# Chapter I
# A Proposed IT Ethical Behavioral Model[1]

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## ABSTRACT

*This chapter advances IT ethics research by surveying the literature regarding IT ethical behavior models and proposes an IT ethical behavioral model for further research. A proposed conceptual ethical behavior model is based on an initial meta-analysis of most of the ethical research. The proposed model suggests that ethical behavioral intention is influenced by an individual's attitude (which in turn is influenced by a variety of other factors such as perceived importance of the issue, consequences of the action, and beliefs), as well as other elements from the Theory of Planned Behavior, equity theory, the environment, control, norms, past ethical behavior, and individual characteristics. This proposed model provides a basis for additional research that should foster a better understanding regarding ethical/unethical behavior and determinants of that behavior. Results from further research in ethical behavior will provide a better understanding of unethical behavior and inappropriate acts allowing organizations to develop realistic training programs for IT professionals, users, and managers as well as incorporate effective deterrent and preventive measures that can curb the rising tide of undesired misuse and unethical behavior in the IT arena.*

## IT UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR: COMMONPLACE

During the last decade, abundant research has been dedicated to the study of ethics and ethical behavior in business. Moreover, unethical behavior in businesses has underscored the need for a better understanding of this behavior as well as additional and better methods of preventing this unethical behavior. Ethical situations arise often

in many different areas of business; this has been complicated by the integration of IT into business operations. Common ethical issues faced by IT professionals include piracy, accuracy, property, and accessibility (Mason, 1986). Among the issues in the news lately is the issue of intellectual property, and specifically software piracy, which has been identified as a major problem facing the $140 billion software market (Lau, 2003).

In spite of its undoubted value to users and organizations, information technology (IT) poses some risks and ethical issues, because its misuse results in serious losses to business and society (Marshall, 1999; Straub & Nance, 1990). From a social and professional perspective, most business professionals and IT users are concerned about unacceptable, inappropriate, illegal, and unethical use of IT. Many recognize the potential harm to society, the IT profession, and the economy (Cappel & Windsor, 1998).

While software piracy has received much interest (with an estimated $30 billion in lost revenues in 2003) (First Annual Business Software Alliance and IDC Global Software Piracy Study, 2004), a new form of piracy has taken the piracy spotlight and being called the next big piracy arena (Bhattacharjee, Gopal, & Sanders, 2003). Referred to as digital piracy, it is defined as "the illegal copying/downloading of copyrighted software and media files." According to the Forrester Research Group (http://www.forrester.com), lost revenues due to digital piracy could reach $5 billion alone from music and book publishers in the year 2005 (not counting losses from software companies or cinema studios). The current piracy target apparently will be Hollywood, as the Motion Picture Association of American (MPAA) estimates that around 400,000 to 600,000 movies are being copied/downloaded on the Internet everyday (MPAA Report, 2003).

To combat unethical behavior (piracy, privacy, etc.), two popular methods have been employed: preventives and deterrents. Preventives impede unethical acts by making it very difficult to commit the act. The idea is to make the culprits expend so much effort that it will wear them down, and eventually they will not want to do it. Deterrents, on the other hand, use the threat of undesirable consequences (mostly legal sanctions) to prevent inappropriate and unauthorized behavior (Gopal & Sanders, 1997). Unfortunately, given the rise in inappropriate and unethical behavior; none of the current strategies appear to be working.

Instead of relying solely on existing preventives and deterrents, knowing what influences individuals to act unethically would be a more advantageous path. This is especially important because many studies have suggested that individuals do not see piracy (and other inappropriate behavior) as a crime or as unethical (Im & Van Epps, 1991; Reid, Thompson, & Logston, 1992). For example, Solomon and O'Brien (1990) examined attitude towards piracy among business students and found that they view piracy as socially and ethically acceptable, and that piracy is widespread among business students. Christensen and Eining (1991) also found that individuals do not perceive piracy as inappropriate and do not believe their friends and superiors think it is inappropriate.

With the goal of curbing unethical behavior, the overall objective of this research is to provide a conceptual model, via synthesis of the literature, of general ethical behavior which identifies and provides a better understanding of the factors that influence an individual's decision to act ethically or unethically in an effort to curb unethical behavior. While much of the previous research concentrated on the unethical behavior and how to control it (Conner & Rumlet, 1991; Moseley & Whitis, 1995; Glass & Wood, 1996; Gopal & Sanders, 1997), this chapter presents a survey of the ethics literature summarizing models of IT ethical behavior and presents a comprehensive ethical model based on an inceptive meta-analysis of those models. By examining and understanding the factors that influence such behavior, measures and policy to alter those factors can be implemented (and thus

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