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ITB7700

Chapter 13

# Software Piracy: Are Robin Hood and Responsibility Denial at Work?

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## INTRODUCTION

Despite the existence of laws and much publicity surrounding software piracy, it is widely believed that software piracy is commonplace (Eining & Christensen, 1991; Simpson, Banerjee, & Simpson, 1994). A recent study (i.e., Business Software Alliance, 1999) confirms that software piracy is increasing, with a 2.5 percent increase in piracy in 1998 over 1997, resulting in $3.2 billion in losses to organizations in the United States and $11 billion worldwide. Yet reasons why such illegal behavior continues to occur are lacking. While some attempts have been made at AACSB-accredited schools of business to incorporate ethics education into business programs, there is no knowledge of such education's relationship to actual behavior, nor is there knowledge on what exactly should be taught. Because previous educational, software-based safeguards, and attempts at raising awareness have failed to stop software piracy, some researchers (e.g., Simpson et al., 1994) believe that only when contributory factors are isolated can appropriate measures be taken to reduce software piracy. In addition, Watson and Pitt (1993) suggest that software piracy research lacks attention to individual factors, important for further understanding of the phenomenon.

Various accounts (see Figure 1) have cited reasons for computer abuse (i.e., the unethical use of computers) that includes software piracy. Thus this study, guided by existing ethical decision-making models, looks at these reasons for computer abuse behavior and relates these to individual characteristics in an at-

Previously Published in *Challenges of Information Technology Management in the 21st Century*, edited by Mehdi Khosrow-Pour, Copyright © 2000, Idea Group Publishing.
This chapter appears in the book, Ethical Issues of Information Systems by Ali Salehnia.

*Figure 1: Some reasons for computer abuse given by various sources*

| Purported Characteristics of Computer Abusers | Citation |
|---|---|
| Lacking in awareness of consequences | Baum, 1989; Ladd, 1989; Bloombecker, 1990b |
| Rationalizations for computer abuse | Krauss & MacGahan, 1979; Parker, 1989 |
| Robin Hood Syndrome | U. S. Dept of Justice, 1989a, 1989b; Perrolle, 1987; Forester & Morrison, 1990 |
| Economic gain | President's Council, 1986; Bloombecker, 1990a; Parker, 1983; Eining & Christensen,1991 |



tempt to understand the underlying causes of this persistent abuse. Specifically, this study looks at the individual factors of Responsibility Denial and "Robin Hood" syndrome.

## ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING MODELS AND SOFTWARE PIRACY

Both generalized ethical decision-making[1] models and specialized software piracy models exist which contain components appropriate to the understanding of software piracy. Rest's (1986) and Jones' (1991) generalized models of ethical decision making form a foundation for the study of both situational and individual factors. Jones' (1991) model reviews the current ethical decision-making models and integrates them into one model, largely founded on Rest's (1986) model. This model suggests that ethical decision making is a four-component process: (1) recognize the ethical[2] issue, (2) make an ethical judgment or determine what is right or wrong, (3) establish ethical intentions, and (4) engage in ethical behavior. These components likely interact and do not necessarily occur in the order listed. Empirical support has been found for this model when applied to computer-related ethics issues, including software piracy (Eining & Christensen, 1991).

### Ethical Judgment and Intent

Nisan (1984) suggests that ethical judgments consist of individuals' standards of behavior (their norms) and general principles regarding right and wrong. These general principles often rely on seriousness of consequences, number of others affected, etc. General ethics theories incorporate these principles and exist to explain the basis of peoples' ethical judgments. The exploration of ethical theories can be used to alter the quality of decisions being made regarding computer