


Chapter 77

Ethics and Social Responsibility for 21st Century ICT

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines ethics and social responsibility for the 21st century world of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). The approach divides into two principal dimensions. One dimension concerns the definition and interpretation of ethics and social responsibility. The other dimension concerns the application of the definition and interpretation to ICT services and technologies in the 21st century. This dimension divides in turn among ICT supplier organizations, managers and professionals within those organizations, and consumers of ICT services and equipment. Ethics and social responsibility are not simply the same concepts. Ethics is about what is normatively right or wrong action in relation to a good or bad outcome. Social responsibility is about what is due to social welfare normatively or social pressure and legal control empirically and who determines how to define that social welfare. Social responsibility thus may be partly normative and partly positive. There is an essential link to ethics, but the two concepts only partially coincide.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines ethics and social responsibility for the 21st century world of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). The approach divides into two principal dimensions. One dimension concerns the definition and interpretation of ethics and social responsibility. The other dimension concerns the application of the definition and interpretation to ICT services and technologies in the 21st century. This dimension divides in turn among ICT supplier organizations, managers and professionals within those organizations, and consumers of ICT services and equipment.

ICT covers a broad scope of communications media, information and communications technologies, and systems, including the internet (the set of networks) and the world wide web (the access service) to which add artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics. E-commerce occurs over the internet (Kracher & Corritore, 2004). All kinds of devices and systems are in use today, and there is continuing innovation

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(Otulugbu & Ogunobo, 2022). ICT and related technologies and systems will increasingly transform the world through both good and bad effects. There are visible, deep, and dark webs. The deep or invisible web is defined as not indexed by standard search engines that access the visible or surface web. The dark web additionally requires special access so that anonymous private communication – and thus also difficult-to-detect illegal activities – can occur.

BACKGROUND

Ethics and social responsibility are not simply the same concepts. Ethics is about what is normatively right or wrong action in relation to a good or bad outcome. Social responsibility is about what is due to social welfare normatively or social pressure and legal control empirically and who determines how to define that social welfare. Social responsibility thus may be partly normative and partly positive. There is an essential link to ethics, but the two concepts only partially coincide.

Conceptions of Ethics

The leading sense of ethics is some judgment or standard about right versus wrong actions in relation to the good and bad outcomes of those actions. The term ethics can take several meanings. In one meaning, ethics (a Greek-based term) is synonymous with morality (a Latin-based term). Individual or personal ethics is of this character. In other meaning, ethics is a professional or organizational code of conduct defining right and wrong actions. For instance, bodies of lawyers or medical doctors adopt codes of conduct. Such codes are particularly associated with professional groups, business organizations, and academic institutions. In a third meaning, ethics is the formal study of morality, values, and codes.

Different perspectives on the formal study of ethics can fall into three major groupings for discussion (Goodpaster, 1984).

1. The grouping typically termed *consequentialism* considers outcomes to be the superior criterion for judging the ethics of actions: whether an action is right or wrong depends on the consequences. Perspectives include egoism, utilitarianism, and Machiavellianism. Egoism and utilitarianism are essential in the philosophical foundations of neoclassical economic theory.
 - a. Egoism is a doctrine that self-interest should guide an individual's choices: an individual should maximize personal utility, and a business should maximize profit. The doctrine does not automatically endorse misconduct violating the law or imposing harm on others: egoism functions within a moral and legal framework.
 - b. Utilitarianism argues for the most good for the largest number of people: aggregate social welfare is the standard.
 - c. Machiavellianism has acquired the sense of amoral cunning. A superior view is that Machiavelli was a political realist who emphasized objective description and analysis. His famous work *The Prince* (1513) emphasized the effectiveness of practice and thus consequences rather than prescriptive or ordinary morality of actions (Ramsay, 2012).
2. The grouping often termed *Kantianism* after the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1729-1804) considers defining moral duties as the superior criterion: an action is right or wrong per se without regard to the consequences. This grouping reflects the social contract tradition through Hobbes,

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