Ethics In Cyberspace Essay, Research Paper

Ethics in Cyberspace

Cyberspace is a global community of people using computers in networks.

In order to function well, the virtual communities supported by the Internet

depend upon rules of conduct, the same as any society. Librarians and

information technologists must be knowledgeable about ethical issues for the

welfare of their organizations and to protect and advise users.

What is ethics? Ethics is the art of determining what is right or good.

It can also be defined as a general pattern or way of life, a set of rules of

conduct or moral code. Ethical guidelines are based on values.

The Association of Computing Machinery (ACM) is one national organization

which has developed a statement of its values. Every member of ACM is expected

to uphold the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct which includes these

general moral imperatives:

1) contribute to society and human well-being

2) avoid harm to others

3) be honest and trustworthy

4) be fair and take action not to discriminate

5) honor property rights including copyrights and patents

6) give proper credit for intellectual property

7) respect the privacy of others

8) honor confidentiality.

The very nature of electronic communication raises new moral issues.

Individuals and organizations should be proactive in examining these concerns

and developing policies which protect liabilities. Issues which need to be

addressed include: privacy of mail, personal identities, access and control of

the network, pornographic or unwanted messages, copyright, and commercial uses

of the network. An Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) is recommended as the way an

organization should inform users of expectations and responsibilities. Sample

AUPs are available on the Internet at gopher sites and can be retrieved by using

Veronica to search keywords “acceptable use policies” or “ethics.”

The Computer Ethics Institute in Washington, D.C. has developed a “Ten

Commandments of Computing”:

1) Thou shalt not use a computer to harm other people.

2) Thou shalt not interfere with other people’s computer work.

3) Thou shalt not snoop around in other people’s computer files.

4) Thou shalt not use a computer to steal.

5) Thou shalt not use a computer to bear false witness.

6) Thou shalt not copy or use proprietary software for which you have

not paid.

7) Thou shalt not use other people’s computer resources without

authorization or proper compensation.

8) Thou shalt not appropriate other people’s intellectual output.

9) Though shalt think about the social consequences of the program you

are writing or the system you are designing.

10) Thou shalt always use a computer in ways that show consideration and

respect for your fellow humans (Washington Post, 15 June 1992: WB3).

The University of Southern California Network Ethics Statement specifically

identifies types of network misconduct which are forbidden: intentionally

disrupting network traffic or crashing the network and connected systems;

commercial or fraudulent use of university computing resources; theft of data,

equipment, or intellectual property; unauthorized access of others’ files;

disruptive or destructive behavior in public user rooms; and forgery of

electronic mail messages.

What should an organization do when an ethical crisis occurs? One strategy

has been proposed by Ouellette and Associates Consulting (Rifkin, Computerworld

25, 14 Oct. 1991: 84).

1. Specify the FACTS of the situation.

2. Define the moral DILEMMA.

3. Identify the CONSTITUENCIES and their interests.

4. Clarify and prioritize the VALUES and PRINCIPLES at stake.

5. Formulate your OPTIONS.

6. Identify the potential CONSEQUENCES.

Other ethical concerns include issues such as 1) Influence: Who determines

organizational policy? Who is liable in the event of lawsuit? What is the role

of the computer center or the library in relation to the parent organization in

setting policy? 2) Integrity: Who is responsible for data integrity? How much

effort is made to ensure that integrity? 3) Privacy: How is personal

information collected, used and protected? How is corporate information

transmitted and protected? Who should have access to what? 3) Impact: What

are the consequences on staff in the up- or down-skilling of jobs? What are the

effects on staff and organizational climate when computers are used for

surveillance, monitoring and measuring?

As the schools incorporate Internet resources and services into the

curriculum and the number of children using the Internet increases, other

ethical issues must be addressed. Should children be allowed to roam cyberspace

without restriction or supervision? How should schools handle student Internet

accounts? What guidelines are reasonable for children?

Organizations need to be proactive in identifying and discussing the

ethical ramifications of Internet access. By having acceptable use policies and

expecting responsible behavior, organizations can contribute to keeping

cyberspace safe.

Selected Resources on Information Ethics

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54, no. 6 (June 1993): 331-332.

Dilemmas in Ethical Uses of Information Project. “The Ethics

Kit.” EDUCOM/EUIT, 1112 16th Street, NW, Suite 600,

Washington, D.C. 20036. phone: (202) 872-4200; fax: (202)

872-4318; e-mail: ethics@bitnic.educom.edu

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Kapor, M. “Civil Liberties in Cyberspace.” Scientific American

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State University and Educational Media Resources, Inc.

“Starter Kit.” phone: (203) 397-4423; fax: (203-397-4681;

e-mail: rccs @csu.ctstate.edu

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