Ethical Behavior in the Digital World

by Sophia

The introduction of new technology can have a profound effect on human behavior. New technologies give us capabilities that we did not have before, which in turn create environments and situations that have not been specifically addressed in ethical terms. Today's digital technologies have created new categories of ethical dilemmas. For example, the ability to anonymously make perfect copies of digital music has tempted many music fans to download copyrighted music for their own use without making payment to the music's owner. Many of those who would never have walked into a music store and stolen a CD find themselves with dozens of illegally downloaded albums. In this tutorial, we will take a closer look at ethics and ethical issues related to the use of information technology.

Our discussion will break down as follows:

1. Information System Ethics

The term **ethics** is defined as a set of moral principles, or the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group. One method for navigating new ethical waters is a **code of ethics**. A code of ethics is a document that outlines a set of acceptable behaviors for a professional or social group; generally, it is agreed to by all members of the group.

The code of ethics document details different actions that are considered appropriate and inappropriate. One of the major advantages of creating a code of ethics is that it clarifies the acceptable standards of behavior for a professional group. While to many, the guidelines may seem obvious, having these items detailed provides clarity and consistency. The varied backgrounds and experiences of the members of a group lead to a variety of ideas regarding what is acceptable behavior. Explicitly stating standards communicates the common guidelines to everyone in a clear manner. A good example of a code of ethics is the Software Engineering Code of Ethics and Professional Practice. It was developed by the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). Their code of ethics provides many straightforward ethical instructions, such as the commitment to honesty and integrity.

TERMS TO KNOW

Ethics

A set of moral principles or the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group.

Code of Ethics

Document that outlines a set of acceptable behaviors for a professional or social group; generally, it is

agreed to by all members of the group.

2. Acceptable Use Policies

Many organizations that provide technology services to the public require agreement to an**acceptable use policy (AUP)** before those services can be accessed. Similar to a code of ethics, this policy outlines what is allowed and what is not allowed while someone is using the organization's services. Essentially, by agreeing to the AUP, you are committing to a set of acceptable behavior. Many AUPs have similar pieces of information, although the specific text may vary depending on the organization. The table below details the general components of an AUP.

AUP Section	Description
Preface or Introduction	Provides details as to why the AUP is needed and how it will be implemented
Definition of Terms	Provides definitions of all terms unique to the AUP that are used within the policy
AUP Coverage	Explains to users the specific technology services covered by the AUP
Acceptable Use Policy	Explains to users what is appropriate. Details all specifics as to what is acceptable use of technology, software, network, etc.
Unacceptable Uses	Explains to users what is inappropriate. Details all specifics as to what is not acceptable use of technology, software, hardware, etc.
Consequences for violation	Details for users the actions that will be taken if the policy is violated

An everyday example of this is the terms of service that must be agreed to before using the public Wi-Fi at Starbucks, McDonald's, or even a university. Violations of these policies have various consequences. In most cases, such as with Wi-Fi, violating the acceptable use policy will mean that you will lose your access to the resource. While losing access to Wi-Fi at Starbucks may not have a lasting impact, a university student getting banned from the university's Wi-Fi (or possibly all network resources) could have a serious impact on the student's success.

📄 TERM TO KNOW

Acceptable Use Policy (AUP)
Policy that outlines what is allowed and what is not allowed while someone is using an organization's technology services.

3. Infringement

Recall that under the terms of copyright, the author of a work controls what can be done with the work, including:

- Who can make copies of the work
- Who can make derivative works from the original work
- Who can perform the work publicly

- Who can display the work publicly
- Who can distribute the work

Infringement refers to the violation of the rights of a copyright holder by using copyrighted works without permission. Infringement is a very broad term, as it encompasses a variety of activities that violate the rights of copyright holders. A good example of infringement would be if you made copies and distributed a music CD without permission.

> 🗎 **TERM TO KNOW**
>
> **Infringement**
>   The violation of the rights of a copyright holder by using copyrighted works without permission.

4. Plagiarism

Plagiarism refers to the taking of another person's work without any attribution and presenting it as your own. Typically, plagiarism is much broader, as its definition can also be inclusive of ideas, words, and other things that cannot be copyrighted. Although not always the case, many cases of plagiarism are also cases of infringement. A good example of plagiarism would be copying a paragraph from a published book and using it in your research paper without a citation or acknowledgement that the paragraph was written by someone else.

> 🗎 **TERM TO KNOW**
>
> **Plagiarism**
>   Taking of another person's work without any attribution and presenting it as your own.

> ⏵ **WATCH**
>
> Take a look at this short video to better understand the importance of using credible resources.

> 📋 **SUMMARY**
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> The rapid changes in **information technology** in the past few decades have brought a broad array of new capabilities and powers to governments, organizations, and individuals alike. These new capabilities have required thoughtful analysis and the creation of new **norms, regulations, and laws**. In this tutorial, we took a look at **ethics** and the impact that information technology has on ethical considerations when using electronic media.

Source: Derived from Chapter 12 of "Information Systems for Business and Beyond" by David T. Bourgeois. Some sections removed for brevity.
https://www.saylor.org/site/textbooks/Information%20Systems%20for%20Business%20and%20Beyond/Textbook.html

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