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Professional Ethics in Information Systems

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Professional ethics in IS concerns a professional's conduct of behaviour and practice when carrying out IS-related activities. Such work may include consulting, researching, teaching and writing. Professional behaviour usually follows implicitly accepted standards, which may be formally stated or 'institutionalised'. While the institutionalisation of codes of conduct/practice is common, and many professional bodies have developed such codes for their members to observe, the field of IS is lacking in this respect.

Compounding this situation is the fact that accepted norms of behaviour vary widely across cultures, professions and disciplines. The former of these variations is one of the most interesting, as well as the most controversial, since it challenges the existence of any universal ethical principles. In some countries/cultures, certain behaviours are certainly frowned upon, but in others, similar behaviour may receive approbation.

Overall, opinions abound and there is a distinct lack of understanding of how and why ethical perspectives differ so much. The first two co-ordinators of this minitrack organised a set of web pages on Professional Ethics in Information Systems, under the auspices of [ISWORLD](#) in order to promote dissemination of opinions and ideas about professional ethics. These pages have hosted debates on what is ethical and unethical in specific circumstances, revealing, as expected, a wide range of opinions. The theme of this new minitrack has been developed out of these web pages, the co-organisers seeking to promote further the exchange of ideas.

The four papers accepted for this minitrack exhibit a wide range of opinions and standpoints that we believe will be of significant interest to the audience. From De Montfort University in the UK, Wu, Rogerson and Fairweather consider how to be ethical in developing information systems. They construct and compare two practical approaches to the ethical development of IS,

looking firstly at rational decision making procedures, then at moral virtues and maturity in development of moral judgement. These two approaches are considered in the light of a case study that some readers will find controversial in itself, viz.: the development of a system to manage the movement of people in the city of Dalian, in the People's Republic of China.

From Oulu University and the University of Jyväskylä in Finland, Siponen and Vartiainen discuss a universalist approach to the teaching of ethics to students whose prime focus of study is not IS or computing. They consider a number of issues pertinent to these students, with discussion of implementation issues and problems that may arise therein. They then apply their framework to the consideration of three hypothetical scenarios. While the paper does not involve empirical analysis, it sets out a valuable thesis for future investigation.

From North Carolina State University in the USA, Earp and Payton discuss employee attitudes towards the data privacy of students in a university context. The context of the paper is informed by laws pertaining to family educational rights and privacy, as well as the very real need of academic and non-academic departments to receive and use accurate student data. Using a 15-item instrument, the authors explore the levels of employee concern with respect to inaccurate data, unauthorised secondary use, improper access and collection procedures.

From Louisiana State University in the USA, Shaw considers the role of identification in the privacy decisions of IS students, notably in contexts where those decisions involve online privacy. The research model applied incorporates deontological and teleological factors, as well as the degree of identification with the university that the students feel. The study suggests the importance of organisational identification in moderating an individual's decision making process.