

Professional Ethics

Professional Relationships

The context in which computer professionals work is often not structured which makes it difficult to manage the responsibilities to

1. employers,
2. clients,
3. co-professionals and
4. other stakeholders.

Professional Relationships

Employer- Employee

Moral foundation for this relationship:

- Relation is contractual
- Individuals should be treated with respects and not merely as a means.
- Neither party should take advantage of the other.
- Employee should be honest with their qualification and employer should not exploit employee (decent wage, safe environment, etc.)

Professional Relationships

Employer- Employee

Another important issue is what does the employee owe?

- Loyalty
- Trade secrets/knowledge in a field. There are many means of dealing with this, by making sure that:
 - Employees sign contract not to reveal secrets gain during employment as part of the job.
 - Employees sign contract not to work in similar area for a certain period after leaving the company.

Professional Relationships

Client-Professional

- Contractual relationship
- Formal contract (scope, time duration, finance and the location of the work)

Professional Relationships

Client-Professional

(There are different models for this kind of relationships)

Paternalistic Model

Professional makes all the decisions, and the client revokes all decision making.

Trust model

Client and professional plays a role in decision making. Both parties play a role by working together. The professional offers options while the client decides which one to take. This requires trust on both sides and that the decision process is shared.

Agency model

Professional is the agent and does exactly what client tells him to do (like telling a stockbroker to buy “Telkom”).

Professional Relationships

Society-Professional

This relationship is usually shaped by law. If Society licenses a professional society, then the professional society should:

- Serve the interests of Society in general.
- Certainly, must not harm Society.
- Must maintain itself.
- Must take DUE CARE based on the special knowledge it processes.
- The end users or anyone affected by the technology should be considered in the process of system development and operation.
- Protect society through legislation.

Professional Relationships

Professional – Professional

- Obligations to other members of their professions. Members must consider what they owe to each other to maintain standards of conduct.
- Loyalty with each other.
- Members have important obligation such as much not take bribes, not lie about qualifications or fudge the results.

Whistle Blowing

Whistle blowing refers to any time that a member of an organization (or a former member) tells someone else about an illegal or immoral practice, if the telling is done in the hope that someone will do something to change the practice.

A **whistle-blower** is someone who **breaks ranks** with an organization in order to make an **unauthorized** disclosure of information about a **harmful situation** after **attempts to report** the concerns through authorized organizational channels have been **ignored**.

Whistle Blowing

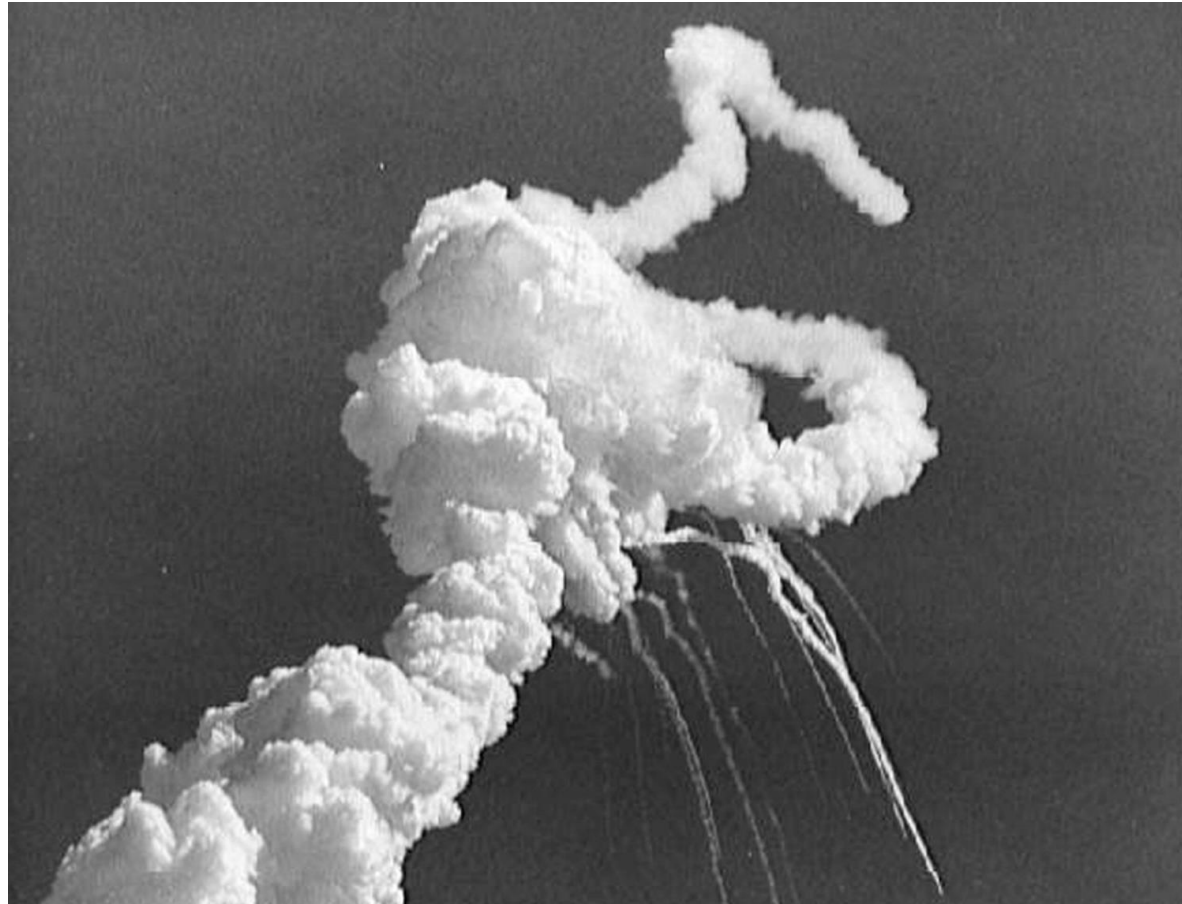
In the great majority of cases, employees tell someone within the organization and don't want to cause any bad publicity for the organization—this is sometimes called internal whistle blowing, though we prefer to call this **internal reporting**.

When organizations punish or discourage internal reporting, bad practices typically get worse, until someone—often motivated by conscience—feels they must notify the press, or a government agency. This is known as **external whistle blowing**, and it can mean serious problems for the organization.

Factors that Inhibit Internal Reporting

1. Unavailable resources.
2. Hostile and unethical organizational culture.
people who speak up, even internally, are sometimes seen as traitors, or as people who are not team players.
3. Toxic leadership.
4. Lack of organizational justice.

The *Challenger* Explosion Killed Seven Astronauts



Courtesy of NASA

Morality of Whistle-blowers

- People become whistle-blowers for different reasons
- Morality of action may depend on motives
 - Good motives (Desire to help the public)
 - Questionable motives (Retaliation, Avoiding punishment)

Molarity of Whistle-blowers

A recent study ([Heumann, et. al., 2013](#)) develops five differentiating whistleblower typologies, based on goals, motivations and context:

The Altruist

The Avenger

Organization Man

The Alarmist

The Bounty Hunter

Corporate Response to Whistle-blowing

WHISTLE-BLOWERS CAUSE HARM

The typical corporate response to whistle-blowing is to condemn it.

Whistle-blowers are disloyal

Whistle-blowing causes short-term and long-term damages to the company

- Bad publicity
- Disruption of organization's social fabric
- Makes it hard for people to work as team

If company causes harm, public can use legal remedies to seek damages from the company

Corporate Response to Whistle-blowing

Whistle-blowing harms organization

- Bad publicity
- Ruined careers of accused managers
- Erodes team spirit by suspecting one another.

Whistle-blowing harms whistle-blower

- Suffer retaliation (Revenge)
- Become estranged from their co-worker (Breakup)
- Labeled as troublemakers.
- Long term prospects are dim.

How can we create an ethical culture in the organizations?

1. Creating **management structures** and **communication** processes that allow concerns to be raised, discussed and resolved.
2. Implement policies that visibly protect and incentivize internal reporting.
3. Make ethics a part of core organizational values.
4. Leaders must be active listeners and role model for integrity.
5. Organizations should use **principle-based ethics** in decision making instead of utilitarian decision making.

How can we create an ethical culture in the organizations?

According to Kantianism or social contract theory, the end never justifies the means. If an action violates a moral rule, it shouldn't be done.

In contrast, a utilitarian process weighs expected benefits and harms. Once an organization begins using utilitarian thinking, the question is no longer “Should we do it?” but “How much of it can we do without harm?”

Moral Responsibility

Exclusive Responsibilities

Role responsibility: is responsibility borne because of a person's assigned duties. A company may hire a bookkeeper to send out invoices and pay the bills. It is the bookkeeper's responsibility to get the bills paid on time.

Causal responsibility: is responsibility assigned to people because they did something (or failed to do something) that caused something to happen. "Joe is responsible for the network being down, because he released the virus that caused the computers to crash."

Legal responsibility is responsibility assigned by law. Homeowners are responsible for the medical bills of a postal carrier who slips and falls on their driveway.

Moral Responsibility

Role responsibility, causal responsibility, and legal responsibility can be exclusive. For example, if one person is responsible for paying the bills, the other employees are not.

Moral responsibility is not exclusive. For example, if an infant is brought into a home, both the mother and the father are responsible for the baby's well-being. people cannot pass the buck by saying, "My boss made the final decision, not me," or by saying, "I just wrote the software; I wasn't responsible for testing it."

Moral Responsibility

In computing field, a team of engineers **should be held to a higher level of moral responsibility than any of its individual members.** There may well be situations where a person has a duty to speak the truth, he has another duty , which is to help others in need.

If whistle-blowing should be done and no individual has the strength to do it, then it must be done by the group acting collectively.

Why should we have professional code of ethics?

A Professional Code of Ethics serves several functions:

- Symbolises the professionalism of the group.
- Defines and promotes a standard for external relations with clients and employers.
- Protects the group's interests.
- Codifies members' rights.
- Expresses ideals to aspire to.
- Offers guidelines in “gray areas”.

Professional Ethics

A professional code of ethics states the **principles** and **core values** that are essential to the work of a particular occupational group.

Most organizations have their own **internal code of practice** that defines the professional ethics of a certain profession.

Why Code of Ethics?

- A code of ethics is essential to a profession; the code will provide an **ethical starting point** for the professionals and for others outside the profession.
- A code of ethics also **ensures quality in treatment** of members of the profession and those, the profession serves.
- A code of ethics provides a **guide** for dealing with **ethical situations** which arise in the course of the job.

Why Code of Ethics?

- These are not **clear-cut set of rules or policies** for all situations, rather a set of **statements of professional belief** which should inform members of the profession about the viewpoints they should consider in making a decision.
- Additionally, a code of ethics **communicates** the ethical viewpoint of the profession to others, which the members of an organization or group must uphold.

What a Code of Ethics is Not...

Not laws

- Not passed by public legislative bodies
- Not intended to encourage law suits or legal challenges
- Might help to resolve important questions in certain disputes.

What a Code of Ethics is Not...

Not complete ethical frameworks or algorithms/Not exhaustive checklists

- Cannot provide a complete ethical framework
- Does not cover every ethical question that might arise about computing
- It is possible for one value or principle to conflict with another.
- Ethics therefore requires deliberation and good judgement that cannot be fully captured in a step by step algorithm
- It is dangerous to provide one checklist which one simply runs through to determine if every ethical question has been addressed.

Function of Ethic Codes

Inspiration:

- Serve an inspirational function by identifying values and ideals to which computing practitioners should aspire.
- Helps in inspiring public trust and respect for the profession.

Education:

- Serve several educational functions.
- Inform and educate new members about the values and standards to which the profession is committed.
- Can inform public policy makers , clients, users and the general public about the profession's ideals, obligations and responsibilities.

Function of Ethic Codes

Guidance

- Ethical principles, values, imperatives and standards of good practice spelled out in ethics codes can be helpful guides for computer practitioners as they expect-as well as the standards that they should demand- from computing practitioners.

Accountability

- Ethics codes can make members of professional organizations accountable to their colleague and to public in general.

Function of Ethics

Enforcement

- By providing a basis to identify ethically unacceptable behavior, codes of ethics enable professional organizations to encourage and even to enforce standards of good practice and compliance with responsible norms.

Tool

- Can be useful tools for computer practitioners as they make decisions to fulfill their professional responsibilities.

Some Examples

ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.

– <http://www.acm.org/constitution/code.html>

- **British Computer Society Code of Conduct**

– <http://www1.bcs.org.uk/DocsRepository/03200/3224/default.htm>

- **IEEE-CS/ACM Software Engineering Code of**

Ethics and Professional Practice

– <http://www.computer.org/tab/seprof/code.htm>