TOPIC 6– ETHICS AND CODE OF CONDUCT

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this topics, you will be able to:
1. Explain the practice ethics of code and conduct in workplace
2. Discuss the terms of copyright, patent, trademark and intellectual property
3. Show the impact ethics of code of social implications towards community

INTRODUCTION

The chapter begins with a look at a legal issue that all computer users should be aware of—intellectual property rights. The specific types of intellectual property rights are discussed, along with examples of the types of property that each right protects. Next is a discussion of ethics, including what they are and a variety of ethical issues surrounding computer use by individuals and businesses. Topics include the ethical use of copyrighted material, ethical uses of resources and information, unethical use of digital manipulation, and ethical business practices and decision making.

6.1 What is ethics?

The term ethics refers to standards of moral conduct. For example, telling the truth is a matter of ethics. An unethical act is not always illegal, although it might be, but an illegal act is usually viewed as unethical by most people. For example, purposely lying to a friend is unethical but usually not illegal, while perjuring oneself in a courtroom as a witness is both illegal and unethical. Whether or not criminal behavior is involved, ethics guide our behavior and play an integral role in our lives.

Much more ambiguous than the law, ethical beliefs can vary widely from one individual to another. Ethical beliefs may also vary based on one's religion, country, race, or culture. In addition, different ethical standards can apply to different areas of one's life. For example, personal ethics guide an individual's personal behavior and business ethics guide an individual's workplace behavior.

Because ethics are fundamentally based on values, different types of businesses may have different ethics. Ethics and moral standards may vary from country to country and from culture to culture. In addition to legal considerations, businesses with global connections should

consider the prevailing ethical standards of all countries involved when making business decisions.

6.2 Personal ethics and work life

While a business may be legally bound by such restrictions as employee confidentiality laws, union contracts, and its customer privacy policy, there are gray areas inside which ethical decisions need to be made. For example, should an ISP comply with a request from a government for customer e-mail records or the identity of a customer matching an IP address? Should a company use marketing data that was mined from individuals' social networking sites? Or should a business share or sell customer information, even if it is legal to do so? This latter decision is one that many businesses have struggled with, especially in challenging economic times when a quick source of revenue gained from selling customer data is tempting.

Although some businesses have succumbed to this temptation and have sold their customer lists, others believe that any short-term gains achieved through ethically questionable acts will adversely affect customer loyalty and will ultimately hurt the business in the long run. An emerging issue is who owns an employee's work-related social media accounts. There have been several lawsuits sur- rounding this issue, such as an employee who took company Twitter followers with him to a new company and an employee who discovered that her employer was posting tweets from her account when she was in the hospital. It is expected that soon social media laws will be developed to resolve these types of issues.

To prepare future employees for these types of decisions, most business schools incorporate business ethics into their curriculum. For example, the Giving Voice to Values (GVV) business school curriculum, created by the Aspen Institute and Yale School of Management and being piloted at over 50 institutions, focuses on ethical implementation of values-based leadership.

6.3 Ethics and the effect from technology

Much more ambiguous than the law, ethical beliefs can vary widely from one individual to another. Ethical beliefs may also vary based on one's religion, country, race, or culture. In addition, different ethical standards can apply to different areas of one's life. For example, personal ethics guide an individual's personal behavior and business ethics guide an individual's workplace behavior. Computer ethics relate to an individual's computer use and are significant today because the proliferation of computers and mobile devices in the home and workplace provides more opportunities for unethical acts than in the past. The Internet also makes it easy to distribute information that many individuals would view as unethical.

6.3.1 Code of Ethics

Another code widely used by various industries and organizations is a code of ethics. Codes of ethics (see the IEEE code of ethics in Figure 6) summarize the moral guidelines adopted by a

professional society or other organization. They typically address such issues as honesty, integrity, proper use of intellectual property, confidentiality, and accountability. So, while codes of conduct usually address specific activities that can and cannot be performed, codes of ethics cover broader ethical standards of conduct.

Although employees are typically forbidden from revealing confidential or proprietary information to outsiders, a dilemma exists when that information is related to an illegal, an unethical, or a dangerous activity involving the business. Employees who reveal wrongdoing within an organization to the public or to authorities are referred to as whistle-blowers. These individuals have varying degrees of protection from retaliation (such as being fired) for whistle-blowing. The type and extent of protection depends on the kind of wrongdoing and the organization involved, as well as the state in which the company and employee are located.

The Sarbanes-Oxley Act (also called the Corporate Responsibility Act and signed into law in mid-2002) provides federal protection for whistle-blowers who report alleged violations of Securities and Exchange Commission rules or any federal law relating to shareholder fraud.
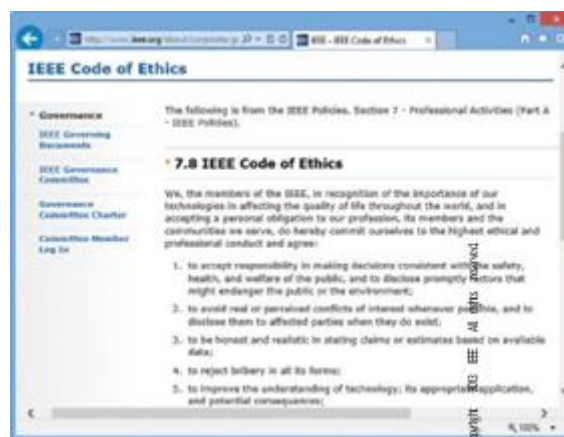

Figure 6

6.4 Using computer to support ethical conduct

What is considered proper and ethical use of school or company resources may vary from school to school or company to company. To explain what is allowed, many schools and businesses have policies that specify which activities are allowed and which are forbidden. Often, these policies are available as a written code of conduct that is included in a student or employee handbook. They are also often available online via an organization's intranet or Web site (a code of conduct was shown in Figure 6).

Policies can vary; for example, one school may allow the use of school computers to download software and another school may not, and one business may allow limited use of the office photocopier or printer for personal use while another may forbid it. As a result, all students and employees should find out what is considered ethical use of resources at their school or place

of business, including what types of computer and Internet activities are considered acceptable, and what personal use (if any) of resources, such as computers, printers, photocopiers, telephones, and fax machines, is allowed.

6.5 Copyright, patent and trademark

Copyrights protect the creators of original artistic or literary works and are granted automatically once a work exists in a physical medium. A copyright can be registered, which provides additional protection should infringement occur. The copyright symbol © can be used to remind others that content is copyrighted; digital watermarks can be incorporated into digital content so that the copyright information can be viewed, even if the work is altered.

Patents grant an exclusive right to an invention for 20 years. In addition to products, processes and procedures may be patented as well.

Trademarks are words, phrases, symbols, or designs that identify an organization's goods or services and can be either claimed (and use the symbol ™ or SM) or registered (and use the symbol ®).

6.6 Intellectual properties

Intellectual property rights specify how intellectual property, such as original music compositions, drawings, essays, software programs, symbols, and designs, may be law- fully used.

6.7 Social implications

Social implications refer to those actions of business that have an effect on society as a whole. These issues relate to a number of areas of activity.