Professional Ethics

Discussion based on Johnson, Computer Ethics, Chapter 3.
Three case studies

- Concerns about safety
- How much security
- Conflict of interest
Why Professional Ethics

- Ethical theories (utilitarian, deontological) might prescribe a course of action
- What about context?
  - Actors are professionals.
  - Professional responsibilities.
Why Professional Ethics (cont'd)

- Why should professional ethics differ from “vanilla” ethics?
- Professional roles
  - Rights
  - Responsibilities
- Computer professional's role: not strongly differentiated
Why Professional Ethics (cont'd)

- Employment context: rights and responsibilities
- Efficacy of ICT employees
  - Specialized knowledge and skill
- Efficacy implies special responsibilities.
Characteristics of Professions

• Profession: occupational group with higher salary and status

• If not strongly differentiated, has distinct set of characteristics
  – Mastery of esoteric body of knowledge
  – Autonomy
  – Formal Organization
  – Code of Ethics
  – Social Function
The System of Professions

• Process of professionalization
• Occupational group as monopoly
  – Must organize into formal group
  – Must show necessity of knowledge body
  – Must show that only masters can judge qualifications
• Self-regulation
• Social function at stake
• Code of ethics: convince public
The System of Professions (cont'd)

• Public recognizes formal organization of occupational group, giving
  – Collective autonomy
  – Individual autonomy

• Social contract: profession ↔ society

• Contract may be broken
Is Computing a “Profession”? Are ICT Professionals “Professionals”?

- Computing WRT the five characteristics?
- Computing WRT professionalization?
- Hard to determine!
  - ICT field broad, fast-changing
- Examine
  - Trends
  - Software engineering
Is Computing a “Profession”? Are ICT Professionals “Professionals”?

• Trends
  – ICT occupations that hide computing
  – How ICT affects college curricula

• The five characteristics?
  – Esoteric body of knowledge
    • It exists
    • What is it?
Is Computing a “Profession”? Are ICT Professionals “Professionals”? 

– Autonomy 
  • At individual level: yes 
  • At collective level: not really 

– Code of ethics: several 
  • ACM, IEEE, ... 

– Social function 
  • ICT important 
  • ICT a good in of itself? 

• ICT: several features of profession
Software Engineering

• Distinct sub-profession of ICT
• Licensing for software engineering?
• Code of ethics for S/E?
• Texas initiative:
  – License software engineers
  – Guides consumers
  – Not strongly differentiated
  – S/E as engineering
Professional Relationships

• ICT professional develops relationships with
  – Employer
  – Client
  – Co-Professionals
  – The public

• Ethical parameters?
Employer-Employee Relationships

- Explicit contract:
  - Employer pays a wage
  - Employee provides a service via labor

- Rights of employee ↔ duties of employer
  - Fair wage paid promptly
  - Humane working conditions and workload
  - Not being asked to do something illegal or immoral
Employer-Employee Relationships

- Rights of employer ↔ duties of employee
  - Work well done and the proper amount
  - Respect for company reputation and secrets

- Honesty of contract
  - Employer
  - Employee

- Cooperation, not exploitation
Customer-Professional Relationships

- Two kinds of customers:
  - Clients
  - Consumers

- Contractual relationship (often implicit)
Customer-Professional Relationships

- Rights of customer ↔ duties of professional
  - Honest representation of product/service
  - Provision of what's agreed on
  - Useful product or service
  - Repairs and service
Customer-Professional Relationships

- Rights of professional ↔ duties of customer
  - Reasonable remuneration
  - Reasonable expectations about product/service
  - Not to demand more than was agreed on

- Mutual-benefit relationship
Society-Professional Relationships

- Increased effectiveness by virtue of one's profession
- Specialized knowledge
- Control of the means for acting
Society-Professional Relationships

• Duties of professional towards society:
  – Promote common good
  – Protect shared resources
  – Consider impact of one's work on society and environment

• Rights of professional before society:
  – Being allowed to practice profession
  – Enjoy same rights, benefits as ordinary citizens
Professional-Professional Relationships

- Professionals in same trade form a “society”
- Actions by one member can harm others.
- Defend common good.
Professional-Professional Relationships

- Duties of each professional to others:
- Behave ethically (maintain good reputation of profession)
- Support common goals
  - Trade unions
  - Professional associations
- Praiseworthy: helping other professionals to do better job
Conflicting Responsibilities

- Responsibilities: employer vs. society
  - ICT professional vs. M.D.:
    - relative lack of autonomy
    - relatively fragmented nature

- Autonomy vs. organizational loyalty

- When is whistle-blowing warranted?
  - BART incident
  - SDI
Code of Ethics/Professional Conduct

• Main function: Statement embodying collective wisdom of members of profession

• For ICT:
  – ACM
  – IEEE
  – S/E Code of Ethics and Professional Practice

• What is important for ICT professional?
ACM Code

• Main topics:
  – General moral imperatives
  – More specific professional responsibilities
  – Organizational Leadership Imperatives
  – Compliance with the Code
ACM Code (cont'd)

- General Moral Imperatives
  - Contribute to society and human well-being
  - Avoid harm to others
  - Be honest and trustworthy
  - Be fair and take action not to discriminate
  - Honor property rights including copyrights and patent
  - Give proper credit for intellectual property
  - Respect privacy of others
  - Honor confidentiality
ACM Code (Cont'd)

• More specific professional responsibilities
  • Strive to achieve highest quality, effectiveness and dignity in process and products of professional work
  • Acquire and maintain professional competence
  • Know and respect existing laws
  • Accept and provide appropriate professional review
  • Give comprehensive and thorough evaluations
  • Honor contracts, agreements, responsibilities
  • Improve public understanding
  • Access CP/COM resources only when authorized
ACM Code (cont'd)

- Organizational Leadership Imperatives
  - Articulate social responsibilities
  - Manage personnel and resources that enhance quality of working life
  - Acknowledge and support proper uses of resources
  - Ensure that users and those affected by system have needs clearly articulated
  - Articulate and support policies that protect dignity
  - Create opportunities for members of org to learn principles and limitations of computer systems
ACM Code

• Compliance with Code
  – Uphold and promote the principles of this Code
  – Treat violations of this code as inconsistent with membership in ACM
Code of Ethics/Professional Conduct

• P/R tool?

• Statements to/for professionals:
  – Shared commitments
  – Agreed-upon rules/standards
    • Guidance in tough ethical situations?
  – Sensitize members to issues
  – Mechanism for educating/socializing

•Impossible to balance inter-goal tensions!
Collective Responsibility

- Collective: more powerful than individuals
- Creating better ICT policies
- Deal with individual areas
  - Whistle-blower protection
  - Gender bias
  - Security
Conclusion

- Individual's knowledge $\rightarrow$ efficacy
- Efficacy $\rightarrow$ responsibility
- ICT professional: responsibilities
  - Employer
  - Clients
  - Other members of profession
- We all benefit when ICT professionals act responsibly