Practical and Professional Ethics Pre-Test*

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Abstract

This module is designed to help you become aware of ethical issues that arise on a day-to-day basis in the context of practical and professional activities such as business, science, engineering, and computing. You will look at brief scenarios and then discuss how realistic they are, whether they portray ethical or unethical activities, and whether there is agreement or discord within your practical or professional community on these issues. This module was developed during a retreat funded by the National Science Foundation and held in Puerto Rico (NSF SBR-9810253). Its appearance in Connexions is part of the NSF-funded EAC (ethics across the curriculum) Toolkit, NSF SES 0551779.

Step 1: Individually evaluate the scenarios below using the following three questions:

- Do you think this situation is common/realistic? Yes or No
- Do you think this situation or activity is Ethical or Unethical?
- In general would others agree with your answer to Q #2? Yes or No

A. Email Scenario

- **An employee uses his/her computer at work to send e-mails to friends and relatives.**
- Do you think this situation is common/realistic? Yes or No
- Do you think this situation or activity is Ethical or Unethical?
- In general would others agree with your answer to Q #2? Yes or No

B. Betting Pool

- **While reviewing e-mail messages a manager discoves someone using the company's e-mail system to operate a weekly betting pool.**
- Do you think this situation is common/realistic? Yes or No
- Do you think this situation or activity is Ethical or Unethical?
- In general would others agree with your answer to Q #2? Yes or No

C. Political Material

*Version 1.2: May 7, 2007 1:12 pm -0500
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- **An employee sends political campaign material to individuals on her employer's/company's e-mail mailing list.**
- Do you think this situation is common/realistic? Yes or No
- Do you think this situation or activity is Ethical or Unethical?
- In general would others agree with your answer to Q #2? Yes or No

D. Computer Monitoring

- **A company occasionally uses software to monitor the productivity of its staff. It only uses the software to minitor employees throught to be wasting time.**
- Do you think this situation is common/realistic? Yes or No
- Do you think this situation or activity is Ethical or Unethical?
- In general would others agree with your answer to Q #2? Yes or No

E. Copying Software

- **An employee makes a copy of software fromwork and installs it on his/her home computer. No one uses the computer while he/she is at work, and the home computer is used only to finish projects from work**
- Do you think this situation is common/realistic? Yes or No
- Do you think this situation or activity is Ethical or Unethical?
- In general would others agree with your answer to Q #2? Yes or No

F. Notebooks to Teachers

- **In order to improve public education, the government provides notebook computers to a large number of public school teachers.**
- Do you think this situation is common/realistic? Yes or No
- Do you think this situation or activity is Ethical or Unethical?
- In general would others agree with your answer to Q #2? Yes or No

G. Doing Homework

- **An employee uses his or her computer at work to complete a homework assignment for school.**
- Do you think this situation is common/realistic? Yes or No
- Do you think this situation or activity is Ethical or Unethical?
- In general would others agree with your answer to Q #2? Yes or No

Reference

- Some scenarios are based on the textbook: Gary B. Shelly, Thomas J. Cashman, Misty E. Vermaat, **Discovering Computers 2005: A Gateway to Information**, Web Enhanced-Complete, Shelly Cashman Series, Course Technology: Boston, MA. p.589.

Step Two: Informally share or discuss your answers with the class

- Use the space below to make notes
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Step Three: Ethical Decision Making Guidelines–Four Informal Tests:

- **REVERSIBILITY**: Would I think this a good choice if I were among those affected by it?
- **PUBLICITY**: Would I want this action published in the newspaper?
- **HARM**: Does this action do less harm than any available alternative?
- **FEASIBILITY**: Can this solution be implemented given resource, interest, and technical constraints?

Step Four: Divide into groups, re-evaluate the remaining scenarios using the above tests, then share or discuss your group's answers with the class.

Scenario	Reversibility	Publicity	Harm	Feasibility
A. (email)				
B. (Betting Pool)				
C (Political Material)				
D (Monitoring)				
E (Copying Software)				
F (Notebooks for Teachers)				
G (Homework)				

Table 1

Practical and Professional Ethics Pre-Test

This is an unsupported media type. To view, please see
http://cnx.org/content/m14463/latest/Intro_Computers_Pre-Test.doc

Figure 1: This media file contains the Pre-Test in MS Word format. It has been designed for Introduction to Computers classes and offers scenarios devoted to ethical issues that arise in computing.

The goal of this exercise is to help you become aware of the ethical issues that arise in computing on a day to day basis.

- You now know how to recognize ethical problems in the real world
- You are already in the habit of using ethical concepts and principles in your everyday thinking.
- You have learned a series of ethics tests that will help you formulate and refine ethical arguments.
- Continue thinking about how ethical issues arise in the real world. Included with this module are some links designed to help you continue to reflect about ethics in computing.