



Principles of Professional Communication 1

Lecture 13

Ethics & Communication

How do we define 'ethics' ?

- A systematic attempt, through the use of reason, to make sense of our individual and social moral experience in such a way as to determine the rules which govern human conduct and the the values worth pursuing in life
- A set of standards that regulate our behaviour
- Socially and culturally determined – what is appropriate in one culture may be inappropriate in another

How do ethics work?

- The word *ethics* comes from the Greek *ethos* meaning *custom and character*
- Enable us to distinguish between what is acceptable and legitimate and what is not
- An important aspect of any ethical system is the role of *truth and lies*

Types of ethics

- *Normative* – dictate what is ‘morally correct’ behaviour according to generally held *social norms*
- Fundamental concern is the development and justification of *systems of moral rules which guide conduct*
- Statements of ‘*ought*’

Types of ethics

- *Relative* – “Fire burns both in Hellas and in Persia; but men’s ideas of right or wrong vary from place to place.” ... Aristotle’s Nichomachean Ethics
- *Absolute* – application of principles regardless of context or circumstances
eg exercise of absolute power in politics – tyranny

Universal declaration of human rights – a set of ethical principles

The UDHR as basis for ethical thinking in the information field:

- Respect for the dignity of human beings (Art. 1)
- Confidentiality (Art. 1, 2, 3, 6)
- Equality of opportunity (Art. 2, 7)
- Privacy (Art. 3, 12)

Universal declaration of human rights – a set of ethical principles

- Right to freedom of opinion and expression (Art. 19)
- Right to participate in the cultural life of the community (Art. 27)
- Right to the protection of the moral and material interests concerning any scientific, literary or artistic production (Art. 27)

Ethics in art & entertainment

- Freedom of artistic expression vs socially/ culturally inappropriate / offensive
- Who decides what is appropriate / good / useful – those who own media or control media?
- News as ‘entertainment’ – where is the line drawn between ‘need to know’ and ‘want to know’? Do we have the right to intrude on peoples’ privacy or grief?
- Entertainment media eg films can bypass ‘truth’ for ‘dramatic license’ eg docu-dramas, reality TV editing practices

Ethics & censorship

- Issues of censorship – violence, swearing, smoking, etc – OK if it is in a dramatic or artistic context?
- Issues of taste – whose taste do we apply?
- Music, video games etc
- Who decides what has “redeeming social importance”?

Interpersonal ethics

- In interpersonal relationships, to what extent do we have responsibility for the impact of our messages?
- Interdependence between freedom and responsibility?
- Stronger obligations in close relationships
- Embarrassment, gossip, deception, white lies, omission of vital information

The rules of ethics & research

- Right to privacy – researchers must ensure that
 - an individual's privacy is protected
 - Research subjects are fully aware of the procedures and outcomes being studied
- Informed consent – informing research subjects that they are being studied and for what reason
- Copyright – if you use material from the web or other sources for commercial purposes, you must ask permission. If you use it for academic purposes, you must acknowledge it correctly

Ethics in cyberspace – some common problems

- Anonymity & use of pseudonyms – potential for harassment, stalking, bullying, defamation etc
- Copyright – what is “fair” use of other people’s material, creative efforts etc – music, pictures, essays, intellectual property
- Privacy infringements – mobile phones, digital camera phones etc – just because technology can be used to infringe people’s privacy, should we use it this way?

Virginia Shea's rules of ethical behaviour in cyberspace

- Remember the human
- Adhere to the same standard's of behaviour online that you would follow in real life
- Know where you are in cyberspace
- Make yourself look good online
- Share expert knowledge

Virginia Shea's rules of ethical behaviour in cyberspace

- Help keep flames under control
- Respect other people's privacy
- Don't abuse your power
- Be forgiving of other people's mistakes

Thanks to Virginia Shea's "Netiquette" www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html

Why don't we act ethically?

- Fear of upsetting harmony and status quo – “whistleblowers”, “dobbers”, “snitches”
- Group behaviour – “everyone else was doing it so why shouldn't I?”
- Self image – don't want to be labelled a “dobber” or be different
- Complexity of the issues – too difficult to deal with

Why don't we act ethically?

- Location too far away – not my concern, not part of my life, mind my own business
- As long as I don't get caught it's OK – Adam Gilchrist “taking a walk”
- International ethics – what happens if our ethical principles don't conform with those of other cultures eg gift giving, political systems, laws?
- Ethnocentric ethics – does one culture have the right to impose their values on another?

Problems of enforcing ethical standards & behaviour

- Self regulation vs legislation
- Absence of laws that apply or are appropriate to new media – privacy laws across international boundaries – whose laws apply?
- Where are ethical boundaries drawn – the problem of public liability – True Stella Awards www.StellaAwards.com/2003.html?
- Just because something is not illegal it can still be unethical