1. What are ethics? Why do they matter?

- 'ethics is about the decision making and actions of free human beings ... about what is good and evil, and how we come to make such judgments'
  
  (Laudon 1995)

- 'the study of the practices of making right and wrong moral choices - “right” and “wrong” insofar as society can best understand those terms'

  (Pemberton 1998)
## 1. What are ethics? Why do they matter?

- ‘very personal’, but also ‘meaningless’ outside a social context (Taylor & Moynihan 2001: 49)
- Berinato (2002) suggests the final arbiter of ethics in business will be the customer
- Laudon (1995) asks whether ethical obligations might not equally apply to organisations as well as to individuals

## 2. Ethics, professional practice and identity

- What is a profession anyway?
- Ethics and information management?
- Why develop professional codes of ethics?

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### 2. What is a profession anyway?

Fullinwider (1996: 73) sees three defining characteristics of a profession:

- ‘performance for public good’
- ‘special knowledge and training’
- others who are dependent/vulnerable
2. Ethics and information management?

- The ease with which certain forms of information can be replicated raises particular ethical issues for information professionals
  - Berinato (2002) warns of ‘function creep’
  - Laudon claims there is ‘an ethical blackhole in cyberspace’

2. Why develop codes?

- One simple answer is that self-regulation is often preferable to legal supervision
- The development of a code of ethics is also often justified as most pertinent for those with specialist knowledge and a charge of social responsibility

3. Some examples of professional codes

The Australian Computer Society’s code includes these priorities:

- 4.5.1 I must endeavour to preserve continuity of information technology services and information flow in my care.
- 4.5.2 I must endeavour to preserve the integrity and security of the information of others.
- 4.5.3 I must respect the proprietary nature of the information of others.
3. Some examples of professional codes

- 4.5.4 I must endeavour to preserve the confidentiality of the information of others.
- 4.5.5 I must advise my client or employer of any potential conflicts of interest between my assignment and legal or other accepted community requirements.
- 4.5.6 I must advise my clients and employers as soon as possible of any conflicts of interest or conscientious objections which face me in connection with my work.

Members of the Association of Records Managers and Administrators pledge to:

- 'Support the free flow and oppose censorship of publicly available information as a necessary condition for an informed and educated society.'
- 'Support the creation, maintenance, and use of accurate information and support the development of information management systems which place the highest priority on accuracy and integrity.'
- 'Condemn and resist the unethical or immoral use or concealment of information.'
- 'Affirm that the collection, maintenance, distribution, and use of information about individuals is a privilege in trust: the right to privacy of all individuals must be both promoted and upheld.'
- 'Support compliance with statutory and regulatory laws related to recorded information.'
4. Some views of practitioners

Survey of IS managers in 96 US SME businesses:

- Ethically acceptable to copy commercial software for purpose other than backup or archive?
  - 29% said Yes
- IS ethics means a lot more than software piracy and data confidentiality?
  - 13.8% said Yes

(Phukan & Dhillon 2000: 242)

5. Some current ethical dilemmas

Mason et al. (1995) pose a series of contentious problems:

- Who owns intellectual products?
  - peer-to-peer file sharing
- Who is entitled to access personal information?
  - adoption records
- How can accuracy of information be protected?
  - banking records
- Who is entitled to control the flow of information?
  - employer monitoring/control of personal e-mails

5. Some current ethical dilemmas

- Some claim that there is an absolute ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ that holds for every case
- Others believe that ethics, like the meaning of information itself, will always depend on context
- Others still suggest that much depends upon one’s point of view and interests
5. Some current ethical dilemmas

Taylor and Moynihan (2002) argue that information professionals are caught in a web of sometimes conflicting needs, torn between the demands of

- Users
- Society
- Employers
- Their own needs

This raises some interesting questions:

- To whom are information managers and systems analysts ultimately responsible?
- Can professional ethics be aligned with an organisation’s pursuit of power and profit?

Laudon (1995) believes that ethics involves a process of learning that can be developed over time through reasoning and experience.

He concludes that

‘An ethics of information systems is impossible without an understanding of how information technologies affect human choice, human action, and human potential.’
6. Further reading
(does the form of citation below conform to the SIMS Style Guide?)