Computing Ethics Reflection

The first module assignment was a reflective activity on the ethics of computing, with two additional discussion modules on codes of ethics and ethical research activities. Although the stated aim of the module was to familiarize students with the academic research process, it would be infeasible for students to satisfactorily complete the module without reflecting upon ethics. Unfortunately, beginning with the first assigned reading, (Stahl et al., 2016), identify through an extensive survey that ethical analysis is seldom applied to leading computing technology and is currently of limited practical relevance. Researching both discussion forum topics (Essex, 2022a; Essex, 2022b) could result in a student identifying multiple examples of essentially uncontested unethical behaviour (Abbott, 2005; Alchuna, 2015), concluding ethics are unimportant.

Despite the potential futility stated by the authors, students are asked to adopt the perspective of working computer professional and consider ethical issues mentioned in the research paper, in my case privacy and professionalism. The Stahl et al (2016) survey found ethical matters related to privacy were most researched, yet violations of a concept most consider a basic human right continue at the hands of cyber-criminals, corporations, and governments (Niazi et al., 2022). Although governments and cyber-criminals may be able to escape consequences, large international companies have been experiencing the financial impacts of GDPR violations(Tessian, 2022). Therefore, as a company stakeholder responsible for cyber security, I would feel bound to guard employee, customer, and supplier information privacy as a computing professional (ACM, 2018).

Professional societies, including the ACM, often have written codes of conduct and professionalism related to ethics in computing was a common research topic (Fig 1). The willingness to comply with such codes may be stated as condition of membership (Albrecht et al., 2012) but non-compliance seldom has significant consequences beyond rescinding of membership (Abbott, 2005). Further to that point, less than one percent of those employed in the various computing technology sectors are members of a recognized organization with such an ethical code (Leece, 2022).

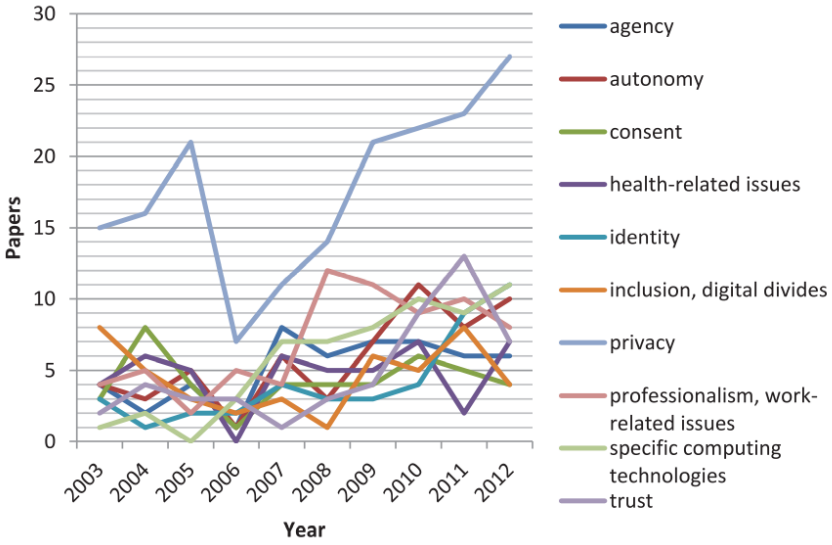

Figure 1 Top 10 ethical issues observed in research survey (Stahl et al., 2016)

The inclusion of ethical training in the computer security curriculum would initially appear a positive step to ensure Essex graduates are well rounded, Stahl et al (2016) did confirm it has been an educational shortcoming. My prime concern with the training is it appears somewhat of an afterthought to the program, potentially put in place to align with BCS accreditation guidelines(BCS, 2022). Reasoning behind this arguably cynical perspective is twofold. First all three ethical assignments are formative rather than summative and student participation in discussion boards was spotty, (note the difference in submission times between students) (Essex, 2022a; Essex, 2022c). Second, very little mention of computing ethics appears in any other module of the program, certainly nothing tied to a summative requirement that would force review of the concepts.

An alternative to the compliance afterthought theory is the potential multi-cultural composition of program cohorts could result in varied ethical opinions, though engaging for discussion, potentially difficult for unbiased summative assessment. That said, The Human Factor module could have considered the ethical issues related to STEM outsourcing since these industries are heavily reliant on technology and human interaction with that technology and data. Regional job losses driven by corporate profit pursuit (Hira, 2019) have fueled national economic growth in India and China at high personal cost to those countries' citizens working night shifts or precarious contracts to meet North American and European expectations(Narayana Reddy & Mohana, 2021). It could be argued that outsourcing arrangements requiring people to primarily work nights to accommodate their customers' preferred hours of business does not align with ACM code of conduct requirement 3.3 (ACM, 2018), yet few would consider IBM an unethical company.

From a personal action plan perspective, I will continue to adhere to ethical codes of conduct for technology professionals as a commitment to personal integrity, not the fear of negative consequences. I am not able to influence commercial aspects of contracts, but I can practice fair and respectful treatment of those under contract in my workplace interactions.

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