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SOFTWARE ENGINEERING CODE OF ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

(version 4) as recommended by the
[IEEE-CS/ACM Joint Task Force on Software Engineering Ethics and Professional Practices](#)

Short Version PREAMBLE

The short version of the code gives the aspirational elements at a high level of abstraction; the clauses that follow give examples and details of how these aspirations change the way we act as software engineering professionals. Without the aspirations, the details can become legalistic and tedious; without the details, the aspirations can become high sounding but empty; together, the aspirations and the details form a cohesive code.

Software engineers shall commit themselves to making the analysis, specification, design, development, testing and maintenance of software a beneficial and respected profession. In accordance with their commitment to the health, safety and welfare of the public, software engineers shall adhere to the following **Eight Principles**:

1 PUBLIC - Software engineers shall always act consistent with the public interest.

2 CLIENT OR EMPLOYER - Software engineers shall act in the best interests of their client or employer consistent with the public interest.

3 PRODUCT - Software engineers shall ensure that their products and related modifications are of the highest professional standards possible.

4 JUDGEMENT - Software engineers shall maintain integrity and independence in their professional judgement.

5 MANAGEMENT - Software engineering managers and leaders shall subscribe to and promote an ethical approach to the administration of software development.

6 PROFESSION - Software engineers shall advance the integrity and reputation of the profession consistent with the public interest.

7 COLLEAGUES - Software engineers shall be fair to and supportive of their colleagues.

8 SELF - Software engineers shall participate in lifelong learning regarding the practice of their profession.

SOFTWARE ENGINEERING CODE OF ETHICS AND

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

IEEE-CS/ACM Joint Task Force on Software Engineering Ethics and Professional Practices

Full Version

PREAMBLE

Computers have a central and growing role in commerce, industry, government, medicine, education, entertainment and society at large. Those who contribute, by direct participation or by teaching, to the analysis, specification, design, development, maintenance and testing of software systems have significant opportunities to do good or cause harm, to enable others to do good or cause harm, or to influence others to do good or cause harm,. To ensure, as much as possible, that this power will be used for good, software engineers must commit themselves to making software engineering a beneficial and respected profession. In accordance with that commitment, software engineers shall adhere to the following Code of Ethics and Professional Practice.

The Code contains eight Principles related to the behavior of and decisions made by professional software engineers, including practitioners, educators, managers, supervisors and policy makers, as well as trainees and students of the profession. The Principles identify the ethically responsible relationships in which individuals, groups, and organizations participate and the primary obligations within these relationships. The Clauses of each Principle are illustrations of some of the obligations included in these relationships. These obligations are founded in the software engineers' humanity, special care owed to people affected by their work, and the unique elements of the practice of software engineering. The Code prescribes these as obligations of anyone claiming to be or aspiring to be a software engineer.

It is not intended that the individual parts of the Code be used in isolation to justify errors of omission or commission. The list of Principles and Clauses is not exhaustive, and should not be read as separating the acceptable from the unacceptable in professional conduct in all practical situations. The Code is not a simple ethical algorithm which generates ethical decisions. In some situations standards may be in tension with each other or with standards from other sources. These situations require the software engineer to use ethical judgement to act in a manner which is most consistent with the spirit of the Code of Ethics and Professional Practice, given the circumstances.

Ethical tensions can best be addressed by thoughtful consideration of fundamental principles, rather than blind reliance on detailed regulations. These Principles should influence software engineers to consider broadly who is affected by their work; to examine if they and their colleagues are treating other human beings with due respect; to speculate on how the public, if reasonably well informed, would view their decisions; to analyze how the least empowered will be affected by their decisions; and to consider whether their acts would be judged worthy of the ideal professional working as a software engineer. In all these judgements concerns for the health, safety and welfare of the public is primary. That is, the "Public Interest" is central to this Code.

The dynamic and demanding context of software engineering requires a code that is adaptable and relevant to new situations as they occur. However, even in this generality, the Code provides support for software engineers and managers of software engineers who needs to take positive action in a specific case by documenting the ethical stance of the profession. The Code provides an ethical foundation to which individuals within teams and the team as a whole can appeal. The Code helps to

define those actions which are ethically improper to request of a software engineer or teams of software engineers.

The Code is not simply for adjudicating the nature of questionable acts; it also has an important educational function. Since it expresses the consensus of the profession on ethical issues, it is a means to educate both the public and aspiring professionals about the ethical obligations of all software engineers.

PRINCIPLES

Principle 1 PUBLIC Software engineers shall always act consistent with the public interest. In particular, software engineers shall, as appropriate:

- 1.01. Accept full responsibility for their own work.
- 1.02. Moderate the interests of the software engineer, the employer, the client and the users with the public good.
- 1.03. Approve software only if they have a well-founded belief that it is safe, meets specifications, has passed appropriate tests, and does not diminish quality of life or harm the environment.
- 1.04. Disclose to appropriate persons or authorities any actual or potential danger to the user, the public, or the environment, that they reasonably believe to be associated with software or related documents.
- 1.05. Co-operate in efforts to address matters of grave public concern caused by software or related documents.
- 1.06. Be fair and avoid deception in all statements, particularly public ones, concerning software or related documents.
- 1.07. Consider issues of physical disabilities, allocation of resources, economic disadvantage and other factors that can diminish access to the benefits of software.
- 1.08. Volunteer professional skills to good causes and contribute to public education concerning the discipline.

Principle 2 CLIENT OR EMPLOYER Software engineers shall act in the best interests of their client or employer consistent with the public interest. In particular, software engineers shall, as appropriate:

- 2.01. Provide service in their areas of competence, being honest and forthright about any limitations of their experience and education.
- 2.02. Not knowingly use software that is obtained or retained either illegally or unethically.
- 2.03. Use the property of a client or employer only in ways properly authorized, and with the client's or employer's knowledge and consent.
- 2.04. Ensure that any document upon which they rely has been approved, when required, by someone authorized to approve it.

- 2.05. Keep private any confidential information gained in their professional work, where such confidentiality is consistent with the public interest.
- 2.06. Identify, document, and report to the client or the employer promptly if, in their opinion, a project is likely to fail, to prove too expensive, to violate intellectual property legislation, or otherwise to be problematic.
- 2.07. Identify, document, and report significant issues of social concern, of which they are aware, in software or related documents to the employer or the client.
- 2.08. Accept no outside work detrimental to the work they perform for their primary employer.
- 2.09. Promote no interest adverse to their employer or client, unless a higher ethical concern is being compromised; in that case, inform the employer or another appropriate authority of the ethical concern.

Principle 3 PRODUCT Software engineers shall ensure that their products and related modifications are of the highest professional standards possible. In particular, software engineers shall, as appropriate:

- 3.01. Strive for high quality, acceptable cost and a reasonable schedule, ensuring significant tradeoffs are clear to and accepted by the employer, the client, the user and the public.
- 3.02. Ensure proper and achievable goals and objectives for any project on which they work or propose.
- 3.03. Work to identify, define and address ethical, economic, cultural, legal, and environmental issues related to work projects.
- 3.04. Ensure that they are qualified, by an appropriate combination of education, planned education, and experience, for any project on which they work or propose to work.
- 3.05. Ensure an appropriate methodology for any project on which they work or propose to work.
- 3.06. Work to follow industry standards when available that are most appropriate for the task at hand, departing from these only when technically justified.
- 3.07. Strive to fully understand the specifications for software on which they work.
- 3.08. Ensure that specifications for software on which they work have been well documented, satisfy the users' requirements, and have the appropriate approvals.
- 3.09. Ensure realistic estimates of cost, scheduling, personnel, and outcomes on any project on which they work or propose to work and provide a risk assessment of these estimates.
- 3.10. Ensure adequate testing, debugging, and review of software and related documents on which they work.
- 3.11. Ensure adequate documentation, including significant problems discovered and solutions adopted, for any project on which they work.
- 3.12. Work to develop software and related documents that respect the privacy of those who will be

affected by that software.

3.13. Be careful to use only accurate data derived by ethical and lawful means, and use only in ways properly authorized.

3.14. Maintain the integrity of data, being sensitive to outdated or flawed occurrences

3.15 Treat software maintenance with the same professionalism as new development.

Principle 4 JUDGEMENT Software engineers shall maintain integrity and independence in their professional judgement. In particular, software engineers shall, as appropriate:

4.01. Temper all technical judgements by the need to support and maintain human values.

4.02 Only endorse documents prepared under their supervision or within their areas of competence and with which they are in agreement.

4.03. Maintain professional objectivity with respect to any software or related documents they are asked to evaluate.

4.04. Not engage in deceptive financial practices such as bribery, double billing, or other improper financial practices.

4.05. Disclose to all concerned parties those conflicts of interest that cannot reasonably be avoided or escaped.

4.06. Refuse to participate, as members or advisors, in a governmental or professional body concerned with software related issues, in which they, their employers, or their clients have undisclosed potential conflicts of interest.

Principle 5 MANAGEMENT Software engineering managers and leaders shall subscribe to and promote an ethical approach to the administration of software development. In particular, those managing or leading software engineers shall, as appropriate:

5.01 Ensure good management for any project on which they work, including effective procedures for promotion of quality and reduction of risk.

5.02. Ensure that software engineers are informed of standards before being held to them.

5.03. Ensure that software engineers know the employer's policies and procedures for protecting passwords, files, and other confidential information.

5.04. Assign work only after taking into account appropriate contributions of education and experience tempered with a desire to further that education and experience.

5.05. Ensure realistic estimates of cost, scheduling, personnel, and outcome on any project on which they work or propose to work, and provide a risk assessment of these estimates.

5.06. Attract potential software engineers only by full and accurate description of the conditions of employment.

- 5.07. Offer fair and just remuneration.
- 5.08. Not unjustly prevent someone from taking a better position for which that person is suitably qualified.
- 5.09. Ensure that there is a fair agreement concerning ownership of any software, processes, research, writing, or other intellectual property to which a software engineer has contributed.
- 5.10. Provide for due process in hearing charges of violation of an employer's policy or of this Code.
- 5.11. Not ask a software engineer to do anything inconsistent with this Code.
- 5.12. Not punish anyone for expressing ethical concerns about a project.

Principle 6 PROFESSION Software engineers shall advance the integrity and reputation of the profession consistent with the public interest. In particular, software engineers shall, as appropriate:

- 6.01. Help develop an organizational environment favorable to acting ethically.
- 6.02. Promote public knowledge of software engineering.
- 6.03. Extend software engineering knowledge by appropriate participation in professional organizations, meetings and publications.
- 6.04. Support, as members of a profession, other software engineers striving to follow this Code.
- 6.05. Not promote their own interest at the expense of the profession.
- 6.06. Obey all laws governing their work, unless, in exceptional circumstances, such compliance is inconsistent with the public interest.
- 6.07. Be accurate in stating the characteristics of software on which they work, avoiding not only false claims but also claims that might reasonably be supposed to be deceptive, misleading, or doubtful.
- 6.08. Take responsibility for detecting, correcting, and reporting errors in software and associated documents on which they work.
- 6.09. Ensure that clients, employers, and supervisors know of the software engineer's commitment to this Code of ethics, and the subsequent ramifications of such commitment.
- 6.10. Avoid associations with disreputable businesses and organizations.
- 6.11. Consider that violations of this Code are inconsistent with being a professional software engineer.
- 6.12. Express concerns to the people involved when significant violations of this Code are detected unless this is impossible, ineffective, or dangerous.
- 6.13. Report significant violations of this Code to appropriate authorities when it is clear that consultation about the problems is impossible, ineffective or dangerous.

Principle 7 COLLEAGUES Software engineers shall be fair to and supportive of their colleagues. In particular, software engineers shall, as appropriate:

- 7.01. Encourage colleagues to adhere to this Code
- 7.02. Assist colleagues in professional development.
- 7.03. Credit fully the work of others and refrain from taking undue credit.
- 7.04. Review the work of others in an objective, candid, and properly-documented way.
- 7.05. Give a fair hearing to the opinion, concern, or complaint of a colleague.
- 7.06. Assist colleagues in being fully aware of current standard work practices including policies and procedures for protecting passwords, files and other confidential information, and security measures in general.
- 7.07. Not unfairly intervene in the career of any colleague; however, concern for the employer, the client or public interest may compel software engineers, in good faith, to question the competence of a colleague.
- 7.08. In situations outside of their own areas of competence, call upon the opinions of other professionals who have competence in that area.

Principle 8 SELF Software engineers shall participate in lifelong learning regarding the practice of their profession. In particular, software engineers shall continually endeavor to:

- 8.01. Further their knowledge of developments in the analysis, specification, design, development, maintenance and testing of software and related documents, together with the management of the development process.
- 8.02. Improve their ability to create safe, reliable, and useful quality software at reasonable cost and within a reasonable time.
- 8.03. Improve their ability to produce accurate, informative, and literate documentation.
- 8.04. Improve their understanding of the software and related documents on which they work and of the environment in which they will be used.
- 8.05. Improve their knowledge of the law governing the software and related documents on which they work.
- 8.06. Improve their knowledge of this Code, its interpretation, and its application to their work.
- 8.07. Not influence others to undertake any action which involves a breach of this Code.
- 8.08. Consider that personal violations of this Code are inconsistent with being a professional software engineer.

This Code was developed by the IEEE-CS/ACM joint task force on Software Engineering Ethics and Professional Practices:

Chair: Donald Gotterbarn;

Executive Committee: Keith Miller and Simon Rogerson;

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