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Subject: A paper from a task force similar to ours -- in Germany.

I was going to send this to Don, the keeper of papers and other reference materials, but I thought the rest of you might be interested in reading this and the next paper from the Gesellschaft fur Informatik (GI). I met Karl-Heinz Roediger at the IFIP WG9.1 workshop in Cuba on Ethics and Politics of Systems Design. I think a lot of what the GI is doing is very similar to what we are trying to accomplish on our task force. See especially the next message.

Suzie
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1 Computer Science - a maturing profession

Computer science is a maturing profession that after a long and dynamic process of expansion now begins to reflect its role in society. The German professional association, Gesellschaft fur Informatik (GI), supports the generation and evolution of professional standards of many types including standards of social responsibility and professional ethics. While this process has been implicitly supported from the beginning it becomes more explicit by the development of guidelines for professionally correct behavior. Such standards are of course present in the everyday practice of every member of the professional and scientific community, but this proves also that this behavior is derived and supported by many different and sometimes contradictory experiences, attitudes and values. Once correct and responsible behavior is to be defined in ethical and professional guidelines the extend of these contradictions becomes visible. Under this impression it may look preferable to do without an explicit definition.

But this is in clear contrast to the society's demand to plan, to use, to control and to understand information technological processes and products. If computer scientists and professionals do not reach some public agreement with users and buyers there are good chances that some governmental actions for the external regulation of these relations will take over, maybe by law or by other enforced constraints. Privacy protection, liability law, centralized regulations for the conduct of examinations or the right of informational self-determination are examples of such external regulations, which are to be obeyed strictly, but which sometimes are only the second best choice. It seems to be preferable if such regulations were propagated (and may be even enforced) by the professional community itself. Ethical codices and ethical guidelines are two examples how to regulate

professional quality below the juridical level. In their development professional responsibility became a central issue of professional ethics in the last decades. Scientific communities in plural societies are part of these societies and share its conditions and limits. To speak for all of its members inside society, these conditions and limits cannot be ignored. This restricts the professional-ethical discourse in its result - but not in its discussion, where plural and conflicting points of view may be discussed.

2 Ethical Codices as instruments defining professional attitudes

The first ethical codices for computer scientist were proposed by ACM and BCS in the early seventies, following the example of many professional engineering and other scientific societies. BCS voted for such a code in 1971, ACM followed 1972. Both codices underwent revisions in 1992.

Since the late eighties IFIP tried to define a global code of ethics, initially driven by the former chairman of the Technical Committee on Computers and Society, H. Sackman. In the technical tradition of information technology and computer science, this code should be trans-cultural, transcending (or ignoring) the quite different cultural, social, economical, political, and juridical borders between IFIP members national societies. This is certainly a very difficult task and the first proposal by the TC9-chairman did not convince TC-members that this task was achieved. Meanwhile a somewhat different track has been proposed. The Council of European Professional Informatics Societies CEPIS recently announced a first proposal on professional ethics and asked their members to think about such regulations within their organizations, but this first CEPIS proposal looks still quite insufficient to many professionals.

The idea of a codex that transcends cultural and society borders demonstrates not only that global regulations may be difficult to achieve but also that the codex form by itself is not free of problems. Even within the industrialized countries there is the basic distinction between juridical systems based on the anglo-american case law and juridical systems based on the code Napoleon or the roman tradition. Another basic distinction exists between countries of different economic order or of completely different religious or ideological value tradition. It is hard to believe that a single global IFIP-code should be ethically acceptable for professionals in islamic fundamentalistic traditions, chinese communist or other national traditions. In the best of all perspectives, this case seems to be hopeless, but probably it prolongs an imperialistic view of technological advancement to be only possible in industrialized countries. Since 1992 the IFIP Ethics Task Group and its chairman Jacques Berleur follow a different route, assembling an ethics reader, which may help to develop some recommendations.

Ethical questions appear as singular questions, where a general rule should be applied. To understand the peculiarities and difficulties arising from the individual case, it is considered useful, to discuss such cases. Before any sanctions a public discourse on example cases seems to be useful. Regulations may follow these cases, otherwise they may be of little or no influence to the professional community. The ACM is following arguably the opposite route: First they installed a codex, then they discussed cases. This may be acceptable, when the common foundation of the codex is beyond discussion, but it remains of questionable practical value in a pluralistic society, where dominating (christian) values serve more or less as lip-service. The actual state of computer science and its rapid moving dynamics do hardly allow such a fixed value initialization (e. g., as part of the statutes). Alternatively a more fluid process, namely a formally sanctioned discourse on

ethical problems using some initial ethical guidelines seems to be more promising regarding their effective consequences. Guidelines may be used for the discussion of actual conflicts as for basic decisions with the advantage that guidelines may be adapted to the actual development over medium terms (which is much more difficult if it is integral part of the statutes).

3 A Task Force for Professional Ethics

Discourses as a formalized procedure are a method of scientific exchange well adopted by the Gesellschaft für Informatik (GI) since mid-eighties. The Fachbereich 8 Informatik und Gesellschaft (Technical Committee on Computer Science and Society) of the GI initiated a first paper on Computer Science and Responsibility in 1988 (Roediger et al., 1991). This paper did not fit the GI-statutes, which had no place for ethical guidelines. This changed with a complete revision of the statutes in 1992 where the organization as a whole wanted to integrate an ethical guideline in the statutes. This is the first positive formulation of such a guideline in the 25 years of the organization's existence. The former GI-President Roland Vollmar installed a pluralist and interdisciplinary working group within Fachbereich 8, which did not only consist of computer scientists and engineers, but also of natural and social scientists, jurists, philosophers and theologians. This task force proposed within half a year of rigid work, meeting every month, an ethical guideline. This ethical guideline proposal was adopted by Fachbereich 8 and is now to be acknowledged by the presidium and to become a by-law of the new statutes. This should happen in January 1994. Due to the present state of the guidelines there are only very few actual experiences with the discourse. This should change rapidly after the guidelines have been finally adopted.

The notion ethical guideline was preferred to the notion of a ethical codex to demonstrate the open character of the proposal. The guideline differentiates between ethical expectations to a member, members in leading positions, members in research and education and ethical expectations to the organization GI as a whole. Included is the demand for continued education and acquisition of competence not only in computer science but also in its relevant applications, thus reflecting the dynamic professional growth and change. Ethical discourses as collective learning and self-understanding are central aspects of the guideline. A collection of case studies of conflicts should aid a common ethical reflection and the further development of the guideline and its adaptation to changes in society. Basically the paper recommends and tries to help. As a consequence of this attitude, the guidelines impose no sanctions (though the statutes have some regulations for cases of extremely disorderly professional behavior).

The GI has not adopted the ACM-policy of an ethical codex (and certainly not the details of such culturally and politically sensitive instrument, but GI has well adopted the ACM-strategy to make ethical conflicts visible, discussible and solvable. Peter Neumanns Risks of Computing newsletter is considered as a valuable example for a collection of ethical case studies as part of the ethical discourse. This collection shall report on ethical conflicts (necessarily sometimes in alienated form) and it shall be commented by the working group, to support and evoke discussions on professional ethical behavior in the GI. This should support members in conflict situations, helping where professional civil courage needs collective support. The ACM tradition to discuss ethical conflicts in self-assessment form or as discussion papers shall be adopted.

The discourse scheme was preferred over the codex scheme because of positive experiences gained in comparable processes in working groups on

Juridical Control of Information Technologies (Wilhelm 1993) and on Theory of Informatics (Coy et al. 1992). Discourses were considered to be an adequate answer to a rapidly growing complexity of the information systems, where individual responsibility must be supported by collective processes. The actual philosophical and political discussion has given only few and hesitant answers. With the ethical discourse project we hope to complement individual professional ethics, which can no longer cope with the growing complexities of a globally interconnected world of information technology.

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