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Dear Don:

This responds to your e-mail of December 8 seeking comments on the Version 4.0 of the SE Code. My overall comments is that, very soon, it should be gone over by a good editor. Committees have a tendency to garble text, to introduce unnecessarily clumsy modes of expression, and otherwise to make the code more difficult to use than need be.

My comments will suggest what I have in mind (as well as my virtually complete satisfaction with the Code's substance).

Short version's intro (and corresponding provisions in main code). Note transition from "must" in line one to "shall" in line 5. Whatever point the transition is supposed to make is too subtle for me. I recommend using "shall" in both (since "must" sounds too much like banging on the table).

1. Public. I think it enough if engineers always act "consistent with" the public interest. To require them always to act "in the public interest" is to forbid them to do good for themselves, their clients or employers, and even their customers when doing that is neutral with respect to the public interest. Surely, not what was intended (or what 2 says).

2. Client or employer. "within confines of". Dead metaphor. Presumably, it means the same as the shorter (and more common) "consistent with".

3. Product. "their products and related modifications". Modifications are generally modifications of something. If of products, they are products. If of something else, what? Frankly, "modifications" just strikes me as confusing.

Enough about the basic principles. You get the idea. Now to the document.

Preamble. This long enough that it might be a good idea to name the paragraphs (say, with letters rather than numbers) to aid in reference.

Preamble. First paragraph. Line 5. "opportunities both to do good or to cause harm, and to influence and enable others to do good or cause harm". How about something grammatically easier to follow, e.g. "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". Better yet: "opportunities to do good or cause harm directly or indirectly". Best "opportunities to do good or cause harm" (since "cause" allows for everything else anyway).

Preamble. Third paragraph. Third last line. "ethical judgment". Actually, you should want them to use judgment, not just ethical judgment. What do you gain by adding "ethical" here when you go on to say "in the spirit of the Code"?

Next para. last three lines. "these judgments concerns [delete s] for the health, safety, and welfare of the public is the primary concern [delete "the" and "concern"]". That is [insert .] the 'Public Interest' is central to this code. [delete this entire last sentence as entirely redundant, enough to say public health, safety, and welfare are primary].

fifth para. Lines 3-4. "support for the [delete "the"] software engineer [add "s"] and managers of software engineers who need [delete "s"]". Switch from singular to plural so confusing drafter mess up verb ending. Simplify.

sixth para. third line. "it is as means". "A means"?

2.02. "illegally or unethically". If "unethically" means "in violation of this code", it would be clearer to say so. If it means something else, then might be good idea to say what. Right now it is just confusing.

2.06. Insert "to" after "otherwise" to make consistent with "likely to...."

3.02 "on which they work or [add "which they"] propose.

3.14. "data [add ","] being sensitive to outdated or flawed occurrences." Outdated what? What is a "flawed occurrence"? Unless this is a technical term, might be better to speak of corrupted data or something means something to your reader?

3.15. "professionalism". Is this a synonym for "care"? If so, why not use "care". If something more is intended, why not say what?

4.04. "[shall] Do not engage." one modal is enough. drop "Do". Is bribery a "deceptive financial practice"? What if the bribery is open? might be better to say "not engage in bribery, double billing, or other improper financial practices. I omit "secret payments" since some--for example, those involving national security, might not be improper.

4.05. "and aspire to resolve them". "Them" refers to "conflicts of interest that cannot reasonably be avoided or escaped". Why would anyone want to aspire to resolving one of them? Or should i aspire to resolve it by unreasonably avoiding or escaping it? So, what does the aspire phrase add but confusion?

Principle 5. last line. "managing and leading". Substitute "or". Surely, one wants what follows to be done by someone who only managed or led.

5.08. "suitably qualified". Is it possible to be qualified but in a way not suitable? what does "suitably" add except confusion.

6.09. "and the subsequent ramifications." what does this mean? Amendments? Interpretations? Effects? Why not say?

6.13. "when consultation about the problem has proven impossible, dangerous, or ineffective." "Consultation" seems the wrong word here. People get paid to consult. More serious, do you really want someone to wait to go to appropriate authorities until the "consultation has proven...DANGEROUS"?

7.05. "passwords, files, security measures in general, and other confidential information". A security measure is not "confidential information". Can you just drop "security measures in general" or rewrite the whole paragraph?

8.02 "safe, reliable, and useful quality software". What does "quality" add? Is the fear that the software could be safe, reliable, and useful and yet lack quality?

8:07 and 8:08 belong under Principle 7, that is, they both concern colleagues. not self.

Well, those are my favorite candidates for wordsmithing. No doubt others will have theirs.

Sincerely,

Michael Davis

PS: Thanks for the comments. I'll use them, as soon as I get time. I believe the instructions for getting "your archive" was in your e-mail describing how to use the list server. But I haven't had time to check that either. Will do over break.