

Interviewee: Mary Prior  
Interviewer: Michael Davis  
Location: De Montfort University, Leicester, England  
Date: 24 Feb 03 (approved)

## QUESTIONNAIRE

### SOFTWARE DEVELOPERS WRITE A CODE OF ETHICS

1. What is your educational background?

I have a BA in English from the University of Lancaster (1975) and an MSc [Master of Science] in Computer Science from the University of Aston (1988). After my BA, I worked for a long time as a librarian, getting more and more involved in the information systems. Eventually, I decided I should know more about computer science; so, I took the MSc. When I got that degree, I became a university lecturer here.

2. What sort of organization do you work for? What do you do there?

I teach Systems Analysis and Design, Data Modelling and Database Design, and Comparative Systems Development Methodologies, in the School of Computing here at De Montfort University.

3. What experience, if any, have you had in software development? If you are a software developer, what led you into that field?

My masters work involved developing some software. Soon after my masters, I worked on two contracts for a company here in Leicester that also involved developing some software. I don't think I've done much since then.

4. Are you an engineer?

No. I work on business applications of software. My concern is the use of computers in business organizations. Engineers build software. I analyze the needs of business to determine what kinds of software they need. I might write specifications for software, but I would not build the software.

5. How did you hear about the IEEE/ACM Joint Task Force on Software Engineering and Professional Practice (SEEPP)?

I heard about SEEPP through Don Gotterbarn, when he was here (Jan or Feb 1997), and through Simon Rogerson who at the time was in the same Department as me). I'm not sure which of them was the first to tell me.

6. What lead you to participate in SEEPP's work?

In March 1995, we had our first ETHICOMP [Ethics-Computers] meeting at De Montfort. I presented a paper saying that we should have a Hippocratic oath like physicians. So, I was already thinking about codes of ethics in computing. SEEPP's work connected with my interest. The invitation was all I needed.

7. Were you familiar with codes of ethics before you became involved in SEEPP? Explain.

The BCS [British Computer Society] has a code of ethics and I had looked at it. I had also looked at other codes in this profession, the one for IMIS (Institute for the Management of Information Systems) in the UK, and the ACM's and the IEEE's.

8. In what ways did you participate in SEEPP's work, especially in the process of preparing the code? (The more details, the better.)

When Don sent out a draft by email, I would respond by email (starting late in 1995 or early in 1996). Yes, even though my office was separated from his (and Simon's) only by a few floors, I think my involvement was largely, if not entirely, by email. I was busy at that time. As time went on, I may have responded less. I left DMU in September 1997. From then on, I think I lost touch and did not participate at all.

9. By what means did you participate? For example, did you participate by email, or by phone, or by face-to-face meetings, or by letter, or by information conversation, or the like?

Email, as I said. I'm sure I had no significant conversation with anyone about the code while it was being drafted.

10. Did any of these means of participation seem to work better than the others? Any seem to work worse? Which would you recommend as best? Why?

Email got me the text; it enabled me to respond quickly; and it allowed me to respond briefly, even with a one-liner. I think it worked pretty well. If I had had to write a memo, I might have done nothing. With a memo, you have to say enough to fill at least a good part of the page. Sometimes I didn't have that much to say.

11. Any events that particularly stick in your mind relevant to the process? (The more details, the better?)

Don was here. I was aware of the reiterations of drafts trying to absorb comments. I don't envy trying to get a draft everyone can sign off on. I didn't pay attention to the politics—though I could tell there was a lot of politics, making the draft so everyone could sign off on it.

12. Do you have documents, paper or electronic, relevant to your participation in the process? May we have a copy?

No, sadly. When I left DMU, my computer's hard drive was erased—and I didn't keep paper copies.

13. Has your thinking about codes of ethics changed as a result of your participation in SEPP's work? How?

My thinking about the value of codes has not changed. But I now have a greater appreciation of the difficulty of drafting such a document.

14. What, in your opinion, is important about having a code of ethics?

We should be adding to the sum of human benefit. It's important that professionals have to put down their marker: Here is what we stand for. Putting down your marker helps with educating the next generation. It is also helpful to individuals who run into an ethical issue, giving them a framework for support. Codes also get a profession talking. It raises issues.

15. Is there anything about your *participation* that you are especially pleased with or unhappy about?

I wish I could have been more involved than I was.

16. Is there anything about the *final code* that you are especially pleased with or unhappy about?

I'm not unhappy about anything. I'm happy it got through the process and was adopted.

17. Is there anyone whose participation in the process seems to you especially important? Explain.

Don [Gottlieb]. Simon [Rogerson] to give you the UK perspective. And Ben [Fairweather] because he's a philosopher.

18. Anyone who you think we should be sure to talk to? Explain.

Maybe someone not involved in the process, Steve McRobb, is working on the IMIS code. He might be interesting to talk to for a comparison.

19. If you had been in charge of the process, what, if anything would you have done differently?

Can't answer. I was just not aware enough of the process to know what to change.

20. Is there anything we should have asked but didn't? Anything you want to add to what you have already said?

No.