

Date: Wed, 18 Dec 1996 01:13:58 -0500 (EST)
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Subject: code of ethics, the next step

Dear Task force members,
It is time to move the code to the next steps. It has been circulated to several groups including the steering committee. It is evident from the comments that we need to do some foundation building.

The steering committee would like to see the relation of this code to other relevant professional codes. I know many of the imperatives were derived from other professional codes. I would appreciate it if you could send me the references for particular imperatives. I will write up a report which describes the roots of the code in other professional engineering and management codes. Then we can identify those elements or combination of elements which have been added to the code to make it a software engineering code.

Comments we have received seem to be based on conflicting views about the function of a code of ethics. Some reject the educational function of a code in educating society and new members about the goals and values of a profession and so have criticized several of the imperatives as "common sense for any practicing engineer". Others have objected to any imperative which is not amenable to clear measurement, which is needed to legally determine if someone has violated the code. Others have objected to competence imperative. Achieving consensus is difficult given this diversity of views about the nature role and structure of codes. In the next two weeks I will write a brief document on the roles, functions, and structures of codes of ethics in the professions. I will then circulate it for your comment. The document will be revised to establish a consensus within our group.

While you are reviewing the document about codes, I will organize the references about the origin of several of the imperatives into a document which shows the foundations of this code in other codes.

Once we have a clear consensus about the function and structure of the code, I would like to produce a revised draft of the code which is consistent with this consensus, in time for the February meeting of the steering committee. This could then be submitted for their comment. After revising the code in the light of these comments it should be circulated as a draft for comment to a larger professional audience. We found this a effective way to achieve consensus in developing the ACM code. *

The plan:

- By the first week in January
 - send references to sources for imperative in draft code to Don.
 - (Don) write draft statement about professional codes
- By Mid January
 - comment on draft about codes
 - (Don) distribute statement about relationship of SE code to other codes
- By beginning of February

Achieve consensus on structure of code and start to revise it in the light of that consensus.

Finalize description about foundations of the code and roles of the code.

By Mid February

Revised draft of code ready for comment by Steering Committee.

By the middle of March

Have a discussion draft ready for distribution on the net and in professional journals

Have survey form ready for distribution with the code.

I know this is a lot to ask during this time of year, but we have at last achieved something positive with the draft code and if we lose this momentum I am concerned that we will lose all credibility. But even more importantly, if we don't get the job done the concept of professional ethical standards will also lose credibility.

I look forward to getting your responses.

With thanks for your effort and best regards,

don

ps. Have a safe and healthy holiday season!

<< TEMPORARY (July 96-Jan 97) ADDRESS CHANGE >>

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