



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It Takes More Than Ethics

Chris Simpson

Abstract

Recent positive developments in ethical outlook are explored, initially within the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) profession, and then broadened into other disciplines and the community in general. To understand why there has been a growing ethical problem in the first place, ethical attitudes of university students, ICT exponents and people in other disciplines have been observed and noted.

The search for practical ethical guidelines continues by questioning why, if professionalism indicates an adherence to a code of ethics that seeks high standards, do we still have trouble with the concept of ethics? Ethics differ from one group to another. Furthermore, ethics keep changing, as is evident in the latest codes, in which 'public good' now comes before the more inward-looking 'good of the profession'.

So, how could an ethical code be more than an isolated, somewhat ineffective and temporary set of guidelines? How can it be freed of boundaries, of context and of time? How effective or relevant is the education of university students in practical ethics? How effective are the professional and ethical bodies?

Some answers are proposed and along the way, together with some simple but powerful notions and tools, that facilitate ethical understanding in university education and in professional practice.

It is then argued that as work is a part of life, then a similar range of ethical options would be available in every context of life, be it as a private individual, a society, an employee, a small business, a corporation or in whatever discipline or role. In each situation, a similar range of lifestyle choices exist, for example, wasteful (careless), indulgent (selfish), sustainable (prudent), long-term view (responsible) or a perpetual view (meaningful and truly progressive). In other words, by agreeing to adopt 'the community ethics', one has taken on a dutiful role. For it to be more meaningful and more fruitful, life further demands such things as care of others and environment, along with some sense of humility, giving, gratitude, purpose, distant vision and wardenship.

How can ethical guidelines transcend into being 'inspirational' guidelines, independent of occupation? Is this not the realm of higher values? And if so, is this essential to the fundamental progress of human-kind?

It may well be so. A few more simple observations and tools are offered that could be of assistance.

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