



Ethics and regulation in the ICT industry

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Lessons for the ACS

Dr. Richard Lucas MACS
Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public
Ethics

Outline

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The Survey

- ★ To understand the state of ethical attitudes in the Australian ICT industry we decided to ask ICT professionals what their actual attitudes to ethics and their industry were. This asking took the forms of:
 - ★ a survey and
 - ★ targeted in-depth interviews.
- ★ Here I present some of the interesting results from the survey and the interviews.

Survey Results

Age

Population Representation		
	ICT	General Population
Depression and WW II Babies (<1946)	4.3%	7.6% (3.5%)
Baby Boomers (1946 - 1954)	13.3%	20.1%
Generation Jones (1955 - 1964)	28.0%	23.0%
Generation X (1965 - 1980)	43.5%	34.6%
Generation Y (1981 - 1999)	11.0%	10.6%

Age

Gen Y is different

- ★ All generations were equally **aware** of how often unethical behaviour occurs. Every generation thought that unethical behaviour occurred too often.
- ★ Compared to the others Generation Y thinks that ethical regulations **ought** to be less important.
- ★ Job security made a difference to Gen Y's **reaction** to requests to behave unethically.
- ★ Gen Y reported having **more ethics education**.

Age x Ethical Problems

Table E - Top Five Ethical Problems

	Compromising Quality	Conflict of Interest	Unprofessional Behaviour	Privacy	False Promises	Copyright	Malware, Viruses, etc.	Compromising Functionality
WWII and Depression	1	=5	2	=3	-	-	=3	=5
Baby Boomers	1	3	2	5	4	-	-	-
Gen Jones	1	1	4	5	3	-	-	-
Gen X	1	5	2	2	4	-	-	-
Gen Y	1	-	4	1	-	3	4	-

Occupational Description

- ★ We asked the respondents to self-describe their occupation and got the following result:
- ★ **247** different answers from **351** respondents. This was reduced to the **17** groups listed below. The very large number of ways that the respondents described their occupation shows the confused state of the classification of work within the industry

Occupation Frequency

Occupation Description	Frequency	Percent
Manager	95	27.1
Developer	73	20.8
Consultant	48	13.7
Administrator	43	12.3
Subtotal	259	73.9

Occupations (2)

Technical Support	20	5.7
Academic	17	4.8
Analyst	11	3.1
Analyst/Programmer	10	2.8
Maintenance	9	2.6
Programmer	6	1.7
Computer Science	4	1.1
Sales	3	0.9
Policy	2	0.6
Chaplain	1	0.3
Communicator	1	0.3
Production	1	0.3
Journalist	1	0.3
Unknown	6	1.7
Total	351	100

Industry Sector

Industry Sector	Frequency	Percent
Private	142	40%
Public	118	34%
Academia	36	10%
NFP	10	3%
Private & Public	27	8%
Private, Public & Academia	15	5%
Not specified	3	1%
Total	351	100

Education

- ★ Only three-quarters (**3/4**) of the respondents had any ICT specific qualifications at all.
- ★ Within these **44.8%** reported formal ethics education. But 37 of 38 (**97%**) Australian universities are accredited by the ACS which has ethics as a mandatory component,.
- ★ Poor quality of ethics education:
 - ★ One-third (**1/3**) said their ethics education was not helpful.
 - ★ Ethics education the respondents received made **no difference** to actual behaviour when faced with ethical situations.
- ★ There was a significant difference between what the tertiary institutions **claim to deliver** by way of ethics education, what the **ACS demands**, and what the respondents **said they received**.

Ethics Education

Formal

	Modes of Training	Percent Within Kind	Percent Within All Responses
Formal			
Lecture	6	8.1%	3.0%
Module	8	10.8%	4.1%
Seminar	7	9.5%	3.6%
Subject	30	40.5%	15.2%
Tutorial	1	1.4%	0.5%
Work Organized	18	24.3%	9.1%
Profession Organized	4	5.4%	2.0%
<u>SubTotal</u>	74		37.6%

Ethics Education

Informal

Informal			
Culture	4	3.3%	2.0%
Faith	54	43.9%	27.4%
Family	20	16.3%	10.2%
Role Model	2	1.6%	1.0%
Scouts	2	1.6%	1.0%
Self-study	41	33.3%	20.8%
<u>SubTotal</u>	123		62.4%
Total	197	100.0%	100.0%

Ethics Regulations

- ★ Only **69.9%** were aware of industry regulations addressing ethical behaviour.
- ★ Why do as many as 30% of respondents not know of anything that might address ethics?
- ★ For those who did know, **39.7%** indicated that they were aware of the ACS
 - ★ This means that **less than 28%** of all respondents knew of the ACS.
 - ★ In all, 15 professional bodies, and four other sources of regulations, were identified.
- ★ When asked if they knew of any ethics regulations within their workplace the number of positive responses rose to 81.9%.

About the ACS

- ★ The ACS is a member of the Australian Council of Professions.
- ★ **But** there is no requirement for members of the ICT profession to be accredited or licensed
 - ★ The ACS does not have the same power over the profession as do many other professional bodies. Eg. Plumbers, electricians, doctors, etc.
 - ★ The ACS is restricted in what it can do about those ICT professionals who do not live up to ACS standards of conduct.
 - ★ If they are members of the ACS their membership can be suspended but that does not stop them from working.
 - ★ If they are not members there is nothing that can be done by the ACS.
- ★ It is important, therefore, to understand what the role of the ACS is and what it can do, in order to recommend ways that it might influence and improve the conduct of ICT professionals.

Survey Responses

And Interviewee Comments

- ★ Most IT people **do not want to be professional** and hence the ACS does not appeal.
- ★ ACS is **not perceived to be an industry body** like CPA (accountants). ICT needs a relevant, effective professional body.
- ★ Difficult for ICT industry to self-regulate because it is so **diverse**. Even Professional Association ACS only has a small portion of the workers who could be counted as ICT.
- ★ A colleague was refused entry to ACS because he did not have a degree. I don't have a degree either. ACS a bit **elitist**.
- ★ Do not put the ACS logo on card, as it is seen as **negative or not recognized**. Look to Microsoft certifications instead.

ACS Positive Survey Responses

- ★ The ACS's Info Age has **extremely useful** occasional **articles**, eg by Michael Bower (ANU) covering some of these aspects.
- ★ Codes of ACS, but not many people know they exist. ACS code of ethics **plays no role**.
- ★ Attended the ethics training run by the ACS through the **certified professional training program**.
- ★ ACS ethics panel and council reviewing the Code of Ethics is more **realistic** and more **useful**.
- ★ The Australian Computer Society does a **very good job** of engendering ethical behaviour **among its members**. However, it is the fly by night retailers and the short term ICT employees that may be most at risk of unethical behaviour.

Last Survey Responses

- ★ ACS needs to target companies, businesses more to show benefits of ACS membership regarding professionalism.
- ★ If the industry were to be regulated by some neutral body, I would much prefer to see it done by a body like the Australian Computer Society who actually understand the industry, rather than the government who seem to have no grasp over the importance of or the workings of our industry.

Other Comments

- ★ Hope you take this seriously and can make good use of your surveys!
- ★ Ask – what is the rest of the world doing? Focus on India and China as emerging nations in ICT. How could the results of this study be used in other parts of the world? Have not other professions done this? If so why do we not copy?
- ★ This project is very valuable. As a complete society we need to tell the people the expectations. Society can lose focus and their behaviour can decline unless they are reminded now and then. Our ethics and standards, as a society, have declined compared to what has been the case in the past. This project is good because it reminds people to behave ethically.
- ★ Aside from a few positive comments the general tenor is that the ACS needs to do more, much more, to be seen as the rightful professional body that can, and will, take measures to ensure that those in our industry are professional and have integrity.
- ★ It may be too late!

Conclusion

- ★ It is not surprising that ethical behaviour is a problem.
- ★ Why should it be otherwise?
 - ★ Incredibly complex, diverse, and ubiquitous industry.
 - ★ Myriad temptations to gain advantage or otherwise make our lives easier.
 - ★ Almost no mechanisms (aside from our own good sense) to help us.
 - ★ There is almost no means to be accountable or find our way back to respectability once things go wrong.
 - ★ Most unethical acts go unchallenged, sometimes it is actually encouraged or compelled.

To be truly professional we need better means of becoming ethical and staying ethical.