ETHICAL DECISION MAKING AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
An Introduction with Cases

Ernest A. Kallman
Bentley College

John P. Grillo
Bentley College
CONTENTS

PART I  APPROACHES TO ETHICAL DECISION MAKING  1

CHAPTER 1

ETHICS IS NOT A FOUR-LETTER WORD
An Explanation of Ethics and Ethical Decision Making  2

Why We Should Care About Ethics  2
Computer Ethics and Regular Ethics  3
Competing Factors in Decision Making  4
The Consequences of Poor Value Judgments  5
The Types of Ethical Choices  5
  Choosing Right from Wrong  5
  Choosing Right from Right  5
Practical Approaches to Ethical Decision Making  7
  Using Law to Make Ethical Decisions  7
  Using Formal Guidelines to Make Ethical Decisions  9
  Using Informal Guidelines to Make Ethical Decisions  11
The Principle of Harm Minimization  13
How Rights and Duties Relate to Ethics  14
  Considering Rights  14
  Considering Duties  14
Consequentialism  17
  Deciding Ethical Questions Through Egoism  17
  Deciding Ethical Questions Through Utilitarianism  18
Kant’s Categorical Imperative  18
  Applying the Principle of Consistency  19
  Applying the Principle of Respect  19
CHAPTER 2

ETHICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
Computers Don't Have Ethics, People Do  22

New Technology, New Problems  22
Why Is Ethical Computer Use a Special Challenge?  23
  The Difficulties That Computers Pose  23
  The Difficulties That People Pose  24
What Is Unethical Computer Use?  26
  Social and Economic Issues  26
  Issues of Individual Practice  26
  Development Process Issues  27
  Issues Involving Managers and Subordinates  27
  Processing Issues  28
  Issues Related to the Workplace  29
  Issues of Data Collection, Storage, and Access  29
  Issues about Electronic Mail  30
  Resource Exploitation Issues  30
  Vendor-Client Issues  31
  Issues of Computer Crime  32

Summary  32
References  33

CHAPTER 3

SOLVING ETHICAL DILEMMAS
A Sample Case Exercise  34

A Four-Step Analysis Process  35
Sample Case: Too Much of a Good Thing?  36
Case Commentary  38
  What Are the Relevant Facts?  39
  Who Are the Stakeholders?  40
  Isolate the Ethical Issues  42
  Examine the Legal Issues  43
  Consult Guidelines  44
  Discover the Applicable Ethical Principles  46
  Make a Defensible Choice  47
  What Are the Options at This Time?  49
  Which Options Do You Recommend?  49
Defend the Legality and Ethicality of Your Recommendation 50
How Would You Implement Your Recommendation? 50
Recommend Short-Term Corrective Measures 50
Summary 52

PART II THE CASES 54

CASE 1
Levity or Libel? An E-Mail Based Effort to Boost Morale Backfires 55

CASE 2
Credit Woes: A Credit Bureau Faces a Decision of Whether
to Revise a System 59

CASE 3
Something for Everyone? Recombination of Data at a Supermarket 63

CASE 4
Abort, Retry, Ignore: Recovery of Data Leads to Discovery
of Confidential File 67

CASE 5
Messages from All Over: Who Controls the Content of E-Mail and BBS? 71

CASE 6
A Job on the Side: A Consultant Is Tempted to Moonlight 75

CASE 7
The New Job: An Offensive Startup Screen Appears
in an Office Environment 79

CASE 8
The Buyout: Inappropriately Acquired Data Prompts
Personnel Problems 83

CASE 9
Charades: A Stolen Password and Its After-Effects 87

CASE 10
Laccaria and Eagle: Restrictive Trade Practices Call for Hard
Purchasing Decisions 91

CASE 11
Taking Bad with Good: The Software Is Bad, So Don’t Pay for It 95
CASE 12
The Engineer and the Teacher: Copyright Ethics in Schools and Industry  99

CASE 13
Test Data: Confidential or Dummy Data?  103

CASE 14
The Brain Pick: A Knowledge-Based System Can’t Know Everything  107

CASE 15
Trouble in Sardonia: Do Copyright Ethics Change Overseas?  111

CASE 16
Downtime: Overdependence on Computers Means Trouble  115

CASE 17
Code Blue: Patient Data at a Hospital Is Compromised  119

CASE 18
Virtual Success: Virtual-Reality Games Invade the Real World  123

Index  127