

# The Ethical Dilemma of Professional IT

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**Abstract:** *Professional ethics has become more important over the years. As we become more specialized in our occupation, the issues become that much more complex and hard. Professional bodies have increasingly been at work developing, revising and refining professional codes of ethics [1]. Professional ethics helps a professional choose what to do when faced with a problem at work that raises a moral issue. Professional ethics encompass the personal, organizational and corporate standards of behavior expected of professionals. Professionals are capable of making judgments, applying their skills and reaching informed decisions in situations that the general public cannot do [2]. Business is the primary player in a system of complexity. The system works only because private and public-sector managers on the whole have a strong sense of responsibility. They take on the burden of making sure that others work together and do their jobs in a responsible manner. When things do work, it is because managers collectively adhere to professional standards even when immediate incentives to do so may be less than compelling. It is important to understand and ensure that professional ethics as a key success of business practice.*

**Keywords:** IT Professional, Information Ethics, Personality Traits, IT Practice, Survey Study

## 1. Introduction

The ethics of information technology (IT) and business is an examination of a wide range of ethical questions that arise from the use of information technology in business and the business of information technology itself. Scientific advances allow businesses to use technology to reach goals more easily and more completely than ever before. In some areas, however, such applications of technology start overstepping on the rights of individuals and may be unethical. Governments and ethically operated companies are aware of these limitations and have passed privacy laws and regulated communication companies. Some companies self-censor and apply internal policies to limit unethical behavior. Businesses that wish to be considered ethical must look at whether applying certain technologies may harm some individuals and constrain such applications to what is absolutely necessary.

Companies monitor employees and visitors and collect much additional information in the name of security. Ethical issues arise from the continuous monitoring of employee activity and the recording of security camera images. An unjustified level of employee surveillance is ethically questionable; the ethical company must try to establish a level of monitoring it can justify. The surveillance of non-employees, such as visitors or suppliers' representatives, must be constrained to an even lower level to be ethically acceptable. Computers can scan the text of millions of messages for words that are of interest to investigators and identify the sender. Companies that employ such technologies must ask themselves about the ethical implications of such surveillance, especially if it is carried out without the knowledge or explicit agreement from their employees.

With new technologies allowing the easy creation and distribution of images and videos, both individual employees and companies need guidelines as to what is acceptable. Without such guidelines, some of this content will be offensive to some of the company staff and to some members of the public. When developing such guidelines, companies may be quite restrictive in terms of what is permissible within the business. Such restrictions only

become ethical issues when the company tries to extend them into the employees' private lives.

## 2. Background of Problem

IT faced with two sides of problem, the legal problem and the moral problem. As the backbone of the evolution in majority of growing industry, IT Professional need to balance their obligation and serve what legally right and morally right. Despite with the world class case, Edward Snowden, this paper proves that IT people can serve their moral obligation and legal obligation.

## 3. Research Methodologies

The research was conducted based on quantitative and qualitative approach. A list of semi structured questionnaires was derived from the literature review regarding assessment of IT professional ethics. These questions are to determine ethical practices being applied in IT profession. The questionnaires consist of two parts. Part 1 is a subjective question while Part 2 is a yes or no question. There are 23 questions asked. Question 1-9 is a subjective question where the respondents have to give their opinions. Question 10-23 is a yes or no question. The questionnaires were given to 20 IT professional from various fields in Malaysia. These 20 respondents are considered as a focus group. Random sampling is chosen as the methods for choosing the respondents. An extensive literature review was conducted to assess the information of the ethical issue in IT professional practices. In the first phase, we review relevant documents from various sources. Relevant articles from literature were also reviewed. The literature review was started with a list of online academic journals and conferences from different online databases. Among the online databases searched are IEEE Xplore, ProQuest Direct, Science Direct, ACM Digital Library, IREP and Google Scholar.

From the articles that we reviewed, we went backwards to review other works as cited in those articles. To ensure that only the most relevant and quality articles that were reviewed; we focused more on a few established impact

factor journals and conferences in the field of ethics. The papers that are relevant are the reviewed backwards to find other authors as well as the citations.

#### 4. Literature Review

Business literature is complete with stories of unethical behavior in executive suites and board rooms, yet everyone is potentially capable of falling into the same traps. With a little insight into the psychological traps that increase the probability that individuals will behave unethically, perhaps such behavior can be restricted. Psychological traps are the root causes of unethical behavior. It similar to fish traps. A fish trap is comprised of a wire cage with an entrance shaped like a large funnel that narrows toward the inside of the cage; the design of the funnel directs the fish to swim into the trap. In the same way, an individual or organization is encouraged to move in a certain (unethical) direction once a psychological trap is present. Later, the action turns out to be disastrous and there are usually no simple means of reversing course [3]. Because they are psychological in nature, some of these traps distort perceptions of right and wrong so that one actually believes his or her unethical behavior is right.

Depending on their context, traps may be nonthreatening and can even exert a positive influence on our lives. For example, empathy is often considered the cornerstone of good ethics but in some circumstances, this personality trait can actually overpower our sense of fairness. This is because traps can incite tunnel vision; the pull to act on them is so strong that people can become blinded to other behavioral options. Individuals that we respect and admire even whole companies can descend rapidly down the path of corruption. Traps exist because at any given moment in time people experience impulses that motivate them to act. These impulses are reactions to internal or external stimuli. It is important to know at what prompts the individual or organization to begin to move in an unethical direction? The diverse traps presented in this paper provide descriptions of different internal or external stimuli that compel people to begin this movement toward disaster.

First is 'Primary traps' are predominantly comprised of external stimuli. They are the main traps that impel people to move in a certain direction without regard for ethical principles. "Obedience to Authority" is a clear example of a primary trap. Students automatically know that they must show deference to their teachers. Consequently, later in life, when the boss orders an employee to do something, many people quickly obey without thinking. If a person of authority orders a subordinate to do something unethical, the compelling need to obey authority serves as such a powerful external stimulus that the individual will likely obey the order without being aware of its opposition to his or her own ethical principles. At other times, the subordinate might be aware that the order is unethical; nonetheless, the impulse to obey is so strong that it overrides his or her judgment. When trying to keep the trap of obedience to authority at bay, the most important thing an executive can do is to hire a psychologist to be part of his or her ethics and compliance team. Psychology can explain the nature of traps and often help structure the proper approach to avoiding or

remediating them.

Secondly is 'Personality traps' consist exclusively of internal stimuli in the form of various personality traits that can make people more vulnerable to wrongdoing. An example of a personality trap is the "Need for Closure," that is, "the desire for a definite answer on some topic, any answer, as opposed to confusion and ambiguity." [4] It is the tendency to jump on the first opinion that comes to mind, rather than tolerating a state of uncertainty and taking the time to consider a problem or judgment from many different angles. The need for closure is augmented under work conditions that make processing information more difficult, namely time pressure, fatigue, and excessive background noise. When such conditions exist, it is more difficult to tolerate a state of confusion and ambiguity. While the need for closure is influenced by situational factors, it is also personality traits some people are more able to tolerate states of ambiguity than others. Within an organization, if coworkers ignore, justify, or condone unethical behavior, this supports the view of the outlaw that he or she did not do anything wrong or, if they did, that it is not that big a deal. Coworkers with a high need for closure can potentially cling to established impressions and, in so doing, discount unethical behavior. To contend with the need for closure, the most important thing an executive can do is to have a psychologist administer the "Need for Closure Scale" so that managers and employees are aware of whether they have a personality trait that might incline them to act unethically.

Thirdly is 'Defensive traps' are attempts to find easy ways to reverse course after a transgression has been committed. For the most part, defensive traps are maneuvers that are reactions to two internal stimuli: guilt and shame. Guilt and especially shame are very painful emotions because they call into question the positive view that people have of themselves. Defensive traps are insidious because they are often very successful at annihilating or at least minimizing guilt and shame. They help people deny their transgressions, thus setting them up for repeated unethical behavior. An example of a defensive trap is the "False Consensus Effect." When people do something unethical, they appease their guilt by falsely assuming that it is something everyone does, and thereby minimize their transgressions. Once the company is aware of the false consensus effect, it is a signal that a transgression has already been committed. In such cases, established reporting and disciplinary procedures that are usually part of the company's code of business conduct and ethics should come into play.

#### 5. Other Recommendations

On the questionnaire survey conducted, the responded are being asked based on their opinion about the typical purposes of a code of ethics. The answer varies, based on the responded experience, a code of ethics help a company or a profession to protects stakeholders and enhances trust, promotes reputation and ethical behavior, prevents unethical behavior, encourages ethical decision-making and provides guidance on how to make ethical decisions, facilitates social integration, legitimizes 'ethics talk'. The responded also describe the purposes of a code of ethics as the company's guidance as distinguish value in

customer eye's. It is letting the employee know the obligation and right given by the employer. It also used to enforce rules and regulations throughout the organization. Code of ethics is intended to guide employees on the acceptable manner of dealing with any kinds of situations at the workplace and among others, helps to prevent any sort of unethical things and to ensure the workers accountability. Code of ethics is a rule that must be followed in order to ensure the activities are within the law.

Corporate reputation can be defined as the collective opinion on an organization that its stakeholders have gained over time, based on its past record. It is therefore the reflection of an organization over time as seen through the eyes of its stakeholders. A company's reputation affects its ability to sell products and services, to attract investors, to hire talented staff, and to exert influence in government circles. Good reputations are built up over years, but can be destroyed overnight. Responded being asked what are they opinion about the effect of ethics towards company's reputation. The respondents agreed that it is very important to be ethical, not being ignorant and just focusing on creating more profit as possible without offending other. Reputation is highly important, without maintaining reputation, it could make customer and prospective customer having a bad image and left to other companies. A company reputation earned trust to their customer; every employee in the company must represent the reputation by having mannered behaviors and disciplines.

Being ethical reflects that the company and promoting good values in their work environment. This cultivates confidence in the perception of their clients towards the company. Practicing ethical work will make a company seems more managed, it can represent how the company in general. The company's reputation is based on its ethics. If the company has no ethics, then its reputation will be effected. When the company has their own ethics, all the employees will follow the ethic and rule when they do their work, thus the workflow will become smooth. When employees work happily in the company, thus they want to stay with the business, reduce labor turnover and therefore increase productivity. Ethical company will attract more investors and of course more business and make more profit in the long run. If there is ethical issues in company that can damage tremendously the company's reputation which can lead to loss of customers, loss of market share.

The ethics code should be well designed if it is intended to promote ethical behavior in a company. Our respondent advised that it should be written and can be referred by anyone, thus it cannot be just a 'lip service'. The ethics code should be signed by the employee and the employer. Some respondent ensure that certain ethics code should be being hanged on the wall as a constant reminder to the employee and everyone can see it, read it and take it seriously. Ethics code should be clearly addressed in black and white to allow transparency and avoid misunderstanding and abuse by irresponsible employees.

It is very clear every respondent strongly agreed that code of ethics should be written as guidance. Employee might forget the rules and ethical value sometimes, whenever unethical

behavior conducted, people can relate and refer to the written rule. As formal guideline, it should be endorsed so employee will remember and obey them, code of ethics should be written, so it can act as evidence if any cases occur and need to be consulted in the future. Different people have different ethics, they might follow their own ethic but when it is written down the company's employee will have to obey and follow the company's ethics as long as they are listed as the company's employee. People have different cultures and believes, in someone culture or religion something can be seen as normal thereby others consider it as wrong according to their cultures or religions, many issues can be raised in this matter, code of ethics should be written and establish among the employee in order to make everyone clear about it. Code of ethics also acts as a promise to the clients

The process of code design will involve multiple stakeholders (but employees in particular) in formulating the code contents. The ethics risk analysis as discussed earlier implies this type of stakeholder involvement. Such a democratic or multilateral approach ensures buy-in from employees, and results in increased ethics awareness and knowledge of ethically undesirable behaviors. This type of process involves extensive employee participation in the code design process. Employees will necessarily have opportunities to comment on codes' contents and they will also participate in annual code revision processes.

A strong organizational commitment to ethics can support an organization in many ways in its attempt to prevent fraud. Among them are (1) Strengthening the resolve to prevent fraud, an organizational anti-fraud strategy normally commences with the resolve to stamp out fraud. Ethics can play a role in building this resolve. This happens when the need to stamp out fraud is not merely motivated on financial grounds, but also on ethical grounds. (2) Making fraud prevention a shared responsibility, as long as the prevention of fraud remains the responsibility of a single person or department within an organization, the chances for success will remain slim. To be effective in the fight against fraud, a widespread resolve to eradicate fraud is required. The responsibility to stamp out fraud should be shared by all members of the organization. By giving an ethical dimension to a fraud prevention strategy exactly this can be achieved. (3) Undermining motivations for fraud, ethics can also make a valuable contribution towards undermining the motivation to perpetrate fraud. It was earlier indicated that persons who engage in fraud know beforehand that what they are about to do is wrong, but nevertheless do it because they have a sufficiently strong motivation. It does however become much harder to find a sufficiently strong motivation in an organization with a pervasive ethical culture and climate. (4) Undermining rationalizations for fraud, the ethical culture and climate of a company equally makes it more difficult to rationalize fraud. Attempts to justify fraudulent behavior in such climate lack credibility. One of the more popular rationalizations of fraud is that it is not a serious moral blunder. Proper fraud education that emphasizes the unethical nature thereof can undermine this rationalization of fraud and render this excuse invalid.

In the personal and the employee point of view, ethics could prevent fraud and unlawful act by understanding ethic is a

value in the corporate culture, and corporate culture is oriented on stakeholder, thus every personnel on the organization will have a protected behavior, because it's the value that has to be served by all stakeholders. Ethics rules the body of the organization and every employee should follow practiced and actively promote the practice of ethics. Employee ethics will reflect the company's reputation; any unethical actions taken by the employee will surely become the company's liability as the company will lose in terms of their reputation to the public.

On the part discussing the main aim of managing ethics, most of the respondent agreed that the aim of managing ethics is to proactively and actively manage the relation between what is good for oneself (an individual, group or organization) and others (individual and collective internal and external stakeholders of the organization). It helps all of the stakeholder to manage and measure (assess) their employee behavior by looking at the corporate culture. Another aim is to control employee behavior and the way they conduct their job in order to achieve good company reputation. These ethical behaviors should be reflected among employee members, team members as well as to the customers. Other purpose of managing ethics is to promote employees awareness and actively implement ethics in their working environment, to ensure and to guide employees to follow certain moral value, to ensure all the workflow in organizations become smooth and perfect, to represent what the company stand and understand the impact of any unethical decision made to the company. Every employee should be aware of it and ensure that ethics are taken in account in every domain in the organization, thus there will be no unethical behavior towards the company.

Based on the respondent experiences, they listed out the benefits for a profession or a company to have a good code of ethics. Among them are enhances economic performance, helps build an ethical culture, stakeholders know where they stand (the contents of the code set clear parameters of desirable or undesirable behavior), provides security and predictability for employees, can contribute to building the company's reputation, creates customer and stakeholder loyalty and builds trust between employees and stakeholders. Managing ethics is aimed to ensure the shareholders treat the stakeholders ethically, as such, show good ethics and provide honest record to stakeholders, and employee should be respected and treated well. Business and service organizations exist are to create valuable goods and services that people need or desire, for this to happen require inculcating the culture with desired ethics.

The respondents strongly agree with corporate that took care of their good ethics, because they are the one who will stole sympathy of most customer. With good ethics the company reputation will increase thus more customer more attracted to them, since good code of ethics exudes the company's confidence to clients and stakeholders. As the good people will represent how the company operates, it will increase the quality of work. Ethics reflect the company's image; once the company's image is known it will attract more customers. A company should have good code of ethics; employees should be treated well, whether they are employed here or overseas. By being respectful of the environment in the community a

company shows good ethics, and good, honest records also show respect to stockholders and owners.

The most important component of implementing a code of ethics is about making ethics real for all relevant stakeholders. This could be achieved by having a proper ethics strategy (e.g. Compliance, Integrity or a combination of these two), deciding who will coordinate ethics (having proper ethics management structures) and designing and implementing proper ethics management systems. Our respondent being asked on the motivation of implementing a code of ethics, they feel that ethics should be 'role of the game', meaning that the ethics should make everyone feel beneficial. Others feel that as motivation, the employee should feel some self-assurance and self-satisfaction, thus it will promote a good reference among other employers, having good reputation among partners and competitors. Other motivation is by having support from each of the employee and motivates each one of the employees. Code of ethics promotes an organized working environment and increases employees' motivation by encourage people to do good deeds and avoid bad behavior. Motivation also comes when seeing a high level management be a role model to other employees, it's a motivation that comes from personality image or reputation. Social responsibility could also be motivation of implementing a code of ethics. While incentive could be one of the solutions, other way around prosecution may be suitable for recidivist, means good action will be rewarded and bad action will have consequences.

It is important to make good ethical decisions because a company needs to shrink the grey areas of ethical dilemmas, uncertainties associated with vague ethical standards need to be eliminated, the negative impact decisions may have on others need to be avoid/restricted, the interests of all stakeholders need to be protected, stakeholder trust need to be created and maintained, the reputations of the company (and/or the profession) need to be maintained and professionals should maintain their professional dignity.

Our respondent being asked on their judgment to implement good ethical decision during critical situation, they respond to keep intact the ethical manner because it will show the company situation in long term it will show the company 'trademark' that this particular company if always consistent to follow their ethics. They willingness to keep company's name and reputation avoid them to do such unethical decision. Corporate have social responsibility, making good ethical decisions shows the commitment of the company to be responsible to their community and stakeholders. It also to make better judgment and fairness to all parties involved. When an employee follows all the rule and ethics in organization it can help our self from involve in a violation of the law. It in importance to make good ethical decisions in critical situation because the case will be referred for years by the decision maker – as benchmarks. One wrong decision made will automatically ruined the company's reputation, and will reflect on who 'you' really are, thus by keeping the good ethical decisions it could build trust among all parties involved.

### 5.1 Edward Snowden as Ethical Dilemma Case

Our respondents believe that in the aspect of revealing something that was not his belonging, it's unethical, however this case has many aspect point of view. In terms of his ethical deal with NSA that he should follow the secrecy agreement with NSA, the agreement with the main company. Some respondent believes, as humanity reason, he done the right things by following his conscious. The other believes, he was against the company's rules and regulations and should be punished of breaching of security and information. Our respondent views this Edward Snowden case as he is being unethical towards his employee by disclosing the confidential information that allegedly belongs to his employer. On the other hand, since the confidential information relates to breach of social freedom and individual's privacy, the social responsibility outweighs the organization's responsibility. Therefore some of our respondents did not agree that he has committed unethical use of ICT. In some of their opinion, his employer (NSA) has committed that offence, thus he was following his moral conscious when revealing the information. Edward Snowden may well have uncovered illegal and unconstitutional behaviors, but he chose to leak the information rather than report it to proper authorities. Then again, agencies like NSA force people to comply with the rules and regulations for the sake of the country, thus it makes is very unethical at some extend if people cannot observe the companies /agencies rules, even if it's completely against their concept of truth.

**Table 1:** Questionnaires – Self Check Questions

No	Details	Yes
1	I feel uneasy when there is little work for me to do	17
2	A person should always take responsibility for his/ her actions	20
3	A person should always do what is right and just	20
4	Nothing is impossible if you work hard enough	20
5	Anyone who is able and willing to work hard has a good	20
6	Hard work makes one a better person	19
7	A reward in the future is usually more satisfying than an immediate one	19
8	Every obstacle that presents can be overcome by working hard	18
9	A person should always do the best job possible	20
10	It is never appropriate to take something that does not belong to you	19
11	People should be fair and honest in their dealings with others	15
12	There are times when using printer and stationery for personal use is permitted	3
13	A person should never claim others work without their acknowledgement	15
14	Sometimes it is appropriate / permitted to tell white lies	13

Table 1 illustrates self-check questions from the questionnaires. The self-check question consists of 14 questions. There are 15 respondents from IT professional background and they are asked to answer yes or no based on the statements. From Table 1, we can see that all and 100% of the respondents agreed on statement number 11, 13, 14, 16, 18, 20 and 22. This shows that the ethical awareness of the respondents is mostly high. They agreed that they should take responsibilities of their actions and always do what is right. They also agreed that when they work hard they will

be successful and they believe future reward is better than an immediate reward. Most of the respondents or more than 90% of the respondents agreed on statement number 15 and 21 while more than 80% of the respondents agreed on statement number 10, 17 and 21. For statement number 23, 53% of the respondents agreed on the statements while others disagreed. Statement number 23 indicates that it is appropriate to tell white lies. We can see that the respondents are divided in term of this statement. Half of the respondents agreed while half disagreed. White lies can be defined as an often trivial, diplomatic or well- intentioned untruth. Some people believe that under no circumstances ever is it acceptable to speak an untruth. Half of the respondents certainly do not believe in withholding information when someone's safety is at stake or when it is a critical situation involving the ethical law is concerned. Sometimes we need to prop up each other and not be so brutally honest, when it's just our opinion. Take time to show some care and concern. A "white" lie is one in which no harm would come if the "truth" were to be revealed. It is usually something that protects the person telling the lie, the person hearing the lie, or both people. It is not sinister to tell a white lie; rather, it can be thought of as a matter of common decency.

### 6. Conclusion

The issue asses in this paper are to see whether IT professional can manage their ethical issue in legal and moral issue. Survey conducted to see whether morally IT professional can differentiate moral obligation in ethics. The ethical dilemma upon IT the whistle blower, such as Edward Snowden known to be 'legally wrong and morally correct'. This conflict between legal and moral is being addressed in this paper. Three tactics developed to deal with three traps of personality, which is to employ a psychologist to help coworkers contend with the strong emotions incited by traps; ensure that the psychologist tests coworkers to make them aware of potential personality traps; and recognize defensive traps as signs that transgressions have already been committed. It should also be noted that one's behavior can be affected by more than one trap simultaneously. Developing tactics to manage traps is an ongoing challenge, especially as more traps are discovered. But the fact that traps accurately define the root causes of unethical behavior will make this task easier and the solutions more effective and efficient.

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