Date of issue: 8th September 2005

Doc. S6-2
Additional Doc.

Session 6: Ethical Dimension of the Information Society?

Ethical values of an Information Society

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(Thursday, 8th September 2005, 10.30am – 12.15pm)

Ethical values of an Information Society

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Agenda

- **What is *an Information Society*?**
- **What are *ethical values* of an Information Society?**

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What is *an Information Society*?

- WSIS – Declaration of Principles
- "We, the representatives of the peoples of the world, ….., declare our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented *Information Society*, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, …"

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Fundamental values of *the Information Society* Art 56

- Freedom
- Equality
- Solidarity
- Tolerance
- Shared responsibility
- Respect for nature

Values – a combination of feelings, beliefs, traditions and ideas that are built up over the years, through varied religious and social influences

Information Society – a society where "everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, …"

Ethics of *the Information Society*
Art 57

- Justice
- Dignity and Worth of the human person – truthfulness, sincerity, brotherhood

Ethics – the set of moral principles that distinguish what is right from what is wrong

Information Society – a society where "everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, …"

The non-Ethicals of *the Information Society* Art 59

- "abusive use of ICTs such as illegal and other acts motivated by racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, hatred, violence, all forms of child abuse, including paedophilia and child pornography, and trafficking in, and exploitation of, human beings"

- *Information Society* – a society where "everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, …"

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Preventive Measures of *the Information Society*

🌷 Laws e.g. strengthening the trust framework, including information security and network security, authentication, privacy and consumer protection

- *Information Society* – a society where "everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, …"

Functions of an *Information Society*

Traditional Society	Information Society
Socialisation	Socialisation (changed)
Cultural Innovation	Cultural Innovation (facilitated)
Social Integration	Social Integration (expanded/extended)
Social Placement	Social Placement (social mobility)
Cultural Transmission and Preservation	Cultural Transmission and Preservation (accessible –expanded/extended)
Social Control	Social Control (reduced)
Agent of Change	Agent of Change (swifter/more rapid)

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Advantages/Disadvantages in the use of ICTs

Advantages	Disadvantages
1. Increased efficiency	1. Security issues
2. Paperless	2. Breach of Privacy
3. Less hassle to go for services	3. Funding issues
4. Greater access to information/knowledge	4. Complex and multi-webbed
5. Increased accountability to/of participants	5. Inadequate internet access or skills or facilities
6. Widen and create network between different sectors of community life	6. Digital divide
7. Opportunity for self-development	7. Incomprehensive laws and regulations
8. Time management and flexibility	8. Property and ownership issues
9. Choices	9. Question of reliability and genuinity/authenticity/accuracy
10. Mobility	10. Limited verbal discussion.
11. Meritocracy	
12. Closer relationship	

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What are the ethical values of *our Information Society?*

• Trustworthiness – honesty, integrity, reliability, accuracy

• Fairness   - equality, impartiality, openness and justice

• Solidarity - unity and agreement resulting from shared interests, feelings, actions, sympathies

• Responsibility – accountability, excellence self-restraint, civic duty

• Respect - dignity, tolerance, civility, decency, ownership

WSIS Article 56 & 57
- **Freedom**
- **Equality**
- **Solidarity**
- **Tolerance**
- **Shared responsibility**
- **Respect for nature**
- **Justice**
- **Dignity and Worth of the human person**

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Promotion of Ethical Values

- Policy
- Training/Education
- Conferences/Seminars
- Campaigns/Roadshows
- Laws
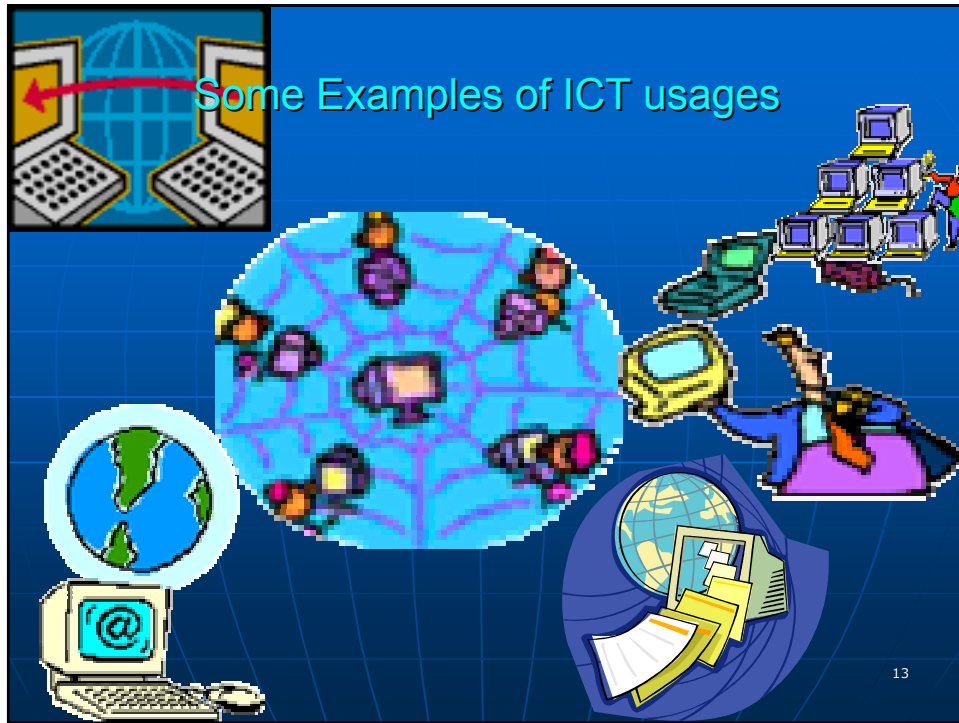- Code of Ethics e.g. Computer Ethics

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Ten Commandments of Computer Ethics
(*Created by the Computer Ethics Institute*)

1. Thou Shalt Not Use A Computer To Harm Other People.
2. Thou Shalt Not Interfere With Other People's Computer Work.
3. Thou Shalt Not Snoop Around In Other People's Computer Files.
4. Thou Shalt Not Use A Computer to Steal.
5. Thou Shalt Not Use A Computer to Bear False Witness.
6. Thou Shalt Not Copy Or Use Proprietary Software For Which You Have Not Paid.
7. Thou Shalt Not Use Other People's Computer Resources Without Authorization Or Proper Compensation.
8. Thou Shalt Not Appropriate Other People's Intellectual Output.
9. Thou Shalt Think About The Social Consequences Of The Program You Are Writing Or The System You Are Designing.
10. Thou Shalt Always Use A Computer In Ways that Insure Consideration And Respect For Your Fellow Humans.

- Code of Ethics e.g. Computer Ethics

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Some Examples of ICT usages

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Thank You

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Ethical Values of the Information Society

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We are now turning into an information society. Our society is truly an information society, our time an information age. The impact of the rapid development in technology has changed the way of life of our current generation and will continue to shape our future generation. This way of life has developed values and standards forming guidelines. The fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, shared responsibility, and respect for nature are common to all. The Information Society should be subject to these universally held values and promote the common good and to prevent abusive uses of ICTs. The question before us now is whether the kind of society being created is the one we want.

The paper first briefly explores the development of the information society and its meaning, values and measures as given by WSIS, secondly discuss the expectation of the information society or what we want our information society to be like, namely, its functions, and finally, examining the advantages and disadvantages of ICT usage to bring out the common values or norms to be considered ethical values of the information society.

What is Information Society?
The growing importance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in human societies is undoubtedly one of the defining features of our present day world. ICTs have become incorporated into all levels of human endeavours, and have had a large impact on their way of life. This is particularly so with the recent decade's ICT innovation of the Internet and World Wide Web. The prominence of information in today's society has lead to the claim that we now live in a new "Information Society," a society where information dominates new modes of social organization. The United Naitons, through UNESCO, has been involved in the Information Society concept for several decades, mostly with the MacBride Commission Report in 1980. The UNESCO-sponsored International commission for the Study of Communication Problems, or MacBride Comission published a report in 1980, entitled, "Many voices, one world: communication and society, today and tomorrow." The report covers various topics, from censorship, concentration of media ownership, and freedom and responsibility of the press, to name a few. UNESCO, as the sponsoring agency, choose to highlight "communication" as a basic right, rather thatn focusing on "information." another attempt by the UN to highlight the importance of information and communication issues is the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). It used this Information Society idea for the larger "world community" and focusing on ICTs and infrastructural expansion. The summit co-sponsored by the UN, in conjunction with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), took place in two phases. The first phase took place in Geneva in December 2003 setting forth a *Declaration of Priniciples* and a *Plan of Action* of the "Information Society". The second phase will take place in Tunis in November 2005.

In the Declaration, the term "Information society" has been used without clear definition. It is assumed that the reader is already aware of the meaning and importance of this term to the modern world. The closest definition of the term can be said to come from the first paragraph of the document, stating that

> " We, the representatives of the peoples of the world … declare our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive, and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize, and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life."

It can therefore be assumed that the notion relates to sharing of knowledge and information to achieve development goals. This is also saying that we are living in an Information Society but at the same time building it.

Values of Information Society

Ajit K. Pyati (http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue10_5/pyati/) spells out values associated with Information Society, embitioned by WSIS, as follows:

1) Communication
2) Human dignity
3) Central role of science
4) Women's empowerment
5) Marginalized and vulnerable groups of society, including migrants, internally displaced persons and refugees, unemployed and underpriviledged people, minorities and nomadic people
6) Indigenous peoples and preservation of their heritage and cultural legacy
7) Improving access to ICT infrastructure, information and knowledge; building capacity; increasing confidence and security in the use of ICTs; creating an enabling environment at all levels; developing and widening ICT applications; fostering and respecting cultural diversity; recognizing the role of the media; addressing the ethical dimensions of the Information society; and encouraging international and regional cooperation;
8) Role to play for UN, governments, private sector, and civil society
9) Connectivity
10) Universal, ubiquitous, equitable and affordable access to ICT infrastructure and services
11) Utilization of post offices, schools, libraries and archives as ICT public access points
12) Rich public domain
13) Ability for all to access and contribute information, ides, and knowledge
14) Affordable access to software
15) Literacy and universal primary education
16) Partnerships between and among developed and developing countries
17) Increased capacity building in the areas of education, technology know-how and access to information
18) Information security, network security, trust
19) Enabling environment
20) Rule of law, pro-competitive and technologically neutral policy and regulatory framework
21) Basis for economic growth
22) Intellectual property protection

23) Standardization
24) Respect of international law
25) International management of the Internet as a core issue
26) Respect for cultural identity, cultural and linguistic diversity, traditions and religions, fostering dialogue
27) Creation, dissemination, and preservation of content in diverse languages and formats accorded high priority
28) Preserve cultural heritage
29) Freedom of press, freedom of information
30) Respect peace and uphold values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, shared responsibility, and respect for nature
31) Ethics, fostering justice, and the dignity and worth of the human person
32) Against abusive and illegal use of ICTs
33) Instrinsically global in nature
34) Regional integration
35) Core competencies of ITU
36) Cooperation
37) Follow-up and progress in bridging the digital divide
38) Shared knowledge, founded on global solidarity and a better mutual understanding between peoples and nations.

The scope covered by WSIS is too broad and difficult to grasp. The main focus of the Information Society is on ICT, and how they can transform society for the better, and the "Information Society" for WSIS is fundamentally based on the role of technology.

UNESCO World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in its declaration has also outlines 10) "Ethical Dimensions of the Information Society" as follows:-

56. The Information Society should respect peace and uphold the fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, shared responsibility, and respect for nature.

57. We acknowledge the importance of ethics for the Information Society, which should foster justice, and the dignity and worth of the human person. The widest possible protection should be accorded to the family and to enable it to play its crucial role in society.

58. The use of ICTs and content creation should respect human rights and fundamental freedoms of others, including personal privacy, and the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion in conformity with relevant international instruments.

59. All actors in the Information Society should take appropriate actions and preventive measures, as determined by law, against abusive uses of ICTs, such as illegal and other acts motivated by racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, hatred, violence, all forms of child abuse, including paedophilia and child pornography, and trafficking in, and exploitation of, human beings.

Values result from the combination of feelings, beliefs, traditions and ideas that are built up over the years, through varied religious and social influences. Fundamental values given in WSIS *Declaration of Principles* Article 56 above are freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, shared responsibility, and respect for nature.

- Freedom - of opinion and expression, to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, to participate
- Equality - fairness, equity and impartial decisions
- Solidarity - unity and agreement resulting fro shared interests, feelings, actions, sympathies
- Tolerance - willingness or ability to tolerate/endure, or allowing something to happen without interference
- Shared responsibility
- Respect for nature

Although acceptance of materials differs from society to society but there are some common issues and values which can be shared, for instance, responsibility for accuracy, authenticity and reliability of information disseminated over the ICTs. What could be accepted as common values and offer some challenges in how to promote these common values. For these values to be universally accepted they must be ethical and recognized as 'good'. This is where ethics play an important role.

Ethical Values of Information Society
Ethics refers to moral principles that define behaviour as right, good and proper, distinguishing what is right from what is wrong. Ethics is concerned with how a moral person should behave, whereas values are the inner judgments that determine how a person actually behaves. Values concern ethics when they pertain to beliefs about what is right and wrong. Not all values are ethics.

Code of ethics guides behaviours of society and acts as a control mechanism. Stated in Article 57, the importance of ethics for the Information Society is seen to "foster justice, and the dignity and worth of the human person. The widest possible protection should be accorded to the family and to enable it to play its crucial role in society."

There are many unique challenges we face in this age of ICT. They stem from the nature of information itself. Information is the means through which the minds expands and increases its capacity to achieve its goals, often as the result of an input from another mind. Information therefore forms the intellectual capital from which human being crafts their lives and secure dignity. The ethical issues involved are many and varied. In addition, abusers are at large.

We have encountered abuses in the ICT usage since its development. Examples which follow are abuses in ICT usage:
Inciting hatred/violence/racism
Racial discrimination
Forms of child abuse
Human trafficking/exploitation
Pornography
Gambling

Appropriate actions and preventive measures provided by Article 59 are basically "as determined by law". This includes the strengthening of the trust framework in the form of information security and network security, authentication, privacy and consumer protection in Article 35.

What do we want in our Information Society?
What we envisage or expect should form guides to the behaviours today. These guides should be based on values both positive and negative. Positive values for a society may not be so in another society. Values which are common need not have the same or similar

meaning. Usages may differ in different societies. How can we know that they mean the same thing, words may be universal but the level of acceptance may differ while meaning may be different altogether. So it would be refered back to the kind of information society that we want to have in our future.

So, what do we want in our Information Society? We should envision what our future to be like, what would expect our future generation to behaviour or to become? What do want our society to function as?

From the table of functions, manifest functions are socialization, cultural innovation, social integration and social placement, whereas the latent functions are cultural transmission and preservation, social control and agent of change. I have compared the functions of traditional society and information society and stated changes in all the functions.

Functions of an *Information Society*

Traditional Society	Information Society
Socialisation	Socialisation (changed)
Cultural Innovation	Cultural Innovation (facilitated)
Social Integration	Social Integration (expanded/extended)
Social Placement	Social Placement (social mobility)
Cultural Transmission and Preservation	Cultural Transmission and Preservation (accessible –expanded/extended)
Social Control	Social Control (reduced)
Agent of Change	Agent of Change (swifter/more rapid)

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We can also see the values and issues from the advantages and disadvantages in the usage of the ICTs for the information society.

Advantages/Disadvantages in the use of ICTs

Advantages	Disadvantages
1. Increased efficiency	1. Security issues
2. Paperless	2. Breach of Privacy
3. Less hassle to go for services	3. Funding issues
4. Greater access to information/knowledge	4. Complex and multi-webbed
5. Increased accountability to/of participants	5. Inadequate internet access or skills or facilities
6. Widen and create network between different sectors of community life	6. Digital divide
7. Opportunity for self-development	7. Incomprehensive laws and regulations
8. Time management and flexibility	8. Property and ownership issues
9. Choices	9. Question of reliability and genuinity/authenticity/accuracy
10. Mobility	10. Limited verbal discussion.
11. Meritocracy	
12. Closer relationship	

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In the table of advantages and disadvantages, we can see the four ethical issues mentioned by Richard O. Mason (MIS Quarterly/March 1986 (pp. 5-12) at http://www.misq.org/archivist/vol/no10/issue1/vol10no1mason.html). The four issues are known by means of an acronym – PAPA – privacy, accuracy, property and accessibility.

Privacy   : What information about one's self or one's associations must a person reveal to others, under what conditions and with what safeguards? What things can people keep to themselves and not be forced to reveal to others? What information should one required to divulge about one's self to others? Under what conditions? What information should one be able to keep strictly to one's self?

Two forces threaten our privacy. One is the growth of information technology, with its enhanced capacity for surveillance, communication, computation, storage, and retrieval. A second, and more insidious threat, is the increased value of information in decision-making for all users.

Take an example of cctv or monitor camera set up in washrooms to observe the usage of mirrors, sinks and other facilities. Washroom users felt that this was an invasion of their privacy and violation of their rights. Those who set up the monitor responded that the information gathered would assist policy makers. Others say that it reduces abuse in washrooms and vandalism.

Another example of invasion of privacy is of stored large databases. This type of invasion crept up slowly. Collection of information stored in a single large database may reveal intimate details about a person and can thereby deprive the person of the opportunity to form certain professional and personal relationships.

The most common case is on credit card fraud. Payment made via the internet is intercepted by an unknown person who later use the information for his/her own benefit.

Another example would be the case concerning dissemination of pornography. The people who disseminate it exercise their right to have freedom of speech, press, etc. another group would see it unethical. Certain other groups would enjoy and see it ethical. So, how do we draw the line between ethical and unethical.

Accuracy   : Who is responsible for the authenticity, fidelity and accuracy of information? Similarly, who is to be held accountable for errors in information and how is the injured party to be made whole?

The manipulation and fabrication of information obtained from reliable or unreliable sources also remove our rights to privacy. Misinformation has a way of fouling up people's lives, especially when the party with the inaccurate information has an advantage in power and authority.

Property   : Who owns information? What are the just and fair prices for its exchange? Who owns the channels, especially the airways, through which information is transmitted? How should access to this scarce resource be allocated?

One of the most complex issues is the question of intellectual property rights. There are substantial economic and ethical concerns surrounding these rights; concerns revolving around the special attributes of information itself and the means by which it is transmitted. Any individual item of information can be extremely costly to produce in the first instance. Yet, once it is produced, that information has the illusive quality of being easy to produce and to share with others. Moreover, this replication can take place without destroying the original. This makes the information hard to safeguard since, unlike tangible property, it becomes communicable and hard to keep it to one's self. It is even difficult to secure appropriate reimbursements when somebody else uses your information. Copyrights, patents, encryption, oaths of confidentiality, and such old fashioned values as trust worthiness and loyalty are the most commonly used protectors of intellectual property.

Accessibility : What information does a person or an organization have a right or a privilege to obtain, under what conditions and with what safeguards?
The main avenue to information is through literacy. In an information society, a person must have three things to be literate:

- One must have the intellectual skills to deal with information. These are skills such as reading, writing, reasoning, and calculating.
- One must have access to the information technologies which store, convey and process information. This includes libraries, radios, televisions, telephones, and increasingly, personal computers or terminals linked via networks to mainframes.
- One must have access to the information itself. This requirement returns to the issue of property.

These requirements for literacy are a function of both the knowledge level and the economic level of the individual. Unfortunately, for many people in the world today both of these levels are currently deteriorating.

As an essential foundation of the Information Society, and as outlines in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers, however, in the exercise of their rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society. These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations. Human dignity is thereby respected.

Ethical Values of Information Society

From the table of advantages and disadvantages, values believed to be ethical could be developed. Such ethical values are as follows:

1. Trustworthiness – honesty, integrity, reliability, accuracy
2. Fairness   - equality, impartiality, openness and justice
3. Solidarity   - unity and agreement resulting from shared interests, feelings, actions, sympathies
4. Responsibility – accountability, excellence self-restraint, civic duty
5. Respect - dignity, tolerance, civility, decency, ownership

The above ethical values are more or less listed in the WSIS Declaration of Principles Articles 56 and 57.

Promotion of Ethical Values of Information Society

Promotion of ethical values can be carried out through changes in, enhancing and reformulation of policy, laws and regulations, having regular training/education, conferences and seminars, campaigns and roadshows, and formulation and revision of codes of ethics/behaviours. I conclude with an example of the computer ethics created by the Computer Ethics Institute to guide the behaviours of Computer users. We cannot avoid from turning into an Information Society so let's build an Information Society that we want to have.

Ten Commandments of Computer Ethics
(*Created by the Computer Ethics Institute*)

1. Thou Shalt Not Use A Computer To Harm Other People.
2. Thou Shalt Not Interfere With Other People's Computer Work.
3. Thou Shalt Not Snoop Around In Other People's Computer Files.
4. Thou Shalt Not Use A Computer to Steal.
5. Thou Shalt Not Use A Computer to Bear False Witness.
6. Thou Shalt Not Copy Or Use Proprietary Software For Which You Have Not Paid.
7. Thou Shalt Not Use Other People's Computer Resources Without Authorization Or Proper Compensation.
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9. Thou Shalt Think About The Social Consequences Of The Program You Are Writing Or The System You Are Designing.
10. Thou Shalt Always Use A Computer In Ways that Insure Consideration And Respect For Your Fellow Humans.

Code of Ethics e.g. Computer Ethics

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