Computer Ethical Challenges Facing Professionals in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT. Zimbabwe is a developing African country, like many of its kind is faced by many developmental challenges including lack of regulations, policies and laws pertaining to computer ethics. an example to this effect is that in Zimbabwe both professionals and ordinary citizens in the streets sell copy righted materials, burn software and photocopy the whole book; use computers in fraud; theft; unauthorized alteration; phone hacking and so on. The recommendation is that the relevant ministry (the ministry of information communication and technology) set or form a board of ethical philosophers and legal experts to draw up the cyber and computer related crime laws or simple produce code of ethics documents to give basic guidelines to computing professionals and users (cyber ethics, copyright infringements etc).The recommendations to reach the population are:

1) composition of an ethical board

2) usage of television, print media and radio for publicity

3) to teach computer ethics in schools at an early stage since the learners are now exposed to the internet.

key words: ethics, regulations, computer ethics, information and communication technology, ethical challenges

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the internet in our world has brought about advantages and disadvantages for the independent users and businesses. The advantages are that communication is fast and efficient. However, there are some disadvantages of this new invention for example it has worker displacement, lack of regulations and ethical codes for professionals to follow. The objective of this paper is to assess what computer ethical challenges are and recommend mitigation strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From the time human beings began living in communities they were forced by circumstances to lay down regulations that governed the conduct of individuals in their community in order to avoid social chaos and unnecessary conflicts. However, each advent of advancement brings about change in people's perceptions of what is right and wrong. This necessity causes confusion and lack of clear direction about how to handle the changes.

Ethics is the science of morality, that branch of philosophy which is concerned with human character and conduct, a system of rules of behaviour and professional standards of behaviour (The Chambers 20th Century Dictionary). Broadly, ethics deals with right and wrong human behaviours. But, what is right and what is wrong depend on the society and time in which we live. The best illustration of the above is the issue of slavery. But, in our world today there are those who are universalist and non-universalist. Although, ethical codes existed long before writing existed we need to understand that there is no universality in ethical issues or agreements across cultures. That, is to say, we cannot apply the same principles of the question of right and wrong. Philosophical schools of thought emerged in ancient India, China, Greece, Europe and later in America, debating the ethical issues of their time.

For example, the Indian Vedas School which is believed to be the oldest philosophical written literature in the world (1500BC) advocated that in order to understand the ultimate truth of human existence, requires grasping what is right. They suggested four practical ways which are prosperity, satisfaction of desires, moral duty and spiritual perfection. To achieve these one had to follow such virtues honesty, rectitude, charity, nonviolence (to living creatures), modesty and purity of heart. For this school and the Chinese philosophers (Lao-Tzu and Confucius – 6th and 5th century) argued that good virtues come from "one's inner soul". From the literature studied, it seems that there is a common ground for all the ethical thinkers including Greeks and the 18th Century Europeans and the Americans.

But, due to the development of technology and access to information from other countries, the current ethical theorists became systematic in their analysis of the issues they discussed. During the course of European history emerged philosophers who advocated for universalism, non-universalism and relativism. Relativists hold that there is no absolute or universal right or wrong. This being the case, right and wrong behaviour should be judged relative to the environment in which the behaviour occurs. Therefore, since there is diversity among societies, we should not judge behaviour in another society by our own standards. But, relativists face problems when two different cultures meet, for example the case of cannibalism. If it prevails amongst certain tribes, should we accept it because it is their culture? The second school is of universalists. Some universalists (Jeremy Bentham, Stuart T Mills, J. Locke) consider the consequence of our behaviour rather than the behaviour itself. The approach to ethics is called consequentialism. According to this view, what is important is the result of one's chosen action in terms of the common good. Utilitarian ethics is a form of consequentialism, which maintains that people want to increase people's happiness. The weakness is how you measure the net happiness of the greatest number (Jeremy Bentham, John Locke). Another approach is egoism of Thomas Hobbes which is consequentialism but not utilitarian. Egoists suggest that every person acts out of self-interest. It is not utilitarian because the utilitarian view of a right act is that it be in the interest of everyone alike. Whilst the egoist always asks "what is in it for me" and if one sees no advantage in being moral then one has no reason to behave ethically. Egoism, therefore poses a challenge to ethical theory. Another approach is known as deontologist. Although a universalist theory it looks at the intrinsic nature of behaviour to decide what is ethical and what is not. In other words it is not the consequence. For instance, one should not steal because it decreases someone else's happiness but because stealing itself is wrong. The approach even further argues saying "it is wrong to steal because if you steal so many other people and our lives will be unbearable". A good example is of illegally copying computer programmes. The school would be against it because if many people copy programmes without permission the authors may lose revenue. Alternatively, the authors may electronically block the programmes so that no one can make a backup copy. The message here is do not copy without permission. In our own language do not burn software. In short, deontologism is saying regardless of the consequences, you should not do that because it is wrong to copy or photocopy someone's work without permission.

Lastly, Kantianism's (Immanuel Kant a German Philosopher) theory is deontologist. It maintains that for ones action to be morally right one must will one's maxim to be universal law, that is accept that others act the same way. Kant's categorical imperative is universalist but not consequentialist. It holds that one's act is morally -right only if one's motive was to do what is right. An action is immoral even if the consequence in a particular case is good, if the motive was not to do what is right.

The contemporary computer professionals believe that to understand computer ethics, one needs to have a firm grasp of the foundations of the ethical theories as postulated by the philosophers discussed above. It is argued that since each school of ethics influences a situation in a particular direction and pushes the final outcome of ethical theory, it is therefore, paramount that the foundation is familiar to the professionals. Computer crimes have emerged over the years and countries or corporate businesses have devised their own codes to regulate the conduct of their employees.

METHODOLOGY
According to Gough (undated) methodology refers to: "a theory of producing knowledge through research and provides a rationale for the way the researcher proceeds". Miller 1999 sees the research

methodology as a planned sequence of the entire process involved in conducting research. This area of research is a crucial stage since whatever results are obtained by and largely depend on the research methodology. In simpler terms, the research methodology therefore is planned architecture of enquiry.

Qualitative data analysis in this paper is employed. That, is analysis of documents constitute what we may call, major technique used in the study. According to (http://ukgeocities.com 2005) documentary research technique has had little attention because of the dominance of positivism and empiricism so that statistics and quantification are popular forms of data collection and analysis. Yet documents are important sources of historical data. History provides us with ways in which our present came about and employing a range of documentary sources enables researchers to reflect on contemporary issues.

Documents may be regarded as physically embodied texts where the containment of the text is the primary purpose of the physical medium. For Sifuna (1995:59) documents normally include a wide range of written and printed materials recorded for the purpose of transmitting information. Sources of documentary research include such sources as laws, declarations and statutes, government records, regulations and observations. That is observations of the environment where the research project is being undertaken. For example, the observation concerning the technology at work (are valuable aids for understanding the actual use of the technology or potential problems being encountered). Another example, observing people selling and buying copyrighted materials at Mbare busy market in Harare.

Observation technique has short comings because individuals who are observed may act artificially. Also, the researcher might miss vital issues.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
There is a serious lack of written materials concerning Zimbabwe scenario.

DATA REPRESENTATION
The previous pages outlined the methodology employed in this study. In this representation the data is presented according to the essence of the problem findings in a developing nation (Zimbabwe). However, it is essential to examine how the developed countries dealt with the computer crimes as they emerged during the early stages of computer development.

The development of computers in the 1960s created a lot of ethical and criminal problems. These issues necessitated the need for ethical codes of conduct and laws for the emerging computer professionals and users. This was as a result of the first crime committed by a computer programmer in 1967 in the United States of America. The programmer used a bit of computer code to stop his banking account from reflecting as overdrawn. But when this person was discovered he/she was not prosecuted because there were no laws to deal with such cases. After this episode, the Western World researchers started series of publications. Donn Parker developed the first code of ethics in the field of computer technology; Walter Manner in 1970 introduced the branch of ethics called today "Computer Ethics". ACM – Association of Computer Machinery decided to adopt a professional of ethics plus the Ten Commandments of Computer Ethics. In the same year (1970s) the United States of America and Europe put in place a variety of computer crime laws which this paper is unable to discuss in detail. These laws were as follows: Copyright Act 1976, Software Copyright Act 1980; Video Privacy Protection Act 1988; Computer Fraud and abuse Act 1986; and many other laws followed.

According to the information that shows how developed nations' researchers and governments responded quickly to the evolving crimes committed by Computer users and professionals in their countries. It is difficult for such a response to happen in developing countries. Some people may argue that these countries are faced with numerous and urgent problems (hunger, diseases) emanating from stagnant economic growth coupled with political instability for governments to worry about computer crimes committed by their computer professionals and users. Unfortunately Zimbabwe falls under this category. But, Zimbabwe lacks a political will to enact regulations and laws pertaining to computer usage. Currently, there are no Information and Communication Technology (ICT) laws in Zimbabwe. The ICT regulations which were said to be in place were withdrawn in 2009 after it created tension in the Inclusive

Government. These regulations were located in a number of Ministries instead of one and hence there was lack of coordination.

With this challenge of lack of laws in place we have created a situation in which computer crimes are committed unknowingly. That is, the majority of the Zimbabwean population do not know what a computer crime is. This is illustrated by many street vendors who sell copyrighted materials, software piracy and many related computer items. These activities were escalated by the non- existence of goods and materials during the economic crisis and political uncertainty of 2006 to early 2009.Zimbabwans resorted to what Thomas Hobbes would term the egoist approach to life. That is, the egoist always asks "what is in it for me?" Therefore, if one sees no benefits or advantage in being moral, then   one has no reason to be ethical. Another scenario is the business one, which stresses that the ultimate purpose of companies is to maximize profits. One of the strategies to increase profitability is by reducing costs. With the advent of technology, the way of reducing cost is to replace human workers with machines (software).These machines work all the time for they do not have (annual leave/ get ill / wage increase and attend funerals) . In any business activity, the owners and employees alike need to be guided by core values such as honesty, respect, responsibility, fairness, compassion, perseverance and courage. These, were also advocated in the ancient times as indicated early in the discussions. The latest concern is computer networks which have invented a new term cyberspace. Cyberspace is defined as being any environment in which information exists and flows. It is the disk/ flash stick in which data are stored, and the wires through which information flows. The problems are those of ownership, for examples, who owns cyberspace? Many questions arise such as the question of should governments control information? How should we define the relationship between data and the human subjects of data? There are many questions which need answers concerning the ownership of cyberspace and the internet privacy. In the internet arena it has been discovered that millions of internet users often expose personal information on the internet in order to sign up or register for thousands of different possible things. These individuals are usually unaware that they are giving away vital personal information which is easily accessed by criminals who in turn use it for criminal purposes.

The outlined challenges for Zimbabwe could only be practiced if there are rules and laws which guide individual managers and employees to comply with. Michael J.Quinn (1998), points out that there is need for each country to have solid ethical boards that enforce the professional codes. For him, the boards need to be able to sanction the conduct of professionals. He further states that:"an ethic code without sanctions is like a crocodile without teeth". His sanctions include expulsion from professional organisations, revocation of professional certification, denial of admittance to professional gatherings and life –time penalties. Examples of such penalties were metered to the Zimbabwe soccer players and officials (Asia Gate scandal).

In Zimbabwe the absence of standards, enforcements and penalties fuels an unethical behavior by professionals and the population in general. The study findings is that Zimbabwe lags behind its neighbours where information and technology laws are concerned (e.g. Botswana and South Africa).In these countries computing and communication industries are regulated strictly often by government bodies. There are rules on the use to which computers and computer networks can be used. For example cybercrime and computer related crime. Some argue that the Zimbabwe does not take the ICT industry seriously. But this study therefore indicates otherwise. The issue is that the government lacks political will coupled with inadequate resources.

The latest urgency of putting the laws in place is the installation of computers and the internet in both rural and urban schools. This connectivity exposes the young mind to pornographic and other unethical materials. The minister of Information Communication and Technology (Minister Nelson Chamisa) is also much aware of these problems concerning the school learners.

CONCLUSION

There is an urgent need for the government especially the ministry concerned to come up with a board which come up with ethical codes of conduct for professionals , business managers , computer users and

the general populace. Once the ethical laws and codes are in place they will be need to inform the public through the radio, media , television , schools and universities to teach ethics so that children will grow up knowing what is right and what is wrong concerning their behaviour and usage of ICT

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