

Chapter 14

The Future of Technoethics

INTRODUCTION

As the title of this book suggests, the knowledge society is in a state of change and transition, rather than a being a fixed point in time and history. One of the greatest objectives (and challenges) in the 21st century is to complete the transition into a knowledge society within the ever expanding landscape of information, technological advancement, and ethical tensions. The western world has survived the fallout of the ‘information bomb’ and the “collapse of globalization”. Society has struggled through information overload, extended work weeks, increased time and space compression, loss of personal meaning, and a variety of new inequalities created through eroding social institutions and fragmenting social relations at a global level. Throughout this struggle, technology has acted as a focal point and catalyst, spurring ethical debates and widespread concern over the direction of society and human life.

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Technoethics is a key component in the advancement of the evolving knowledge society because of the central importance of both technology and humans. As demonstrated in this book, technoethical inquiry provides important insights and direction to help refocus attention on key areas of technology related human activity that raise widespread ethical concern and debate which necessitate special attention and care.

THE EVOLVING RELATIONAL SYSTEM OF TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY

Finding solutions to many new ethical issues revolving around technology in society are not obvious with approaches developed thus far. In response, this book advances the study of technology and ethical issues arising within a complex system that is constantly evolving and changing within society. This systems view places technology at the centre of human activity and human activity at the centre of technological progress and innovation. Because the relationships held with technology are always changing in multiple ways and at multiple levels within society, a relational system is ideally suited to discern the subtle ebb and flow of these changing relationships. Key questions that come to may include: What meaning does technology have in a complex relational system of humans and society? What are the positive and negative aspects of technology advancement for individuals and society? To what extent is technology an instrument of humans and to extant extent are humans and instrument of technology? How do individuals and organizations balance human and technological needs? What ethical aspects of technology can be derived by developing a system approach?

The rapid acceleration of knowledge production in technological contexts increases the need for in-depth mastery of technoethics for leveraging organizations. This compounds the already challenging task of accessing and sharing tacit knowledge within individuals and organizations that is core to successfully harnessing knowledge production, particularly in scientific and technological areas which are complex, highly specialized, and difficult to communicate. Part of the problem is that scientific and technological knowledge creation and management is being mismanaged, or to put it another way, knowledge management is currently dominated by professionals who are not knowledge experts in the domains they are trying to manage. A significant number of knowledge managers come from Business with MBA degrees and have no knowledge (except domain specific business knowledge) in the domain of technology and ethics. Accessing technoethical knowledge in the domain of specialist areas (e.g., nanotechnology, biotechnology, ICT) requires expertise to help translate technical information for the organiza-

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