Chapter XIII
Business Ethics and Technology in Turkey:
An Emerging Country at the Crossroad of Civilizations

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ABSTRACT

IT ethics cannot be analyzed without assessing business ethics in general and the cultural environment. This study is based on the Turkish case. Turkey lies at the crossroads of civilizations, making it hard to define a generally accepted set of ethical principles. Western, Islamic, and Turkish cultures are in competition with each of them, and a synthesis has not yet been achieved. Therefore, a common identity and common ethical standards cannot be acquired. In fact, such a synthesis could be categorized as a new civilization. This disagreement causes proliferation of unethical behaviors such as the illegal copying of software. The majority of highly educated technical people in Turkey approves of the illegal copying of software, if it is necessitated by the interests of the country. This shows that we have a long way to go to reach global ethical standards, and country-specific differences cannot be eliminated in the short term.

INTRODUCTION

While the IT sector is growing exponentially and converging with every aspect of our lives and work, it also has effects on business ethics, and various moral or ethical problems can arise. The Internet also presents us with utterly new ethical challenges for which we have no precedents in our efforts to struggle (Bynum, 2005; Ess, 2002).

There are several definitions made through IT ethics. Some defined computer ethics; others defined information ethics. According to Bynum (2001), Deborah Johnson (1985) defined computer ethics as one that studies the way in which

Figure 1. The conceptual map of IT ethics
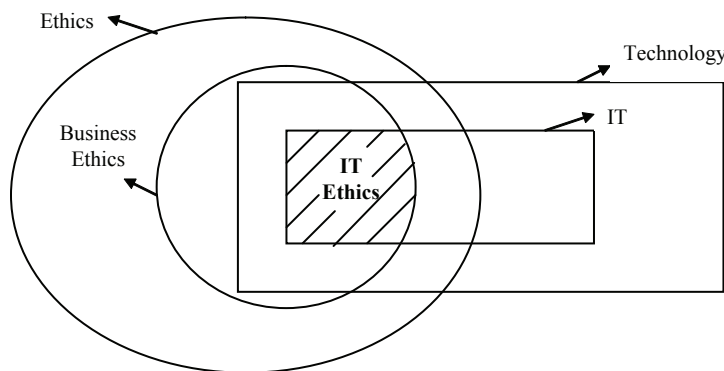
computers "pose new versions of standard moral problems and moral dilemmas, exacerbating the old problems, and forcing us to apply ordinary moral norms in uncharted realms" (Johnson, 1985, p. 1). Moor (1985) also defined computer ethics as a field concerned with policy vacuums and conceptual muddles regarding the social and ethical use of information technology.

On the other hand, information ethics is characterized as a biologically unbiased extension of environmental ethics based on the concepts of information object/infosphere/entropy rather than life/ecosystem/pain (Floridi & Sanders, 2002).

In Figure 1, we present a conceptual map of IT ethics. Business ethics is a subset of ethics, and IT is a subset of technology. The intersection of IT and business ethics is IT ethics. Business or IT ethics develops within the context of culture; geography; history; legal, economic, and political environments; and so forth. Unethical behavior in one country or civilization may be seen as ethical in another. For example some highly educated technical people in Turkey approve of the illegal copying of software, if it is necessitated by the interests of the country. A common example is cracking the Hotmail e-mail account in order to use a 250 MB quota. In fact, such high quotas are available only to American citizens.

For IT ethics, this presents an important obstacle, since IT products are used worldwide and cultural disparities hinder the establishment of globally accepted, standard IT ethics. The solution may be that each major culture and civilization should be analyzed from the perspective of individual businesses and IT ethics, and then, common denominators should be found.

The ideal solution would be the global acceptance of a particular country's environment and reducing the cultural differences to a minimum. In fact, at the start of the 19th century, Eastern civilization came close to that point; however, it could not succeed. In the 19th century, a great majority of the world was ruled by Western countries. Exceptions were China and the Ottoman Empire (Huntington, 1997; Lewis, 2002). Today, globalization again has become a major trend. However, Eastern cultures' contributions are much more significant. This is due to the relative economic and cultural strength of the East compared to the situation in the 19th century.

That does not mean that a clash among civilizations will take place, as proposed by Huntington (1997). Rather, it simply means that Eastern cultures also should contribute to the formation of a global culture. A globally accepted set of cultural values should not be determined solely by the West. This would diminish the attractiveness of the global culture for Eastern citizens. Global culture and ethics should embrace the best practices of the East. Huntington (1997) argues

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