Chapter 7
Technoethical Study of Electronic Technology Ab/Use at University

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ABSTRACT

This case explores how university students view non-work related use of electronic technology within universities (I.e., electronic monitoring technology and personal use of electronic technologies). Of particular interest are student experiences and ethical stances concerning non-work related use of electronic technologies within universities as well as the variables that affect their decision to engage in or not engage in personal electronic technology use during class. To this end, a technoethical case study utilizes research literature and conversational data derived from online group work taken from a research course offered by the communication department of a large urban university. Findings indicate the presence of ethical tensions and contradictions in how students rationalize non-work related use of electronic technology within universities. This case study sheds light on student's attitudes, subjective norms, attributions of responsibility, and factors affecting students' ethical stances towards non-work related technology use at university. It also offers recommendations on how to leverage mutual understanding and consensual decision-making in similar contexts where ethical and social controversies arise, surrounding technology and its use in society.

BACKGROUND: ELECTRONIC TECHNOLOGY AB/USE AT UNIVERSITY

The widespread integration of electronic technologies in universities is transforming organizational operations as well as how students, faculty members, support staff, and administration interact with one another. This can partly be attributed to the many educational and organizational advantages perceived to accompany electronic technology use within university settings. New electronic technologies allow university members to exchange more information in less time and with greater

flexibility than possible through face-to-face interactions. Electronic technologies include, but are not limited to, computer monitoring and filtering systems, surveillance cameras, IM and other chat tools, electronic mail, Internet, audio and video conferencing tools, mobile devices, and personal data assistants (Luppicini, 2008a). Non-work-related use of electronic technologies may include personal use of electronic technologies as well as institutional uses of counter measure electronic technologies to control personal use.

Non-work related use of electronic technologies within universities is a relatively understudied area of research. This is particularly salient in the lack of practical research focusing on insider perspectives and attitudes towards electronic technology use within universities. To date, only a few studies have specifically focused on individuals' personal views and attitudes towards non-work related electronic technology use in organizational contexts and none have focused specifically on insider views and attitudes towards non-work related electronic technology use within university contexts. One relevant study of non-work related Internet use at work by D'Abate (2005) found that individuals may rationalize non-work related use of the Internet during work hours in a variety of ways including, viewing themselves as capable of simultaneously conducting work and non-work related tasks, viewing non-related Internet use a justified reward for completed work, and viewing themselves as feeling tempted by the convenience of access. Although this study does not address personal views and attitudes towards non-work related electronic technology use within university contexts, it does provide compelling evidence to suggest that individuals' personal views and attitudes about non-work related electronic technology use within work contexts plays a powerful role in shaping professional conduct and organizational actions revolving around non-work related electronic technology. Moreover, it highlights the importance of understanding the role of ethical values and rationalization processes in

shaping individuals' approach to non-work related electronic technology.

SETTING THE STAGE

What is Technoethics? In referring to the *recent Handbook of Research on Technoethics*, Luppicini (2008) provides the following definition:

Technoethics is defined as an interdisciplinary field concerned with all ethical aspects of technology within a society shaped by technology. It deals with human processes and practices connected to technology which are becoming embedded within social, political, and moral spheres of life. It also examines social policies and interventions occurring in response to issues generated by technology development and use. This includes critical debates on the responsible use of technology for advancing human interests in society. To this end, it attempts to provide conceptual grounding to clarify the role of technology in relation to those affected by it and to help guide ethical problem-solving and decision making in areas of activity that rely on technology (p. 5).

This technoethical case study explores how university students view non-work related use of electronic technologies within university, a technoethical case because it focuses on the ethical and social aspects of technology use in society. In view of the importance of electronic technologies within university contexts, there is a need to get an insider perspective from students to better understand how electronic technologies are used and abused within their university. This case is intended to shed light on students' attitudes and ethical stances concerning non-work related electronic technology use within their university. This case is also intended to identify areas of concern about non-work related use of electronic technology within universities and offer possible solutions to help guard against potentially destruc-

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