

**Will ICT ethics engage organizational transparency?**

**Will the evolution of ICT ethics engage organizational transparency?**

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## **Abstract**

In a world business context characterized by the central role that ICT plays, the need to analyze its ethical and moral dilemmas is crucial. At the same time, the exponential growth of business ethics also demonstrates the need for organizational transparency, as demonstrated by some well-known financial scandals. Currently society perceives ethics as “value added”; however, managers tend to disregard the link between ICT ethics and business ethics.

The aim of this paper is to relate the evolution of computer ethics and the phenomenon of organizational transparency. This research work makes an important contribution to an area where there is a lack of existing literature.

## **Keywords**

Corporate social responsibility, ICT, computer ethics, global ethics, transparency, organizational transparency

## **Abbreviations**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

## Introduction

The idea that business should be conducted ethically is not a new one. Neither is the idea that business should be conducted in socially responsible ways. For most of the last century, however, continuous failures seen through examples such as Enron raises important questions: what is corporate social responsibility? and does transparency means the same thing?

Corporate social responsibility has variously been described as a “motherhood issue” (Ryan 2002, p. 302) or “the hot business issue of the naughtiest” (Blyth 2005, p. 30). There seems to be an infinite number of definitions of this concept, ranging from the simplistic to the complex, and a range of associated terms and ideas (some used interchangeably), including corporate sustainability, corporate citizenship, corporate social investment and corporate governance. In fact, it has been suggested by some researchers that such use distorts the definition of corporate social responsibility or its performance (Orlitzky 2005).

The period between 1920 and 1950 highlighted some conception of responsibility and responsiveness practices (Windsor 2001), and Peter Drucker was one of the first to explicitly address CSR. In the 1960s, a period of economic growth, the discourse of CSR is not heavily represented; however Davis acknowledges the substance of social responsibility. During the 1970s, the literature on CSR includes many references to Milton Friedman’s ‘minimalist’ view of corporate responsibility (Lucas, Wollin and Lafferty 2001), in which The US Committee for Economic Development’s (CED) 1971 model of CSR reveals that despite Friedman’s pronouncement, there were other evolving views about the role of business in CSR. Business is being asked to assume broader

responsibilities to society than ever before and to serve a wider range of human values. Business enterprises, in effect, are being asked to contribute more to the quality of American life than just supplying quantities of goods and services. Inasmuch as business exists to serve society, its future was said to depend on the quality of management's response to the changing expectations of the public (Carroll 1999).

The 1980s have been described as having a more responsible approach to corporate strategy (Lucas, Wollin and Lafferty 2001). A prominent "development" in terms of CSR was the global debate on sustainable development that emerged in this decade. On the other hand, the literature of the 1990s has not so much expanded the definition, but used the concept as the base point, building block, or point-of-departure for other related concepts and themes, such as: stakeholder-theory, business ethics theory, and corporate citizenship (Carroll 1999).

Moreover, during the present century the issue came to public prominence as a result of highly-publicized events such as the collapse of Enron, as well as the development of global business. Recent literature appears to be moving away from a US-dominated discourse to a more international one. In fact, such public prominence made the notion of "transparency" into an analytical tool and a guideline to propose and enforce new configurations of economic life. We dispute this approach, seeing transparency more as a "state of mind" and not as a component of CSR, and proceed to investigate how computer ethics can promote organizational transparency.

The objectives of this paper are, firstly, to analyse the impact of ICT in our lives and to demonstrate the need for computer ethics. Secondly, it examines some views about the future of computer ethics. Following that, the issue of transparency is addressed, and it

relates to ICT. The methodological proposal based on computer ethics is presented, and finally, the conclusions are outlined.

## **Society and ICT**

Through history, it is possible to acknowledge significant changes that influenced humankind in a decisive way. Tofler (1984) describes three moments, classifying the agricultural revolution as the first “wave” of change in human history; the industrial revolution of the seventeenth century as the second “wave” and, more recently, a third that started in the 1950’s heralding the beginning of a new civilization based on information and knowledge.

Within the existing modern global conditions of a widespread dissemination of unprecedented means of advanced ICT, organizations acquire a new persona by thus absorbing unique sources of social power. These sources are offered by ICT. It is now commonplace to assert the widening of horizons and the acceleration of the flow of information in a tightly interconnected, networked world. But this is just the surface. The more important question is whether such an enhanced means of information gathering and communication may allow us to enhance our ethical powers too.

ICT is Janus-faced or, as Floridi (2006) states, ICT engages a tragedy of the Good Will. Unlike other types of modern technology, ICT is uniquely placed to either obscure sources of ethical misconduct and omissions or, alternatively, ensure the widest publicity possible. It can both help cover and uncover organizational practices in which responsibility is hidden. ICT is thus neither a threat to established social norms nor a puzzle to be understood by them: it is itself a new established social norm.

## **The need for computer ethics**

Some authors like Baird et al. (2000), Spinello and Tavani (2001) and Spinello (2003) seem to disagree with the term “computer ethics” and prefer to use “cyberethics” to capture the wide range of moral issues involving computer networks and interconnected communication technologies. However, it seems to us that the acknowledged differences are not that real, based on the following explanations of computer ethics.

To underpin the conceptual foundations of computer ethics or its historical background, we also believe that is necessary to underline the differences concerning computer ethics and ethics itself. Ethics is the philosophical discipline that deals with theories of morality or how we ought to behave toward one another. Traditional ethics offer us principles of not “harming”, but say little about how to apply them. However, in accordance to Górnjak-Kocikowska (1996), undeniably computer ethics is an applied ethics. It does not just address the proper principles of ethical thinking. Instead computer ethics considers ways of forming arguments and judgements on particular information technology related activities, such as: privacy, security, intellectual property, and so on. And certainly, through the codes of ethics of professional societies, computer ethics is highly normative, because it brings a direct message to computer professionals and users of ICT that they need to consider how they ought to behave.

The first temporal remark concerning computer ethics is pos Second World War, due to the intervention of Norbert Wiener, one of the co-creators of computer technology, in his outstanding work “*The human use of human beings*” (1950, 1954). In his visionary book Wiener paid attention to the ethical problems that this technology might cause. Before

Maner coined the concept “computer ethics”, Don Parker and Joseph Weizenbaum also paid attention to the arising ethical issues in computer technology, however at different levels: Parker noticed the unethical behaviours of computer technologists and Weizenbaum conceived the software ELIZA.

After that, Maner created a “*Starter kit on teaching computer ethics*” (1978) and started his “underground movement” with Bynum, as stated by Bynum himself during ETHICOMP 2007. Maner’s arguments for a rationale computer ethics are well documented in his paper “*Unique ethical problems in information technology*” (Maner, 2003). His arguments are

- that certain ethical issues are so transformed by the use of computers that they deserve to be studied on their own, in their radically altered form or
- that the involvement of computers in human conduct can create entirely new ethical issues, unique to computing, that do not surface in other areas

Maner still argues a “weaker view” and a “stronger view” regarding computer ethics. Although the weaker view provides sufficient rationale, he draws mainly his attention on establishing the stronger view using six levels of justification:

- level 1: computer ethics should be addressed because it will allow computer professionals to behave in a responsible way. At a minimum this rationale maybe considered as a moral indoctrination. At most, it is weakened by the need to rely on an elusive connection between right knowledge and right conduct
- level 2: computer ethics should avoid computer abuse and catastrophes

- level 3: computing technology continuously creates temporary policy vacuums, and because of that, anyone who studies computer ethics would have the perpetual task of tracking a fast-moving and ever-changing target. The other purpose of a computer ethicist is to be aware of policy framework clashes
- level 4: the use of ICT permanently transforms the degree of certain ethical issues, and therefore an independent study is required
- level 5: the use of computers creates, and will create, novel ethical issues that require special study
- level 6: the rising issues of computer ethics are so broad and large that is enough to define a new field

Another breakthrough on computer ethics can be found in James Moor's (1985) article "*What is computer ethics?*" In that paper Moor argued that computers are logically malleable, and that characteristic makes them a revolutionary technology. That characteristic implies that through them it is possible to manipulate and to do any activity that can be characterized in terms of inputs, outputs, and connecting logical operations. We should still note that this property functions syntactically and semantically. Finally, another characteristic that Moor states is that information technologies are also informationally enriching.

Bearing in mind these attributes, Moor presents his vision of computer ethics which engages two components (1985, 2003):

- the analysis of its nature and social impact

- the corresponding formulation and justification of policies for the ethical use of such technology. The use of the concept “computer technology” is to demonstrate the broader vision of such technology

Another concept introduced by Moor is that of policy vacuums. Such phenomenon can be understood as the way that computing technology is being employed in a given situation, but people are puzzled how it should be used.

Simultaneously, Deborah Johnson also followed a course of computer ethics, giving rise to her book “*Computer ethics*” (1985). This was a book mostly dedicated to teaching, and for that reason, covering issues such as intellectual property; software ownership, etc. However, this book was revised in 1994 and 2001 with the purpose of including ethical issues arising out of professional settings, and this is clearly seen in her excellent introduction to computer ethics in the 1994 version “computers are new species of old moral issues.” Also during the 1990s, Donald Gotterbarn (1991, 1992) devoted his attention to the social responsibility of computer technologists.

Finally, in the late 1990s, Floridi and his colleagues (1999, 2004, 2006) developed the information ethics theory. The name information ethics is appropriate to Floridi’s theory, because it treats everything that exists as “informational” objects or processes. In fact, all entities will be described as clusters of data, that is, as information objects. More precisely, any existing entity will be a discrete, self-contained, encapsulated package containing because:

- the appropriate data structures, which constitute the nature of the entity in question, that is, the state of the object, its unique identity and its attributes

- a collection of operations, functions, or procedures, which are activated by various interactions or stimuli (that is, messages received from other objects or changes within itself) and correspondingly define how the object behaves or reacts to them

At this level of abstraction, informational systems as such, rather than just living systems in general, are raised to the role of agents and recipients of any action, with environmental processes, changes and interactions equally described informationally (Floridi 2006). However, Tavani (2007) present some interesting critics to Floridi's work. In the light of the discussion above, we may affirm that since its birth and evolution, computer ethics as a research field engages mainly three perspectives:

- the human values approach: focus on human beings and their actions, intentions and characters (see the ethical theories section)
- the professional approach: devoted to the social responsibility aspects regarding computer technologists
- the information approach: analyse information to create a new ethical theory

The human values approach was the first vision of computer ethics history and is based on Wiener's work, continued by Terrell Bynum as reflected, for example in his latest work, "*Flourishing ethics*" (2006), and also by Górnjak-Kocikowska (see for example 2007). The professional view is mainly supported by the work of Johnson (1985, 1994, 2001), and Gotterbarn (1991, 1992). Finally, Luciano Floridi (1999, 2004, 2006) is the leading author for the information approach.

## **The evolution of computer ethics**

Having introduced computer ethics this paper now addresses the debate about the possible evolutions of computer ethics.

Krystyna Gorniak-Kocikowska and Deborah Johnson both argue that the first major transformation is that computer ethics will disappear as a separate branch of applied ethics. As a consequence, computer ethics will be ready to achieve a global ethics. Critics of this approach state that, “different cultures have different moral codes” (cultural relativism). They argue that the idea of a universal ethics is a myth; however, we maintain that the idea is possible. Why and how, are the fundamental questions that need to be justified, and for that, we will base our “defence” on four different levels of argument:

- globalization and ICT
- neurobiological sciences
- cultural relativism
- philosophical systems

Before going further, we should summarize some basic principles of a global ethics:

- global ethics is not a new ideology or superstructure
- it will not be a substitute for existing philosophical ethics
- global ethics is a necessary minimum of common values, standards and basic attitudes

Global ethics therefore is a “project” to be fulfilled. However, it will call for a change of consciousness, which has already made great progress in the last decade, but is still an ongoing process through the other three levels of justification. Wiener (1950, 1954) claims that human beings are a “mix” of energy and information, and therefore information is included on the social side of human existence. Therefore, ICT can be justifiably seen as the most human technology there has been in a very long time or maybe even the most human technology ever (Górniak-Kocikowska 2007), and as we know globalization is characterized by an encounter of different moral traditions and value systems (Collste 2007, King and Heltne 2007).

On the other hand, the most recent discoveries of neurobiology, namely the work of Damásio (2000, 2003a, 2003b) or Gazzaniga (2005) could give us important clues to such task. In their work it is possible to acknowledge a link between our ethical behaviour and the neurobiology of the human species.

Cultural relativism, as it has been called, challenges our belief in the objectivity and universality of moral truth. It says, in effect, that there is no such thing as universal truth in ethics; there are only the various cultural codes, and nothing more. However, in accordance to Rachels and Rachels (2007) it is important to distinguish the various elements of cultural relativism because, on analysis, some aspects turn out to have more validity than others. The following claims have all been made by cultural relativists:

- different societies have different moral codes

- the moral code of a society determines what is right within a society; that is, if the moral code of a society says that a certain action is right, then action is right, at least within the society
- there is no objective standard that can be used to judge one society's code as "better" than another's. In other words, there is no "universal truth" in ethics; there are no moral truths that hold for all people at all times
- the moral code of our own society has no special status; it is but one among many
- it is mere arrogance for us to judge the conduct of other peoples

In this sense, cultural relativism is a theory about the nature of morality. At first sight, it seems quite plausible. However, the problem is that the conclusion does not follow from the premise that is, even if the premise is true, the conclusion still might be false. The premise concerns what people believe in some societies is different in other societies, where people believe something else. The conclusion, however, concerns what really is the case. The trouble is that this sort of conclusion does not follow logically from this sort of premise.

Even if the cultural differences argument is unsound, cultural relativism might still be true. What would it be like if it were true? Rachels and Rachels (2007) respond to such question, presenting the following justifications:

- we could no longer say that customs of other societies are morally inferior to our own: this, of course, is one of the main points stressed by this theory. We would have to stop condemning other societies merely because they are "different"

- we could decide whether our actions are right or wrong just by consulting the standards of our society: cultural relativism suggests a simple test for determining what is right and what is wrong: all you need to do is ask whether the action is in line with the code of our society. This implication is disturbing because few of us think that our society's code is perfect- we can think of all sorts of ways in which it might be improved. After all, if right and wrong are relative to culture, this must be true for our own culture, just as much as for other cultures
- the idea of moral progress is called into doubt: people in general like to think that at least some social changes are for the better

Plus, when we compare the existing Western and Eastern philosophical systems it is possible to encounter several similarities, as discussed in *"The Bourgeois Virtues"* (McCloskey 2006) and Nivison's contribution to *"The Classical Philosophical Writings"* (Nivison 1999).

According to "virtue ethics," morality cannot be captured in a universal code; the right thing to do in a particular situation is what a virtuous person would do. How do we identify a virtuous person? Considering Aristotle's definition as stated previously, it is a quality of character that makes for a life well lived. This has echoed of Confucianism and Buddhism.

Confucianism because its ethics is about character; which means, similar to Aristotle's vision. Confucius, however, goes a step further than Aristotle, and helps escape the potential circularity of virtue ethics. He provides a starting point for understanding how to live a good life. There is not a single, universal moral code, but there is a "root of

humanity”, and that is the cultivation of our closest loving relationships. But why Buddhism, if it is bounded to suffering? Well, through the reading of Buddhist philosophical and religious literature we find many texts that address moral topics, and a great deal of attention devoted to accounts of virtuous and vicious actions, virtuous and vicious states of character and of virtuous and vicious lives, which means engaging at some level the position of Aristotle. However, in the Buddhist perspective, there seems to be a lack of direct attention to the articulation of sets of principles that determine which actions, states of character or motives are virtuous or vicious, and no articulation of sets of obligations or rights, namely due to its metaphysics.

On the other hand, it is also possible to acknowledge some common issues between Confucianism and Kant, namely concerning duty. In fact, both doctrines embrace the need for duty; however it is central to Confucianism, but not having a universalizing impulse such as Kant. Confucius's moral imperative is more local, intimate and concrete than Kant's. Despite their differences, both philosophical systems support a similar concept.

But global ethics imposes another challenge: how to promote ethical behaviour in society? Clearly, ICT imposes a human centred perspective, because it is the most human centred technology invented by human kind. Thus, the three different “schools” of computer ethics could have a decisive role in the creation of a global ethics. Ethics and computer ethics could act as a research field, to demonstrate to society in general that computer ethics might be integrated into early education, perhaps from primary school onwards in order to promote ethical behaviour.

In spite of some criticisms that may arise, for example from the situationist school which claims that our behaviour is explained by the various situations or situational factors rather than by character traits, it is possible to acknowledge the ideas plead by Confucianism and Kant. Experiments conduct by Milgram in the 1950s, reveal that many people have weak characters especially when confronted with intense situations that challenge morally upright behaviour, and that the idea of a virtuous agent is not as common as many people might believe. Virtues (vices) are good (bad) habits or character traits that are made firm by habituation and practice. Virtues do not determine a person's behaviour, but they determine the way that person is and his or her disposition, which is expressed in one's decision, determined through rational deliberation (Alzola 2006). We would certainly expect a non-virtuous agent not to possess firm character traits. Berges (2002) identifies three considerations that explain why situationist social psychology diagnosis relies on a misreading of the virtue ethicists' descriptive commitments in moral psychology. First is the Aristotelian description and distinction between the enkratic (continent, self-controlled) versus the virtuous, and the akratic (incontinent, weak-willed) versus the vicious. The enkratic agent may act in a virtuous behaviour by resisting contrary impulses from disordered desires and emotions, while the akratic agent may act in a non-virtuous behaviour despite the intention to act virtuously.

Berges (2002) points out that both the enkratic and akratic agents fall short of virtue (possession of stable character traits), although both to some extent know what the right thing to do is, but are plagued by strong emotions and appetites. In the case of the akratic, the agent may end up doing the morally wrong thing because of weakness of will; the agent allows the non-rational (emotions) to rule the rational appetite (the will) against

better judgment and good intentions. In the case of the enkratic, although the rational appetite is able to order the non-rational appetites, the agent does so at the cost of renewed assaults from the rational.

The second consideration is the failure of situationists to distinguish between virtues and natural dispositions. Although the latter may be termed character traits, Berges (2002) points out that they fall short of virtues in that they are not the product of systematic conscious habituation and therefore are not reliable. Having an undesirable natural disposition, for example, lacking honesty does not imply that a person never behaves honestly, but that the person does not act honestly across a variety of situations (Stichter 2005). Human personalities are not typically structured as an evaluatively integrated association of robust traits, so that one would expect to find much variability across situations and not observe substantial consistencies. Berges (2002) identifies several distinctions between natural dispositions and virtues. Natural dispositions or traits are not the product of habituation and are simply the raw material on which habituation must be set to work. Unless it is made firm through habituation (habitually doing the right thing through practice), a natural disposition can be improved or worsened, so there is no reason to believe that this concept of character trait would be reliable and so display cross-situational consistency (someone who is naturally kind may behave unkindly in some situations; someone who is naturally mean may behave generously in some situations). Virtues on the other hand, are the result of a process of conscious and systematic habituation, which are anchored in firm beliefs or principles. No agent therefore, is naturally virtuous since he or she is not naturally in possession of firm

character traits; such agents are neither virtuous nor vicious, but merely incapable of acting according to firm motives and lacking stable character traits.

The third consideration is related to the second. Robust character traits require systematic conscious habituation over a long period of time across a variety of situations, so that people can have personalities without having acquired robust traits of virtues and vices. Virtues and vices therefore, are more than dispositions; they lead one to act in a certain way for characteristic reasons, in a characteristic behaviour, and to have characteristic attitudes and emotions (Alzola 2006). It is important to note that situationists (Doris 2002) do not claim that people do not have virtues, but that they do not have character traits as traditionally conceived. In the Aristotelian view, Webber (2006, p. 205) defines a character trait as a relatively stable disposition to be inclined with a certain strength towards a certain kind of behavior in response to a certain kind of situational feature. Virtuous traits are therefore not simply dispositions to behave in a certain kind of way whenever a certain kind of situational feature is present. Virtuous and vicious behaviours therefore, do not just consist in behaving in a certain way too often, but in that way on appropriate as well as inappropriate occasions.

## **Transparency**

The word “transparent” comes from the Latin word “*transparere*,” a combination of *trans-* (“through”) and *parere* (“come in sight, appear”). Relating the etymological foundation of the word transparency to our introduction regarding corporate social responsibility illustrates the view that transparency is a “state of mind”, because it reflects the evolution and increase of human organizations (Ribas 1989).

According to Kaufman (1995), human organizations are complex, adaptable systems. Organizational units, to preserve their identity and integrity, and to guarantee their survival, are “forced” to interpret an amount of information beyond their processing capacity, given the variety and quantity of information that is presented in the evolving environment. Vaccaro and Madsen (2006) suggest that the increase of complexity due to Industrial Revolution made organizations more opaque. However, they also argue that human organizations are firms, and the first sign of transparency was the artisan workshop. In fact, a clear example of a transparent human organization could be the Army of Ancient Rome, whose opponents knew all its tactics, and even so they were competitive and successful.

In spite of the etymological and historical approach to transparency, it is necessary to address the question of what transparency means in our society. General definitions of transparency define it as “lifting the veil of secrecy” (Davis 1998) or “the ability to look clearly through the windows of an institution” (Den Boer 1998, p. 105). The general idea is that something is happening behind curtains and once these curtains are removed, everything is out in the open and can be scrutinized.

The literature acknowledges three dominant streams. Welch and Wong (2001) focus on government agencies that are making themselves more transparent by putting all kinds of information about their performance on websites. Meijer (2003) shift the focus to government agencies that are making private or public organizations more transparent. He describes how government inspection services release performance information about schools and hospitals. Fung, Graham and Weil (2007) investigate government agencies that demand that private or public organizations make themselves more transparent. The

label these policies as “targeted transparency policies” which consist of mandated public disclosure by corporations or other private or public organizations of standardized, comparable and disaggregated information regarding specific products or practices to further a defined public purpose. The perspectives show an important difference between self-reporting forms of transparency and transparency created by outsiders. These distinctions emphasize different aspects but are overlapping.

However, these streams fail in their intention, because transparency is more than public affairs or public agencies that demand transparency which gives rise to other questions: who is becoming transparent? and who is creating the transparency?

There is a certain sense that the notion of transparency reflects the day-to-day experiences of contemporary organizations. Today, organizations feel under pressure not only to stand out in a cluttered communication environment saturated with competing messages but also, and more significantly, to present and express themselves in their surroundings in coherent and legitimate ways (Argenti 2000, Cheney and Christensen 2000, Fombrun and Rindova 2000, van Riel 2000). The source of this pressure is manifold. While legal restrictions force organizations to disclose information about their actions and plans, including the publishing of annual reports (van Riel 2000), business practices are increasingly scrutinized by media and business analysts (Deephouse 2000). In the current business environment, internal and external stakeholders not only expect to have unrestricted access to corporate information but also demand that organizations are held accountable for their strategic choices. The investment policies of pension funds, for instance, are regularly scrutinized these days by investors and other citizens. Exposed to the critical gaze of pressure groups, media, business analysts and other inquisitive

stakeholders, it is not surprising to find that organizations today feel more vulnerable and, in a sense, more transparent than ever before.

Given the uncertainty associated with the condition of transparency, it is easy to understand why organizations increasingly emphasize the “corporate” dimension of their communications. The trend among contemporary organizations to brand themselves rather than their products (Ind 1997) is one manifestation of this uncertainty. Indeed, it may be argued that the managerial challenge to understand and orchestrate the “whole” of the organization as communication, so often emphasized in popular writings, is a direct and necessary product of this condition. This logic captures but part of the story. In their endeavours to adapt to their surroundings, organizations themselves often “plant”, as Weick (1979) points out, the very conditions they set out to discover. Thus we find that contemporary organizations not only describe their communication environment in terms of transparency but also prescribe transparency in communications as the proper managerial response. When, for example, van Riel (2000, p. 158) talks about the transparency of today’s organizations as “a basic requirement”, it is not entirely clear where this condition originates. Is it a pre-existing condition or is it a considered strategy? While a clear distinction between cause and effect has always been problematic in the social sciences, and is certainly so within the domain of strategy and persuasion, this problem compels us to be sensitive to logical inconsistencies or unsubstantiated assumptions associated with the notion of transparency and its application in contemporary organizations. While transparency is typically presented as a condition shaping corporate communications, it is simultaneously an assumption necessary for organizations to pursue and justify their corporate ambitions.

In conclusion, transparency can be voluntary or it can be forced. When companies find they have a more positive brand image by being more forthcoming about their practices, transparency becomes more attractive. The trend toward transparency is shifting the locus of power to customers, employees, shareholders, citizens, and other stakeholders. Companies find their image as a good citizen affects their ability to effectively compete for customers, employees, partners, investors, and the hearts and minds of regulators. Such companies are proactive. By contrast, when a company uses the word “compliance,” it is reacting to the increasing weight of regulations and government interventions that require an increasing burden of reports on a growing range of management practices.

## **Organizational transparency and ICT**

With the advent of ICT the relationship between the companies and social systems was radically changed. In fact, we cannot use the concept of transparency only because modern transparency is *mediated transparency*. Transparency has been mentioned as a key characteristic or social construct of information technology since the first debates about informatization in the 1980s (Nora and Minc 1980, Zuboff 1988). Several authors have shown that the use of ICT increases organizational transparency at different levels. Within the organization, for example, power relationships or work relationships became more transparent (Zuboff 1988, Zuurmond 1994, Marx 1996). In the relation between organizations and their environments the argument relies on the work of Welch and Wong (2001), Northrup and Thorson (2003), Meijer (2003).

Hood (2006, p. 19, 20) stresses that direct face-to-face transparency in traditional town

meetings are disappearing. Berends' (2003) dissertation shows that digitization creates a virtual kind of transparency. Managers have information about employees but they have little contact with them. Numbers dominate their representations of work processes. This leads to what Berends calls 'uprooting': managers function in a different reality than employees. This shows that transparency through information technology is a "mediated transparency".

However, mediated transparency often goes one-way. Citizens could engage information through mass media and the Internet. The Internet creates opportunities for presenting information about performance in various ways. The effect of it, however, is that the transparency is taken away from its context. Information about school performance seems interesting but is difficult to interpret without knowledge of the local context. Postman (1998, p. 70) writes: "[...] information appears indiscriminately, directed at no one in particular, in enormous volume and high speeds, and disconnected from theory, meaning, or purpose." The observation that modern transparency is mediated transparency forms the basis for a cultural sociological and media theoretical analysis of the "new transparency". On the other hand, the new problems that ICT imposes are linked usually with the concept of intentional motivation. Such motivations are especially poignant in the specific case of environmental degradation to which certain corporate activity unavoidably leads.

In that sense, ICT allows us to solve problems regarding the attribution of responsibility to corporate actors that would otherwise be impossible while at the same time, it allows the passive recipients produce negative effects through its actions engaging the need for a global ethics.

## **Methodological proposal**

There is a theoretical gap concerning the transparent analysis of human organizations. The proposal is to diminish the existing theoretical gap through the use of computer ethics, in this case virtue ethics and Floridi's information theory. Virtue ethics and information theory will be used simultaneously regarding the individual behaviour of each actor (inside or outside the organization) in order to acknowledge transparent behaviours. Transparency will be the centre of four axes, each one of which will engage three basic assumptions: values, vision, and identity (their appearance in the model will be similar to radar graphic). Values try to acknowledge the foundations and motivations for transparency, and its range. Vision approaches the capability to detail any level for any position, individual, group or organization. And finally, identity corresponds to the appropriateness of transparency based on the nature of the envisioned entity (person or organization).

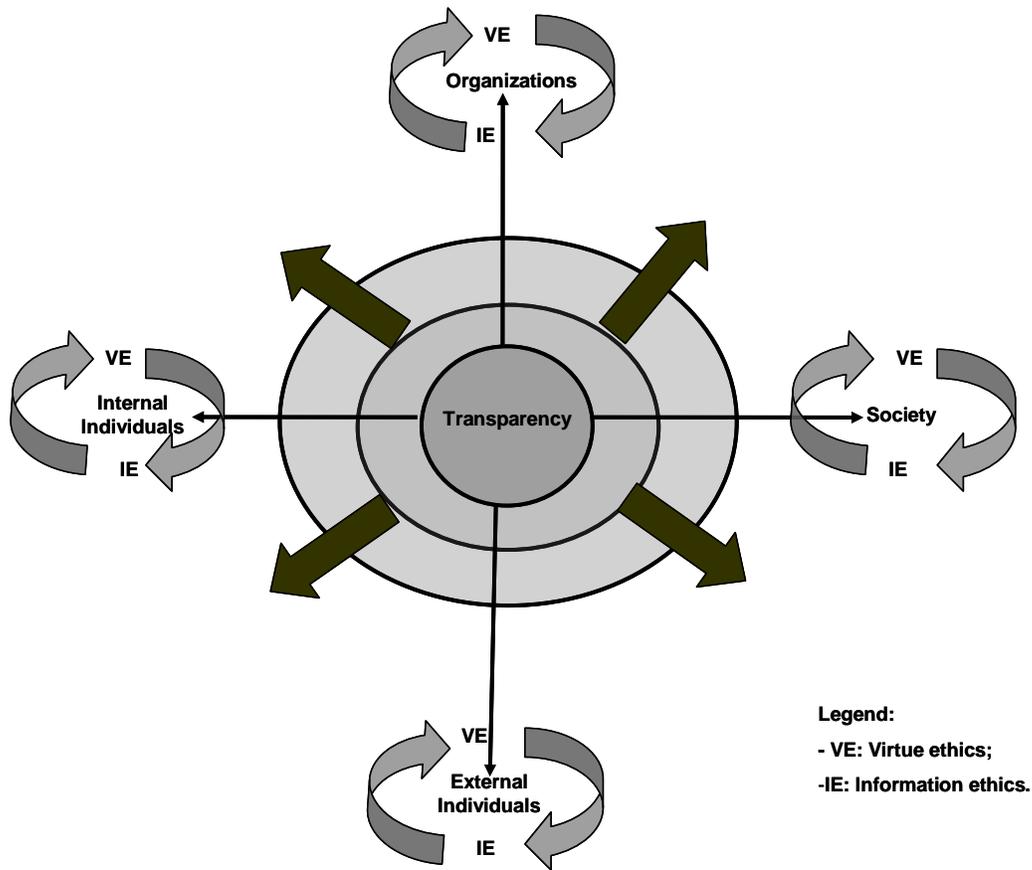


Figure 1. Methodological proposal

All types of human organizations are externally chartered, regulated, taxed by a government (which represents society): private companies, public institutions, civil society groups, families, and people. Everybody, and every organization, hooks into many “bureaus” of government at all levels all the time. In addition, the exponential increasing of external individuals who chartered the organization due to ICT raises new transparency issues. Finally, from an internal point of view, organizational behaviour is determined by the relationships between manager’s values and internal individual’s values.

ICT improves organizational transparency, however, the emergence of numerous and often completely new “virtual spaces” whose unknown consequences and challenges are directly related to organizational transparency are extremely diverse, as for example virtual communities. Such challenges can be addressed through the composition of the e-space (Wickl 2007)

- web-space, which corresponds to the functioning and utilization of web resources that request the usage of a web browser and which is located on a particular website
- non-web related space, does not require the use of a browser, but is based on applications such as e-mail, VoIP programs, and others
- m-space is a natural extension of Internet space, and it is related to non-physical terrain, such as mobile phones

This discussion obliges us to understand what kind of entities operate in e-space, as well as their taxonomy. Taking into consideration the impact of such entities it is possible to divide them into three different groups (Griffin 2006)

- a group of known and identifiable entities that affect an organization, for example a corporate virtual community
- a group of identifiable and unidentifiable entities whose e-space is neutral to the organization
- a group of unknown or difficult to identify entities that operates in e-space, affecting an organization in a real way, as for example a former worker that was on the virtual community and still has access

With respect to their impact taxonomy it is possible to divide them into two generic types

- direct, whose influence is directly connected to an particular organization resources
- indirect, whose aim is not intentionally the organization resources, but ultimately affect them

## **Conclusion**

Organizations must be concerned with how they make decisions, what values drive their choices, and how transparent they are in a generic sense.

Transparency means opening up corporate decision processes to active engagement with society, but at the same time the quality, accuracy and meaning of the data and information provided is an important issue, as the methodological proposal demonstrates.

In conclusion, guiding organizations (transparent organizations) means much more than increasing competence, improving operations, and managing customer and supplier relationships. It embraces standards of integrity, virtue and ethical behaviour by leaders and workers. Transparency evokes the need for much greater respect of the written and unwritten rules of ethics and the values of a global society, which the field of computer ethics can help to achieve.

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