

Introduction

Professionalism: It's NOT the job you DO, it's HOW you DO the job (anonymous)

Professionalism, in the sense described in the quotation above, is arguably more important in some occupations than others. It is vital in some because of the life and death decisions that must be made, for example, in medicine. In others, the rapidly changing nature of the occupation makes efficient regulation difficult and so the professional behaviour of the practitioners is central to the functioning of that occupation. The central idea behind this book is that this process of rapid change is relevant to information and communications technology (ICT). The technology changes so quickly that regulation will always lag behind.

The contributors to this volume come from a variety of backgrounds, and this range of contributions is intentional. It is not just academics who have important things to say about professionalism in ICT. Some contributors are or were ICT practitioners, one is a retired judge from the High Court of Australia, some are ICT academics and others are philosophers. Underlying all chapters, except the first, however, is the concept of ICT professionalism. The first chapter, by the Hon Michael Kirby, focuses on regulation. What it does, by showing the difficulties in regulating new technologies — and ICT in particular — is highlight the importance of professionalism in ICT. If regulation is difficult, the behaviour of professionals is paramount. The rest of the sections all contain chapters that approach aspects of professionalism from different perspectives.

The second section contains reflections on professionalism and ethics by experienced ICT practitioners and the third focuses on professionalism itself. The fourth considers ICT governance and its relation to professionalism. Section five contains two discussions of ethics education, something considered by the Australian Computer Society (ACS) as a necessary component of education for ICT professionals. Codes of ethics are a common component of a professional's armoury and these are discussed in Section Six. Finally, in Section Seven, ethical concerns about ICT in society more generally are considered, together with the role that professionals have in this context.

These sections, considered as a whole, present a richer picture of what an ICT professional is or ought to be. In fact, the overall argument of the book is that, given the problems of regulation, if the ICT industry is to make its proper contribution to society, those in the ICT industry must be professionals in the sense of behaving professionally.

Each section of the book contains an introductory piece by the editors outlining not only the chapters, but more importantly, setting the scene

for those chapters and making the links between the various sections. Each section's introduction also contains information on the chapters' authors to assist the reader in understanding the perspective from which the authors are approaching their topic.