What is good governance?

The previous sections have considered aspects of regulation and professionalism. Both are important in information and communications technology (ICT) governance. Good governance requires some regulation but, as the Hon Michael Kirby pointed out, regulation has problems and hence the importance of professional behaviour in ICT.

ICT governance can be discussed at various levels, for example the global, national, industry, corporate and project level. These are not wholly distinct, but it is useful to separate them for clarity. Governance at the global level has chiefly been discussed in relation to the Internet, but its discussion is outside the scope of this book. National governance, rarely discussed as *governance*, is primarily an issue of national policy regarding ICT, often Internet policy and, again, this is outside the scope here (see Weckert and Al-Saggaf, 2008, for a discussion of Internet governance). Corporate governance, which has been noted by many as having come to the fore after some spectacular corporate collapses, generally refers to the running of the whole corporation, while corporate ICT governance is concerned with the role of ICT within the corporation (for a very useful background discussion of ICT governance see de Cruz (a)). Part of this is the governance of ICT projects, something that has a close link with professionalism, as discussed in this book. ICT industry governance is, again, little discussed as *governance*, but elements — for example, codes of ethics — are emphasised by the ACS and other professional bodies. In this section, the main emphasis will be on ICT corporate governance, although much of what is said will have relevance for the other levels as well.

What is ICT governance? Standards Australia has this definition (AS8015:2005):

> Corporate Governance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the system by which the current and future use of ICT is directed and controlled. It involves evaluating and directing the plans for the use of ICT to support the organization and monitoring this use to achieve plans. It includes the strategy and policies for using ICT within an organization. (For a discussion see da Cruz (b))

This definition is clearly focussed on ICT in corporations and on how ICT can benefit the corporation.

The definition below, from the South Australian Government, contains the additional feature of encouraging 'desirable behaviour'.

> ICT Governance is a collection of principles and practices that guide the correct application and delivery of ICT. Components include;

- Strategy — clear direction statements.
- Policies — clear boundaries are set.
- Procedures & Guidelines — clear detail as to who, what, how.
- Accountabilities — clarity of roles and responsibilities.

> ICT Governance is defined as 'specifying the decision rights and accountability framework to encourage desirable behaviour in using IT'.

ICT governance is a subset of corporate governance, and models exist such as that published by the OECD, which defines corporate governance as 'providing the structure for determining organizational objectives and monitoring performance to ensure that objectives are attained' (DECS, nd).

Other definitions are discussed by Richard Lucas and Cecilia Ridgley in this section, with Ridgley providing critical analyses of a number of them.

A notion that is closely related to governance is that of an integrity system (see the discussion in the introduction to Section One). A governance system can be seen as a more formal part of an integrity system. Integrity systems are non-legal institutional mechanisms that are designed to reduce inappropriate behaviour and to promote and support an ethical climate. According to Seumas Miller, an integrity system 'is an assemblage of institutional entities, roles, mechanisms and procedures, the purpose of which is to ensure compliance with minimum ethical standards and promote the pursuit of ethical goals' (Miller, 2010: 354). These mechanisms might include behavioural codes, unofficial sanctions, meetings in which ethical topics are raised, education on ethical issues, mechanisms of accountability and so on. As this suggests 'integrity 'systems' are a messy assemblage of formal and informal devices and processes' (Alexandra and Miller, 2010: 39), which are focused on developing and maintaining the individual integrity of the members of the organisation. For example, codes of ethics include standards of conduct and occupational ideals to guide members; a statement of the fundamental goals of the occupation; and the principal rights of members of the occupation in relation to groups such as employers, peers and clients. These codes clarify the kinds of behaviours that are expected from members. They can be used as a resource to help make decisions and guide behaviour (especially in situations which are not covered by legal regulations), as well as a tool for raising awareness about particular ethical issues that may not otherwise be obvious. Unofficial sanctions are a means of punishing inappropriate behaviours. These may include cautions, reasons for promotion or demotion or other such means of encouraging or discouraging particular behaviours. They operate as clear feedback on behaviours. The role of ethical discussions is to raise awareness of ethical issues and encourage industry members to engage with them. Such discussions could be structured or informal, and take the form of discussing

real cases in the industry or introducing hypothetical ethical scenarios. As can be seen, there is much in integrity systems that is not normally thought of as governance, nevertheless it is useful to see governance in the context of integrity systems.[1]

The two papers in this section take rather different stances on ICT governance. In the first, Lucas, an academic with backgrounds in both ICT and philosophy and long industry experience, focuses on the professional, claiming that governance is a proper subset of professionalism, meaning that full ICT professionalism includes ICT governance as well as knowledge while, in the second, Ridgley, an ICT practitioner, argues that an approach that focuses on the individual is inadequate. Lucas takes as his starting point the relationship between the professional and virtue (see also Richard Volkman's paper on virtue ethics). In general, a virtuous professional is one who promotes human flourishing. But, he argues, there is an inherent problem with seeing an ICT professional (Lucas uses IT rather than ICT) in this light because ICT *in itself* does not contribute to human flourishing in the way that, say, medicine does. ICT contributes through its contributions to those other fields. Ridgley agrees that values play a central role in governance but argues that a systems approach is required to overcome the 'decision disconnect' between various components in the governance structure. Her main focus is 'the relationship between ethics, governance, the enterprise, and information and communications technology (ICT) organisations'. She argues that value systems are central in governance and provides a detailed account, using a systems-thinking approach, of how governance can be undertaken that minimises the risk of decision disconnect arising from the aforementioned components of ethics, governance, the enterprise and information and ICT.

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1   We acknowledge the contribution of Dr Jeremy Moss to this discussion.

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Biographies

Dr Richard Lucas has over 30 years experience working and teaching in the ICT industry. He has worked professionally as an ICT project team leader, senior systems analyst, systems engineer, programmer, and instructor in the fields of agriculture, defence, engineering, health, health insurance, electoral systems, and taxation. He has worked in the public and private sectors as both an employee and independent consultant. For more than 15 years he has taught ethics and social responsibility to ICT students at the professional, vocational, and university levels in Europe and Australia. He has developed curricula and teaching support material for undergraduate and masters subjects in the fields of ethics, technology and professionalism. In 2009 he published *Machina ethica — a framework for computers as Kant moral persons*. Currently he is the head of discipline for information systems, in the Faculty of Information Sciences and Engineering, at the University of Canberra.

Dr Cecilia Ridgley is an executive consultant working with large, government greenfields programs. Cecilia's professional background began with the military as an army officer cadet at the Australian Defence Force Academy, moving through senior leadership positions in the Australian Government, before joining the private sector as an IT management consultant. Cecilia's leadership of high-profile projects and enterprise strategies for large whole-of-government and NGO programs over the last 20 years has provided insight into the ethical demands of IT in a public policy environment. Cecilia's background spans enterprise and information architecture, organisational modelling, program management, change leadership, risk management, budget control, business and IT analysis, transition and transformation leadership, security and assurance management, and people management. Cecilia brings these disciplines together to develop a strong, systemic response to values challenges in governance of IT in large businesses. Cecilia has consulted for international firms before managing her own practice — Redline Consulting, and has lectured at the University of New South Wales — Australian Defence Force Academy. Cecilia has published award-winning research in belief systems; learning; counter terrorism; and crucial decision-making and holds a PhD in computer science on a systems approach to ethical decision-making.