Tshwane Declaration: A new dawn for Information ethics in Africa

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Abstract: *Information ethics is at its infancy in Africa. Enormous contribution to information ethics has been done by academicians from the western world and another fair share from the Far East countries. Africa is considered the cradle of humanity and therefore rich in social and ethical diversity. It is thus apparent that in this information and knowledge edge era, Africans should now shift the paradigm to information ethics. Concerted efforts have been fronted by academicians in information science to develop a working formula for information in Africa. These lead to the formation of the Tshwane Declaration for information Ethics in Africa. This Declaration formed a framework of developing integrated information ethics for Africa. However, the extent of this declaration implementation is questionable. This paper, therefore, is intended to provide a background on the Tshwane declaration, explore the impact of this declaration on information management in Africa provide a recommendation on the way forward for information managers in Africa.*

Introduction

Information ethics is a multidisciplinary area of study that explores the ethical issues arising from the information continuum, which encompasses information; generation, gathering, organization, retrieval, distribution, and use. Information ethics is also perceived to be an interdisciplinary field of study that covers a conglomeration of discipline, for instance, computer science, library and information science, philosophy, communication science, journalism, and mass media. Consequently, the areas of concern include the following: the right to privacy, the right of access to information, the right to intellectual property and the quality of information (Bitz, 2013).

In recent years, there has been a growing urge to integrate leading African scholars into international ethics discos with the intention of rationalizing the impact of new information and communication technologies in Africa. The integration of scholars in the ethical discos initiated the organization of the first ever Africa Information Ethics conference which was held on 7th February 2007. Roughly 100 academics and policymakers from Africa and world at-large converged for the conference on Information Ethics which steered the adoption of the Tshwane Declaration on Information Ethics in Africa. The three-day conference was held at Kivietskroon outside the South African capital Pretoria, under the theme: Ethical challenges of the Information Age.

This paper therefore, attempts to look at factors that led to Tshwane declaration on information ethics and highlights the extent to which it will impact on information management in Africa.

Background of Tshwane Declaration for Information Ethics

In the the better part of second half of the 20th century, computer scientists for instance Norbert Wiener (1989 - 1950) and Joseph Weizenbaum (1976) brought to the limelight the societal challenges of computer technology. The initial academic discussions centered on the responsibility of computer professionals (Capurro 2013).

Capurro and Bitz (2010) observed that the ethical paradymes of the worldwide information society formed the the bigger part of the UNESCO agenda. Since 1997, UNESCO introduced a sequence of events allowing specialists and decision makers to address the ethical dimensions of the information society. The primary objective of the UNESCO Information ethics Congresses, organised in 1997, 1998 and in 2000, was to inspire the reflection and deliberation on the ethical, legal and societal aspects of the information society by converging participants from the most significant possible number of countries representing the broadest range of educational, scientific, cultural and social environments. The ethical, legal and societal effects of information and communication technologies (ICTs) formed the larger part of the three priorities of UNESCO's Information for All Programme (IFAP).

The two World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) meetings held in Geneva (December 2003) and Tunis (November 2005), had specific intentions of deliberating on the ethical dimensions and challenges facing the global information society. After the first meeting in Geneva, two significant documents were published, that is, the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action. The second high-level meeting in Tunis agreed on two extra documents, namely the Tunis Commitment and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society (WSIS 2003/2005). In clauses 55-56, the Declaration of Principles explains the ethical dimensions of the information society. Additionally, the document stated that the global information society must uphold the fundamental values of human freedom:

- ✓ Human rights should be respected;
- ✓ There should be no offensive use of contemporary ICTs.

Capurro (2007) further narrates, that in October 2004 an intercontinental convention on Information Ethics was held in Karlsruhe Germany. This convention was organized by the International Center for Information Ethics and sponsored by the Germans' Volkswagen Foundation. Prominent internationally recognized experts in the field of information ethics were invited to participate, and it was a first of its kind in the world. The symposium

concentrated on the novel and puzzling ethical question raised by modern information and communication technologies within the paradigm of globalization and knowledge economies. The idea of this conference that surfaced from this symposium was; localizing the Ethical Internet Issues in Intercultural Perspective. Themes deliberated on by the participants included subjects such as privacy, access to information, intellectual property rights, quality of information, security, spamming, advanced capitalism and the digital divide which involved the question of the information-rich versus the information poor.

It was eminently clear to all participants that the African continent had poor representation at the symposium. The handful of African participants were mainly sourced from expatriates. Consequently, there were cardinal reasons that occasioned the absence of African scholars in the summit. Some of the ideas just to mention a few relate with; Lack of international recognition; poor funding and facilitation for attending international events and also not much research has been done on the African continent on this critical information ethics topic. A closer scrutiny portrays a picture that indicates seems that African scholars have meager publications compared to there global counterparts and therefore they did not have much to offer on ethical challenges facing Africa in the era of globalization. Rafael Capurro searched for Publications related to African Information Ethics by African scholars and came across a limited number of publications (Africainfoethics.org)

Having seen the challenges encountered by African countries, about 100 academics and policymakers from Africa and other parts of the world convened at the Africa conference on Information Ethics leading to the adoption of the Tshwane Declaration on Information Ethics in Africa. The three-day conference was held at Kivietskroon outside the South African capital Pretoria, under the theme: Ethical challenges of the Information Age.

The conference was hosted by the South African Government, via the Departments of Communications and Arts and Culture, with the official patronage of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (Capurro 2101), The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) e-Africa Commission, the Presidential National Commission on Information Society and Development and in close collaboration with the International Centre for Information Ethics, the University of Pretoria in South Africa and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in the United States of America (USA/US).

African academics and policymakers sought to address the ethical challenges of the information society from their perspective with the belief that the mobilization of the academic research in Africa is crucial for the sustainable social, economic, technical, cultural and political development of the continent.

It was realized that the use of contemporary Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) such as computers, the internet, radio, and television poses many ethical challenges in the African continent, for instance, a social exclusion which is triggered by a lack of access to relevant information. Other challenges included computer illiteracy as well as the adequate protection of core information based on human rights. These rights included the right to freedom of expression (FOE) and the right of access to information (FOI).

Delegates at the Africa conference adopted the Tshwane Declaration on the Information Ethics in Africa with a commitment to focus on enhancing African discourse on developing norms and values for the African Information Society.

Apart from the Tshwane Declaration, the University of Pretoria committed itself to establish a Research Centre for Africa Information Ethics, to enhance research areas on information ethics in the continent.

Delegates also established the African Information Ethics Network that will enable academics and ICT and information policymakers to participate in a global dialogue to discuss the challenges posed by the information society.

To enable academics and policymakers to address the practical applications of ethical challenges of the information society, delegates recommended the establishment of Information Society and Development Advisory Councils to advise African governments and other stakeholders on the central ethical issues about the development of information and ICT-related policies in Africa.

In a nutshell, the adopted declaration was a basis for enhancing the field of Information Ethics in Africa, and resolve to uphold the following principles:

- ✓ Entirely, people have equal rights as illustrated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Therefore, people need and ought to have access to information over and above the ability to benefit from it to exercise their human rights.

- ✓ Recognition of Information as a fundamental tool for promoting the freedom goals, democracy, understanding, global security, peace and development and should be used as such.

- ✓ Information availability, accessibility, and affordability across all linguistic groups, gender, differently abled, elderly and all cultural and income groups should be paramount.

✓ International, the information centralization is manifested as nations move towards Information and Knowledge Societies. They are attaining the reality of global Millennium development goals demands that Africa should be a key player in this movement.

✓ Policies and practices that regard to the creation, dissemination and utilization of information within Africa should be pegged on ethics based on universal human values, human rights, and social justice.

✓ Africans can contribute to Indigenous knowledge and cultural diversity to the global Information Society. This indigenous knowledge should enrich the universal body of knowledge by preserving, fostering and enabling its applicability.

The impact of the Tshwane Declaration on information management in Africa

The Africa Information Ethics Conference converged scientists and politicians to discuss what could and should be thought and done to create an excellent African information society. The conference endeavored to champion for information ethics in Africa and from an African perspective. As a result, it encouraged African scholars to make explicit the perspectives and challenges of the African information society as a whole.

Tshwane declaration was an African tailored approach to information ethics. It created the foundation for an African discourse on Information Ethics and set the stage for the advancement of the conversation. For instance; On 6 - 7 September 2010, the second African Conference on Information Ethics was held in Botswana and focused on the teaching Information Ethics in Africa, the present status of Information Ethics, and the prospects and challenges. On 5 - 7 September 2012, the third African Conference on Information Ethics was held in Pretoria (South Africa). It also shed more light on Online Social Networks (OSN) in Africa. Two workshops preceded the conference, one from 2 - 3 June 2012, taking place in Nairobi (Kenya) on information for sustainable development and another one on 3 - 4 September 2012 in Pretoria, which was concerned with the basic concepts of Information Ethics (Capurro, 2013).

The declaration ushered in the establishment of an African Center for Information Ethics (ACIE) as a coordinating agency of the African Network for Information Ethics (ANIE). This center was meant to cooperate and coordinate with international partners such as the International Center for Information Ethics and the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. The coordinating agency created the platform for exchanging information about African teaching and research in the field of information ethics. Consequently, providing an opportunity for scholars around the world having a shared interest in African information ethics to converge and exchange ideas

Information and knowledge sharing was highly encouraged through the enormous emphasis placed on applying existing technologies and traditions as a starting point. Occasionally, this starting point has often been referred to as the information and communication culture. Existing resources, for instance, the conventional paper documents, were converted into learning tools and presented through radio or oral demonstrations with the community, e.g., using the modest tools, technologies and other capabilities such as the human voice, hand signals, or radio (Capurro, 2013). The learning tools facilitated the creation of African information and knowledge base

Tshwane conference elicited various disciplines of potential cooperation with UNESCO. The subjects for collaboration were identified, and it was agreed that would not only put the outcomes of the conference into effect but also place it is placed in the international context facilitated by UNESCO. One discipline associated with the ethical dimensions is the implementation of e-government in Africa. The WSIS Declaration and Action Plan, for instance, conveyed the desire for governments to implement e-government systems to facilitate administrative activities and services delivery to their citizens. Ultimately, Africa embarked on the e-government road with countless e-government projects, and NEPAD (the New Partnership for Africa's Development) launching an e-government initiative urging African governments to implement e-government projects.E-government has since become an essential driving force in Africa, in fact, it is a goal to be achieved by most governments. Countries including South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, Kenya, and Mauritius have heavily invested in e-government projects and the training of people to implement these projects (Capurro, 2013)

Throughout the conference, academicians and practitioners from all corners of the world met in small groups to discuss and identify possible research opportunities in the field of African information ethics. It was anticipated that philanthropic organizations such as the Gates and Ford foundations would be approached for funding. The research emphasis was on the practical implications of the ethical challenges associated with knowledge sharing and the use of information on the African continent (Capurro, 2008). The conference empowered and encouraged intensive research in the field of African Information Ethics, therefore accelerating publication and development of its content.

Tshwane Declaration initiated the induced greater transparency in the provision of government products and services to the public and businesses. It necessitated making available information about those services more complete and pro-actively accessible to both the media and the public. Therefore, the entire section of the society will be better informed and educated about what is precisely offered; when and how to obtain those services; and how to ensure that promised services are delivered (UNESCO 2009).

Acknowledging the hitches in the teaching of information ethics in Africa, the publication of a Reader on Africa Information Ethics was launched. This publication was used as a textbook for students and scholars. This, therefore, contributed to the development of a distinct field of African information ethics and ushered in a new era where information ethics and eventually it started to teach in African schools.

To a greater extent, the Tshwane declaration prompted inclusivity. The inclusivity does not just refer to institutions and organizations, but it also relates to sub-populations that have special needs — for instance, ensuring the inclusion of women and men, youth (girls and boys), diverse linguistic and cultural groups, elders, people with disabilities, literate and illiterate people, the unemployed, underemployed and migrant populations, minority ethnic, racial and religious groups, among others. This in-turn created unity in diversity within the broader African arena, therefore, creating a coherent and ethnically unified information society (Capurro, 20130).

The conference led to the establishment of a Summer School on Information Ethics, hosted at the School of Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. The summer school trained African practitioners and scholars on relevant issues about African information ethics, therefore, developing human capital in that field.

The Ethics Declaration for Africa Information Society is perceived to be a possible and necessary means of having a common ground for tackling global issues, although it presupposes a broad and sustainable analysis and critical discussion of the issues at stake (Cappurro & Britz, 2010). Despite the challenges that Africa encounters, Tshwane declaration developed principles that need to be articulated by its African states which created a common understanding for addressing ethical issues. The declaration minimizes or instead eliminates assumption by Ladd (1985) argument that the very idea of a code of ethics is a contradiction since ethics is inherently problematic, and that what can be codified are ethical principles as the temporary result of argumentation, not established by consensus or decision-making.

The way forward for Information Managers in Africa

The new information and communication technologies with the present challenges and opportunities created by the fast moving technologies and the emerging new frontiers of information call for new approaches. The Tshwane Declaration for information Ethics in Africa has led to the creation of African Network for Information Ethics, Teaching of information ethics in African Schools, scholarship on information ethics research, Unity and commonness in addressing African Ethical Issues, encouraging knowledge sharing among others. New types of partnerships, involving governments, local organizations and academic institutions are

called for and should be engaged in a series of well-targeted practical initiatives. Such alliances will grow Information ethics which is at its infancy in Africa.

Based on input from African institutions, this paper proposes the following types of initiatives which new partnerships could immediately implement to develop information ethics in Africa:

Working with African academics and policymakers: Useful and practical actions that could be developed through the mobilization of the academic research in Africa include enacting enabling laws for the creation of information ethics in the utilization of information resources.

Institutional capacity-building: Local academic institutions need greater capacity to support the teaching of information ethics in African Information Schools, collaborate with the west for transfer of skills and part-ownership in the development of online content on the subject. Local institutions should also be enabled to help the continent comply with international information ethics requirements. This can be done through training on the verification of unethical practices on information utilization.

We are raising awareness among scholars and other stakeholders not just about the potential opportunities in Information ethics which is at its infancy in Africa, but also about how to overcome barriers and engage in international information ethics through conferences, workshops, and seminars organized worldwide as part of the capacity building at the lower levels.

Technology-sharing: By using open source databases libraries with the support of international partners and groups of local institutions and experts can be helped on the necessary training from within shared platforms that are locally owned and managed.

African governments should pay particular attention to ICT infrastructure facilities and service provision in their policy to encourage the growth of information management ethics in Africa.

Conclusion

After realizing the shortcomings of African countries during the World Summit on the Information Society in 2004, the Tshwane Declaration was adopted by the participants of the African Information Ethics Conference. It was appreciated that Information Ethics in Africa is a young academic field. However, there lies a long history of Information Ethics in Africa which concerns Africa's rich oral and written traditions throughout many centuries about different kinds of information and communication practices using different moral codes and media. These conferences led to the adoption of the Tshwane Declaration which centered on major basic principles. Currently, the rationale of the declaration is felt far and wide. For instance; the creation of African Network for Information Ethics, Teaching of information ethics in African Schools, scholarship on information

ethics research, Unity and commonness in addressing African Ethical Issues, encouraging knowledge sharing among others. Conclusively, Positive impact of Tshwane declaration is indeed immense and commendable in-regards the change of African paradigm towards information ethics.

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