
Social Responsibility in the Computing Profession – ACM Special Interest Group on Computers and Society (SIGCAS) -- Annual Showcase

Prof. Katina Michael, Dr. Roba Abbas | 14 September 2022


Article 25

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.
The Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international treaty that recognizes the human rights of children, defined as persons up to the age of 18 years.

- Treaties are a form of hard law at the international level
- Normative setting is there, but is it working?

Articles of Interest (UN CRC)

- 3. Best interests of a child
  - All organizations concerned with children should work towards what is best for each child.

- 12. Respect for children’s views
  - Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them...

- 16. Protection of privacy
  - Children have the right to privacy. The law should protect them from attacks against their way of life...

- 17. Access to information
  - Children have the right to reliable information...
    Mass media such as television, radio and newspapers should provide information that children can understand...

- 31. Rest, play, culture, arts
  - Children have the right to relax, play and to join in a wide range of leisure activities.

- 32. Protection from harmful work
  - Governments should protect children from work that is dangerous or that might harm their health or education.

- 36. Protection from exploitation
  - Children should be protected from any activities that could harm their development.
Questions?

How do we think about innovation / technology, regulation and the rights of the child?

Does soft law (corporate social responsibility) have a part to play?
Are these privacy breaches related to the pacing problem or are they related to a company’s risk appetite?

**The Pacing Problem:**
“the growing gap between the pace of science and technology and the lagging responsiveness of legal and ethical oversight society relies on to govern emerging technologies.”


Are they related to how we characterize and perceive innovation / technology?

- **Radical** innovations are rare but might be highly impactful on children (e.g. AR headsets).
- **Modular** innovations which are high impact on component knowledge are usually product-based and may provide longer battery life or faster processing speeds. Smaller form factor.
- **Architectural** innovations can change the way children interact with digital services on platforms. E.g. single sign on (ID bridge) across apps.
- But **incremental** innovations are plentiful and sometimes go under the radar. Who’s watching?

If a company chooses to do the wrong thing by children, and absorb the costs of poor data handling, then?

- We need to
  - Revisit our socio-technical objectives
  - Put on public interest technology armor
  - Co-design with children
  - Embed values by design
  - Consider soft law (corporate social responsibility) – we will focus briefly on this point today

- From an individual employee perspective we need to ask: would I design or develop X if it was my child whose data was being mined or compromised?
Corporate Social Responsibility as “Soft Law Initiatives”

- Soft law can come in the form of diverse initiatives
  - We can speculate, that if individual organizations do the right thing by children, then CSR soft law initiatives would be entirely complementary to hard law (e.g. treaties)

- Soft law program archetypes:
  - Statements and principles
  - Codes of conduct and codes of practice
  - Recommendations and guidelines,
  - Policy declarations
  - Communications, standards, action plans

IEEE Standard for an Age-Appropriate Digital Services Framework Based on the 5Rights Principles for Children

IEEE 2089-2021

IEEE Consumer Technology Society
IEEE 2089-2021
A set of processes to follow when designing digital services for kids

Identifying Risks Early in the Design Process

Age-Appropriate Risk Register

• AAR is an information repository created for clarity, unambiguity and reasons of traceability for your product or service that contains data and insights gained in child impact exploration, prioritization, and product/service requirements

• Review the AAR for areas of functional and operational impact on children

• Identify criteria for risk tolerability of hazards, opportunities, and requirements in each context of use.

• Enables assessment of tolerability level for each risk and establishes the necessity for further risk mitigation
Sustainable Solutions Through Soft Law

• “We would like to strongly encourage organizations to think about the sustainability of their efforts and avoid devoting resources to the creation of initiatives that are not intended to be enforced or implemented.
• Trust and credibility fundamental principles in the design of AI soft law and that, when selecting program archetypes, it is imperative to consider the alignment of incentives between parties.
• Finally, the exclusive use of soft law is not the answer to every governance problem. Instead, a flexible approach that complements or substitutes for hard law can create effective synergies for the governance of AI”.

Gutierrez, Marchant & Michael (2021, p. 12)

Ultimate Aim

▸ Soft law places pressure on technology developers to act in a socially responsible manner
  – Tech designers for children should be championing co-design practice
▸ The emergent role of public interest technologist more important than ever before
  – Need to hire graduates interested in societal challenges, not just tech
▸ Industry develop a self-regulation approach
  ◦ “Name and shame” can be just as powerful as full-blown regulation
Further Work

Contact

katina.michael@asu.edu

roba@uow.edu.au