

Information Overload

Volume 6: Issue 56, April 2007

Welcome:

The April edition of Information Overload takes a look at the Professional Codes of Conduct that we adhere to as practitioners in the library and information management profession in which we work.

Are you aware of the many different clauses that govern our professional lives? Do you care if occasionally you overstep the boundaries surrounding ethical behaviour, after all few if any organisations seem to check to ensure that we are abiding by these rules and regulations. Are there any disciplinary procedures in place for blatant transgressions? Or is the industry in which we work, reliant on self-assessment and policing?

We would like to thank you in advance for forwarding this edition onto friends, colleagues and other interested readers. Please note that all back issues of this edition, as well as our registrant resources edition can be read and/or downloaded from our web site – <http://www.iea.com.au/web/Publications> should any of the topics be of interest and use.

Lorraine Bradshaw
Marketing Coordinator and Projects Officer

In this Issue we will be looking at:

- In a shark eat dog kinda world;
- Falsifying our experience;
- Corporate fibs;
- Disciplinary procedures;
- A Thought to ponder.

In a shark eat dog kinda world

As information professionals we are duty bound to abide by a certain set of agreed to, and other assumptive codes of ethics. At the industry level we are guided by our professional associations see - <http://www.rmaa.com.au/docs/membership/codeofconduct.cfm> as an example, whilst at an organisational level we are bound by individual contracts that prevent us from gaining an unfair competitive advantage, divulging information to an outside party, insider trading and a whole host of behaviours that can be labelled as “unethical”. For example, the Records Management Association of Australasia (RMAA) states “You should be aware that information is the property of the employer / client, and must not be distributed freely or used for your personal advantage or that of a third party without the employer / client’s consent.” Which is all very well, but...

© IEA 2007. All rights reserved. You are free to use material from the Information Overload newsletter in whole or in part, as long as you include acknowledgement of source.

Information Enterprises Australia Pty Ltd
Unit 4, Upper Level, 201 High Street, FREMANTLE WA 6160
Tel: 08 9335 2533 Fax: 08 9335 2544 e-mail: training@iea.com.au

But what happens when we decide to leave one organisation for another, sometimes a competing organisation. Or consider the disgruntled employee who was “asked to leave”. Do we “forget” what we have seen and learnt and start again with the new client, or are we hired because of the insider knowledge and experience that we have? Of course the hiring organisation would never openly admit to that kind of hiring practices, but nonetheless it is something to consider in the context of this paper.

Would we be duty bound to a previous employer not to use knowledge gained in the course of our duties? Are the contracts we sign not worth the paper they are printed on if we take nothing tangible away with us when we leave, yet still have the knowledge locked away inside our personal data capture stores (brains)? Can this be policed in any way shape or form? And more importantly perhaps is it worth policing?

And what of the consulting arena? Organisations that pay for a consultant’s knowledge and experience do so in the full knowledge that they have worked for a wide variety of clients, usually in very similar situations to the ones they themselves are in, with the same kinds of problems faced by others. Why should they re-invent the wheel when you (as an employee or consultant) can significantly shorten the lead-time, by providing the right answers at the right time!

The person (be it employee or more often than not – consultant) can then sift through their personal banks of information and knowledge gained through years of experience so they can explain “why” faster. And more importantly they can tailor their answers depending on the “it depends” factor for your own particular organisation and the problems or situations you are facing.

The problem is - Clause 3 of the RMAA Professional Code of Conduct States “You must not disclose information acquired in the course of your professional work except where consent has been obtained from the rightful legal owner or where there is a legal or professional duty to disclose.”

However, every time we read something, hear something or actively engage in something we are bringing our personal experiences to bear and will filter the new information based on the “old” information that we have. Consider that in the context of a new position (be it employee or consulting relationship), and we can shorten project time, saving an organisation a considerable amount of money (in time and false starts).

So where do we draw the line? And as we mentioned at the beginning – is there any chance this can be or should be policed?

Falsifying our experience

However, there is another side to this discussion. What happens when you are a little economical with the truth with regards to the experience you say that you have?

Carrying on with the Records Management Professional Code of Conduct for just a minute, Clause 5 states “You should always be aware of your own limitations and not knowingly imply that you have competence you do not possess.” But do we think about these kinds of things when we are competing with other professionals for the position/job of work that we, or our companies want? Is the odd white lie acceptable?

We may decide to up skill our job titles (because filing clerk doesn’t sound too impressive); we may decide to upgrade our qualifications after all who will check to see what level of

degree you obtained, or whether you completed all the units you needed? Or consider those degree's that you can still purchase over the Internet – does it matter what letters you have plastered after your name. If you consider that your degree (and/or other qualifications) only have a very short shelf life, in that changes are occurring on a daily basis within our industry, surely experience should count for far more than a bit of paper with a few words written on it. Shouldn't experience count for everything.

However, it is interesting to note that, once you have started to “pretend” you are something you are not, it is extremely hard to conveniently forget to put on the fictitious qualifications on subsequent CV's. The higher up the corporate ladder you move, the more likely it is you are going to be found out as recent high profile cases show.

For example - “**David J. Edmondson** (born [1960](#)) is an [American businessman](#) who was the [chief executive officer](#) and President of [RadioShack](#), one of the largest retailers of consumer [electronics](#). In February 2006, Edmondson resigned his position at RadioShack after it was revealed that he had misstated his academic record on his résumé”. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Edmondson

Whilst you may not have misstated your academic record in order to obtain a position, there are other more subtle ways to falsify your experience. For example, you didn't roll out the entire system on your own, but the client to whom you are pitching the services of the company you work for can't determine that because of the choice of words that you have used. If you don't supply a full academic record along with your carefully worded CV, how are clients going to know? And perhaps more to the point – will they care if all they are concerned with is perceived expertise and bottom line costs?

Whilst follow-ups and reference checks are possible, they are not always done, and if they are, there are ways around those too. Mobile phone numbers are perhaps the simplest method used by people who want to hide behind false or misleading information. Closely followed by a “friend” within the reference organisation.

Now I am not suggesting that any of this happens within the context of the Australian library and information sectors at all, but many cases worldwide prove that others are not quite so ethical when it comes to gaining competitive advantage in a corporate environment.

Corporate Fibs

The roll of “dis”honour of corporations who have misstated a number of key areas grows ever larger.

Whilst the **Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002** (Pub. L. No. 107-204, 116 Stat. 745, also known as the **Public Company Accounting Reform and Investor Protection Act of 2002** is a [United States federal law](#) passed in response to a number of major [corporate and accounting scandals](#) including those affecting [Enron](#), [Tyco International](#), [Peregrine Systems](#) and [WorldCom](#), was supposed to halt this kind of behaviour. There are a number of organisations who continue to join the ranks. - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarbanes_oxley. If you would like to know who has been a little economical with the truth in a few areas, including spying through understatement of profits and everything in between. It does make for quite interesting reading. For those of you who are interested there is a list of organisations at - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporate_scandal

As a records and information practitioner would we be more or less likely to blow the whistle on alleged wrong-doing? Or would we turn a blind eye and insist that it is not our

job to let anyone know what we are filing, given that we are not supposed to divulge confidential information to outside parties.

The ethical dilemma continues.

Disciplinary procedures

So far I have been unable to locate on any of the industry websites any reference (except in passing) to disciplinary procedures should anyone transgress the professional codes of conduct as stated in the many policies available.

Which raises a large number of questions:

- Do we have to rely on an individual's personal ethics to ensure that we don't overstep the professional codes of conduct that we are supposed to abide by?
- Or is it the role of the individual organisations to weed out those people who are a little economical with the truth?
- Is it truly possible to weed out these people and/or organisations? Do we want to weed out these people if they have the experience we want, and can complete the work that we need doing? Who then is at fault?
- Should our professional bodies have a say in the penalties imposed? Or indeed is it possible for penalties to be imposed given the comments above. If it is not possible to impose penalties, why do we insist on adding a professional code of conduct clause – that isn't specifically related to such issues as Internet and Email usage etc, at all?

As always – this is just an attempt at generating discussion on these and many other issues relating to our industries. If you would like to comment, then please email me and I will make a list of comments and pass them back (I will remove names to protect identities of course).

A Thought to Ponder:

“Worry about being better, bigger will take care of itself”

Gary Comer

Your comments and suggestions on the subject of this newsletter are most welcome. Or if you would like to see other issues covered in future editions, please email me at training@iea.com.au. Please feel free to pass on this newsletter to your colleagues' friends and associates. To subscribe they should send an e-mail to training@iea.com.au with “subscribe newsletter” in the subject line.

If you have any suggestions as to what should be included in future editions, then please send an email to training@iea.com.au. If you would prefer not to receive this newsletter, please send an email to training@iea.com.au with “unsubscribe newsletter” in the subject line.