
ETHICAL PORTFOLIOS: SUPPORTING IDENTITIES AND VALUES

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Introduction

One of the main accepted reasons for using e-portfolio tools and technology is to support personal and professional development. Alongside this, the self-presentation aspect of portfolio use is now increasingly being recognised as an important means of presenting one's identity to others. Given that values are a central component of people's identities, and that ethical development is a vital part of personal and professional development, one might expect values and wider ethics to feature strongly in the e-portfolio literature. But though these topics have appeared in the literature of personal development, there is little evidence of them in the e-portfolio literature. The impetus for this paper is the recognition of this gap in discussion, research and publication relating the e-portfolio community to values and ethics.

The paper pursues a twofold approach to addressing the identified gap. First, it seeks to clarify the issues of relevance and interest in the field of ethics and e-portfolios. Second, it explores a particular area of interest, that of individual ethical development and the role for e-portfolio process and tools in it.

To help map out the field of ethics and e-portfolios as a whole, this paper begins with a brief discussion of the concepts ethics, values and identity. It also outlines the possible dimensions to explicating the issues of ethics and e-portfolios. The dimensions include the information about values of individuals, groups, communities and organisations that could be represented in a portfolio and the possible benefits of using ethics relevant information in conjunction with portfolio systems. The paper then considers the ideas of individual ethical development and multiple identities and outlines a generic developmental process that might be supported by portfolio tools geared towards ethics. Having done that, it provides an account of a concrete, step-by-step process that could be undertaken by using existing and novel e-portfolio functionality to contribute to one's ethical development. The paper also briefly considers the systems implications of the proposal put forward in this paper by outlining an e-portfolio model for ethical development.

Most current e-portfolio practice, as well as unsupported personal development planning, assumes that people know what they want to do, or can assess their values based on reflection and questionnaires without immediate human support. This is fine for some people – those who are high achievers and feel in control of their lives. For others it is questionable, and even high achievers do not necessarily have an intimate understanding of their own values, and how these relate to the values of the people, groups, and companies they are involved with. An ethical portfolio approach aims to fill this gap by focusing attention on people's identities and values. It is hoped that this will not only clarify personal goals, but help people find those goals which are most closely attuned to who they really are.

“Know thyself”.

Ethics, values, identity: the concepts

As ethics has not thus far been one of the topics explored by people engaged in conceptualising and implementing e-portfolio systems and practice, it appears meaningful to begin mapping the field by defining three key concepts – ethics, values and identity. For the purpose of this paper, a pragmatic understanding of what ethics, values and identity are about, and how they relate to each other, is called for. The brief definitional exercise that follows will be complemented later when discussing ethical development and managing multiple identities.

Ethics

From the academic point of view, Ethics is one of the main sub-fields of Philosophy. As a field of academic inquiry, Ethics or Moral Philosophy seeks to distinguish between what is good and what is bad, and what is right and what is wrong in more or less abstract terms. A distinction is made between formal or theoretical Ethics and applied ethics, where the latter draws on moral theories, principles and pragmatic reasoning to solve real world ethical dilemmas.¹

Since the mid 1990s an increasing number of academics and professionals in different fields, e.g. economics, public policy and corporate practice, have realised the necessity of introducing ethics to their respective fields. As a consequence, engagement with ethics is becoming less and less a sole occupation of academic moral philosophers and applied ethics is coming to the fore.

In its most practical form, applied ethics involves deliberation and choice between different, concrete courses of action in specific situations. In order to be meaningful, such deliberation and choice require awareness of relevant ethical considerations or standards. As Onuf (1998, 669) argues, “[e]thical conduct reflects what we feel we should or must do, given available standards”. The relevant ethical considerations may differ from context to context.

Applied ethics is central to most everyday professional practices, such as health care and business, even if practitioners in such fields would not engage in explicit ethical reflection. Health care professionals, for example, are frequently faced with the task of deliberating and choosing among a variety of options regarding how to treat individuals. Such options tend to have different, possible justifications and consequences, each of which might be argued to be ethical (or unethical) on some grounds.

From the point of view of individuals, concern with ethics can be seen as a central part of human “quest for dignity”, where ethics is about “trying to be decent”. (Coicaud and Warner 2001, 3) Onuf echoes this view by suggesting that the most important ethical standard is “honourable conduct”. For Onuf, everyday ethics “begins with the reasons we give for our conduct”. In his view, “[t]he reasons that people offer for their conduct must refer to the kind of standards that people always start with – the personally relevant, highly specific, frequently inconsistent standards that make their world inescapably their own”. (Onuf 1998, 669-670)

Everyday ethics is geared towards facilitating people to live together harmoniously. It places emphasis on the imperative of reciprocity among people while providing guidance on what count as good and what as bad ways of relating to other people. (Coicaud and Warner 2001, 3) What is seen as decent behaviour or honourable conduct in different cultures, spheres of society and specific contexts, such as a particular professional practice, has to do with the values underpinning the culture, sphere of society or practice.

Values

Specific ethics, i.e. more or less formally codified sets of beliefs regarding what constitutes good and right action, are essentially charged with values, where any code of conduct prefers certain values over others. Some values that are generally regarded positively include justice, love, friendship, tolerance, generosity, sincerity, and key liberal political values include freedom and equality.

For the purpose of this paper, it is important to understand how ethics and values relate to each other. Coicaud and Warner (2001) have identified three key roles that values play in ethics. First, values define what is good versus bad and right versus wrong, where ‘the good’ defined by specific values is based on “respectful interaction of people”. Second, values contribute to, and help us to engage in, “ethical mapping” of our world. Ethical mapping involves making distinctions and establishing hierarchies between “principles to abide by and ideals to aspire to” and “courses of action to avoid”. Values facilitate a reflective process through which we can articulate (for ourselves) “what we should be striving for, what we should be [cf. the concept identity] and what we should do [cf. the concept moral agency]”. Third, values such as justice or love both permit people to relate to themselves, to other people and the society in which they live in a “reconciled manner” and are the “the good exchanged in the relationship”. For example, mutually engaging with one another in a manner that

¹ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethics> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Applied_ethics.

abides by the value of justice fosters an equitable relationship, making justice a good exchanged in the relationship.

Coicaud and Warner conclude about positive values with a very encouraging thought, which in part motivates us to pursue the idea of an ethical portfolio: “[E]xperiencing positive values has an inspirational and fulfilling effect on people, an effect that enhances the desire for and the possibility of a more ethical world geared towards opening up to others and sharing.” (Coicaud and Warner 2001, 3-4). It is reasonable to suggest that living a fulfilling life involves having a positive self-identity or identities. Opening up to others and sharing is about recognising other people for who they are and treating them in a respectful manner, while revealing part or all of our ‘selves’ in the process. These observations point towards a link between values and identity, which will be explicated next.

Identity

The concept identity is used in Philosophy and Social Sciences to signify that a person understands him or herself as separate and distinct from other people and possesses some degree of self-awareness. The notion identity refers to both a person’s image or mental model of themselves and individual’s characterisation of themselves with reference to a particular group, practice or idea(l).² An individual might define themselves e.g. in terms of a family, a particular profession, gender, religion or a nation.

It is possible that people have several identities as opposed to one, dominant identity, where each identity can relate to a different aspect of a person’s life and/or personality. An example of one individual’s multiple identities with reference to the above mentioned “identity contexts” would be a mother, an academic researcher, a woman, a Greek Orthodox and British.

Identity is a relational concept or phenomenon in that it would be difficult to conceive how a person living in complete isolation from other people could possess any meaningful identity or identities. This observation brings one back to ethics and indicates a link between ethics and identity. The link has been articulated well by Coicaud and Warner: “Ethics forces each of us to feel that our identity is also defined by our relations to others. It is the experience that, somehow, we owe something to others and that our ability to handle what we owe to others decides in some sense who we are.” (Coicaud and Warner 2001, 2)

Each group, community, or other entity with which an individual identifies him or herself, either explicitly promotes certain values or perhaps more typically contains an underlying, i.e. largely unarticulated, code of conduct. Such a code of conduct or set of values define what constitutes good and right and what as bad or wrong behaviour in each of them. The values define what counts as ethical ways of relating to both other members of one’s particular group and people who do not belong to one’s group, e.g. how good citizens behave in relation to each other as opposed to treat non-citizens. As a consequence, values can be seen as a central component of people’s identity construction even if people have not, or are not always capable of, explicitly articulating the values central to their specific identities.

The major part of this paper explores some ways in which e-portfolio systems could be harnessed to support individual’s ethical development by helping people to articulate and reflect on the values “they live by” and would like to live by. Prior to taking up this subject matter, however, a brief overview of possible dimensions to linking ethics and e-portfolio thinking will be provided.

Dimensions of ethics and e-portfolio thinking

One of the objectives for this paper is to map out the field that emerges from the idea of “e-portfolio” standing for “ethical portfolio”. One useful dimension of this field distinguishes the view of portfolio as product – a set of information that has been collected, may have been selected, and may be presented – from the view of e-portfolio technology as enabling or promoting beneficial processes. A second useful dimension distinguishes the focus of both product and process: the set of information could be about the ethics of an individual, group, community or organisation; processes could benefit

² See <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-personal/> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identity_%28social_science%29.

individual, group, community or organisation, possibly independently of the subject of the information.

Firstly here is treated the question of what information is or could be gathered related to ethics. This prepares for the more significant matter of the benefits which might be envisaged from using such information appropriately.

Information about values

It may be as well to note at this point that the discussion in this paper in no way assumes that any values are better, higher, or more ethical than any others. This assumption is followed through with the idea that tools to help manage values related information should be tools to help individuals make choices, not tools to promote particular values, or for indoctrination. One can use the term “ethical profile” for such information. An ethical profile of a person, group, community or organisation would be some kind of rating of that entity against a selection of values. The more widely recognised the values used in the profile, potentially the more useful such a profile could be.

Information about the values of individuals

Many approaches have been taken to trying to ascertain or describe an individual’s ethical position, or their personally-held values. However, it would appear that there are no well-known initiatives which seek to represent this kind of information in any machine-processable form. If there is any normal practice, it seems to be no more formal than individuals writing a piece of free-format text about the values they hold. Even this is not easy in the context of recruitment, because of both the common desire, and associated legislation, to avoid discrimination on the grounds of religion or creed.

Some examples of constructing a personal ethical profile rely on a relatively simple self-rating approach. The work values inventory at Saint Anselm College³ asks reader to decide on the basis of present reflection what values are important to them. An issue here is that people often are less clear about their values in the abstract, and more consistent in their actions than in their words. Nevertheless, this seems to be the current norm for career-centric values analysis: Arizona State University has is another example⁴ of the same general type. There are certainly many others in the context of careers advice and planning. Another self-rating inventory intended to help with life decisions more generally is the Life Values Inventory.⁵

One particularly well-detailed values inventory, intended for a wider use than just careers, is the Hall-Tonna Values Inventory. Because of the many value concepts used (125) the approach is through questionnaire (or “instrument”) rather than simply self-rating. It is used by several consultants, e.g. HT Hall Associates⁶ (which includes one of the originators) and the Minessence Group.⁷

One emerging challenge is the question of how to evidence information about individual values which emerges from such questionnaires. This might be more difficult, the more finely detailed the value concepts are. Meeting this challenge invites comparison with existing e-portfolio practice of evidencing skills or other personal qualities, and will be taken up briefly below.

Another significant challenge is to relate individuals’ values as revealed by and represented in any kind of test to values as applied in any other domain. For example, if one discovers one’s profile according to the Hall-Tonna inventory, how can this be used to select an educational institution or an employer which will be in harmony with these values? This would require some kind of profiling of an institution, a course, an employer, or a job, and then matching two profiles together. This challenge is not taken up in this paper, and remains for further work.

Another avenue to explore is the way that many people indicate their implicit values in terms of particular people or groups. When people admire someone else, when they express the feeling that they would like to be someone else (or “in their shoes”), or even when they count someone else as a good friend, it seems plausible to suppose that at some level they perceive some sharing of values with

³ <http://www.anselm.edu/administration/CES/WorkValues.htm>

⁴ <http://career.asu.edu/S/careerplan/selfdiscovery/ValuesAssessment.htm>

⁵ <http://www.life-values.com/>

⁶ <http://www.hthall.com/>

⁷ <http://www.minessence.net/>

that other person. To be the object of admiration, the other person does not have to be alive, or even historical: they could be fictional. This kind of information would probably be easier to elicit than direct reflection on explicit values, from some types of people.

Also plausible is the hypothesis that people feel more comfortable in a group, the more values they have in common with it. Thus, recording which groups an individual feels most comfortable in might be an indication of their values, if the values of the group can be established.

Information about the values of groups

Much has been written about group values from the perspective of Social Psychology. Because small and informal groups rarely have any kind of portfolio presence, there remains a challenge to explore how groups might represent their values. They may or may not use group portfolios for representing group values. This needs to be done in such a way both that the values can be read and understood by the individual members of the group, and that the values can be integrated with any e-portfolio tools they may use. To be most useful, group ethical profiles would need to use the same value terms as would be used in other ethical profiles.

Information about the values of communities

There seems to be little by way of attempting to represent the values of communities in a structured way. But there are some clearly recognisable examples of situations where certain values seem to be expressed in the context of a community. Consider the campaigns or movements for local government areas to be nuclear-free, or fair trade. At an even more local level in the UK, there are Neighbourhood Watch groups.

These kinds of values can be expressed in promotional material for local government, for example in attempts to promote an area as desirable either for investment or for people to live in – both of which would potentially increase local government revenue.

To represent the values of communities in a way that is useful across various applications, there would need to be some standard list of values (perhaps in terms of principles or causes) that could be expressed at a community level, and standard approaches to what adherence to a cause should imply. Such an approach already exists for “Fairtrade Towns” (the term includes any populated area).⁸ If the implications (in action) of a community value are clear, that should help towards ways of verifying that a community actually abides by its claimed values.

Information about the values of organisations

When we turn to business and government there is a profusion of interest in and writing about ethics. The field of “corporate social responsibility” is well-developed, and many organisations are concerned at least with avoiding the scandal and ensuing collapse which can be brought about by practices which may be judged unethical – or, for that matter, direct demise which can follow financial malpractice.

Beyond the desire to avoid scandal and collapse, values play a part in the image of a company, or of brands belonging to a company. The problem is that it is difficult to verify whether an organisational claim to adhere to principles is actually reflected in practice. If verification is attempted at all, it is normally delegated to specific agencies. Agencies such as the Soil Association⁹ (to do with organic food) and Fair Trade labelling organisations¹⁰ already have verification programmes for consumer products, while it is possible to imagine other high-profile organisations such as Amnesty International¹¹ (to do with human rights) or Transparency International¹² (to do with government corruption) verifying governmental or corporate practices.

With regard to information about the values of governments around the world, there are a set of related norms guiding the actions of all states. Today, among the members of the society of states it is seen as good to respect the sovereignty of each other, where intervention (military or otherwise) might only be

⁸ http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved_fairtrade_towns.htm

⁹ <http://www.soilassociation.org/>

¹⁰ <http://www.fairtrade.net/>

¹¹ <http://www.amnesty.org/>

¹² <http://www1.transparency.org/>

justified on humanitarian/human rights grounds, genocide being the clearest case. Other key norms of the society of states, embodied in the United Nations and other key international organisations, include self-determinations of peoples, democratic institutions within states, economic cooperation, collective security, international law (including the laws of war) and anti-imperialism. The collection and verification of information relating to these norms, i.e. providing evidence of actions that promote or undermine them, poses a challenge as there are multiple actors acting in the name of most states, formal governments being just the tip of the iceberg. Different UN agencies, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, among others, are trying their best in gathering such information. (See e.g. Frost 1996, Erskine 2003, Home 2004)

Thus, the ethical information available about organisations tends to be a mixture between small areas of formally-assessed status, and promotional material which typically has neither formality nor reliability. The concept of a portfolio applied to this kind of information would at least imply that claims by organisations to hold particular values could be supported by evidence, and that evidence might be able to be delivered on demand – effectively by click on a Web link – to those who had the time and the interest. A rating or reputation component could then provide the facility for feedback on performance, reducing the likelihood or success of baseless claims.

Summary of information about values

The emerging picture is very patchy. Information about values, whether of the individual, an organisation, or a community, is only likely to be reliable when there are quite clear methods of assessment, and where this assessment is performed by a competent and independent body. Where this is not the case, it could be taken as basing ethical judgements on hearsay, or the unproven opinion of an interest group.

Before an ethical profile can be constructed, some recognisable values have to be selected, as well as ways of rating people, communities or organisations against those values. While this is relatively straightforward for certain well-defined areas such as organic produce, to agree on definitions of values, and description of norms derived from them, will need great and continuing effort from organisations and individuals.

The opportunity is then to introduce portfolio practice for values in a similar way to portfolio practice for skill and competence, and to work on developing possibilities for informal as well as formal assessment of values and norms, alongside self-assessment backed up with a portfolio of evidence. The motive for this must be that some good will come out of the use of this ethical portfolio information, and it is to that we now turn.

Plausible benefits

Looking again at our three areas of the individual, the organisation and the community, one can envisage benefits from the use of ethics relevant information in conjunction with portfolios. An organisation could plausibly benefit in several ways, and these could include the use of such information relating to individuals, as well as organisations. For example a retail business might well reckon that its business would be improved by managing ethics relevant information about its customers – such as the extent to which they valued organic or fair trade goods. Indeed, perhaps some large retailers have started down that path already. A community could benefit from transparently promoting coherent values among its associated people and organisations, through making that community a better, more trusted place to be.

To investigate such benefits further would be a major undertaking, and this paper focuses on the possible benefits to the individual. Not dealt with here is the application of ethically-related information to ethical investment, to the potential benefit of both individuals and organisations.

In particular, the remainder of the paper focuses on the ethical development of individuals, as this is relatively close to the established area of personal development through e-portfolio tools. After considering the role and purpose of e-portfolio tools in ethical development, this is linked with values and identity. But different people tend to deal with the central issue of managing their identity, and representations of themselves, in different ways – this is exemplified by the contrast between the positions associated with Goffman and Jourard. Bearing this in mind allows better consideration of

what features of e-portfolio tools could best support representation of identity and values, and support ethical development. The paper goes on to look at a plausible approach to an ethical development process using e-portfolio tools, and finishes by considering the systems requirements implied by this kind of process.

Individuals' ethical development and multiple identities: What role for e-portfolio tools?

The possibilities for representing information relating to individuals' personally-held values by using e-portfolio technology were outlined in the previous section. This section focuses on explicating what ethics related purposes such use of e-portfolio technology could have. To achieve this aim, the concepts of ethical development and 'moral agency' are introduced. The view of identity as related to ethics is extended, covering the previously introduced notion that people hold multiple identities.

Ethical development

In one current conception, e-portfolio tools are seen as a means for supporting and celebrating learning and maturing by individuals in both formal and informal contexts. This can be seen as a positive and empowering use of e-portfolio technology. The most typical formal contexts are educational institutions, where e-portfolio tools are mainly used to support personal development processes. Such processes have so far typically not included the recording of, and reflection on, one's values or explicit consideration of ethical issues, which are central to what this paper sees as ethical development.

The lack of engagement with ethics is perhaps in part due to the fact that formal education tends to leave this kind of development to take place through maturation. As a consequence, in order to look at ethical development one needs to look primarily at maturation rather than formal education. Even within the highly formal context of Harvard in the 50s and 60s, Perry (1970) charted his views of ethical development as being largely outside the scope of the formal educational programmes of the time. In keeping with this, the present paper involves looking positively on the idea of e-portfolio related technology being used independently of formal education.

If ethics is essentially about trying to be decent by distinguishing right from wrong and acting accordingly, what might individuals' moral maturation or ethical development involve? Especially when young people are concerned, two important, related forms of maturing can be discerned, both of which are ethically relevant. The first is individuation, and the second is increasing recognition of oneself as a member of various communities, a particular society and/or wider culture.

On the one hand, individuation (a concept notably used by C. G. Jung, among others) entails becoming aware of oneself as a unique person with specific characteristics and interests. This goes along with an increasing wish to explore and develop one's individuality, whether through one dominant identity or with multiple identities. Some examples of identities that a young person might hold simultaneously are a university student, scientist, Roman Catholic, Italian, athlete, heavy metal fan, and supporter of Juventus.

On the other hand, comprehension of oneself as a member of various communities, a particular society and/or wider culture involves understanding what counts as meaningful, acceptable and desirable conduct in each of them. As was stated in the section on the concept identity earlier in this paper, the groups, communities or other entities that individuals identify with either implicitly or explicitly promote some set of values. It is possible that what counts as acceptable or desirable conduct in one such group, community or 'practice' is not acceptable or desirable in another. In other words, there may be an inherent conflict between the values underlying two separate practices. For example, some heavy metal band that a person admires and identifies with might undermine values central to the same person's Roman Catholic faith. Such conflicts can result in internal ethical tension within individuals. (See Frost 2003, Rouse 2001, Walzer 1994)

The view put forward in this paper is that managing one's multiple identities and memberships of various communities, including resolving possible ethical tensions arising from them, could well be supported by e-portfolio tools. Encouraging and supporting individuals in such endeavour is important because it is central to people's ethical development, or, to use terms common to Moral Philosophy, their development as 'moral agents'.

To be a ‘moral agent’ involves being capable of engaging in ethical deliberation, choice and action. Ethical deliberation involves explicitly recognising what values different courses of action might uphold and promote, including the consideration of the possible consequences of specific actions or persistent patterns of behaviour. It also encompasses being aware of any values or ethical standards that underpin the practice within which the action in question falls. While this is seen as an ideal, all humans possess the potential to understand and respond to ethical reasoning and to choose to act in an ethical manner (however defined in specific situations). However, such human potential needs developing. (See e.g. Coicaud and Warner 2001) It is suggested here that there is a role for e-portfolio tools in such development processes.

Managing one or more identities

As has already been implied, developing as moral agents or promoting individuals’ ethical development is not necessarily a single-track affair. Some people at some stages of their life incline towards managing various, more or less separate identities or personas. This is a position often associated with the work of Erving Goffman (e.g. Goffman 1959). Others prefer to pursue consistency and self-disclosure across contexts, as represented in the work of Sidney Jourard (e.g. Jourard 1971). In either case, the individuals may or may not be aware of the values underpinning the key entities in the context of which their identity is constructed. Both types of people could benefit from e-portfolio tools and related processes helping them to reflect on and articulate such values for somewhat different reasons.

The first kind, who wishes to maintain several separate identities, would be supported in maintaining or managing such distinct ‘selves’, while getting the chance to identify any tensions between the values underpinning their different identities. They would be encouraged to seek to resolve such ethical tensions without having to give up any of their identities or to pursue self-disclosure across contexts. The second type of person, engaged in self-disclosure throughout their lives, is naturally motivated to pursue a consistent set of values across the board. “Ethical portfolio” tools would help them to become more aware of their core values, to discern what kind of action and choices upholding their values might involve, and to indicate when their core values might conflict with the dominant values in a particular group with which they may wish to engage.

It ought to be noted that in reality it is clear that the polar opposites of Goffman’s and Jourard’s positions are extremes of a spectrum, where everyone occupies positions somewhere in between. Nonetheless, the above proposed uses of e-portfolio tools to work with information regarding values could benefit people situated anywhere on that continuum. All types of people would be likely to benefit in the form of support in refining and elaborating their explicitly held values and corresponding behaviour.

Summary of role for e-portfolio tools

At this stage, two key general points about the role of e-portfolio tools in ethical development may be discerned. The first point is that, however an ethical profile information may have been gathered in the first place, e-portfolio functionality will mean that it is available later to help with ethical development related processes. An example of such a process will be discussed shortly below. The second point is of a subtly different nature. Whatever the developmental processes that use the information, the fact of having values explicitly recorded will tend to raise the awareness of those values in the individual mind. When that awareness is raised, the individual is likely either to become more conscious of their core values across their life (following Jourard) or more aware of the different values attached to different identities or contexts (following Goffman). Thus it can reasonably be suggested that the simple fact of having values represented by an e-portfolio system is likely in any case to contribute to individuals’ ethical development.

Before suggesting an e-portfolio model for ethical development, which involves working out the systems implications of the proposal put forward in this paper, some considerations regarding an e-portfolio process and activities amenable to ethical development are required.

E-portfolio related process to support ethical development

This section outlines one possible view of an overall process of ethical development, which could be supported by e-portfolio tools. This is intended to be illustrative, and not definitive.

Grant et al (2004) proposed a model of “personal theory building” with skills in mind, and much of this approach can be transferred to values. The information on which to base personal ethical development can be gathered in the same way as for other personal development supported by e-portfolio tools. What is essential is a practice of recording salient aspects of events in which the individual is involved. This can be formalised, for instance, as a learning log. Much of established personal development practice focuses on skills, and for that it makes sense that, when recording experiences, the system prompts in terms of skill-related concepts. Instead, for ethical development, it will be useful to have prompts that draw attention to the values and wider ethics related aspects of experiences.

Good prompting questions will need to be designed carefully, but an example of some rough ideas might be “did you see someone doing something you really admired?” or “did you feel guilty or uncomfortable in yourself about something you did?” or “did you notice anyone expressing approval or disapproval of some activity?” or “did you feel that someone else did something wrong?” Prompting questions would be built in to the e-portfolio tool. Material to inform such questions could be drawn from applied ethics, from moral education, and from “personal qualities” strands in existing personal development systems. These relatively raw records – of personal reactions to the ethical aspects of life experiences – form the natural raw material for later reflection, and they would be stored by the e-portfolio management system.

A next step in this process would be to analyse the experiences into some categories. One level of categorisation (not the only one) would be to analyse the values implicitly or explicitly associated with the experience. This could be done informally, without an analytic scheme, but probably it would be easier to take forward if there was some predefined structure. Actually devising a convincing scheme is not easy or straightforward, but it should cover values which the individual recognises as significant to him or herself. Schemes with very few items might not give a useful record, and schemes such as found in the Hall-Tonna values inventory (mentioned above, with 125 value concepts) may be rather complex to use directly. A different approach would be to devise a personal analytic scheme with the help of Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly 1955), but the challenge here would be that it would not be shared with other people. LUSID (Strivens & Grant 2000) is an example of a PDP tool that is based around analytic schemes for skills. It could be very easily adapted for this kind of use by adding a series of analytic questions and concepts focused on values and related ethics.

Another level of categorisation would be in terms of the context of the experiences. As has been noted above, different contexts can be associated with different groups of people around the focal individual, and these different groups of people are likely to have sets of implicit or explicit values, and codes of conduct, which differ from one another. Ethical analysis is likely to be fruitful only when these different contexts are distinguished, and experiences from each context grouped together. This is a salient feature in young children’s development, when they learn to distinguish the different standards of behaviour appropriate to home, school, shops, playgrounds, grandparents, friends’ houses, holiday, etc. But at this early stage, what is being learned is simply what counts as acceptable behaviour in these different contexts, rather than any explicit understanding of the values which may be involved. People only slowly, if at all, adopt standards of behaviour which apply across contexts.

The next logical step is perhaps the hardest to envisage in the abstract. It is the process of discerning patterns in the recollected material, which can then lead on to an advance in the individual’s self-understanding regarding their values. What sort of patterns could be envisaged in reflection for ethical development? Patterns in other people’s actions could lead to theorising about the values they hold; appreciation of patterns in one’s own actions and responses could lead to potentially “new and shocking” (Eliot 1940, II) understandings of the values expressed by one’s actions which may be in conflict with the values associated with one’s overall self-identity or any of one’s several identities.

The stage is now set for the individual to elaborate the understanding of the values they hold, which one imagines can be regarded as developing in some way, however great or small, as a result of this overall process. Along with the increased awareness and understanding, the e-portfolio technology

should be able to store the new ethical profiles, which may be associated with several identities. Moreover, it could potentially link up with other systems and tools that can use the ethical profiles to help the individual make ethical choices.

This can be seen as an end-point for this part of the ethical development process, but of course it can be the start of new patterns of action. The reconsidered values can indeed be fed back into existing careers planning processes, but there is much more potential. To the extent to which the ethical profiles are based on common terms, such profiles could play a part in systems guiding an individual to ethical consumer or investment choices, to leading the individual to associate with other people, groups or organisations that have values in common with the individual. Beyond traditional careers guidance, there is the potential for recruitment systems to take individuals' values into account, in matching the individual with potential employers who, again, have values in common.

E-portfolio model for ethical development

The process described above has implications in terms of requirements of a system to support that process. These are addressed now.

Part of the essence of any e-portfolio system is to help manage the storage and recall of personally-relevant information, which may be of many kinds. Increasingly the storage of e-portfolio information is seen as being distributed, potentially across many servers: some belonging to educational institutions or employers, and others involved with social and networking Web systems like blogs or services like MySpace.

The bulk of this information can be left where it is, while overlays or superstructures of personal connections, associations and significance – including ethical significance – could well be represented by systems using the Topic Maps standard. The Topic Maps web site¹³ acts as an index to this ISO standard way of representing knowledge. Steve Pepper¹⁴ describes Topic Maps as a “standard for describing knowledge structures and associating them with information resources. As such they constitute an enabling technology for knowledge management. Dubbed ‘the GPS of the information universe’, topic maps are also destined to provide powerful new ways of navigating large and interconnected corpora.” Extensively used e-portfolio systems could well result in a large corpus of information for each individual.

The raw information by itself, while much of it would be relevant to personal values, would not contain those connections that most essentially signify personal meaning. Because this information, held on various servers, would not be too closely tied to self-identity, people would have relatively fewer worries about their identities being revealed more widely than desired. Information of genuine personal significance, held in the Topic Maps superstructures, would be relatively easy to control by the individuals who are implicated. This kind of technological approach can be seen as helpful in securing people's involvement with recording values-related information.

The main point to put across at this stage is that an ethical portfolio approach does not imply specific tools or techniques, but rather is based on the assembly, storage and reuse of ethical profile information potentially across several contexts.

On the one hand, for people inclined towards the position characterised by Goffman, this kind of e-portfolio technology can be used as a means of organising personal information into categories relevant to the various identities or personas, and of managing the boundaries between these. Among the information that could be sorted in this way are the values espoused for each identity. On the other hand, for those more amenable to Jourard, an e-portfolio management system can be used as a means of promoting consistency and coherence of the disclosure of personal information in general, and values in particular.

The current e-portfolio systems closest to satisfying the requirements of ethical portfolio use are probably those that already allow people to record their own skills or competencies, to assemble evidence for them and to present the claims and evidence to others. In addition to their capabilities at

¹³ <http://www.topicmaps.org/>

¹⁴ <http://www.ontopia.net/topicmaps/materials/tao.html>

present, such e-portfolio management systems would need to add the capacity to represent values alongside skills, perhaps defined outside the system, and also some way of grouping and categorising activities, goals, etc. as well as values into different contexts which could be associated with different identities. Given these additions, the common functionality of selecting material for presenting to different audiences can be reused to good effect.

Though the technical side of building ethical portfolio systems is not difficult, the pedagogic side appears to be more challenging. How can practitioners and developers together work these tools in to systems which effectively help people's ethical development? While outlines of possible process have been given above, the devising of detailed implementations of these processes is not at all obvious, and is especially challenging if it is desired that the tools work independently of human support. It will be interesting to see whether the growing field of mentoring and "life coaching" can take up this ethical portfolio approach.

Moving from the individual to the group, it is traditional wisdom that the values of the groups of people with whom an individual associates are formative of the values of that individual. A full e-portfolio model for ethical development needs to include provision for group values to be represented, and those values to be available to the ethical portfolio tools used by individuals. One approach to this, yet to be explored in any depth, is for groups and small communities which use ICT tools to maintain an explicit ontology of their domain – again this could use Topic Maps as a representational standard. While it is certain that many people would not be interested in the concept of ontology, they might well all recognise that there are some things that are the accepted subjects of communication within the group, and other things that are marginal. The challenge would be to integrate values into such ontologies.

Conclusions and further work

The arguments promoting e-portfolio approaches have tended to neglect values and explicit engagement with ethical considerations. Major dimensions of relevant issues have been set out, which are seen as having potential for informing further research and development. The paper has argued that personal ethical development is one area in which individuals can benefit. An e-portfolio approach to representing personal and personal-related values could support ethical development, and at the same time serve as a basis for managing the information most closely connected with individuals' self-identity or multiple identities.

Technology for representing values and for supporting ethical development would ideally allow individuals the greatest control possible over their personal value-related information. This could be achieved through separating the bulk of portfolio-related information, on servers across the Internet, from lightweight Topic Map representations of value concepts and their relationships to the rest of the portfolio information. The values related information would then be able to be particularly closely controlled by the individuals concerned. The e-portfolio technology also needs to support the representation of different contexts in which different identities can be presented, and the association of experiences, goals, etc. with those contexts of identity.

Further work is needed to detail realistic provisional scenarios of ethical development using e-portfolio tools. These scenarios need to be compared and contrasted with other, existing scenarios of personal development using e-portfolio tools to clarify the value added by the ethical portfolio approach.

More work is also needed on the understanding of how groups can use ICT systems to maintain representations of their own values and codes of conduct, in a way that will be recognisable and usable by the individuals who are associated with those groups.

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