LIS: Investigations

LIS: INVESTIGATIONS

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Reviews of RFID technologies tend to focus on the functionality of the device, the standards followed, the necessary hardware and software for effective use, the implementation of RFID services, price and the resulting improvements. The article "Do RFIDs (radio frequency identifier devices) provide new ethical dilemmas for librarians and information professionals?" presents an alternative perspective with an analysis of the current and ethical implications of RFID technology for our profession.

This article is based on the analysis of some ethical dilemmas, and uses the process model of the library as a framework for examining the issues surrounding the application of RFID technologies. It also looks at new technologies and the role of ethicists, particularly the important role a proactive ethicist can play in predicting potential issues. An ethical dilemma is defined as "a scenario in which doing the right thing means that one is also doing, or about to do, a wrong thing." For example, conflicting and competing interests may place privacy in second place thereby weakening the moral position of upholding an individual's right to privacy.

In discussing the ethical dilemmas in libraries, the paper discusses the role of moral agents – librarians – and their (moral) responsibilities to information objects, to library users, to the State, and within the library process model. The authors conclude that while RFIDs can pose new threats to privacy, the dangers can be averted, for example, by ensuring that links are not made from specific information objects to individual users. However, the adequacy of safeguards in place is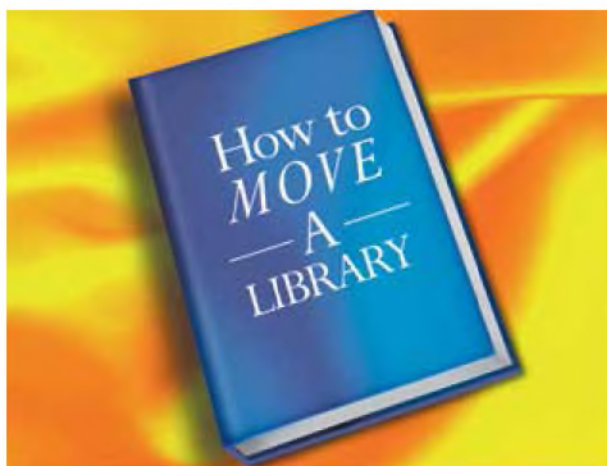 questioned and the impact of future developments both in technology and political thinking explored. The conclusion is that librarians need to have an ethical policy framework to deal with new technologies that will not doubt create further ethical dilemmas.

The article provides timely and useful pointers to ethical issues to be considered when implementing new technology-based services. It is well researched and stimulates in the reader a heightened ethical awareness and a framework for considering the application of new technologies. One must assess what the technology 'should do' rather than what it 'can do' and create policies and procedures to ensure the integrity of services implemented.

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Further reading

A collection of professional guidelines for librarians and other library employees adopted by national library or librarians associations or implemented by government agencies is available from the IFLA website. **www.ifla.org/en/faife/professional-codes-of-ethics-for-librarians**

From our collection

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