International Ergonomics Association

IEA Code of Ethics Review

8 July 2006

Professional Standards and Education Committee
IEA Code of Ethics Review Subcommittee

Chair
Carol Slappendel
(July 2003-September 2005)
Stephen Legg
(October 2005-July 2006)

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## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General review of relevant codes of ethics and codes of conduct</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of the current IEA Code of Ethics to professional certification programmes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The proposed new IEA Basic Document: ‘IEA Code of Conduct for Ergonomists’</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations to the IEA EC and the IEA Council</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. IEA Code of Ethics (Current)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. An analysis of the differences between the current IEA Code of Ethics and the proposed new IEA document</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Code of Conduct for those registered as European Ergonomists (CREE)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Board of Certification in Professional Ergonomics Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Canadian College for the Certification of Professional Ergonomists Code of Ethics for Ergonomists</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

The IEA has had a Code of Ethics in place for some years. In 2003, the IEA Professional Standards and Education Committee considered that it was timely to review this document.

The review was conducted in 2004/5. It examined the relevance of the current IEA Code of Ethics. This involved conducting a general review of relevant codes of ethics and codes of conduct, seeking general opinions about the current IEA code and its relevance and considering information arising from the Nordic Ergonomics Society’s conference NES2004, which was organised around the theme: Working life ethics. In 2005/6 comments from the IEA Executive Committee and Federated Societies’ Presidents and Council members were sought and addressed.

The review concludes that the current IEA Code of Ethics should be revised to provide more concise guidance on ethical principles, professional conduct and research ethics for ergonomists. The review identifies the specific changes needed to action this conclusion. This has resulted in a proposed new IEA Basic Document: ‘IEA Code of Conduct for Ergonomists’ (see appendix 1).

If the new document were to be approved by the IEA Council, it would be appropriate to modify a related IEA Basic Document: ‘Criteria for Endorsement of Certification Programmes’ so that it more clearly specifies that a certification programme should have a Code of Conduct and that this should be broadly aligned with the IEA Code of Conduct for Ergonomists.

The IEA Code of Ethics Review Subcommittee therefore submits for approval by the IEA Council at its 2006 meeting, that the IEA Council:

Introduction

The IEA has had a Code of Ethics in place for some years. It is a lengthy document (1,564 words) that comprises five sections called: Professional Conduct, Professional Qualifications, Practice, Research, and Disciplinary Action (see Appendix 2).

In 2003, the Chair of the IEA Standing Committee for Professional Standards and Education, John Wilson, identified that it was timely to review the Code and make some improvements including:

- Changing the name of the Code of Ethics to a Code of Conduct for Ergonomists
- Separating the Code of Ethics into a Code of Conduct and a body of Ethical Principles for Research with Human and Animal Participants
- Presenting the Code more clearly as a guide or template for use by Federated Societies or groups or institutions of ergonomists, such as professional certification programmes.

A review has subsequently been undertaken by a Subcommittee of the current IEA Standing Committee for Professional Standards and Education, comprising Carol Slappendel (Chair from July 2003 to September 2005), Shrawan Kumar, Ian Randle and Stephen Legg (Chair from October 2005 to July 2006).

The review examined the relevance of the current IEA Code of Ethics. This involved conducting a review of relevant codes of ethics and codes of conduct, seeking general opinions about the current IEA code and its relevance and considering information arising from the Nordic Ergonomics Society (NES2004) conference, which was organised around the theme: Working life ethics. It also included consideration of revision comments from IEA Executive Committee members and IEA Presidents and Council Members in 2005/6.

General review of relevant codes of ethics and codes of conduct

The review identified four codes from ergonomics organizations that were directly relevant:

i) **The Code of Conduct for those registered as European Ergonomists (CREE)** (Appendix 4). This code is short, comprising nine key points relating primarily to standards of professional conduct such as competence, integrity, equity and fairness. Maintenance of high ethical standards is mentioned prominently. There is no specific guidance about research ethics.

ii) **The Board for Certification in Professional Ergonomics (BCPE) Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct** (Appendix 5). This code is similarly short, comprising a preamble and eight principles covering responsibility for professional judgement, honesty, fairness, impartiality, integrity, development and maintenance of competence, avoidance of misrepresentation, deception avoidance and conflict of interest, equity, confidentiality and public welfare and interest. There is no specific guidance about research ethics.

iii) **The Board for Certification of New Zealand Ergonomists (BCNZE) Professional Code of Conduct** (Appendix 6). This is called a Professional Code of Conduct but, as it is based on the IEA Code of Ethics, it also includes guidance on research ethics.

iv) **The Canadian College for the Certification of Professional Ergonomists Code of Ethics for Ergonomists** (Appendix 7). This Code of Ethics does not appear to be based on the IEA Code of Ethics. It is of medium length and quite detailed. A preamble identifies it as a guidance tool, yet also discusses mandatory and voluntary adherence. It contains eight sections: definitions, professional responsibilities, responsibilities and obligations toward the public, profession, clients, colleagues, discipline and disciplinary processes. Although it is called a code of ethics, in reality, it almost exclusively deals with professional conduct.
Conclusion
The word 'conduct' is referred to more often in the titles of the four codes than 'ethics', reflecting their association with professional certification schemes. All four codes refer to similar standards of professional conduct. Only one, the New Zealand replicate of the IEA Code of Ethics, refers to research ethics.

Relevance of the current IEA Code of Ethics to professional certification programmes

The IEA is particularly concerned about ensuring that high standards are promoted and maintained in relation to the design and operation of professional certification programmes for ergonomists and human factors professionals. The IEA has produced criteria for such programmes and has a system for programme endorsement by the IEA.

Professional certification programmes should have a code of conduct in place to guide the activities of certified members. The IEA Endorsement Criteria need to be amended to make this requirement more explicit than it is currently.

If the IEA is relevant and useful we would expect to see its guidance materials being used by existing and new certification programmes. To this end, the IEA Code of Ethics Review Subcommittee contacted a number of certification programmes seeking general opinions on the IEA Code of Ethics and whether it had had any impact. Responses were received from the CREE and BCPE certification schemes, as follows:

CREE in Germany: email message from Prof. Dr.H.Strasser
"In our System of Certification of Professional Ergonomists according to CREE we use a German translation of the CREE Code of Conduct. This Code (see Appendix 4) comprises nine elementary topics, which seem to stem from the IEA Code of Ethics existing at the time when the Harmonized European Training Programmes for the Ergonomics Profession (HETPEP) and the CREE Certification System in 1992 have been established. To my personal opinion, the present Code of Ethics is too extensive. It should be shortened, focusing on essential ergonomics-related topics and not addressing all "human rights".

BCPE: email message from Kris Rightmire, Executive Administrator
"The BCPE's Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct was adopted in May of 2002 (see Appendix 5). If memory serves me correctly, I believe the BCPE’s Code was modelled after those of other certification organizations (non-ergonomics) here in the United States with whom we have established cordial, working relationships, namely, the American Board of Industrial Hygiene (ABIH), http://www.abih.org, and the Board of Certified Safety Professionals (BCSP), http://www.bcsp.org. I do not recall if IEA's Code was taken into consideration by the committee charged with developing our Code, but would guess no."

Conclusion
The impact of the IEA Code of Ethics on the two largest professional certification programmes appears to be variable. Feedback from CREE suggests that the IEA Code could be simplified.


To assist the IEA Code of Ethics Review subcommittee, the Nordic Ergonomics Society conference committee agreed to have for its 2004 conference (NES2004) a central theme: Ethics in working life. A report and the outcomes are attached in appendix 8 and can be found at the web site www.nes2004.dk.
The conference included three keynote presentations about ethics in praxis and research (ethics of science, ethics of consultancy work, ethics in the company) and extensive group discussion about the nature, content and practical use of Codes of Ethics and Professional Conduct in ergonomics and by ergonomists.

There was great diversity in the knowledge and understanding of ethics between ergonomists in the Nordic countries and whether ethical considerations were adequately included in research projects and consultancy tasks. The experience of focussing the NES2004 conference on the theme of ‘Working life ethics’ was successful in helping to raise the awareness of Nordic ergonomists about ethics, both in research and in praxis.

Conclusion
There was a clear need for guidance on ethics, particularly amongst ergonomics practitioners. There was also a clear need for guidance on the distinction between ethics and professional practice. If this is true in the Nordic countries, it is likely to be just as true elsewhere in the world.

Conclusions
The current IEA Code of Ethics (Appendix 2) already contains most of the important material required, but it is lengthy and complex.

The other codes that were examined (Appendices 4-7) were succinct, but focused on professional conduct. There is limited reference to research ethics.

This review concludes that the current IEA Code of Ethics needs to be revised so that it simpler but still refers to both professional conduct and research ethics.

The proposed new IEA Basic Document: ‘IEA Code of Conduct for Ergonomists’

The review subcommittee then identified the specific changes that were needed to action the above recommendation. This resulted in a new proposed IEA Basic Document: ‘IEA Code of Conduct for Ergonomists’, initially dated 15 August 2005.

An analysis of the differences between the current IEA Code of Ethics and the proposed new ‘IEA Code of Conduct for ergonomists’ document of 15 August 2005 is in Appendix 3.

The proposed new IEA Code of Conduct for ergonomists’ document of 15 August 2005 is more concise and includes reference to both professional conduct and research ethics. It represented a substantial revision of the current IEA Code of Ethics in that it was shorter, more succinct, retains most of the substantive material that is directly relevant, yet has removed repetition and unnecessary generic statements.

The proposed new IEA Code of Conduct for Ergonomists’ document of 15 August 2005 was submitted to the IEA Executive Committee (EC) for comment in August 2005 and sent to all IEA Federated Societies Presidents and Council Members in April 2006. A tabulation of the comments received and subsequent minor changes made are given in Appendix 9.

Recommendations to the IEA Council

The Professional Standards and Education IEA Code of Ethics Review Subcommittee recommends the following for approval by the IEA Council at its July 2006 meeting:

It is recommended that IEA Council approves: