WikiLeaks and Ethics of Whistle Blowing

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WikiLeaks

In a time in which the Internet pervades everyday life and information published is readable all over the world, it becomes very important to deal with ethical problems related to *whistle blowing via the Internet*. 
WikiLeaks

Although there are accepted general concepts like privacy, anonymity and freedom of speech, for every new kind of phenomena we have to discuss its ethical aspects (Kizza, 2010)( Nadler and Schulman, 2006).

WikiLeaks

A current example is the WikiLeaks platform which published a vast amount of secret documents. To evaluate ethics of WikiLeaks (Hanson and Ceppos, 2006)(WikiLeaks About) we will apply three different ethical approaches.

WikiLeaks About, [Online]. http://wikileaks.de/about.html
The Utilitarian Approach to WikiLeaks

*The Utilitarian Approach* is focusing on the consequences that the publications of WikiLeaks have on the well-being of all parties that are involved directly or indirectly.
The Utilitarian Approach to WikiLeaks

In *The Utilitarian Approach*, there are two opposite sides to consider.

- On the one hand, the uncovering of misconduct and the increased transparency of the governments are of such importance that the publication benefits society as a whole. It alleviates the opinion making and leads to a greater understanding of governmental work.
The Utilitarian Approach to WikiLeaks

- On the other hand the publications may cause harm. They may threaten the national security and so harm society. They can lead to a society with decreased institutional integrity which may eventually result in self-censorship, decreased communication, more technical restrictions and so in less freedom.
The Virtue Ethics Approach to WikiLeaks

The Virtue Ethics Approach is focusing on attitudes that develop our human potentials such as e.g. honesty, faithfulness, trustworthiness and integrity. WikiLeaks disregards these virtues in many different contexts by degrading loyalty, privacy and integrity of data, purportedly putting people’s lives at risk. Some would argue that they represent personal courage and care for weak groups in the society.
The Virtue Ethics Approach to WikiLeaks

The virtue WikiLeaks undoubtedly represent is transparency which is not considered a classical ethical virtue, but may be seen as an element of democracy.
The Virtue Ethics Approach to WikiLeaks

WikiLeaks must ensure that the increased transparency gained by the publication is much more worth than all other aspects which will only be the case at severe misconduct by the concerned party that is made public as no other way of democratic corrective action was available – according to usual practices of whistle blowing.
The Information Ethics Approach to WikiLeaks

*The Information Ethics Approach*: we can study how information is revealed/communicated in the networks of agents. Within IE approach we can ask questions such as: what is the function of “information hiding” and “encapsulation” such as found in Object Oriented Programming and in any hierarchical organization.
Approaches to WikiLeaks

What would be (information theoretically) the behavior of a society in which every agent would be connected with every other agent sharing any information they have?

(Dunbar's number defining the maximum number of connections in the human network has been proposed to lie between 100 and 230, with a commonly used value of 150. Can we imagine millions and billions connections? How would we cope with them?)

The global character of WikiLeaks

Interesting to observe is the global character of WikiLeaks, in a world regulated on the base of nations, which seem to act in a grey zone since the legal situation is unclear and different governments are still searching for a crime Julian Assange can be charged for.
The global character of WikiLeaks

In reality the issue of WikiLeaks (Kintzinger and Zepelin, 2010) (Greenberg, 2010) implies much more than an ethical discussion about whistle blowing and leaking, integrity and freedom of speech.

The publicity of information in the digital age

WikiLeaks have become a symbol of a deep change in the publicity of information in the digital age, at least with the present-day technology. It has generated the greatest confrontation between the established order and the advocacy of the culture of the totally open Internet.
The publicity of information in the digital age

We are at the moment a part of the world where it is difficult to control and keep information secret and safe from eavesdropping and unauthorized use. Some of the relevant questions are:

Has the institution of legal secret, business secret, military or organizational secret become obsolete?

If yes, why?
The publicity of information in the digital age

If no, how to protect information which should be protected? Who and how decides which information is worth making public and which is not? According to Assange (Bieber, 2010) (Fallows, 2010) personal integrity must be protected. Why not institutional integrity?

The publicity of information in the digital age

If leaking is a good democratic mechanism shall we not have the leaks of WikiLeaks as well? And so on…a chain, or a loop of leaks?

In a totally transparent world, how would information overload be managed?

Shall we give up all trust?

If not, whom shall we trust?
Problems with information protection may lead us to a society where conversations are reduced to minimum and information becomes less accessible as with WikiLeaks it has become obvious that anything can be made public. In the end, the result may be not an increase, but a decrease of freedom. How to avoid this scenario?