

PROBLÉMATIQUES D'ÉTHIQUE EN SHS

Title: Ethical Reflections on Knowledge Organization: Values put forward attitudes

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Libraries are spaces where multiple voices are confronted, so it is crucial to think about forms of dialogue between knowledge organization and representation, which is non-neutral, and the ethical commitment of librarians to meeting the information needs and demands of different communities of library users.

When knowledge representation is not carried out in a reliable way, prejudice, censorship, omission, or misrepresentation of information may occur. Librarians will have to deal with ethical values as well as cultural and linguistic boundaries, and they will face dilemmas that require ethical decision-making (Beghtol 2005). As Olson (1999, 66) says “[o]ur purpose may not be to exert power, except the power of retrieval, but we are part of a powerful cultural discourse, not simply affected by it.”

Librarians should “[...] expect to enhance their ethical awareness – particularly in terms of understanding the ethical dimensions of a specific context or activity – and appreciate the diversity of viewpoints and values that come to bear in ethical deliberation” (Froehlich 2011). So, it is imperative that the professionals responsible for knowledge organization in libraries expand their ethical awareness to deal with the processes, tools, and products throughout knowledge organization.

In this sense, the following assumptions are presented: 1. Librarians work to promote access and appropriation of information, so it is assumed that they work for good; 2. There is no neutrality in knowledge organization and representation; and 3. Guidelines for a responsible knowledge organization and representation must be encouraged to minimize the effects of non-neutrality.

Considering that professional ethics represents a set of ethical values of a group, and that librarians are, by nature, team players, they can be good parameters to ethical issues. The higher is the effort to recognize what belongs to them and what belongs to the author or producer of the document, to the institution, to the knowledge organization systems – including initiatives of specialization, always studying – more justifiable will be the processes developed by them and the tools and products elaborated by them.

When harmful effects, such as injury or exclusion occur and impose an attitude on the librarian, decision-making has ethical implications as well as its absence. The use of generic concepts or common-sense statements will no longer be accepted by the users’ communities committed to the empowerment of their specificities.

Dilemmas in knowledge organization can be evaluated from different ethical theories, e.g.: Utilitarian model, Kant’s deontological model, Rawlsian model, Feminist ethics, Derridean ethics, John Dewey’s pragmatic ethics etc. (Fox and Reece 2012). But there is a lack of literature regarding the way librarians build their philosophical bases, and this is serious, as pointed out by Jacobs (2007).

Identifying and reflecting on a field's core values require an explanation of what qualities are attached to a thing that is valued, for whom the thing is valuable and why (Budd 2006). The value "cultural warrant", as proposed by Beghtol (2002), for instance, has the following *qualities*: presentation of different types of information and assignment of different access points to the same information; *for whom it is valuable*: all users' communities, especially those who do not belong to mainstream *because* different users have different identities and specific information needs, which must be respected. The problem that can arise from the negligence of this value is *biased representation or incompleteness*, which is the failure to knowledge representation caused by inappropriate application of knowledge organization systems or professional's prejudice. In this case, there is no concern or care for users' needs, which would cause some difficult or inaccuracy in information retrieval, or even negative impacts on the users' self-image.

By identifying the field's core values, which voices are excluded in the context of a library and by trying to invite them to be present, librarians will open spaces for negotiation to make users feel comfortable while interacting with the library (Olson 2002).

Inevitably, librarians will be slanted in knowledge organization and representation because there are many perspectives within the same domain. It will be necessary to choose which of these perspectives will be represented, but it can be done in a defensible way, that is, by explaining to users why certain choices had been made and what epistemic stances had been taken.

Ethical values involved in the librarians' performance in knowledge organization and representation will influence their decision-making process, thus issues related to institutionalized efforts that guide librarians' - and archivists' - attitudes must be investigated.

Many authors and the International Society for Knowledge Organization (ISKO) itself have emphasized the need for an ethical reflection within the own domain of Knowledge Organization, including assumptions that have been taken for granted. In this way, there are two issues that can be addressed: How to increase cultural hospitality in library catalogs through librarians' ethical awareness? What are the main ethical values that should guide this reflection?

As information researchers, we should investigate our epistemic stances and some ethical approaches on how to index/classify, how to evaluate/update/adapt existing knowledge organization systems, and how to teach students. We must investigate what it is, but also what it can be.

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