Information systems have effects far beyond their operational or functional uses. As information systems become more pervasive in human organizations, these effects pose increasingly significant ethical dilemmas and create unintended social costs and consequences. Management practice and public policy lag behind the advances in technology and their impact on social systems.

Today’s leaders must be able to anticipate and address these challenges, although they are often unprepared to do so. Technical professionals, who have been taught to think in terms of logic, structures and flows, also experience difficulties in addressing such situations. By creating awareness and offering analytical frameworks for a variety of issues stemming from information systems’ implementations, this book can contribute to the development of these professionals’ ability to cope—and perhaps avert—these problems.

We have developed this book with the following audiences in mind: professionals entering information systems management; undergraduates in computer information systems programs; graduates in management information systems programs; students of public policy and public administration; and professionals entering public sector management.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section highlights several social implications of information systems. We start broadly with “Global Perspectives on the Information Society” and then delve into specific challenges. “Digital Divides: Their Social and Ethical Implications” examines the impact of technology access on societies, while “The Perils of Access and
Immediacy: Unintended Consequences of Information Technology” explores the impact on organizations and individuals. “What, Me, Worry? The Empowerment of Employees” and “Managing Workplace Privacy Responsibly” provide different perspectives on the relationships among organizations, individuals and the technologies they use. We close the section about social system effects with a provocative examination of technology-mediated interpersonal interaction with “Virtual Harms and Real Responsibility.”

The second section is devoted to several chapters addressing many of the ethical challenges posed by information systems. “Ethical Challenges for Information Systems Professionals” provides an introduction to ethical viewpoints and an overview of the difficulties professionals face in the implementation of information systems. The next chapter, “Living Within Glass Houses: Coping with Organizational Transparency,” describes the increasing pressures corporations face for ethical behavior and corporate social responsibility. This is followed with the specific illustrations of “Ethical Challenges of Information Systems: The Carnage of Outsourcing and Other Technology-Enabled Organizational Imperatives.” The last chapter in this section, “A Contrarian’s View: New Wine in Old Bottles, New Economy and Old Ethics—Can it Work?,” questions whether ethical questions and implications have really changed with the advent of information systems.

The last section provides an overview of policy considerations, highlighting several of the legal ramifications of information systems. We begin with consideration of questions of responsibility and accountability for systems, with “Liability for Systems and Data Quality” and “Software Engineering as a Profession: A Moral Case for Licensure.” The next two chapters address the protection (“Copyright Law in the Digital Age”) and preservation (“‘Digital Orphans’: Technology’s Wayward Children”) of technology-based intellectual property. “Compliance with Data Management Laws” then highlights interesting legal issues of data management.

We end this book with a chapter that suggests how future efforts might address these difficult issues and implications. “The Central Problem in Cyber Ethics and How Stories Can Be Used to Address It” offers a different way to learn, discuss, and think about the social, ethical and policy challenges posed by information systems.