

Ethical Issues in the Use of Biometric Technology

The use of biometrics is centuries old as the need for unique identification of individuals has existed throughout history. The more recent examples of its use are of Frenchman Alphonse Bertillon who developed “Anthropometrics” in 1888 and the Englishman Edward Henry who in 1900 used fingerprints for the first time to classify and identify criminals. However, since the tragic events of 9/11 biometric technology has been gaining popularity as the public now expects greater security. Additionally, there are some tangible benefits in the use of biometrics. For example, it is unique, convenient and fulfils the need for strong authentication. The main applications so far are governmental, e.g. ID Cards, e-passports, e-borders, air and port security and policing systems. Among the commercial enterprise the leading users are the travel industry, transport and financial services.

However, there are serious ethical issues in the use of biometric technology. The main issues concern the personal privacy, the conflict with one’s beliefs and values and the collection, protection and use of personal biometric data. The civil liberty organisations argue that the technology undermines the human rights for privacy and anonymity. It is intrusive and has the capability to make serious impact on personal freedom and democratic rights. The technology is prone to failure and is not fake proof as it can be spoofed.

But due to many issues and threats around the world, e.g. threat of terrorism, identity theft and fraud, security, illegal immigration, benefit fraud and crime prevention and detection issues, it has become important to have the capability to freeze someone identity for later identification and verification. At the same time since 9/11 the biometric technology has advanced tremendously. The hardware has improved in design and accuracy, the prices have come down and, therefore, biometrics has firmed its place in the security world.

The public concern regarding the issues mentioned above cannot be ignored. There is a compelling need to find “Workable and Deployable” solutions to these issues. The academics have a very important role to play through consultations, workshops and student education.

Profile of Dr Aziz Shaikh

Dr Aziz Shaikh obtained his Ph.D. in Statistics in 1974 from London University and started his career as a lecture in Statistics & O.R. at Brunel University. While at Brunel he got an M.Tech. in Computer Science and left Brunel in 1983 to pursue his career in computing. He has over 20 years experience in the information technology industry worldwide. He has worked for a number of multi-national companies and in 1994 set up his own consultancy offering Project Management, Business Analysis and Systems Implementation Consultancy. Over the last five years he has been working as an independent consultant in Biometrics and is particularly interested in the areas of Biometric Applications, Systems Implementation and Biometrics Education and Training.

He is also serving on the Board of Directors for the British Biometrics Industry Association (BBIA) and is the Secretary of the BBIA. He is a member of the International Association for Biometrics (iAfB) and has served as an Executive Member of the Management Committee when he played an active role in the affairs of the iAfB. He was invited to join the BSI IST/44, BSI Biometrics Standards Committee, and is a member of the WG4 (Profiles for Biometric Applications) and WG6 (Cross-Jurisdictional and Societal Aspects) sub-committees. He is a member of the Skills for Security led Human Identity Management and Biometrics Sector Consultation Group. The role of the group is to provide a forum for developing standards, skills requirements, qualifications and training in the Human Identity Management and Biometrics sector.

Dr Aziz Shaikh has excellent communication and inter-personal skills, the ability to liaise effectively at all levels of an organisation and productively leverage his significant experience in this field.

Publications:

Dror, I. E. & Shaikh, A. (2005a). Training for expertise in face recognition and working with face recognition technology (TNA). *United Kingdom Passport Services (UKPS) Technical Report*

Dror, I. E. & Shaikh, A. (2005b). Face recognition technology: Cognitive considerations in system design. *United Kingdom Passport Services (UKPS) Technical Report*

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