

Reflective activity:

What if I was a computing professional?

As a computing professional working for a big media outlet, who is leading the technical team that is in charge of managing the website, I would be a stakeholder with a unique set of responsibilities. My role involves developing software, systems, and applications that may collect, process, and store user data. This places me at the crossroads of ethical considerations, where choices about data handling and privacy can have far-reaching consequences. These issues may even be more prominent when considering I'd work with many stakeholders who do not have a computing background as most of them are not aware of the ethical issues that may arise in connection with such activities. Moreover, besides the issues of technical nature, some other issues may arise concerning the workplace and work ethics.

As demonstrated by Stahl et al. (2016), I'd expect that the most challenging ethical issue would be privacy. The paper suggests a strong relationship between privacy, the internet, and consent. Indeed, when it comes to publishing online content, several safeguards have to be put in place to protect the privacy of the readers and to comply with the regulations and ethical codes the most important of which are GDPR (Data Protection Act, 2018) and British Computer Society (BCS) Code of Conduct (2022). These safeguards would include informing users about their rights, seeking their consent for the processing of their data, and also technical measures such as anonymising the data and securing the data against tampering.

Since these measures do not bring any "business value" directly, some stakeholders in the company may think that these are a meaningless burden, and they

may push the development team to focus on the other aspects that “really matter” rather than wasting their time. In this case, I would try to communicate the importance of GDPR compliance to higher management. I would also demonstrate that by adopting the “data protection by design and by default” approach (ICO, 2023a), such arrangements can be done in an efficient and hassle-free manner, and most importantly, a privacy-centric approach can be blended into the organisation's culture. In order to emphasise the importance of privacy in general, and UK GDPR compliance in particular, the ICO's previous penalties against various companies can be cited as examples, such as that of British Airways (ICO, 2020a) or Marriott International (ICO, 2020b). Since in both instances the companies were fined more than 18 million English pounds, these cases may serve as evidence that UK GDPR compliance brings an implicit business value, not to mention that it also helps to protect the company's reputation.

Finally, I believe that the checklist prepared by ICO (ICO, 2023b) may help all stakeholders in the company to track and understand the status of UK GDPR compliance as well as the steps that should be taken. I would definitely use this checklist to communicate the expected actions as well as the rationale behind them across the company.

Another challenging topic that may come up is gender equality. I believe this issue should be considered as part of the “Inclusion, Digital Divides” category in the work of Stahl et al. (2016). As demonstrated by several studies (PWC, 2017; Richter, 2021) the representation of women in the technology sector is still far from the ideal levels, and those who take part in the IT workforce are often subject to abusive workplace behaviour. Moreover, Tziner et al. (2023) suggest that abusive workplace

behaviour leads to various long-term negative effects for the organisation, including economic and psychological consequences.

From a professional standpoint, ethical behaviour enhances the reputation of both individuals and companies. Adhering to industry codes of ethics, such as those provided by the BCS (2022) ensures that computing professionals uphold high ethical standards. Within this context, as the team leader, I would remind all team members of and hold them accountable for the code of conduct which requires them to be supportive of each other and display a non-discriminatory, professional attitude. Adopting a zero-tolerance policy against abusive behaviour, especially towards women, may help foster a supportive organisation culture. In addition to this, I would actively communicate the importance of gender equity to the top management so that women candidates would be given equal chances in the hiring process.

In conclusion, ethical issues concerning privacy and gender equality profoundly influence the role of computing professionals within companies. As the leader of a team made up of computing professionals, I would be able to navigate these issues and make a positive impact by employing the aforementioned policies and adopting a proactive and constructive attitude.

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