

Seminar 3: Case Study – Privacy

The Case

Ricardo works for the records department of his local government as a computer records clerk, where he has access to files of property tax records. For a scientific study, a researcher, Beth, has been granted access to the numerical portion “but not the corresponding names” of some records.

Beth finds some information that she would like to use, but she needs the names and addresses corresponding with certain properties. Beth asks Ricardo to retrieve these names and addresses, so she can contact these people for more information and for permission to do further study.

Now consider, what are the ethical issues involved in deciding which of these options to pursue?

- If Ricardo is not responsible for determining allowable access, should he release the names and addresses?
- Suppose Ricardo were responsible for determining allowable access to the files. What ethical issues would be involved in his deciding whether to grant access to Beth?
- Should Beth be allowed to contact the individuals involved? That is, should the Records department release individuals' names to a researcher? What are the ethical issues for the Records department to consider?
- Suppose Beth contacts the individuals to ask their permission, and one-third of them respond giving permission, one-third respond denying permission, and one-third do not respond. Beth claims that at least one-half of the individuals are needed to make a valid study. What options are available to Beth?

Answer:

Personal data are governed through the GDPR in the EU. All companies based and/or operating with EU citizens must comply with the regulation.

Ricardo as a computer record clerk must make sure all his actions comply with the GDPR, otherwise, his employer will be at risk of a hefty fine.

Ricardo is not allowed and he should not grant access to Beth unless he has written permission from the data owners to do so.

Beth should only contact the individuals that gave permission for having their data processed. Since Beth only got permission from one-third of the individuals, she can either wait for the individuals that have not responded to reply and allow her to process their data, or seek additional participants in different places.