

Case study on Privacy

Ricardo, as a computer records clerk, has access to property tax records that contain sensitive personal information, including names and addresses. The main ethical issue here is whether he should release this information to Beth, who has been granted access to numerical data but not names.

There are several ethical issues involved in this scenario, and they vary depending on the roles and responsibilities of the individuals involved. Let's address each of the questions you've raised:

Ricardo's Role and Responsibility:

If Ricardo is not responsible for determining allowable access, he should not release the names and addresses to Beth. Access should only be granted to Beth if it complies with the local government's policies and relevant laws. By releasing sensitive information without proper authorisation, Ricardo would be violating privacy rights and ethical standards (BCS, 2021).

If Ricardo is responsible for determining allowable access to the files, he faces several ethical issues. He must balance the researcher's need for data with the privacy rights of individuals. The release of personal information should adhere to strict privacy guidelines. Ricardo must ensure that individuals have given informed consent for their data to be used in the study. If he releases the information without proper consent, it may violate ethical principles. Ricardo needs to ensure that the data is securely handled and protected to prevent unauthorised access or breaches. He should be transparent about the data access process and the purpose of the research (Stahl et al., 2016).

Records Department's Ethical Considerations:

The Records Department should consider several ethical issues when deciding whether to release individuals' names to a researcher.

Protecting the privacy and personal information of citizens is paramount. Releasing names without consent could be a breach of privacy. Ensuring the security and integrity of the data to prevent unauthorised access or data breaches. Only releasing data with informed consent and being transparent about the research purpose and data usage. Compliance with relevant laws, regulations, and government policies is essential (Armond et al., 2021).

Beth's Study:

If Beth contacts the individuals and receives mixed responses and If at least one-half of the individuals have given permission, she may proceed with her research as long as it complies with legal and ethical standards. However, she should consider the potential bias introduced by those who declined or did not respond (Bos, 2020).

Beth could seek additional participants to meet her study requirements. This may involve expanding the dataset or finding similar data from other sources. If she cannot obtain the required number of permissions, Beth might need to reevaluate her study design and objectives to work with the data she has ethically obtained (Forester & Morrison, 1994).

The ethical concerns in this case study revolve around privacy, data access, informed consent, and the balance between research needs and individual rights and protections. The resolution should prioritise safeguarding personal information and ensuring that research is conducted ethically and responsibly.

References:

BCS The Chartered Institute for IT. (2021) The Code of Conduct.

Forester, T. & Morrison, P. (1994). Computer Ethics: Cautionary Tales and Ethical Dilemmas in Computing. United Kingdom: MIT Press.

Armond, A. C. V., Gordijn, B., Lewis, J., Hosseini, M., Bodnár, J. K., Holm, S., & Kakuk, P. (2021). A scoping review of the literature featuring research ethics and research integrity cases. *BMC Medical Ethics*. 22(1); 1-14.

Bos, J. (2020). Research ethics for students in the social sciences (p. 287). Springer Nature.

Stahl, B., Timmermans, J. & Mittelstadt, B. (2016) The Ethics of Computing. *ACM Computing Surveys* 48(4):1-38. DOI: 10.1145/2871196