Is There an Ethicist in the House?

Strategies for Identifying and Managing Ethical Risks with Big Data

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September 16, 2015

Privacy and Information Management
Big Data Is Calling for Ethicists

It's Time for a Big Data Code of Ethics

Big data ethics is a board-level issue

Confronting the privacy and ethical risks of Big Data


FINANCIAL TIMES
What Is Ethics?

Two meanings:

1) A set of standards prescribing what humans ought to do.

2) An individual’s or group’s study and development of the appropriate ethical standards—a conscientious manner of being.
Why Are We Calling for Ethics?

• Technology normally helps us take action.

• Big data fuels autonomous action and “thought.”

• There is potential for a lack of human control.
Concern 1: Big Data Could Be Creepy

- Desired personalization versus Big Brother.

- Predictivity versus predetermination.

- Concerns that algorithms will shape us.
Concern 2: Unintentional Discrimination

Businesses need to distinguish the differences.

Need to focus on the appropriate and meaningful differences.
Concern 3: Big Data May Take the Wheel

• How do we make sure that algorithms make the right decision?

• What is the right decision?
Why Are These Concerns Important?

• Public concerns and business missteps may lead to disruptive legislation

• Regulators may step in if the wrong decisions are made.

• Customers and employees may lose trust.
What Are We Looking for?

• Looking for the standards that will appropriately mitigate risk.

• No definitive answer.

• Reasonable minds will differ.

• We need to study, develop, and evolve our standards in context.

• We need to implement big data conscientiously.
Discuss and Articulate the Standards

- Clear standards increase efficiency.
- Clear standards can mitigate unexpected consequences.
- Articulation promotes alignment with market and customer values.
- Articulated standards can build customer trust.
Value Questions for Standard Development

• What data practices raise the key risks?
• How could data practices impact customers and employees?
• Are customers and employees entitled to know how data are used?
• Are customers and employees entitled to access data?
• Are there any personal characteristics that are “off limits?”
• What do we want to be able to say about our data practices?
Practice Questions for Standard Development

• What data do we collect?
• How do we use our data?
• Who has access to the data?
• How do we secure data?
• How long do we keep data?
• With whom do we share our data?
• How do others use our data?
• What have we said about our data practices?
Ethics by Design: The Early Steps

- Does the initiative align with our standards?

- Were the data inputs sourced appropriately?

- Is this the type of data we want to use?

- Are there alternatives that better align with our values?
Ethics by Design: The Later Steps

• How might others use the data?

• Are there unintended consequences that we need to guard against?

• How should we limit access?

• How are people using the data?
Additional Controls

• In-house philosophers.

• Civil liberties engineers.

• Review boards.
Potential Pitfalls of the Philosophical Mindset

• Looking for the right answer instead of the reasonable solution.

• Exaggeration of worst-case scenarios.

• Ethics can be undervalued.

• Failure to integrate ethical values with other key values.
Additional Resources


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