

Introduction to IT Ethics and Legal Issues

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Designed as quick-reference notes for students or professionals new to the field.

1. Why Ethics & Law Matter in IT

Aspect	Reason
Trust	Users must believe systems handle data responsibly.
Risk Management	Ethical lapses ? legal penalties, brand damage, financial loss.
Regulatory Compliance	Laws (e.g., GDPR, HIPAA) impose concrete obligations.
Social Impact	Technology shapes privacy, equality, and access to information.
Professional Reputation	Codes of conduct (ACM, IEEE) guide career longevity.

2. Core Ethical Principles for IT Professionals

Principle	Description	Typical Application
Beneficence	Act to do good and improve welfare.	Designing accessible software.
Non-maleficence	Avoid causing harm.	Preventing security vulnerabilities.
Autonomy	Respect users' control over their data.	Providing clear consent mechanisms.
Justice	Ensure fairness & equitable access.	Avoiding algorithmic bias.
Accountability	Take responsibility for decisions & outcomes.	Maintaining audit trails.
Transparency	Make processes understandable to stakeholders.	Publishing privacy policies.

Reference codes: **ACM Code of Ethics**, **IEEE Code of Conduct**, **ISACA Code of Professional Ethics**.

3. Major Legal Frameworks (U.S. & International)

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Domain	Key Legislation / Regulation	Scope
Data Protection & Privacy	GDPR (EU), CCPA (California), LGPD (Brazil)	Personal data collection, processing, storage, and cross-border transfer.
Health Information	HIPAA (U.S.)	Protected health information (PHI) security & privacy.
Financial Services	GLBA, PCI DSS	Financial data confidentiality & payment card security.
Intellectual Property	Copyright Act, DMCA, Patent Law	Ownership, copying, reverse engineering, software licensing.
Cybercrime	Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA), GDPR?2 (proposed), NIST Cybersecurity Framework	Unauthorized access, malware distribution, ransomware.
Accessibility	ADA (U.S.), EN 301 549 (EU)	Digital accessibility for people with disabilities.
Consumer Protection	FTC Act, EU Consumer Rights Directive	Deceptive practices, unfair terms, data breach notifications.

Tip: When evaluating a project, list which of the above statutes may apply based on data type, geography, and industry.

4. Common Ethical Dilemmas in IT

Situation	Ethical Question	Typical Resolution Steps
Employee Monitoring	Is it acceptable to track staff activity?	Balance security needs with privacy; disclose monitoring policy.
Algorithmic Bias	Do model outputs discriminate?	Conduct bias audits, adjust training data, involve diverse stakeholders.
Vulnerability Disclosure	Should a researcher report a flaw publicly?	Follow responsible disclosure guidelines; give vendor reasonable remediation time.
Data Mining for Profit	Is selling aggregated user data ethical?	Obtain informed consent, anonymize data, respect purpose limitation.

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Situation	Ethical Question	Typical Resolution Steps
Use of Open? Source Code	Can code be incorporated without attribution?	Honor license terms (MIT, GPL, Apache); keep a record of dependencies.

5. Risk Management Lifecycle (Ethics?Focused)

1. **Identify** – Catalog data, systems, and