

# Why Having a Chief Data Ethics Officer is Worth Consideration

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Emerging technology has vastly outpaced corporate governance and strategy, and the use of data in the past has consistently been “grab it” and figure out a way to use it and monetize it later. Today’s consumers are becoming more educated and savvy about how companies are collecting, using and monetizing their data, and are starting to make buying decisions based on privacy considerations, and complaining to regulators and law makers about how the tech industry is using their data without their control or authorization.

Although consumers’ education is slowly deepening, data privacy laws, both internationally and in the U.S., are starting to address consumers’ concerns about the vast amount of individually identifiable data about them that is collected, used and disclosed.

Data ethics is something that big tech companies are starting to look at (rightfully so), because consumers, regulators and lawmakers are requiring them to do so. But tech companies should consider looking at data ethics as a fundamental core value of the company’s mission, and should determine how they will be addressed in their corporate governance structure. I teach the value of data ethics in both the Executive Masters of Cybersecurity program at Brown University, as well as the Privacy Law class at Roger Williams University School of Law. Young executives and lawyers should be thinking about data ethics for the future.

Companies that are thinking about data ethics in a new way are hiring Chief Data Ethics Officers, sometimes referred to as CXOs. Data science does not traditionally teach data ethics, but with the advent of artificial intelligence, and the biases that may be inherent in AI, the discussion is delving into a new realm and considering how to address whether products come to market, whether biases may have societal implications, and whether the use of data is the “right thing to do.”

Data ethics is important to consider when developing new products and services, and hiring a Chief Data Ethics Officer will help promote a company culture devoted to determining the appropriate collection, use and disclosure of data going forward, instead of the “grab and monetize” attitude of the past. Consumers will appreciate the ethical considerations given to their data, and will make purchasing decisions that take into account the care taken by companies in handling their data.

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