DATA PROTECTION

What are we protecting when we protect data?

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M1 International Relations & Risk Management

Session 01 · 21 September 2026

Bilal Ghalib · Session 1

M1 International Relations & Risk Management · Université Catholique de Lille

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Today: map the landscape, meet one case, leave with a better question.

DATA PROTECTION · SESSION 1 · MON 21 SEPTEMBER

What are we protecting when we protect data?

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Université Catholique de Lille · FLSH · 2026–27

WHERE THIS COURSE GOES

Six questions, each one a professional standard

Question	What a professional produces	Where it comes from
1 · MAP	Record of processing: who, what data, why, where it goes, how long	GDPR Art. 30
2 · LAW	Lawful basis, principles, necessity and proportionality	GDPR Arts. 5, 6, 9
3 · RISK	Risk to people's rights: likelihood × severity	Art. 35(7) · CNIL PIA method
4 · HANDOFF	Controllers, processors, contracts, international transfers	Arts. 26, 28 · Chapter V
5 · DECIDE	Risk treatment: avoid, reduce, share or accept; residual risk	ISO 31000 · Art. 36
6 · REDESIGN	Measures: privacy by design and by default, security	Arts. 25, 32

WHERE THIS COURSE GOES

Together, the six questions are a DPIA-shaped case analysis: the document a risk manager writes before an organisation does something risky with people's data.

Every session rehearses it. The exam asks for it. And the EU AI Act's high-risk rules phase in through 2027–28: organisations will be hiring people who can do this.

GDPR Art. 35 · Roles: DPO, privacy & GRC analyst · Credential: IAPP CIPP/E

A FIRST CASE, ACCIDENTALLY

Where your work will live

This course's materials, and the answers you'll submit, sit in a Google Drive folder. That means the servers of a US company, under terms you agreed to when you opened your account.

Who here read them?

What did you agree to?

Should I be using it?

Keep the question. Sessions 4 and 8 (cloud, transfers, state access) are about exactly this.

0–10 · MEET THROUGH DATA

Your name, and one fact you'd be happy to see on the university website.

In pairs. Then introduce your partner to the room.

10–25 · SELF-SNOOP · 5 MINUTES

Search yourself as a stranger would. Find:

1. something you published
2. something someone else published about you
3. something old
4. something true but misleading
5. something that reveals another person through you

Show nothing you don't want to. Compare categories, not discoveries.

10–25 · WHAT DID YOU FIND?

Which of these is private?

Old	**Wrong**	**Inferred**
Relational	**Permanent**	**Surprising**

25–35 · THE FUTURE READER

Write one harmless sentence about your weekend.

Now the reader changes. Hands up when you would rewrite it.

a friend	your professor	an employer	an insurer	the police	a government in twenty years

25–35 · ORWELL, 1984, PART I, CHAPTER 1

Did anyone actually watch you?

Did the possibility change what you wrote?

35–50 · THE STANDARD: GDPR ART. 4(1)

Personal data is any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person.

Identifiable means directly or indirectly: a name, an ID number, location data, an online identifier, or factors specific to someone's physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity.

Recital 26: count every means "reasonably likely to be used" to identify someone, by anyone.

Regulation (EU) 2016/679, Art. 4(1) and Recital 26 · EUR-Lex

35–50 · SORT THE CARDS

Obviously personal · maybe · obviously not

a name	an IP address	a bus-card number	a photo	a week of location traces
an "anonymous" user ID	postcode + birthdate + sex	the rent you pay	a Strava run	a household's electricity bill

Identifiable by whom, combined with what?

ONE WORKING MODEL

What changes the stakes of a fact?

CAPTURE
make it durable and searchable

→

LINK
connect it to other data

→

INFER
derive what was never said

→

ACT
change what happens to someone

The original fact doesn't change. The capability around it does.

When someone says "it's only a name" or "it was already public", ask: public under what computational conditions?

50–55 · THE QUESTION · LEAVE IT UP THROUGH THE BREAK

If all we were protecting were secrets, why would any of that matter?

What are we protecting when we protect personal data?

Break: 10 minutes

West Germany, 1983

- Adults who were teenagers under Nazism
- The RAF years, and computerised police searches
- A country cut in two
- France, 1974: the SAFARI scandal, which led to the CNIL in 1978
- Orwell's year is on the calendar

You are about to decide something they decided.

THE DECISION PACKET

Bonn, March 1983. You advise the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

The situation

The Bundestag passed the census law last year without a single vote against. Census day is 27 April; thirty million forms are printed. The form covers housing, rent, work, education, commuting and household. For the first time, the law lets statistical offices compare returns against local population registers and pass corrections to municipalities. Planners want this.

What has changed

In a few months a boycott movement has appeared: hundreds of citizens' initiatives, backed by the Greens and parts of the church. Leaflets ask which files the census will be linked to. People mention the computer searches used against the RAF. Orwell's year is on the calendar. Constitutional complaints have been lodged in Karlsruhe.

What it's for

The last count was 1970. Housing, schools, transport and pensions are planned on numbers thirteen years old. Municipal funding is per head. Nobody disputes that the count is needed.

No hindsight: decide with what was known in March 1983.

72–92 · IN GROUPS · MAP FIRST, THEN DECIDE

Copy this row. No opinions until it's filled.

Whose data	What data	Who collects it	Where it goes	Who else could get it	What they could do	How long it lasts

Then, in one sentence each: what fact would most change your decision?

Board headings while they work: WHY DO IT? · WHAT DOES THE TECHNOLOGY MAKE POSSIBLE? · WHAT COULD IT MEAN FOR A PERSON? · WHAT SHOULD THE STATE DO?

72–100 · THE DECISION · IN GROUPS

Bonn, March 1983. You advise the Interior Ministry. Census day is 27 April.

Fill the MAP row on your packet first. Then choose one and defend it in one sentence.

1 · Proceed as planned, register comparison included

2 · Modify: proceed without the register comparison and transfers

3 · Postpone until the court has ruled

4 · Abandon the census

No hindsight: decide with what was known in March 1983.

Three questions

1. What is the legitimate gain?
2. Which part of the design creates a new capability, not just a count?
3. Who is affected but not in the room?

100–110 · WHAT HAPPENED

13 April 1983

Two weeks before census day, the Federal Constitutional Court issues a temporary injunction. The census stops.

Bundesverfassungsgericht, Karlsruhe

15 December 1983

The count itself is constitutional. The register comparison and the transfers to municipalities are not.

From human dignity (Basic Law, Arts. 1 and 2) the court derives a new right: **informational self-determination.**

TWO IDEAS TO CARRY ALL SEMESTER

What the court said (paraphrased)

No trivial data

Once processing is automated, no data is insignificant. What matters is what it can be linked to and used for.

The chilling effect

People who can't tell who knows what about them stop standing out. A society where people avoid assemblies is no longer free.

Official English translation: bundesverfassungsgericht.de

THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION ON THE BOARD

Not files. The conditions under which a person can act without every act becoming a record for a reader they can't see.

FROM KARLSRUHE TO YOUR FIRST JOB

The rules you'll work with grew from moments like this one

1978
France: Loi Informatique et Libertés; the CNIL

1981
Council of Europe Convention 108

1983
The census judgment in Karlsruhe

1995
EU Data Protection Directive

2018
GDPR applies

2024
EU AI Act in force, phasing in

110–115 · A VOICE YOU'LL MEET

Hello Future Pastebin Readers

Quinn Norton, 2015. Journalist, and a guest in this room on 10 November.

Someone you can't imagine may read this later.

115–120 · EXIT TICKET · ANONYMOUS

Before today, I thought data protection protects _____.

Now I think it protects _____,

because _____.

Three of these open Thursday.

Next: Thu 24 Sep, 13:00 · Lawfulness, purpose, minimisation

A good beginning

مَنْ أَشْرَقَتْ بِدَايَتُهُ أَشْرَقَتْ نِهَايَتُهُ

“When the beginning is illuminated, the ending is illuminated.”

Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī · al-Ḥikam

So we begin with a question, not a definition.

YOU ARE NOT A ROW

You are not a row

2 minutes each

Pair up.

Tell your partner something about your name that a database probably wouldn't know.

No need to share anything private.

Then we sort the room alphabetically.

1. What information did we need?
2. What assumptions did we make?
3. What did the data describe accurately?
4. What did it leave out?

Pair up.

Tell your partner something about your name that a database probably would not know.

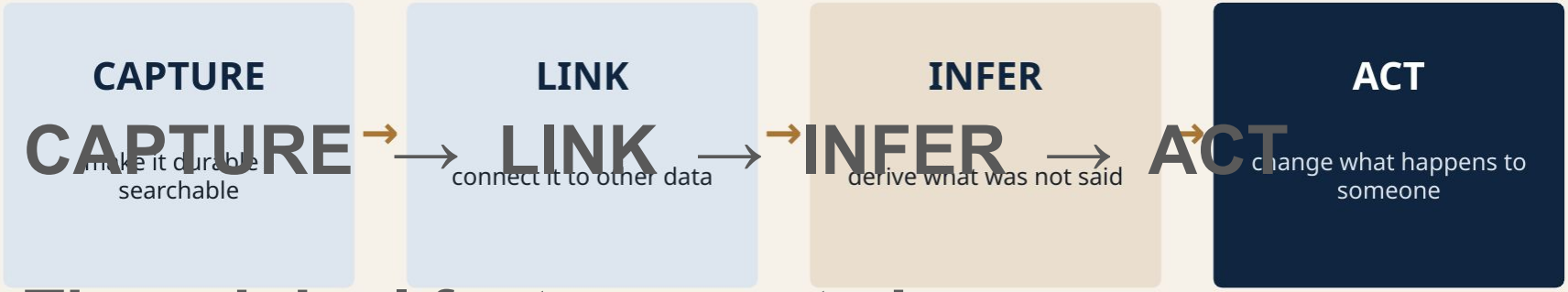
Then we will sort ourselves alphabetically.

A data model can be accurate without being adequate.

A data model can be accurate without being adequate.

What changes the stakes?

WHAT CHANGES DATA?



The original fact may not change.
The surrounding capability does.

The datum may stay the same while the surrounding capability changes.

Whenever someone says “it’s only a name” or “it was already public,” ask: public under what computational conditions?

A SHORT TIMELINE

A SHORT HISTORY OF INFORMATIONAL POWER

The meaning of data changes with capability



1939 Census, classification, persecution
1949 German Basic Law: dignity first
1970s Computers + police data matching
1983 Census Judgment: informational self-determination
1987 Census protests continue
2018 GDPR applies
Now Data can be linked, inferred from, and acted on at machine speed

The same record can become a different kind of power when linking, inference, reach or institutional authority changes.

DECISION CASE

West Germany · 1983

You are advising the government before a planned national census proceeds.

You are responsible for a national census.

The goal is legitimate: planning public services.

Computers now make matching records across systems much easier.

Public trust is collapsing.

THE CASE FOR PROCEEDING

Good population information helps plan housing, transport, services and infrastructure.

THE CONCERN

What changes when questionnaires, registers and increasingly powerful computers can be connected?

Should the system proceed as designed?

What would you need to change before saying yes?

Your decision

PROCEED | MODIFY | POSTPONE | CHALLENGE | REFUSE

What would you need to know before you became more confident?

WHEN “HARMLESS” DATA CHANGES

Six moves we will practise all semester

1 **MAP**

What is actually happening?

2 **LAW**

What constrains this?

3 **RISK**

What could happen, to whom?

4 **HANDOFF**

Where can control change hands?

5 **DECIDE**

What should happen now?

6 **REDESIGN**

Keep the value. Lose the danger.

Strava heatmap, 2018

People shared fitness traces for one purpose.

Aggregation and visualization made other patterns visible—including activity around sensitive locations.

Ask:

What was captured?

What became linkable?

What could be inferred?

Who could act on it?

The exam is not memorising cases. It is learning to run these moves on a case you have not seen.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

LEAVE WITH A BETTER QUESTION

What do you see differently now?

Complete two sentences:

Write for two minutes:

Before today, I thought data protection was mainly about…

1. What do you see differently now?
2. What do you want us to investigate in this course?

Now I am wondering…

Next time: Useful is not the same as necessary.

And: what should this course make you able to do by December?

بسم الله