



# DEBATING ETHICS:

DIGNITY AND RESPECT IN DATA DRIVEN LIFE

40th International Conference  
of Data Protection and Privacy Commissioners

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## THINKING GLOBAL, ACTING LOCAL: exploring common values that underpin privacy

On 25 September 2017, in the margins of the 39th International Conference of Data Protection and Privacy Commissioners in Hong Kong, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Privacy, Digital Asia Hub and the European Data Protection Supervisor hosted a [meeting](#) with a difference.

Our aim with this meeting was to start a conversation with people from around the world about the values that they think underpin privacy in their countries to see what the similarities and differences are.



**Stephen Kai-yi Wong, [Personal Data Commission Hong Kong](#)**



...Most of the value of corporates is now ethics-dependent, in terms of intangible assets such as intellectual property, trust and reputation. The negative impact of ethical mistakes is increasingly costly, visible and may be hard to reverse if confidence and trust are undermined. I believe that corporates will strive to uphold their intangible assets. I also believe that the challenges posed to various personal data privacy issues could eventually be resolved by collaboration.



**Professor Joe Cannataci, [UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy](#)**



What IS the truth about privacy? Is it the same everywhere? Or is it the same in core values - while allowing for cultural differences at the periphery? Can a right like privacy be universal while retaining elements of diversity? My research suggests that not only is privacy alive and well, but that privacy-related behaviour may have a common core across most societies with some 'local differences'. In some places it may manifest itself slightly differently, but privacy-related behaviour remains a universal characteristic of human kind.



**Ms. Malavika Jayaram, [Digital Asia Hub](#)**



Just because there is no law in a country, does not mean that individuals don't care about privacy; companies need to be cognisant of that. We need to catch up with the next generation, they are negotiating the online environment differently. They do care about privacy – instead of Facebook, they use Snapchat for example. What will new forms or future avatars of privacy look like?



The meeting room was set up to offer an environment for people to engage in dialogue around meaningful questions. The group was introduced to the flow of the session, which focused on these questions:

- What does privacy mean to you in your country? Why is privacy important in your country?
- What are the values that underpin privacy in your country e.g. autonomy, democracy, human dignity?

The aim was to explore common values and those not common to all with a view to seeing if there are grounds for global standards of privacy. What else did people think would be helpful to explore together as next steps?

World-Café is a method for fostering dialogue in large or small groups so that the collective wisdom of a diverse range of people can be shared around questions that matter in real life situations.

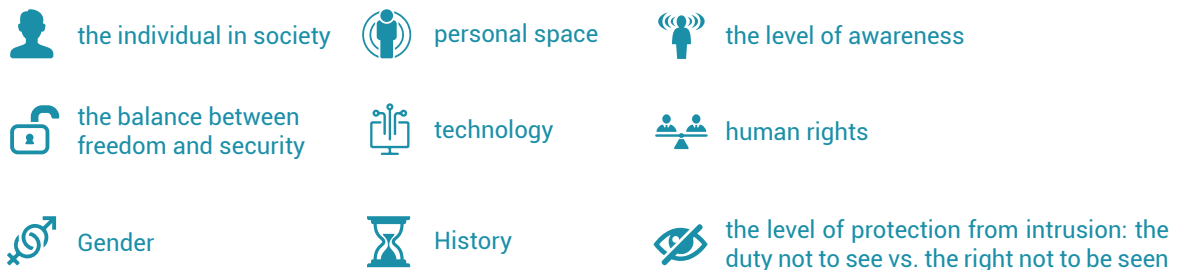
It helps a community to surface and deepen its conversation to action.

[www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)

As the discussions on the first round of questions were reluctantly concluded by the groups, participants were invited to identify some of the ideas that emerged at each table - it became clear that there is a natural link between the importance of privacy and the underlying values

- Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the context of the main conference, it was unanimously agreed that privacy is important! However, the balance between the values underpinning privacy vary around the world; for instance freedom, dignity and fairness are shared values but each may have more importance in one country than another, in other words they are not equally assigned (see the [table](#) of similarities and perceived differences).

While it was agreed that privacy is an enabling right which leads to others such as the freedom of expression, variations exist in different parts of the world on the importance attached to privacy for example because of the emphasis on:



**Mrs Teki Akuetteh, ICT Law & Data Protection Specialist @ Nsiah Akuetteh & Co., Ghana**

“ Africans recognise the dignity of the human being. Though there is recognition of personal space (privacy) in African cultural norms, there are situations where the individual space is given up for the collective interest such as of the family or community and so on. [Read more](#)



**Professor Hiroshi Miyashita, Associate Professor of Law, Chuo University, Tokyo**

“ The concept of privacy in Japan is based on trust, both within people's personal lives and in wider society. In Japan, a data breach is a breach of trust and such breaches are a source of reputational risk for companies. So while data breach notifications are not mandatory, Japanese companies will notify breaches in order to limit the damage to their reputations. [Read more](#)



Another lively round of conversation began followed by an invitation to summarise and harvest the discussions at each table to then share them with all the participants

| Similarities:         | Perceived differences: |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Freedom               | Freedom*               |
| Dignity               | Dignity*               |
| Fairplay              | Fairplay/Fairness*     |
| Set in ground law     | Context of privacy     |
| Enabling right        | Social harmony         |
| Balance with other HR | Tradition              |
| Respect               | Religion               |
| Intimacy              | Remedies               |
| Privacy needed        | Regulation             |
| Trust                 | Legal system**         |
|                       | Right to be Forgotten  |

\* See first paragraph before the list of comments following the first round of discussions.

\*\* Legal systems can cause big differences in each country including the extent to which you can get remedies in law.

This table does not of course reflect the rich dialogue that took place about the complexity and context of privacy in different countries but does give a flavour of the engaging conversations that took place in each group. It also shows that there are differing levels of priority given to each value rather than markedly different values being exhibited around the world.

### What did people say about next steps?



To reflect some more on what can be similar and what can be different, with an emphasis on the similarities and further analysis of them.



Ethics is broader and shouldn't be grouped with principles such as legitimate basis.



There must be room for local values in global standards.



#### Giovanni Buttarelli, [European Data Protection Supervisor](#)



These discussions revealed that whether data protection or elements of data protection are codified in law or not, culture may play a significant role in encouraging an ethical approach to privacy.

Can the values discussed be developed into a common culture taking into account similarities and perceived differences, new values, dignity and so on? And if so, how? By exploring it through more dialogue!

It seems that technology levels the playing field across countries and cultures - depending on the level of access to it of course - making history, among other contextual elements, less important. Because we know our actions are being scrutinised, whether on social media, by advertisers, or intelligence services, we are changing our behaviour.

The theme of ethics allowed us to have this dialogue and connect with each other about who we are. This was only the beginning. This interactive exchange of ideas is a sign of what you can expect at the International Conference of Data Protection and Privacy Commissioners in 2018 where we shall be Debating Ethics: Dignity and Respect in Data Driven Life. Join us in Brussels next year, your thoughts and contributions are essential in the digital ethics movement.