



Contribution ID: 166

Type: **Talk**

## **Factors influencing Sensitive Data Protection practices in South African public schools**

*Tuesday, 3 December 2024 15:50 (20 minutes)*

The current digital age has resulted in a surge in the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools that collect, store, and transmit huge volumes of sensitive data. Thus, sensitive data protection is a critical issue for all organisations in South Africa, including public schools. The problem is that schools often prioritize the benefits of using these ICT tools while neglecting the importance of protecting the substantial amounts of sensitive data produced, stored, and managed via these digital tools. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the factors that influence sensitive data protection practices in South African public schools. A qualitative research strategy with semi-structured interviews was applied. Fifteen interviews were conducted among school administrative clerks, teachers, Department of Education finance clerks, and school social media managers. A thematic data analysis approach was used in collaboration with NVIVO to analyze the collected data. The findings revealed both hindering and facilitating factors for sensitive data protection practices in South African public schools. Technological resources, awareness, and training do not hinder sensitive data protection practices in schools. On the other hand, organisational culture and attitudes hinder the practices. The findings revealed a conflicting landscape of compliance with the POPI Act and highlight the importance of using these factors to cultivate a culture of sensitive data protection practices in South African public schools.

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**Workshop Duration**

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**Session Classification:** ISSA

**Track Classification:** Cybersecurity / ISSA