DataTalks Guide

How to talk about digital security?

August 2019

What is a *DataTalk* ?

The *DataTalks* are conversations that help organisations reflect and make informed decisions about what data to publish and collect and how to protect unpublished data against loss or cyber attacks.

- They are **scripted, practical and direct** conversations
- They help to **humanize** digital security
- They adapt to the **context** and **needs** of each organisation
- They contain real-life **examples** to help **demystify the data**, put the risks in context and make concrete decisions that help minimize risks
- They are based on **trust** and **respect**

Who are they addressed to?

- **Organisations** and **networks** of civil society organisations: large, small, medium size, with higher and lower level of institutionalization
- Groups of **people** and **communities** working towards the common good
- **Activists** and/or **journalists**

Our experience

During November 2018 and April 2019, the DataShift team carried out a series of *DataTalks* with organisations and journalists all around the world. In these **conversations**, which lasted approximately **45 minutes**, we first conducted a **diagnosis** on the **potential challenges** and **risks** faced by the different actors. We also gave guidance and informative material to generate confidence and help them improve their digital security practices and data management.
The organisations varied in scale, the challenges they faced and their previously acquired knowledge. However, the methodology we have chosen, "a guided conversation", and the relationship of trust we built with them, made it possible to provide **personalized support** and arouse interest among the participants and its collaborators' networks. As a result, the vast majority of the organisations that participated in the *DataTalks* chose to take the online course on digital security for beginners, to continue learning and to be able to train others on this important topic.

What did we learn and what do you have to take into account before starting a *DataTalk*?

- **Trust and genuine interest of the participants**. Jointly deciding who will be part of the conversations is the one first step. Not everyone wants to talk about how they manage their passwords, safeguard their data or organize their files. These are all sensitive issues that require a certain trust or previously built relationship. Who wants to participate? Who will be involved in the conversation? Identifying which organisations of the network which you are part of or which members of your team have a genuine interest in learning about these issues is important if you want them to own the conversation.

- **Not everything starts with the computer**. Depending on the context and degree of formality of the organization, you should bear in mind that before discussing about electronic data, it is important to discuss about physical data. Many organisations in the global south have difficulties in working with digital archives, some because they work with governments that have great limitations in terms of digitization; others because they are just starting or do not have the necessary resources to buy space in the cloud or have more than one computer. Identifying what the context is and what the challenges are will serve to understand partners' risks, generate empathy and provide the solution that best suits the problem faced.

- **Demystify the power of data**. Journalists and activists who participated in the *DataTalks* mentioned the power they felt they had while having the contact details and information about influential and famous people or politicians. "Having contacts" is still a way to generate influence. However, several of the people we talked to started to think and reflect about their practices during the conversation. One of the biggest insights they had was that this impulse of having more contacts made them collect unnecessary data that could put them at risk. Helping them to reflect on what type of data is necessary to collect for each organisation's objectives and raise awareness about the risks involved in having certain data is also an important challenge that can be worked on throughout the conversation.

- **Less is more.** Sometimes we start the conversation with a very extensive question script or that contains specialized technical language. Other times we are tempted to offer unlimited amounts of information to the *DataTalks* participants. In both cases it is important to understand that less is more. Summarizing the information as much as possible and adapting it to each need, recommending the most pertinent resource or manual, will allow a greater incidence and impact on the practices of our colleagues.

- **The information is out there.** The field of digital security and data management is constantly changing. While there are experts dedicated to these issues, the amount of online resources is infinite, which means that with a little effort and research, you can also become your own master and learn by yourself about all these issues. If you have any doubt about which sources of information are reliable and which are not, contact us or write us at DataShift@civicus.org. We are willing to help!

Let's do it!

Once you have identified who will participate in the *DataTalks*, it is important that you have at hand the following questions that will serve as a script to guide your conversation.

Remember: Spontaneity and adaptability are the rule. The questions below are just a guide. It is important that you **adapt the content to the needs of each organisation**. You may also find that it is too much for a single conversation. In that case, we recommend coordinating a **follow-up conversation**, so that you and the participant can have time to search for new material and process all the information.

Questions Script

- What is your understanding of data? Do you work with sensitive data and/or personal data? Is all this data necessary for the project/or your organisation? Is it possible to minimize the amount of personal or sensitive data? Do you have any policy to deal with this?
  (This first question allows you to know what the degree of familiarity of the organizations with the data they manage is and what their data collection practices and objectives are)

- Who has access to the data of your organisation? Is there a specific list of people or organisations involved in the project?
  (These questions will allow you to identify if it is necessary to suggest some type of access control)

- Where is the data stored? On your devices, on the server of the organization, on the website, in the cloud (Google Drive, OneDrive, iCloud, AWS, etc.), on paper? How is your data transferred? Do you use email, messengers, thumb flash memory or any other channels?
  (Understanding where and how the data is stored and how the data flows, will serve to help the organization generate a first risk diagnosis)

- How long will that data be stored? Do you have a plan for the data storage or data deletion? **(This question serves to warn partners about the need of thinking about a data storage and data deletion plan, since generally conserving all the information we do not use in an indeterminate way will only cause a growth of risks)**

- Do you have a trusted person that manages your technical support or other computer issues? Who fixes/configures your devices? Is this person part of the organization or he/she works externally?
  (This question allows us to know what the capabilities and resources of the organization to implement protection measures are)

- What are the risks of loss or theft of your devices? Do you have some kind of protocol on how you would deal with the loss of a device with important data?
  (The objective is to understand if they have some type of security copies and encryption / backup or if it is necessary to propose response measures to this type of incidents)

What's next?

We suggest **taking notes** during the conversation and explaining to the participant that an email will be sent or a new **follow-up call** will be arranged to provide **selected and curated resources** according to their specific needs.

Below, you will find a **list of suggested resources in English**. In case you have specific questions, you need to contact an expert in the field or you would like to take our online digital security course do not hesitate to write to DataShift@civicus.org

Resources

- The **DataShift <u>blog</u>** is regularly updated with news of citizen-generated data in action.
- **<u>Sign up</u>** to our free and publicly available **Digital Security Starter Course**.
- **<u>Access Now</u>** has a wealth of resources available, as well as a multilingual helpline to assist in **preventing or dealing with compromised data and social media accounts**.
- This **<u>guide</u>** by The Engine Room explains how the **GDPR** could affect your organisation.
- This **<u>video</u>** and these **<u>case studies</u>** give more **in-depth explanations of responsible data in practice.**
- This **<u>guide</u>** from the Tactical Technology Collective has useful tips on how to make your **passwords** more secure and when to consider investing in a **password manager.**
- **The Engine Room** has compiled a selection of **<u>resources</u>** for those in need of assistance with archiving.
- The **Electronic Frontier Foundation** has more technical **<u>tips</u>** on **how to securely delete data from different hardware and operating systems.**