Data Socialization:
Fostering a Data Culture

What does it take to be a Data Ready organization? All around the world organizations are either prepared or preparing for the **Fourth Industrial Revolution**. Now, consider this: What will it take to be a Data Ready Humanitarian Organization? What are the data-driven strategies, programs, activities, and frameworks required to support data skills development? And, how do we implement this on a local to global scale? The recent **World Economic Forum conversation on Data Responsibility** highlighted the need to focus on **helping all staff incorporate these necessary skills**. For the past year, we've been on this journey at IFRC. Building on existing networks and skills, the data literacy program is taking a holistic view on data readiness. Most data programs focus on advancing the high-end information management / data science skills. These types of activities are occurring across the IFRC and in other humanitarian organizations. The Data Literacy program connects the data curious to the data leaders by building a data culture to support data readiness. We are taking a multi-layered, inclusive approach to deliver more sustainable changes.

Data Socialization was the theme of the first year of Data Literacy at IFRC. Fostering a Data Literacy program in a large global organization is no small task. The core activities were collecting user stories, building with existing ecosystems/networks in the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, and devising skillshares/content. Data skills are part of everyone's job. Unfortunately, often the approach this area is in an 'exclusive' manner. Meaning – if the participants are not familiar with the technical tool of the day or the ins and outs of, say, machine learning, the staff are not engaged or may even be intimidated. In order for organizations to achieve a sustainable Data Culture, it needs to be inclusive, uncomfortably inclusive. We focused on **building organizational confidence and trust**. There is so much potential to collaborate on this shared journey, but it takes time to bring everyone along.

Using the IFRC Geneva office, where we work, we invited staff to participate in prototype Data Skills activities as part of our **"Informal Data Working Group"**. We invited everyone to co-create and learn in the 1 – 2 hour sessions throughout the year. Humanitarian organizations often work with very limited financial resources. In fact, this program has yet to pay anyone to teach data skills. The potential growth will need more investment in various forms. Data Socialization uses **what we know and what we have already**. There is no shortage of talented staff at IFRC and in the National Societies bringing a wealth of knowledge around all types of data use.

DATA SOCIALIZATION IS…

Data socialization is the combination of sharing and widening data skills from the basics to intermediary, while fostering a data culture. Often when people talk about data (eg. Big Data, AI) and technology (eg. tools and infrastructure) there is a focus on the tools, data methodologies, and job roles to deliver 'data' or 'information' artifacts. This is regularly framed by the terms of the **data pipeline** of "find, get, verify, clean, analyse, and present." While it is true that individuals and organizations have varying degrees of 'data readiness', **what is the content for the introduction series of modules?** How can we connect the usual

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suspects with the data curious? Being accessible and building learning pathways for data skills provided the impetus to plan beyond the data products and data science corpus of knowledge. We cite many external resources and invite people to explore their particular data journey. **We needed the "introduction to data chapter."**

TACTICS

There are few tactics we employed to encourage a steady conversation over a series of activities. There is no one size fits all for each individual's data journey. We created 'modulized' and 'self-directed' discussions and/or activities to serve the various types.

Skills Scoping

How can you get a baseline understanding of the skills and opportunities for an organization? What if you have a limited budget and time to get a sense of the barriers, opportunities, skills people can share, and skills that they want to learn? Given resourcing restrictions, a full scale ecosystem map of a global organization was not possible (yet). There are competencies in people's job descriptions, but how can you find out the day to day needs? We conducted a session designed at asking people to talk about data, data types, their data workflows, and what they see as the **barriers and opportunities** to use data. Then, in the second part of the session, we asked which **skills people want to learn and skills they could share**. This methodology builds on the **Aspiration Tech technique of "agenda hacking"**. Overall, the top skills that people want are: analyzing data, spreadsheet skills, data storytelling, data management techniques, and specific technologies.

Informal Data Working Group

We convened data leaders from four different work units to plan out initial ideas for activities. The session content is shaped from the intel obtained in the 'Skill Scoping' exercise. The circle widened as more individuals/units expressed interest in leading particular conversations and sessions. The Informal Data Working Group is designed to be open to everyone. We also planned themes/topical sessions based on key milestones like **Open Data Day**, the launch of the **Handbook of Data Protection**, and the **OpenGeo Week**.

People Before Data

With program designed in a collaborative way, we then employed the 'data help desk' model. Each of the data leaders are genuinely keen to support a data culture. After all the sessions, we made ourselves available to support people to learn, direct them to additional resources, and answer their questions. It is amazing how much people's trust in data and technology has been sprained. Rebuilding this confidence and trust in an open and collaborative way helps foster a data culture. Data and technology can be effective and, even, fun if we approach it with an honest appreciation for people's fear of change and learning styles. By creating spaces for conversations and giving everyone equal access to explore their data skills, we put people before data.

Session Design

Most of the data literacy activities and content were created in modularized format. We created content with a 1-hour maximum content, outcome designed and participatory interactive. We also made choices to remove laptops and technology out of the conversations. Data socialization is about the critical thinking and contextual approaches to how and why we use data. Some examples include – How do we design incorporating data protection guidance? What are the key questions we ask before making an information product?

Global Content

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All of the news session designs and training materials are being shared via various teams at IFRC, our regional offices, and in National Societies, especially via the **Surge Information Management Support (SIMS)**. We've also collected data skills content from the Burundi Red Cross, Netherlands Red Cross, American Red Cross, Spanish Red Cross, Qatar Red Crescent Society, and more. We've obtained input from the Norwegian Red Cross, Senegal Red Cross and Nepal Red Cross (to name a few). Data leaders have delivered sessions across the world. For example, the Data visualization module has been shared in Budapest, Honduras, Kenya, Madagascar, Switzerland, Senegal, the Philippines and Qatar.

Partners/Allies

Reaching as many people – staff and volunteers – across the IFRC means building partnerships. We look forward to evolving these activities and encourage more connectivity to help the shared joined. We collaborate with amazing partners either formally or informally.

SEE THE FULL ARTICLE. *Credits: The Data Pipeline image is from the School of Data ccby.*

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