Transcript

Title: Webinar - Social Data in Action: Where Social Science Meets Data Science
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Year: 2021

Audio/video for this transcript available from: http://commons.swinburne.edu.au

JANE FARMER: Thanks to everyone for being here for this talk, which is the first in a series of webinars about where social science meets data science, social data in action. And we decided to have this series of webinars because kind of caps our work to date and also kind of points to the next phase of work.

So in the Social Innovation Research Institute at Swinburne, and working alongside the Centre of Excellence in Automated Decision Making and Society, we've been-- we like to think pushing the boundaries of this work for about the last three to four years.

The premises of this work are really that a lot of data are collected in and about social, community, and community health sector. And this data has possibilities to be repurposed. We want this sector to be as enabled as carpets with data.

And what-- the work that we're doing aligns with an international movement. And our work is uniquely grounding the work of this kind of international movement in the Australian context. And we like to work very closely with partners, not-for-profits, and non-governmental organisations and their management and staff, and going into the future, much more work with staff and end user clients, consumers, and citizens.

This work operates very much at the nexus of social science, data science, practise, and lived experience. So we'll just go on to the next slide, thanks, Anthony. So just before I go any further, I'd like to acknowledge on behalf of those present the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, who are the traditional owners of the lands on which I am located. And I'd like to pay my respects to their elders, past, present, and emerging.

I pay my respects to all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of all of the places where you, our audience are located and within Australia, and hope that the path towards reconciliation continues to be shared and embraced. Next slide.

OK, so we want this to be a very-- as participative as possible. So we do encourage you guys to post questions in the chat or comments, as long as they're not too cruel. And at the end, we will hopefully have a session for questions and answers.

So please at that point raise your hand if you have something you want to say. We are recording this session. So if you have any issues with being recorded, please contact Paul at the email address given here. OK, next one.

OK, so we're going to talk a little bit now just to talk about what social data in action is. And just before I go on to talking a bit about some of the points that Sarah Williams has made in her fabulous book, Data Action, I just wanted to highlight what we're talking about in terms of data here.

So really, what we are thinking about in terms of data is open public data, the kinds of data from the census, AIHW, et cetera, but also closed public data that's available for purchase or on presentation of a research proposal around business and health data.

Largely, I guess our work has been with repurposed data of not-for-profit organisations, local government, community health organisations, and also social media data. And this data tends to be about things like services delivered, outputs, feedback, incidents, and forum posts, et cetera. And it's often quite messy and irregularly collected and managed. And finally, we've also worked quite a lot with corporate data, such as consumer purchasing habits, et cetera.

So let's lean a little bit into the work of our international movement here in Social Data for Good. Senator Williams talks about this work as really being more than a research project, I guess. It's a social data and actions by project, solutions, and a methodology, and really, a call to action that asks us to rethink our methods of using data to improve or change social strategies and policy.

And as I highlighted at the start, it really sits at the nexus of data, data science methods, and importantly, people. And those people are both subject experts in the different social science and community health topics and the communities represented in the data.

I think a really important aspect of this work is that it generates visualisations that aid understanding. They legitimise or present as useful the data the NGOs have. And they also fit with our sort of very ephemeral bite-size thinking.

One of the other things I think about these data once visualised is that they are quite equalising. So you can have different stakeholders engaging with data sets, and it doesn't involve reading great big tomes of reports to actually understand what's going on.

And finally, I think a really important part of this is its empowerment and enablement agenda, which is really around thinking about these data is being historically closed and secret and only available to elites, and the idea of opening up these data for public and social empowerment. Next slide.

So really, where does this work that we're talking about sit? Around the world, there are many initiatives looking at working with data and data collaborative. So just a few little sprinkling of these initiatives here--

The Data Collaboratives Dot Org organisation works at New York University, and it's very much a great big sort of repository of different data projects, particularly data collaborative projects. And NESTA in the UK are sort of early pioneers in the work of looking at repurposing data sets that are already out there and existing and gathered for new insights in this kind of seminal report, really, in 2017, on governing with collective intelligence.

We have philanthropic initiatives around the world, such as DataKind. In Scotland, there's initiative called The Data Lab, which is really largely funded by the Scottish government and business and really interested in data as an economic force for the country.

Another great kind of initiative is from The Urban Institute in Washington DC, which is a think tank. And they have a programme called The Neighbourhood Partnerships, which is really about working with communities and empowering communities around data.

And the other example I've given there is the Centre for Social Data Analytics, which is at the University of Auckland and an initiative that, again, works very strongly with government and practise. And then we have our own social data analytics lab at Swinburne.

And I think all of the things that these initiatives have in common is that they are working at the nexus of practise, citizens, social innovation, government research, and philanthropy. So it's a very kind of partnered and quite sort of down and dirty kind of gritty space. Next slide.

Now, I guess as I said that we sort of feel that we're a bit of a point in time with our own work. And we've got quite good at some of these different techniques. So here, for example, showing our capacity to plot quantities of data spatially.

In this project, we're really interested in what we could find out about rural mental health needs, and worked with a number of different data sets there to look at where forum posts are happening or for Beyond Blue and SANE mental health forums, but also with info exchange around people's searches for mental health services so we can get a picture of what's going on in terms of needs across Australia from these data sets. Next slide.

And we can also find out about the topics and themes that people are talking about, particularly over time. So here as in here on this project, which we did for the Victorian government Department of Premier and Cabinet, looking at the changing public conversation about family violence after the family violence policy in Victoria. Next slide.

And we've even managed to build a data collaborative infrastructure with funding from the Australian Research Council and different university partnerships. And this enables us to routinely combine and overlayer data sets of different kinds in what we call our data co-op platform. And Amir Aryani will be giving a webinar in this series in a few weeks' time specifically about the work of the data co-op. Next slide.

The data co-op platform has enabled us to actually start to work in place-based projects and to use local non-government organisations and corporate data. I'm working with these organisations, obviously, overlayering their data with open data.

So here in this project, which is kind of just starting to work with partner organisations in the city of greater Bendigo to highlight the role that each organisation could play and what can be done collectively to move the dial on community well-being.

And the idea is at the end of the project to be able to build an indicator dashboard so the different organisations can understand the change that they're making through looking at their own data in the dashboard and also collectively across the community.

And we can see that the outcomes of these projects very much with-- in line with what Senator Williams said was constituted a social data project is not just these new data products, but also community relationships built on trust around data capabilities built in the organisations and the community and kind of just ease with using data, and a greater awareness, obviously, of comparative status across suburbs of well-being, and these new opportunities to work together in these new kind of data-driven spaces to address local challenges.

But I think we would all agree-- anyone who's been involved in these projects-- that it's not easy. And as we can see the steps along the way in this infographic, the work does involve generating data agreements around privacy and security, and then organising the data so that it's all being able to be analysed at the same spatial level and so on.

So there's a lot of work to be done with the data before the analyses can be actually carried out. I'm now going to hand over to Anthony to give some perspectives on some of his work. And then I'll come back at the end to finish up.

ANTHONY MCCOSKER: Thanks, Jane. So what we're doing here is essentially building data capacity-- or this is the way that I see it anyway-- data capacity and social data insights with different partners in different contexts through what we'd call a ground up or collaborative approach.

And the point is to begin with social problems and bring together different types of expertise and different types of actors, so people with domain knowledge and frontline actors, but also working alongside social scientists and technicians and data scientists.

And one of the questions that we often get is, where do the consumers and clients and citizens, ordinary citizens sit in this process? And to me, they're extremely valuable and extremely important. But our focus is working with the nonprofit sector or civil society as the drivers of this kind of work, and in particular, in building their capacity as a way of leading the way with social data projects.

So there's-- I'll talk a little bit about a couple of projects that we're working on at the moment and the methodologies that we've developed around this. But I wanted to start with some points about why we need this kind of ground up or collaborative approach.

First of all, there's huge pressure on the nonprofit and community sector to innovate through digital and data transformation. They're the buzzwords, of course. So data and digitisation and automation are absolutely priorities for the boards and the executives in a sector.

And all of the conversations that we have with them, with those people, are about what's happening in that space with a lot of movement happening after COVID, of course. But it's often experienced as pressure and as guilt, or as what we are beginning to call data shame, so feeling-- the feeling that they're not doing enough with the data they collect and the data that they produce to generate positive outcomes.

We do know, however, that most organisations are poorly resourced. They don't have the infrastructure and they don't have the expertise. They don't have the time. They're just making do in terms of the goals that they have.

We also know that there are policy gaps, that government at the moment is very focused on two key areas. One is sorting out data sharing and data security in the public sector. So it's really focused on how data works across government and government agencies, and also how data might improve the economy or profit in the private sector.

But not much actually flows down through to civil society, to the nonprofit sector. And that's where we see that there's a huge amount of potential, and there's a lot of gaps. There are a lot of gaps around-- in that space.

We know that there's a need to build new inclusive forms of digital literacy. And the way that we are starting to conceptualise and work out what data capacity is and what it's about and how we can further those interests is very much bound up in what we understand about data literacy and data capabilities.

So I want to talk a little bit more about that in a minute. But one of the things that we want to emphasise is that there's-- like we're most interested in the way that domain-specific social data science drives innovation.

So if we think about this connection between data science and social science, it's really taking the problems of food security and the problems of community health and mental health and homelessness, humanitarian emergency, child and family welfare, et cetera, and seeing them as the drivers of technological innovation and what we can do with data and what we can do with machine learning and automation.

Let me just try to move this forward. There we go. So one of our recently completed data action projects confirmed a lot of this, and particularly, the pressure to transform and upskill, and the idea of data sharing by organisations already doing amazing good in the world, but also confirmed the enthusiasm in the sector for leading the way through innovation and work with data. They know that they can do more and they can do interesting things.

So in this project, we worked with three NGOs. One is a disability support, one an employment service for young people, and one in mental health support in the entertainment industry. And the team, as you can see here, was led by Kath Albury and Jane and Amir.

And the team is a big team. It's very transdisciplinary, and actually worked collaboratively with members of the organisations in different kinds of roles. So we weren't just working with the IT and data people in these organisations, but people at the frontline and working with clients and with their particular mission.

The methodology that we developed-- evolved on the fly-- and I want to focus on this a little bit because it's a really important part of how we actualise these kind of projects. And it kind of evolved in relation to COVID.

We had to move everything online and work collaboratively with a workshop method over about six to eight months that we would have done in person and would have done sitting with people in the organisations had to do online.

We were adapting a kind of data walk approach, which was pioneered by the Urban Institute probably about 10 years ago. And that focuses on that process of visualising and sharing data as a method of collaboration and participation, as Jane explained earlier, and coming-- doing that kind of iterative work in terms of analysis and visualisation over time.

So we're looking here at a number of workshops, a number of one-on-one discussions, a lot of work in between. And all of this takes a lot of resources and time, of course. So we want to emphasise that these aren't easy projects to get up and running.

So just a little bit about some of the outcomes of that project-- for one of the organisations that we worked with, Good Cycles, was really identifying different forms of social value for the work that they did.

So, for instance, they're a social enterprise addressing youth unemployment, and they prepare young people for work through a training programme. So over this four-month period, we were looking at 25 trainees.

And ordinarily, the impact statement that I would make would be about the number of trainees that moved into full-time employment outside of their services. But that's not a huge number, 18 out of 25 trainees. It says something. That's really amazing. But what else can they say? What else can they do with the data that they collect?

So one of the problems or questions that we established with them was how can they use their trip data to tell a story of the organisation's contribution to the environmental sustainability that is part of their mission as well?

So by mapping the bike journeys of their trainees and analysing that data against measures of the cost of Motor Vehicles and the impact on the environment, we could calculate a sustainability cost, which is a different kind of impact story than the one that they were delivering already.

And this is really important for future funding, but it's also-- it also gives the organisation something else to work with in terms of the work they do and where they place their effort and their focus.

So just finally before I hand back to Jane-- so in our current work with the Automated Decision Making and Society Centre at Swinburne, we're working with a collective of NGOs and community sector organisations to develop and test data capacity framework.

So this is both a diagnostic tool for organisational data inclusion, I guess is what you would call it. And it's also a lens for focusing action within each individual organisation. So the aim is to help guide positive change in the sector, so something that we can use across different kinds of contexts, so whether it's community health or food security or emergency services, et cetera.

But it's also to understand the data transformation trajectory and encourage an outcome's focus that's also about more than just efficiency gains or business analytics, which is often the focus, partly

because that's where a lot of the tools that are developed for commercial interests shape data analysis, which is another story.

So these dimensions of data capacity you can see here. They're drawn from a review of the emerging international research, but also from our discussions with programme partners with the-- partners for the research.

And each are kind of individually crucial to the way that data is made, and the purpose to which it's put. And the level of maturity also in the expertise around each of these dimensions is really important and it's really variable.

So some might have a large focus on legal aspects of working with data, but not necessarily enough of a focus at this point around the technical needs and infrastructure or capability development across the organisation.

So we know, for example, that while there's a fair bit of focus on access to data, and we've had 10 years now of emphasis from government and from the sector around open data sources. But these aren't necessarily accessed or operationalised in a way that means that they actually have a flow through to the kind of work that organisations can do with data. There are blockages, and we want to unblock those blockages.

So yeah, I'm not-- so as we develop this capacity framework, we're developing or we're collecting sets of questions that we'll turn into a decision tree that organisations can use to move through each of these elements or dimensions of the capacity framework and look at ways in which we can kind of develop capacity across the sector. I'll hand back to you, Jane, to take over from here.

JANE FARMER: OK, thanks, Anthony, just a couple of slides to finish up then, so start thinking about your questions or comments. So really, in total, then, what are the opportunities from social data in action?

So hopefully, the message we've been getting across here is that not-for-profit and community sector organisations, they do have to collect a lot of data in the day-to-day work that they do. And so they have a lot of data. And there's potentially other things they could do with it.

So that there's the opportunity here for action. So bringing people together around a problem with data, identifying the data sets can be an incredibly insightful exercise in itself, looking at what can be done in terms of different analyses.

As Anthony was saying about Good Cycles, this can be a really different-- a real opportunity to think differently about the business, planning about what to do based on these data, doing that, and obviously, that cycle of kind of monitoring and repeating.

These kind of initiatives, though, are also-- and I think this is hopefully we've got across something that we're really keen on is building data capability in the sector, data literacy, and just kind of interest and enthusiasm and kind of curiosity, I guess, around using data and also networks.

So in all of these projects, people start to work with other people in different organisations or across university practise boundaries, and we start to build these networks. And these can be applied for-- obviously, for other projects.

And so essentially, my-- it's my kind of passion that the community sector should be-- is at ease with data and is able to do things with data as corporates. Because for heaven's sake, this is about us and the community and social good. Next one, Anthony.

But as we've found to date, there are challenges. And many of the challenges are to do with the fact that this is an emergent space with evolving practises and norms. So it does take time, and we do need to be patient.

And particularly, some of us work in organisations that are very bureaucratic. And so we have to work through a lot of those kind of bureaucratic processes to make this-- kind of oil the wheels and make this happen.

This second point here is that organisations are in these projects, so really in a process of kind of coming to terms with data work and feeling safe and secure about using data.

And as Anthony talked about data shame, there does tend to be a lot of kind of discussion from community partners about oh, these data, they're a bit of a mess, and I'm not sure they're consistent, and, oh, I haven't actually looked at that data set. I think there's a lot of gaps and kind of data embarrassment and data guilt and data shame, that it's all kind of sitting there unused.

And then when they do actually want to use the data, there's quite data work there, right, to kind of get it all organised in ways that can be analysed. But it's not-- again, it's a challenge.

The third challenge is what I would call something that comes out of the not-for-profit industrial complex, and this is data territorialism. So all of these organisations in the kind of neoliberal market-driven worlds, they're kind of set up to work in competition.

And so-- and they're all in a competition to get money from government or philanthropics. And so that causes challenges in working with each other, and it also causes challenges in transparency of data. Because they're all trying to tell a story that will enable them to get the next lot of funding and obviously in competition with each other.

So I guess data projects are a great space to work in a space that isn't playing to competition. It's playing to collaboration. And particularly, if they're place-based projects, they can have a completely different focus that can bring partners to work together.

Finally my final challenge here is another thing that does sometimes come up in projects is that once you start generating these data insights and data visualisations, I find that often, partners around the table get quite-- they get the--

Two things happen. One is they want more, so like, oh, that's great, but can we have this now? And the second thing is like, oh, that's great. I can't remember what the question was now. So I think the solution here is just feeling really comfortable about all of this.

Like yes, data is a space of exploration. It's a space of finding things out. It's a space of blind alleys and going back. It's really about experimenting and discovering. Next and final slide.

So what are the next steps? The next steps for our work-- this is from my point of view. Anthony might have come up with a completely different side here. But I feel like the next steps are that this kind of work should become the norm and easy.

There should be off-the-shelf templates to do things like data agreements and data collaboratives and different kinds of analyses. And there should be a kind of scaling up and skilling up that happens kind of simultaneously.

So the scaling up obviously is around the, well, OK, if I'm a non-profit organisation, how do I do this? Do I have to have my own data scientist? Or do I work with a bunch of other organisations, and we kind of have a data collaborative, and we have capacity through that?

Or do we work with some arm's length organisation? And so I think there's a need for kind of new organisational models around how to do this data work. Involving consumers and end users is super important and really the next step because it's another kind of capability building venture to engage end users with these data that obviously, they are partners in generating. And a lot of the time, they are the major partner in generating these data.

And finally, I think this kind of whole sort of capability raising within the sector should lead to the sector itself developing new tools and technologies. So in one of the projects that we've been doing, a place-based project, the question constantly comes up is, well, that's fine. We know about our city now. But how do we compare with other cities?

And so how do we build these kind of benchmarking technologies without asking everyone to collect the same data? We need a kind of equalising technology or something like that. And so my kind of vision here is a new public interest technology sector coming out of this work.

And because we're all engaged in it and becoming capable of using data and evidence, then we can refresh democracy, because our vision shouldn't be small. OK, so I think that's the end here. Do we want to just flash up the next slide to point to the next webinars, so we don't forget to do it at the end?

So before we hand over to you for questions, I just wanted to point out that we have some other webinars coming up in this series, and they will be amazing. So please don't miss them. We've got Marina Micheli from the European Commission talking about data governance. We've got Sarah Williams from MIT talking about public empowerment through data. And we've got Julia Stoyanovich talking about what, Anthony?

ANTHONY MCCOSKER: About AI and our literacy, essentially.

JANE FARMER: Cool, and we've got our very own Amir Aryani talking about data co-ops and data co-op infrastructure. We are now finished, and we can hand over for questions, or we can throw questions at each other to start with.

Maybe I'll throw one to you, Anthony, to start with because we have got a question prepared for each other. So Anthony, do think it's realistic that this will become business as usual, and how will it become business as usual?

ANTHONY MCCOSKER: Yeah, I don't have a definitive-- I don't have the crystal ball on business as usual. But one of the things that I think has been noticed for a long time-- so I remember reading a good 20 years ago, awesome book by Bonnie Nardi and Vicki O'Day on information ecologies.

And they were talking about in organisations, the people who play the role of-- I think they called them information gardeners, but we can call them data gardeners. They're people who just do the kind of technology work that put themselves forward, that self select when there's any sort of innovation happening in their space.

And they use tools in different ways and innovative ways and against the grain sometimes or come up with ideas. I think that's-- there's always been that element of innovation and drive to do different things across many sectors-- like private sector as well, of course, in terms of entrepreneurship.

But there's a huge entrepreneurial element in the nonprofit sector as well and in the community sector. And often, that's a response at the moment. I think it's increasingly a response to what can we do with data and what can we do differently with it.

So I think-- I do see that there's a lot of potential building. But we need-- we, as a country, need to be able to enable this. So there's policy drivers for this. There's educational drivers. And there's drivers around collaboration.

So the point that you made about benchmarking, for example, continually comes up in our conversations that even though there's this kind of competitive territorialising aspect to the sector, there's this desire to benchmark at the same time.

So there's potential, huge potential for collaboration and data projects that perhaps universities have a role in mediating or being the intermediaries in. But it's in that space of who are the trusted intermediaries that I think is really important.

So I have a question for you, Jane, as well, because I'm actually really interested in this idea. And I know that in these conversations, in the process of establishing data sharing and collaboration, it's often time consuming and difficult and complex. What, in your experience, brings communities and NGOs and corporates together to want to work together on collaborative data projects?

JANE FARMER: Cool, that's a great question. We are going to let you guys ask questions in a minute, by the way. We're not just navel gazing. Yeah, look, I think that as we've kind of pointed out a wee bit, a champion is very useful.

So I think looking at our-- some of our projects, an organisation or a leader who wants to drive a project is super important. I think leaning into what you just said that a not for profit-- the not-for-profit sector is highly innovative and looking for creativity and excitement.

And so I think there's different motivations. But I think in order to keep these projects going in the periods where you're waiting to get the legal agreement signed and things like that, it's about keeping the conversation going and being a good partner, like giving people what they ask about and trying to-- yeah, like keep the momentum going in the ways that we can.

So there's a question here from Anne, Anne Smith. Do you want to ask the question, Anne? I can see you on my screen. Do you even remember what your question was? You're on mute, so I can't hear what you're saying. Do you want me to read it out? OK, I'll do that.

It just says, this is great. Oh, thank you. Giving community sector organisations focus on survival and managing-- oh, you've raised your hand.

AUDIENCE: Yes, I've unmuted myself, sorry. I'm crapping on without any sound. Look, essentially, I want to do a lot of work with the community and not-for-profit sector, and a lot of it is around evaluation also some action research. So absolutely, I think what you're talking about is just fantastic.

But my-- to some degree, you kind of named this, but at the moment, particularly, you've got a sector that's coping with all of the COVID consequences, very focused on survival, sometimes managing large funds coming through from COVID.

So their focus is very driven, and there's a lot of deep-seated fear about anything to do with data, as well as a recognition that there's all this amazing data available. And one of the things I've been working with with CEOs is, how do you actually define your impact and your value, that social value you were talking about?

And there's a desire to do something about it, but there's an enormous barrier in the fear. So we try and build it into projects we're working on, but there's very limited capacity to do much around that.

So I'm kind of wondering what you're discovering and ideas you've got about how you might help people get some traction and help people engage with that and see some value in doing so.

JANE FARMER: Do you want to speak to this, Anthony?

ANTHONY MCCOSKER: Yeah, it is a common one, because we have these competing narratives about data. Particularly, I think this is more complex when we're working with community health and mental health, for example.

So there's as much work in the ethics and responsibility and accountability and transparency aspects of these projects as there is in the actual data science and analysis. So probably I would say 80%, 70% to 80% of the time is building trust and establishing the kind of infrastructure that allows safe practises as in safe projects.

And I'm using the government's five safes kind of language around that and those frameworks that emphasise responsibility, and communicating that and keeping those communication channels open.

One of the things that always seems to gather traction is aligning the data project with the mission of the organisation. So if the mission is around food security or employment services, et cetera, what are the data-- what are the questions that you can ask of data that align with that mission in a really natural and really obvious way so that the use of the data doesn't seem in any way scary or problematic for those who the data are about?

So that's a huge starting point. And there's a lot more to it, obviously, but it's the-- it's probably one of the biggest challenges at the moment around that kind of trust building and the tensions that are there in terms of personal data security.

JANE FARMER: OK, we've got another question from Sally Cohen. I don't know if Sally's still with us. I can read the question out, and then we can decide what we're going to do with it. So the question is-- Oh, Sally.

AUDIENCE: No, please, I'm more than happy for you to read it out. That's fine.

JANE FARMER: No, no, you do it, Sally.

AUDIENCE: Oh, OK, hello. Really interest-- thank you. This really interested Jane and Anthony about data sovereignty. I agree totally with Anne about the importance of this work and really exciting. And how do you, we, collectively manage data sovereignty throughout this? Thank you. I'll turn myself off the video and shush now.

JANE FARMER: Do you want to answer this, or should I have a go?

ANTHONY MCCOSKER: I'm just thinking about the Bendigo Project.

JANE FARMER: Yeah, I'm thinking that Sally's talking about end users, right, with data sovereignty? Is that correct? Yes.

AUDIENCE: I'm also talking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data.

JANE FARMER: Yeah. Yeah. OK. So, I mean, I think we've kind of wrestled with this considerably. And to the extent of-- and I guess where our discussion landed was that all of the levels of the organisation have to be comfortable and at ease with data.

And it's-- so we started with management, basically, and working through projects where management and organisations come together with us in discussions about data. And clearly, in some of the communities that we're working in, there is quite a strong overlap between being a community member or a data producer and a person who is an operative in the organisation.

But it's definitely the-- I guess the next step, as I was saying, to get into conversations with end users or clients or citizens, whatever we want to say, about data. And obviously, there are projects in which people own their data and they have data sovereignty, and they are able to trade with their data and say, I will give my data to these kinds of projects, but I'm not giving it into these kinds of projects.

And I think that's an aspiration. I would love to get into that space. And that's the next step, as far as I'm concerned, for the work that I'm doing. But at this point, we're working much more with that kind of management level.

And I think-- as I say, my justification for that is that at that level of the organisation needs to be really agile, capable, and know what they're doing with data before we can open the conversation up. So it's really a kind of staged conversation from my point of view.

But obviously, everything we do-- we look at what are the consents around the data, like what are the data, first of all? What are the consents around using these data, and have that as a conversation that we have with the organisations.

So we're not doing anything that hasn't been consented to, although we know that people don't necessarily spend a lot of time looking at the consent before they tick the box or click the app or whatever. And so yeah, that is where I'm at with it. I don't know if you want to add to anything, Anthony.

ANTHONY MCCOSKER: Well, just the idea that I'm really interested in at the moment is around data donation. And data sovereignty, I think, sits with that in a way, in the sense that we have a lot of systems in the organisations that are producing data through transactions, through case management, through customer relation management, all of that kind of activity.

But we want to look at how we can produce data in different ways and produce it with citizens, with communities, with collectives, with the people driving what it is that they want to find out or what it is that they want to contribute to.

So I think there's a huge amount of work to be done in this space. And there's not a huge amount. There's a lot of enthusiasm for this kind of work. But we need to show more models in practise, I think. We need to have more examples of this working, and understand the mechanisms that make it work effectively.

JANE FARMER: OK, and Kristen from Vic Health, are you still with us Kristen? Do you want to ask your question? Hello.

AUDIENCE: Hiya. Yeah, I guess sort of interested-- I'm sure there's many ideas about how a government could support this. But perhaps one of the first ones or the main ones that governments could support NGOs that they fund to improve the data or increase the data capabilities, reduce their shame.

JANE FARMER: That's terrible. I feel that they're not even shameful.

ANTHONY MCCOSKER: I think there's a huge amount of tension around the reporting that is needed, the data that needs to be produced for reporting purposes when organisations, NGOs interface with government. And there's a lot of inflexibility around that process.

And I know there's a lot that could be done to expand on that, to look at ways that that data could be used or adapted or collected or produced in a way that's more productive. So yeah, there's a few things going on there, I think.

JANE FARMER: I think-- I was just thinking, as you were saying, looking at all of the initiatives around the world and where government are involved. And they're not necessarily really involved in this not-for-profit or citizen empowerment kind of space.

And a lot of the initiatives that I've looked at, I wouldn't say they're not involved at all. So without sort of dissing government, I think that the not-for-profit philanthropic kind of university space are potentially the optimal partners to get this working and show how it can work and its benefits. And then maybe it's kind of ready for government to kind of look at and support.

ANTHONY MCCOSKER: There's a good question here about-- from Sarah-- hi, Sarah-- that is about the pathways for those with data skills to connect with organisations with data needs. Are there volunteer opportunities? Absolutely.

Every organisation that we speak with has space for, I think-- and it's starting to open up the avenues for this kind of voluntary work. It tends to be connecting with universities. They tend to go to universities, first of all, to find interns, to find students who are working across disciplines, perhaps computer science, data science, communications, entrepreneurship, who are interested in applying those skills.

I think also, there are organisations like Red Cross do a lot of work with volunteer data science groups and have specific projects in that space. But I think we do need to have these conversations more openly and advocate for bringing those skill sets into the nonprofit sector and civil society, because they tend to get snapped up by commercial operations for much more boring purposes. So yeah.

JANE FARMER: I think that aligns with what Janina has asked, as well, or commented on, who's asked about how do not-for-profits compete for this talent, essentially. Again, I'm not sure that every non-profit organisation needs their own data analysis department or whatever.

I do think there's-- I mean, there's a question in the whole of the kind of digital era about re-engineering your workforce, which is a bigger conversation. But I think there are other models that can work here, like the idea of collaborating or cooperating and with the data science at its heart.

So I do think the space here for new models-- I know it's really hard to do that, and it's easy to say for some goddamn academic, but not necessarily practical and reality.

ANTHONY MCCOSKER: Building on that, though, there's-- so I think we've had probably two decades of work in digital literacy and digital skills and digital upskilling and transformations of the workforce and workplaces around digital skills.

And I think just drawing on my hat in measuring that-- that level of inclusion in populations more generally-- if we think about data skills in the same way, we can divide them into the kind of operational skills that are the everyday kind of business analytics, the sort of-- the work that is about

working with spreadsheets and creating pivot tables and working with data that just helps with the little decisions that need to be made every day in order to-- for an organisation to operate, for instance.

But then thinking about the strategic skills that can lay on top of that-- and often, they're not the hard science. They're not necessarily the engineering and the programming. They're not necessarily using our or our programming language to do the kind of analysis work.

But they're also about the problem solving and the problem posing, the question framing, the things that can cut through and make all of that hard data science make sense and be effective. So I think there's a lot of work to do there.

And there is a question from Jenny Robinson as well about how NFPs feel limited or constrained by commercial business analytics tools. And I think there is a lot of that, especially because the business model of those tools is that the baseline-- the cheap version does certain things. And in order to build on them or to build customisation, particularly for a very special set of purposes, is extremely expensive and usually prohibitive.

So some of the better data projects that I've seen actually work outside of those environments, draw on the data, or extract the data that comes through those tools and works on top of it or works around it in a more customised way. And, of course, that's harder to do. But yes, I just am feeling the pain and frustration around the limitations of those tools.

JANE FARMER: Just before we finish, I just have to love Chris McCracken's question about rural data scarcity, because that's my space. And I-- yeah, that's why we got into the rural mental health project was like, can we get more data by this kind of layering and quite into the whole idea of data bricolage at the moment where we kind of used layering and--

It would be like mixed methods, I guess, if it was more traditional research where we like-- well, all data can be kind of crushed together around place to kind of understand place-based challenges more. So I think this is a really exciting space that no one's got their arms around internationally.

A really good report just come out from the Urban Institute about rural data, which is on their website if you want to check it out. But it's a space that we are working in. So if you want to get in touch and have a chat, that would be cool.

I think we've got lots of questions there, and probably, we're about to run out of time. So email us and ask us these questions, or have a further chat if you're interested in this work. And hopefully, you'll come to the next webinar where Marina Micheli from the European Commission will be talking about her amazing work on different models of data governance. And thank you very much for being here. It's been great, great to see all these people and all these questions. Bye.

ANTHONY MCCOSKER: Thanks, everyone.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]