
Annual Meeting of the New Champions Rethinking Personal Data

Dalian, People's Republic of China, 12 September 2013

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World Economic Forum The New Data Commons

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Summary

Participants at the Annual Meeting of New Champions held a private session to discuss innovations and risks in the use and exchange of personal data as part of the on-going Rethinking Personal Data project (www.weforum.org/personaldata).

The focus of the session was on discussing a new approach to using and sharing personal data that strikes the right balance between managing the risks that can be created when personal data is used and exchanged, and promoting innovation through the free flow of personal data. Striking this balance is key to fostering a sustainable personal data ecosystem that fulfils its tremendous potential for social and economic good while respecting the rights of individuals.

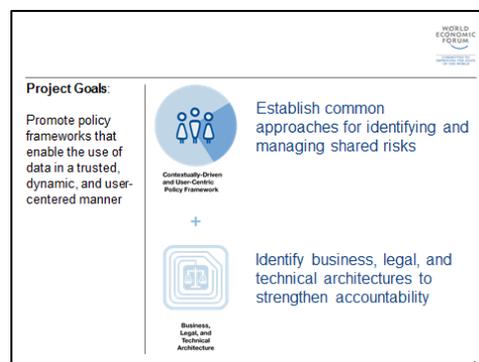
The participants felt that in order to strike this balance, a new approach is necessary that is more flexible, based on the uses of data rather than the collection of data, and is centred on the individual. In order to implement a new approach, business, legal, and technical innovation will be necessary to create the right operating environment.



The dialogue will continue with multiple interaction touchpoints with different stakeholder communities over the remainder of 2013.

Introduction

This private workshop convened a range of stakeholders as part of an on-going project which aims to promote the trusted flow of personal data by advancing the need for a flexible set of usage-based principles, centred on the individual, to govern data use. The group included several practitioners who use personal data to solve pressing business or social challenges.



The session opened by recapping the need for change to achieve a balanced personal data ecosystem. It was acknowledged that shifting the attention from the 'collection' of personal data to the 'use' of this data would be the appropriate and practical course of action to take in the era of Big Data. To do this will require new policy frameworks and technological innovations, as well as a means for effectively engaging the individual. And the creation of these new systems requires rethinking traditional notions of collection limitations, use specification, and notice and consent – all of which were valid in the past, but are now insufficiently flexible and robust to be effective in today's world.

To further the dialogue on some of these issues, the Rethinking Personal Data initiative team is focused on promoting the need for innovation in the business, legal, and technical architecture underpinning the personal data economy, and for a policy approach accepted by all parties that is based around the context in which data is used, and centred on the individual.

Identifying Opportunities and Risks, and Striking Balance

The session was structured around three main questions: How can we use personal data to discover new opportunities? What are the risks and harms associated with these innovations? How do we balance the opportunities available with the potential risks and harms?

When discussing the first question the group noted that a discussion focusing on the benefits of personal data use, rather than potential downside risks, was overdue. It was also recognised that there are many potential innovations possible in the personal data space that could bring value to governments, enterprises and society at large. However, due in part to media coverage, it was observed that most people are more acutely aware of the risks of personal data use, rather than the benefits, which impedes progress in multiple ways.

There were many good cases of innovative uses, for example, the United Nations World Food Programme noted that mobile call data records (CDR) were employed by their Vulnerability Assessment Mapping (VAM) program to enhance food security risk management and contingency planning. Companies are using CDRs to identify and predict malaria hotspots by linking mobile operator data with disease datasets. This helps to more efficiently plan for and administer vaccinations and other medication. Some companies are using personal data to optimize the traffic network and urban planning efforts emerging markets. Finally, there were examples of mobile operators that have found ways to monetize their signalling traffic in new, innovative (B2B) business models.

There was a general consensus that data-driven innovation was highly leveraged – the more data that a system has the greater potential for innovation. It is also context-driven. That is, the innovations are driven by need in a given circumstance, which may be different from that in which the data was originally collected. As more data is attracted into a system, and data sets can be flexibly layered on top one another, there is greater potential for further innovation.



The dialogue then shifted to a discussion of the risks that could occur when personal data is used. Risks manifest at different levels, and while most businesses have systems in place to identify various classes of risk that impact them directly (financial, operational, etc.), in general these organizations are not equally focused on risks to individuals or society.

Regardless of the system or set of controls in place, the potential exists for misuse or harms breaches. Some participants reminded the group that whenever a data set was assembled, some degree of misuse was inevitable.



Also discussed was the role that legislation plays in addressing or responding to various risks. Many participants warned of the unintended consequences of legislation that can occur as times and technologies change. Highly effective regulations can have reduced efficacy over time as technologies evolve and circumstances shift. A possible resolution is for all parties to be involved in the design and implementation of policy frameworks.

It was raised that a common misperception is that the risks of personal data use affect the individual, however, the benefits impact society at large. As this misperception propagates further, it is reasonable to expect that individuals might feel apprehensive about personal data use and exchange. However, if more is done around communicating the individual and company-specific benefits, public opinion may view personal data use far more favourably.

Balancing the risks to individuals, businesses, and society with the benefits that each of these groups receive was viewed as a key priority. The participants discussed the necessity to have a robust risk management system that does not stifle innovation in the personal data space. A number of potential approaches for doing so were mentioned.

Encouraging the development of new, exciting data visualization tools was one suggestion to connect more effectively with individuals, which is in keeping with the notion that increased engagement of the individual must be a central priority going forward. If individuals had a way of viewing with whom their data has been shared, and for what purpose, the group felt that they would have greater agency in managing their own risk exposure.



Technological innovations were also at the heart of a robust system. Advances in the way that data is anonymized and aggregated have the potential to enhance individual's privacy protections while still allowing researchers, government agencies, businesses, and other stakeholders the flexibility that they need to innovate. A potential system could feature

permissions that are coded into the data and automatically detect the allowability of a forward transfer or use.

Finally, legal tools could be updated by borrowing established conventions from other fields to create stronger legal protections that can be practically implemented.

Broadening the dialogue and moving forward

Overall participants felt that the structure for discussion proposed by the World Economic Forum was the right way to further the conversation. However, there still remain many additional steps that need to be taken in the coming months.

The legal and technological tools need to be further developed and enhanced. In order to develop a policy framework to underpins these, additional socialization and dialogue is necessary. Legal experts, personal data and privacy experts, and policymakers from multiple geographies should all be consulted to ensure that any set of solutions is truly global in nature and can be successfully implemented in practice.

Just as important is the participation of the practitioner community. Businesses, governments, and social organizations that use personal data to innovate and address key challenges are vital in ensuring that new tools and approaches fit the needs of those who will be employing them.

The dialogue is ongoing, and the Rethinking Personal Data project will be hosting a series of meetings leading up to the 2014 World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos-Klosters, Switzerland. The next discussion on a new approach for using personal data will take place at an IIC Policy Discussion in London on 11 October 2013, and with the project Steering Board and Working Groups.

Contact

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Visit www.weforum.org/personaldata

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