

>> Hello and welcome. Thank you for joining today's Digital Impact Virtual Roundtable. Today's roundtable is called, "The Data Culture Project: Building Data Capacity With Confidence." So I'm Catherine D'Ignazio. I'm an Assistant Professor of Civic Media & Data Visualization at Emerson College, and I'm really pleased to moderate the discussion today. So the Digital Impact Virtual Roundtable Series highlights issues related to digital data and civil society. This conversation is part of a larger constellation of activities that Digital Impact and The Digital Civil Society Lab are undertaking to weave together various communities around the globe. So we're going to invite you to learn more about the different initiatives and opportunities available through Digital Impact, The Digital Civil Society Lab, and Stanford PACS. So our primary goal here at Digital Impact is to advance the safe, ethical, and effective use of digital resources for the benefit of civil society. So today we're going to be talking a little bit about the ways to build capacity to work with data. Learning to work with data is like learning a new language: immersing yourself in the culture brings the best results, but trying to build a data culture can be a lonely effort especially in organizations that really haven't recognized the importance of data or organizations that are very small where you're the sole person that knows anything about data. So the data culture project is designed to try to change all of that. So we received funding from a 2016 digital Impact Grant, and the Engagement Lab at Emerson College and the MIT Center for Civic Media joined forces with more than 30 organizations to develop a resource that would demystify data literacy. So the result that we're going to be talking about today is a hands-on, self-service curriculum that empowers professionals at all levels to ask questions, gather and analyse data, tell stories, and experiment with different audiences. So over the next hour our panel will highlight concrete ways to build a data culture, the motivations behind them, and how they're working together with various partner organizations, and how those partner organizations have implemented this project, and how it's working for them so far. So before we start the conversation, we want to share just a couple of housekeeping details. So for everyone but the panelists that you'll see, your microphones are going to be muted for the length of the discussion. We do want to hear from you, and in fact we're going to be actually asking you to build something. You're going to actually be doing a quick, little activity. So the way to then ask a question is not to speak because you're on mute but it's to use the question function on your control panel to submit your questions or comments, and then I'll pass them along to the panelists. And today's recorded discussion will be shared on the Digital Impact podcast on iTunes – so you can share it out with your friends or your organization leader – and at digitalimpact.org. So please stay connected on social media. Subscribe to our mailing list for updates. And remember these conversations are driven by and for the community so if you have a topic you'd like to explore, you can email us at hello@digitalimpact.org and suggest something. Now, I'm super pleased to introduce our panel today. So today we're joined by Rahul Bhargava. He is a Research Scientist at the MIT Center for Civic Media and the codeveloper, along with myself, of The Data Culture Project. Maryna Taran, the Data and Digital Collaboration Product Manager

at the World Food Programme. And then Andrés Felipe Vera Ramírez, the Strategic Director at El Radioperiódico Clarín in Colombia. So thanks to each of you for joining us today and let's just get started.

>> OK. I think that means we're handing off to me? [Laughter] I have a little bit of a cold. Sorry. So forgive me if I cough or stuff like that. We're in Boston and we're still fighting the last bits of winter. So that's coming through in my voice a little bit. But you should all be seeing a couple of slides. I want to give you a little bit of background about the idea of building data capacity with confidence and our approach to that and how, actually, all of us on the panel met. So it's a bit of our backstory. So the first thing I want to talk about is thinking about data as an asset. Now, you usually hear about data to help you improve your operations. That's efforts to try to figure out how to streamline some operation or make some process more efficient. That's one way to think about data as an asset. The second way – in the middle there – which has gotten more popular lately has been spreading the message. So these are things like infographics to get your word out if you're a nonprofit like a lot of the organizations we work with, trying to talk about your impacts and your outcomes by using data to help tell a story. The last piece – which, actually, a lot of our work focuses on – is using data to bring people together. And we have this lovely phrase we learned from a colleague as he visited the White House [murmur of agreement] years ago, right? The idea of data as a campfire to bring people around. And the last bit, which I don't actually write here, which is important to remember is that data as an asset can also be a toxic asset. So remembering that you need strategies both for architectures or tension and all that stuff. But we're going to focus in today on thinking about building capacity to work with data at an organizational level. And we've been doing workshops for about 10 years working with organizations small and large, and just trying to learn about how these organizations start to build data literacy, and see a lot of spreadsheet trainings and things like that. And then run into a bunch of these barriers. Do you want to take over, Catherine? Talk a little bit about that?

>> Sure. So you can see some of the barriers here on your screen. And in general a lot of people think, like, oh data culture – we need to train everyone to be highly technical. But in fact, you know, that's a kind of erroneous way of thinking that leads you down this path of you're using a lot of technical jargon and thinking like, oh, we need to make sure that, you know, sort of IT owns this or so on and so forth. We need a lot of expertise. If people are going to be doing things with data that are creative, they need to have a lot of expertise in order to be able to do that. So these are some of the barriers that we've found along with some more, you might say, psychological barriers, and a sense of, like, when organizations then go in to doing trainings that are IT-focused or technically focused. Those end up being really boring because they don't seem relevant to people. They don't connect to the everyday work that people are doing, and they don't allow people to come together and creatively brainstorm ways to use data productively. And often some other constraints can be things

like budgets. Of course, almost every organization is constrained by budgets in some ways. And so in some of The Data Culture Project we talk about how you don't necessarily need a huge budget to have a data culture. Right? So we can change our perspectives and do things sometimes on a shoestring rather than needing to invest millions of dollars in a giant IT architecture. And then finally, one of the benefits of having a data culture is that you can work against these organizations silos. So often it's like the data is situated in one place – whether that's monitoring and evaluation or whether that's IT – and the data folks aren't talking to the folks in, say, marketing and communications who could be really leveraging a lot of that data that you're collecting for engagement or community building or running programs or something like that. So these are some of the barriers to establishing a data culture but I guess in our approach is, like, through the simple acts of bringing people together around a set of shared and fun activities. These are ways to start to bridge this barriers until you get your millions and millions of dollars for your perfect architecture –

[Laughing]

So the way that we've framed this in the past, you know, a lot of companies think, a lot of organizations think, we need data scientists. We need a data scientist team. We need these expert statisticians. In fact, a lot of times what you really don't need – a lot of times you have the folks that you need already at the table. They have the expertise they need. Really you need to change the culture and show people why data relates to their jobs already. OK. So what is a data culture? That's what is probably on people's minds. That's the central focus here. So really four things, the way that we define it. So the first is that leadership. It really needs to flow from above in order to be successful. So leadership prioritizes and invests in data collection, management, and analysis. Leadership prioritizes creative data literacy, and that's really the approach that we take, but for the whole organization, not just for IT and Evaluation. It's really about how do we get the whole organization thinking creatively about how to combine data for new sources of insight for everybody's work? And that staff are encouraged and supported to access, combine, and derive insight from the organization's data. And staff recognize data when they see it. And this is actually – it sounds super basic, but this is really key is that a lot of time when we talk with nonprofit organizations they're like, oh, we just have no resources to collect data. But then when we probe a little bit further, like, they're, they have emails, they have case reports, they have surveys, they have all this qualitative information. A lot of times you already have the data that you need. It's not that you need to go out and collect a bunch more data. So a data culture is when staff can see the data that they have on hand and recognize and offer creative ways to do future things with it to produce new knowledge and insights with it.

>> So I'll take over there, again, and talk about – just get to the concrete point of what we're talking about here. So what we want to talk about is a creative approach that is arts-based to involve the whole organization in building a data

culture. And that's really what The Data Culture Project focuses on. So we argue that if you want to build capacity across the organization, you can't just do those IT-based freshy trainings. You need to figure out new ways to do things, whether it's from sketching data stories with simple data sets on big pieces of paper and fat markers and crayons to building a data sculpture out of simple craft materials as we're all going to do in about five minutes. Or practicing actually making arguments with data, like the creative exercise of coming up with an argument that's data-centered and data-informed. And these are all examples of activities that we have available for you all to work on, and we're going to do one of them in about – in a couple of minutes we're going to practice that. But they all sit on this sort of pipeline. And people draw working with data in a bunch of different ways. They all sit on this pipeline of going from asking questions to finding a story to telling a story. And what we argue is that, look, at each point on this pipeline you can have some way to engage people to bring people together around data, as we talked about earlier, to engage them to do something fun and to do something creative that actually invites them to work on the muscle of working with data. And part of the problem we see is that sort of the technologies and the processes have been too pulled together. And we want to pull those apart. And the evidence base we're trying to build is that the muscle you work in these creative activities transfers right over to the technologies once you've learned those. So we had, for a couple years, packaged that up as a toolkit [murmur of acknowledgment] that we call databasic.io. It's a series of technologies but really the activities that use the technologies. These are free and online and available all on our databasic.io website. And they're available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese right now. And they also have culturally-localized sample data. And they work on a couple different skillsets. But each of them is a sort of playful, fun invitation, as even the name of them. You know, like "WTFCSV" which talks about how confused you are when you open up a spreadsheet for the first time and don't really know what to do. [Murmur of agreement] They don't know what to do. [Murmur of agreement] They try to be fun and engaging invitations that can help people get involved in ways that aren't so much about the technology. So The Data Culture Project sprang from the organizations that were using those tools saying, "hey, wait, we need to work on culture, not just these skills." So over the last couple of months we've been working with organizations and partners like Maryna and Andrés to talk about how they could do something more creative. And we figured out a way to pilot that with the organizations that ran these as brown bag lunches. And they're going to speak more in a – after we do a short activity, Maryna and Andrés will speak a little bit more about how they engaged that into their existing data efforts, some of which were very technical. That's – we iterated on that. All of our work is designed with partners so it's not so like we've built some kind of technology or activity and then pushed it out somewhere. We are both educators and have backgrounds in the arts and technology so we built these with these partners and iterated on them to improve them and test them out and launched that out. And so we'll point to this at the end and also point to a mailing list of people that are trying to work on this in creative ways. This

includes activity guides, facilitation videos, things like that that try to help you figure out what works for your organization. One of the things we learned was just it's definitely not a one-size-fits-all sort of thing and say, "here's how we do it; figure out how it works in your organization." But that – we find that that can be a little bit hard to understand. People did it and they had great outcomes. Here's some quotes about what happened. We found that people found these activities to be more accessible. They were able to turn it into action because they felt it was relevant. We worked on that mindset problem. Like, some of the barriers that happen when you think about changing a culture, not learning a technology. These are two very different things. [Murmur of acknowledgment] And so we had some nice results. But it's kind of hard to understand what that means without actually doing it.

>> Yep.

>> So while I introduce us, I want you to be looking around your desk or wherever you are for anything that you have that's interesting or creative whether it be sticky notes. I have a little dinosaur head here. Or my phone or like little paper – I have little clips. Look for stuff like this around your desk. OK? [Laughing] Catherine's trying to get a large plant over there [laughing]. Stuff that's on your desk that you'll be able to use in a minute, like a dead leaf [laughing]. You're not watering it enough. [Laughter] And we're going to do the same. So we want you to do the data sculpture challenge. And this is one of our activities and we're going to do an experiment here and see how it goes. So we want you to look around your desk and find any craft materials and I'm going to show you some fun data. And in a minute I'm going to ask you to try to find a super simple story in that data and build something that represents the story with the stuff you have. And I don't want you to, like, you know, rip up your sticky notes and make a bar chart out of sticky notes. You're more creative than that.

>> No bar charts.

>> No bar charts. So here's some fun data about how much ice cream people in the United States eat. [Laughter] So ice cream, a topic that we can all relate to, hopefully. And what I want you to do is look at this data really quick and try to find a story, either in one set or the other. On the left you should see a chart that shows how much the average person ate of ice cream each year since 1918. This is some great data.

>> Oh! 1946!

>> Yeah.

>> People were eating a lot of ice cream in 1946.

>> So maybe that's a story you want to tell visually somehow. And then on the righthand side you see from a sample survey about people's favorite ice cream, like flavors. Again, in the US. And if you want to download the actually zoomed-in version you can go to the url listed there, bit.ly-yummydata. What

I want you to do is build something quickly while we talk. And then post it to Twitter with the hashtag #datasculpture. If you have a Twitter account, that would be great. Otherwise you can post – if you can get it online on Instagram or something, you can paste the url of it in the questions. Then we can pull that up. And then we’re going to look at some of these afterwards. So we’re going to chat for about five minutes while hopefully you’re building something that is some kind of story from what you see here. And I think Andrés and Maryna are also going to try to build something with the materials they have. And be creative. Again, when I do this with students I tell them they fail if they make a bar chart out of pipe cleaners.

>> Yeah [laughing].

>> That’s my line I tell them [laughing], so –

>> And remember that you don’t have to represent all the data. Right? There’s actually, like, a lot of different stories you could tell here. So it might be that you represent one data point, like the – I mean, the one I’m interested in is this, like, thing that we all ate 5.1 gallons of ice cream in 1946 [laughing].

>> Well, so let’s dig into that, right? So this is real interesting and this is the conversation that happens is, “what was going on in the US in 1946?”

>> Post-World War II.

>> Right. World War II just ended.

>> Yeah.

>> So maybe people are really, really excited –

>> Yeah.

>> And decide they need to eat, like, ice cream to celebrate.

>> Like, we are going to eat ice cream and have babies.

>> Yeah!

>> All of a sudden.

[Laughter]

>> So maybe that’s a story that you could try to tell in some way with, like, a little [inaudible]. And what’s the favorite flavor? Chocolate?

>> Chocolate. Yeah.

>> So maybe, like, this is – if you want to hold that up – that’s how chocolate ice cream is going. And then I’ve got my little people and they’re all eating.

>> And this could be an animation.

>> And this is like a little animation – yeah. [Laughter] So the point of an activity like this is is that it changes your relationship to the data. Right? Like,

having this stuff around is a material, like stuff that is much more familiar to people than, like, this. You know? This is scary. The computer is scary and intimidating to a lot of people.

>> Yeah. Spreadsheets are scary. Or, spreadsheets are unfriendly, I guess. They're not welcoming for newcomers.

>> Yeah. Yeah. And I'm a super dork and even I don't like spreadsheets that much [laughing]. So and then the other great thing about this is it's very easy to do. You can make a simple handout like this with your own data and then if people make – and we have some organizations that have done this activity at their lobby. You know? And then people take the stuff back to their desk. And then they show it to other people.

>> Yeah.

>> And then suddenly there's a conversation about it.

>> Yeah.

>> Right? So it brings – literally, again, it brings people together around data in a very different way. So that's an example of what we mean by creative approaches –

>> Yeah.

>> To building a data culture.

>> Yeah. Again, that campfire thing. So, it, you know, if you – I recently gave a presentation that talked about the campfire as a technology but it's a technology of gathering, of how do you bring people together around something? And so that's what, you know, even when they're very modest like a little ice cream eating dinosaur here, they become these objects of conversation. They become sort of these novel things that you take and pass along within the organization, things to tell each other and talk about and shared experiences.

>> So again, while you're building, once you've got something that's super simple and built, do take a picture of it and see if you can post it to Twitter and maybe we'll be able to show some of them.

>> That would be great.

>> Again, it's kind of an experiment. We both struggle with webinars because we can't see all of you. Or even online conversations like this – like, so we're trying to make it something that's a bit more interesting than, like, a sit back and watch TV. And then right after this we'll get to a conversation about how this stuff happens in an organization. But we do feel like it's hard to understand it without doing it.

>> Without actually doing it.

>> Yeah.

>> See we're at – we have, like, two more minutes.

>> OK. So Maryna and Andrés, do you want to talk a little bit about what you're building?

>> So, I'm – I think I'm done for the time being. So I've made two ice cream cones. [Laughter] And I think I kind of plagiarized Rahul's idea of the little men. [Laughter] So one is the very big ice cream cone of 1946 and then there's a smaller, basically half of it is the 2013 consumption of ice cream. And here we have no idea what the favorite flavors are, so hence the question mark on the top of the cone. Whereas here we know kind of that between chocolate and cookies and creme that's probably a third of all the ice cream being eaten.

>> Right?!

>> That's great. So already we see one example, like a comparison story, right? Comparing two different sets of data. And you're also trying to merge these two data sets and you're discovering the fact that we need to go get more data because we know that the favorite flavor so it's one snapshot in time in 2014. So we can't back-project that. So you've already illuminated, like, something about the data we don't have and how we can't answer a question and tell a story with that. So then that was, like, three minutes. Right?

>> Yeah.

>> So you can get to complicated questions about telling data stories very quickly with simple craft materials. Andrés, do you want to talk us through what you're making over there?

>> I actually am doing more drawing than using all the materials because I was very engaged by your story of this as a timeline because –

>> Ah!

>> Before the work, I did some drawings of this work but with a big rainbow that ends with ice cream in 1946. And as a timeline it goes, but at the end I have less ice cream than what I had in 1946 to make this kind of comparison.

>> Awesome.

>> Cool. So again, a change over time story is definitely a good one, a fun one that you can tell. I'm going to try and switch here and see if we have any tweets. Let me just reload. I have a – so what you're seeing now, hopefully, is a page of search results for the hashtag #datasculpture on Twitter. And let's see what people did. Oh cool! OK, great. [Laughter] So, we have from Renaldo Vargas a bar chart [laughing] – it's not a bar chart. Oh, it's a rainbow. Oh, interesting. [Laughing] So you used your own data.

>> That's great.

>> Cool! Nice. I like that. And having the things themselves represent the data is a nice example. So here we have – oh, OK. So this is just, like, a giant ice cream cone, perhaps, that [inaudible] is working on.

>> Yeah. I like the – yeah, like the main point being the lead story is US eats a lot of ice cream [laughing], so much that it’s overflowing the cone and spilling out over the desk [laughing].

>> Totally.

>> Really good data sculpture.

>> Right. So heart-centered design. That’s cool. I don’t quite get that one. It probably needed more than a tweet-length explanation.

>> Yeah.

>> So cool! So we see a couple of examples. And I think one of the things here is that the material – oh, great. OK, another one.

>> From Bart Sullivan, a data sculpture put together to show a data timeline of ice cream consumption in the USA. So the timeline –

>> Oh, OK. So it’s actually the line chart.

>> OK.

>> And then you’re actually – I love the magnifying glass actually zooming in on one.

>> Ah, nice.

>> Oh yeah [laughing], this has one too.

>> [Laughing] Nice!

>> It’s like, it’s a wonderful – like, when you’re in the physical space you can do these things that are –

>> Yeah!

>> Physical, not jokes but like tricks of the story. And trying to – even though you broke the rules a little bit in making a line chart, you augmented it.

>> A very creative way to direct our attention with the magnifying glass, right? Like, so, on a kind of 2D graph that would often just be, like, a call-out, like an arrow or something. But I love the magnifying glass going, like, “hey, look right here!”

>> OK. So maybe we should get to a conversation.

>> Yep.

>> And keep an eye on that. I think maybe we’ll come back and show some more. But those are great examples within the space of sort of how you can start to build this stuff.

>> Yes.

>> So let me go back to our presentation.

>> Yep.

>> And – OK, great. So there's a quick example of what we mean by sort of how you can have creative approaches to work out a data culture organization. The next thing I wanted to do was hand it off to Catherine to start a little conversation with Maryna and Andrés about how this works in their organizations. And then maybe how they thought about integrating data culture project and our approach into that.

>> That's great. And can you fast forward one slide? So we have their names up.

>> Yes. I'm sorry.

>> There we go. So yeah. So maybe I'll start it and maybe both of you could just take a moment to describe some of the challenges in your organizations. So, like, what – maybe we'll start with Maryna. What are some of the challenges that you all have faced at World Food Programme and sort of how did you come to the recognition that you might want something like a data culture in your organization?

>> Great. Thanks, Catherine. So for us, I think looking back at your definition, I think we definitely have the first two parts of the definition going well for us. We have a very supportive leadership team that is very much interested in promoting creative use of data. Being the largest humanitarian organization, we really struggle, though, at making data sort of everybody's business. We're very traditional in our approach and we have what Rahul described as pockets of data. So traditionally data for us, it's either with the monitoring and evaluation or vulnerability assessment mapping or IT whereas now we're really trying to make data part of everyone's job and that's where we have struggled a little bit with building the culture and making data less intimidating. Also, we tend to collect a lot of data and quite a bit of it is labeled as interesting but not necessarily action-oriented. People still don't know always how to make that leap from, OK, this is great data we've collected to, like, this is a concrete decision we can make based on that. [Murmurs of acknowledgment] So with some of the activities that you guys have helped us put together, we tried to make data less intimidating. And we tried to ask people to put their computers down – and it's a very strange message especially coming from IT – and actually engage with the arts and crafts materials in understanding some of the basic components that go into making data not just interesting but impactful and leading to decision-making. So some of the things we talked about quite a bit when we were doing these activities is, well how do you use color when you're building visualizations? And these are all things that they can then go back and apply whenever they're doing Tableau visualizations or something fancy with technology afterwards. But the first steps they really do need to make away, maybe, from their laptops. Or we also talked a lot about audiences and how to select the right piece of data for a specific audience because our management team is very used to getting a lot of very standard dashboards that just have a

bunch of data thrown at them without any concrete piece that, you know, kind of stands out and says this is the action you should be really looking at.

>> That's great. Thank you. Yeah, if we didn't say it before, The Data Culture Project tries to work at all stages of that data pipeline that we showed earlier. So from that phase of where you're even thinking about like, what data should we be collecting, through to the stage where you're communicating your data and thinking more, like, along the lines of the data sculpture activity. Like, how do we communicate this in a way that will be accessible and, you know, digestible and engaging for the people on the other end of it? And then in the middle where you're saying, what is the analysis and the insight? How do we make decisions with this data? And so there's fun to be had at all those stages [Laughter] even though you might not think about it as being fun. So Andrés, maybe I'll turn to you and maybe you can tell us a little bit about El Radioperiódico Clarín because I know it's quite different in size from the World Food Programme – it's a very large international global organization. Maybe tell us a little bit about El Radioperiódico Clarín and your mission and what are some of the challenges that you all have faced in regards to data culture?

>> Actually it's very, very different because our constraint is not size in terms of being huge but being very, very few. Well, we are just three people and one of them is my father who is the director and he has been a journalist for almost 50 years but everything I have learned it's because I have been with him. So I know what data can be just by thinking on how context matters to it because I have had the experience of elders around me. So in this context everything I have done is trying to create that level of environment where people have access to all sorts of resources but this has changed dramatically today. This program, El Radioperiódico Clarín, will be 50 years old this year.

>> Ooh.

>> But I used to be the Informing Economic Editor of somehow big newspaper, local newspaper. And there I had a team of six people and the whole newspaper was over 60 or 100 people. So basically what I did for this part of the data culture project was learning the materials but thinking as a system, including the whole city, and embracing our limitations, our constraints, and including others. So basically we had the silos in our organizations but also we had the silos in the system. So basically we included people and organizations because we don't have technical skills in our organizations. But they might have systems engineers but they have them by fixing computers. They don't know they can use the [inaudible]. Maybe [inaudible] but they include them in the activities. So they realized they had hidden potential in the activities. And because of that I included them also in our program and I included more many organizations. I included some that had experts that wasn't aware of working with journalists. And I used the activities of The Data Culture Project as a charity. For instance, I did the activity of asking questions with different groups, some groups of journalists, some groups more technical, and also I did the word count. And I did the word count with the questions to see what kind of questions they

were asking and what can I measure and can't I measure. So I realized that there's a potential in mixing these works that happen separate, and one way of connecting these separate works is through questions which is the starting point of The Data Culture Project.

>> That's a great point and this came up often. So we piloted with 30 organizations, two of whom are represented here, and one just persistent theme throughout that pilot was that all of the organizations took the activities that The Data Culture Project offered and really tailored them to work within their organizations. That's something that we encourage is to take the simple activities and the videos which go along with each activity and then to remix them, to use data sets, to use information that's relevant to your organization as a way, again, of engaging people and having people care about something that they know already. Like, we try to do that in sample data in the activity. So in the activity in The Data Culture Project called "Asking Questions" we try to use fun sample data like a spreadsheet of UFO sightings or spreadsheet of all the dogs in New York – which it's very fun to explore all the dogs in New York [laughing]. But we encourage folks to then tailor that. Like, if you, if the organization is like, "we don't need to analyse dog data. That's not useful for us," which I would understand. Then a lot of what the organizations were doing was taking those things and saying, "oh, OK, actually we're going to do this asking questions activity but we're going to use our monitoring and evaluation data. We're going to use things that we've collected from the field." So I guess that would be one next question. Maryna, how did the World Food Programme, how did you all modify or try to tweak the activities in order to make them relevant? Maybe if you could give us an example and why that your audience ended up and within the organization really responded to.

>> Sure. So we actually tried to stick with the sample data because whenever we try to move away with it in the past when we would be doing different types of activities or trainings, people really focused too much on it. They usually are subject matter experts and they would be like, "oh, that's interesting. I was there in that year." And then they would really go deep into the stories they had behind the data without focusing on the activity. So the way we tried to tie it into examples that would be relevant for them is we would usually have a discussion after the activity on how we can apply it within our own context. For example, when we were doing the sketch activity, we talked a little bit about the use again of colors and of symbols and then we had a few of the people that were in the room actually pull up visualizations that they worked on before where they figured out that after the activity that maybe they actually should have paid more attention to these sort of nuances and details. And looking also at using texts as data – so we had a discussion. Like, do we ourselves have some datasets where we're not really looking at a lot of the text analysis that we could be doing with the tools. For example, we have beneficiary help desk data in one of the countries and they categorize the requests and follow up on, you know, what actions were done on these requests but they don't do full-text summary analysis of that. And that was something that the team thought that they now

felt empowered to do, to do more visual analysis of this full text afterwards.

>> If I jump in there – that’s actually a great example about when you think about building a culture you end up in places like that. Like building a practice and a muscle for talking about how we tell stories with data. You know? A tool doesn’t help you do that, like Excel or something. But looking at building a space where people can say, “oh, I made this thing.” Do you walk away with the right story? How am I telling the story? Or even, hey, look at this cool visualization I saw? And I like how they tell the story. Let’s pick it apart to try to understand how they’re doing that. And that’s actually an activity we’re going to be adding in to The Data Culture Project that we’ve been doing for quite a while and we call it “Collective Critique,” where you look at a visualization and you try to pick it apart to understand what the pieces are. And then that helps you actually build a language for talking about how to tell a data story well.

[Murmur of Agreement]

>> Yeah. And Andrés, what do you think have been some of the benefits for your organization in terms of these activities? Do you feel like you’ve seen some change in the way that people talk about data or the way that people use data in your organization? Have people reflected on that with you?

>> One thing I would like to say before is that according to what Maryna said, I’m very surprised that what they do in such a big organization is very similar to what we did in our organization which is very small. We were very surprised about text as data because we as journalists always use text. But we are afraid of data or numbers. We avoid complexity constantly. So we get text constantly and we get numbers and words. So because of that, I get very engaged by Maryna’s answer. And also we use the activities just as they were suggested. And what has happened is that once we finish the activity, I just received a call like one month ago telling me, “you know what? We want to do more data journalism because we think this is the future and we can open up to a new agenda.” So what we had was igniting a flame of curiosity about data and about, well, trying new things. So, this happened in the staff but the people who called me were the executives telling me, “you know what? We will establish a team and we will connect with our media organizations.” So I think what is more powerful is that it ignites creativity and curiosity within the organization, especially because in Colombia we are in very step zero of data culture. So I am taking these activities and I am sharing these activities also to the public sector because the government in Colombia still uses paper so we have a lot of paper but it’s hard to manage it. So I’m sharing it. You know what? Let’s start with the basics. Let’s start with the data collection and let’s think on data as an asset as you suggested at the beginning.

>> That’s a great point. I think one of the other things we want to talk about is just introducing the idea that data can be useful to help you make decisions. And that first example I gave about, like you know, improving operations. This

is a nicer way, a friendlier way – so when I started doing these workshops 10 years ago, and I still run into this now, people are intimidated by that technology.

>> Yep.

>> And then they associate data with technology. And it doesn't need to be. Like, what we like to talk about is working with data is mostly about counting. And like, we're all pretty good at counting. So just because you're not good at the computer doesn't mean you can't use that data. And a lot of our work is just helping people realize that that data can be useful for something about your job. It's not about evaluating how you're doing. It's about helping you do your work better. And that invitation to sort of play with it in a creative way helps them get to that spot. And I like to talk about the way one of my mentors, Edith Ackerman, talks about this is saying that when you're playing, when you're tinkering, when you're working with sort of fun materials or doing playful things, you're much more likely to try out ideas that are otherwise risky. Right? So when I'm playing with these materials, I'm going to try something that I wouldn't try when I'm playing with the computer as a material because I feel more comfortable with them. And I think that's a really powerful insight that we try to carry through a lot of our work that reflects what you're talking about, Andrés. It's about, like, helping people change their mindset to say, "oh, this is something I can do and it's something that I can do correctly and well." And sure, I'm not talking about, like, making causal correlation inferences. I'm talking about – but there's a lot of space between counting and that. And we can invite people to work in that space by having something playful.

>> Yeah, exactly. And I think it's not necessarily about only – yeah, like we said, it's not that you'd need a data scientist or a statistician but it's not that you don't need those people either [laughing], right?

>> Right. Yeah, yeah.

>> It's about recognizing the times when you do. So when you need to make a causal statement or do inferential statistics, then you know, if you've been, if you're in a data culture, you'll recognize, OK, this is the extent of my abilities. Like, I can do some counting. I can do some descriptive statistics. I can have some creative ways we can combine some email marketing data with this other data to make a cool engagement diagram, but for the, like, causal analysis I'm going to go to the data scientist [laughing], right? So it's recognizing what is within your purview and what's outside of your purview. But actually there's still a lot within your purview for the majority of folks in the organization. So I don't know [inaudible] –

>> We can keep talking about it. Now is a good time if folks have –

>> Yeah.

>> Questions about sort of creative approaches to building a data culture or how that works within your organization or how it worked for – we have what's sort of a newspaper journalism organization here and a nonprofit international

aid organization here. And please feel free to ask that in the questions but failing that we'll keep chatting [laughing]. So I think that one of the things I want to think about is if you've – maybe I'll ask Maryna this. In the workshops did you sense that sort of adding in – because I know you're doing, you have this Tableau rollout. I know you're doing a lot of more traditional technology trainings. Did you get a sense from the participants in your work as you roll this out in neutral offices that these activities were a different type of invitation that led to a different outcome?

>> Yeah. So actually we try and incorporate all of them during these sort of workshops and we break up the really technical training with these types of activities. And I think it was a bit different in getting people to step away from thinking that all they need is a dashboard or a KPI or something that's going to look exactly like what they're used to seeing as data, and getting them more to think about what am I trying to achieve and what story am I really trying to tell with these numbers? So even coming – for IT, I think, this was a very good experience for us because we're very used to people coming to us and saying, “well, build this dashboard and this is, you know, the pie chart that has to be in the middle.” Whereas now people are starting to engage with us in a discussion: OK, what I'm trying to really convey or let's see what the data can tell us before actually, like, they come with a list of requirements that have to be done. So I think it was very different in getting a mindset change, I think.

>> So we have a nice question here from Cory Newhouse. Cory says, “what strategies have you used to shift the conversation in your organizations from this frame of ‘data is for the funders’ so it's just to prove your value to the funders versus ‘data is for us’?” And I know from working with nonprofits that often nonprofits feel stifled by data because, like, they're like, “oh my gosh, we have to collect data and it's all just to prove to” – like it's like an ownerless task. It's a compliance task or it's just for, like, the funder needs, that it's not actually important for us. So I don't know, either Andrés or Maryna, if you all have thoughts about that? Like, sort of how do you get enough buy-in of, like, the data is actually is for us. It's not just a matter of, like, compliance with the people upstairs?

>> So I think actually one of the activities was very useful for this. Convince Me – it was one of the activities that you guys have. And when we played it out as a group we had people take on very different roles. We had people who played the role of a donor and they have a very different need for the type of data they want to receive. Whereas we had somebody sort of playing out a very, very completely role of – for us it was, I think, a farmer or something like that. And then we went ahead and did a similar exercise like I said before, always applying it to the data that we have in the organization. And what also works very well is if you have a mixed group of participants in each of the activities where you can somebody. For us it would be from logistics and then from donor relations and from maybe operations. And they all bring different perspectives to how data can then be useful within their role. And it's very helpful if you

can have that conversation. Well, what data are you guys sitting on? What are the numbers that you have? And what are the questions that you're struggling to answer? And maybe we can match those up.

>> Yeah. I think I'll echo that. A lot of what we see is usually, like, data being extracted from some group of people, being analysed, and then maybe being presented back to them. So what we try to flip – with our work, we try to flip that around and put the people that the data is actually collecting the data or it's about in charge of analysing it to sort of figure out outcomes for what they want. And that is a really great way to sort of help them realize, “oh, I wish we had this data too because that would help me do my job better.”

>> What you included in the presentation about bringing people together through data is very, very powerful. Actually it's the key component of everything I have been trying to do in the city: connecting systems, connecting organizations with data. And one thing that – I have a feeling that Rahul, was talking about the mentor of lifelong kindergarten which was my approach to everything that we do in here. Thinking on this as a play. Thinking of what we want to do but playing. Enjoy the ride. Enjoy the process of all this learning journey and not suffer this journey because it will be very, very painful for you if you are taking extra jobs to learn something that you don't know how to use it. So I am using this approach of thinking and playing but also making the purpose of what you want to achieve at the core of everything we do. And this can be as simple as a special report of a journalist that can be much meaningful with some data or it can be an inside support of a news organization of what we are doing as maybe in times that are troubling as the times of media nowadays. So I am moving all [inaudible] simply in this range but always enjoying the ride.

>> That's great. Do you want to move through a couple more questions?

>> Yeah! So I think one we can move through kind of quickly – so from Angel Consino, “what tools do you recommend for creating data visualization graphics that are simple to use?” So I'll throw out a couple of tools that are simple to use but, like, just before I do that, just to reiterate that a data culture approach would be about thinking about how do you use those together or use those tools to bring people together in conversation with each other? So if you want some simple, quick tools, some good ones that come to my mind – maybe you all have other ones – are Data Wrapper is a quick, free, online tool. A lot of journalists are using that to create bar charts and pie charts and all sorts of graphics. Google Charts is increasingly doing really nice graphics. They even have a nice “Show Me” function that will based on your data recommend different kinds of charts to show you. Any other quick ones that come to your all's minds?

>> Yeah, I mean, with my classes I actually use Tableau. You can do a lot for free and it has a little bit of learning curve but –

>> Tableau is public?

>> Yeah.

>> Yeah, Tableau is public. Yeah.

>> Yeah.

>> But you can do quite a bit with that. I mean, the problem for us when we think about that is that the, like, the list gets longer and longer all the time.

>> There's a lot of tools [laughing].

>> And they go up and down. Like, the websites are there and then they stop working. So it's actually really hard to sort of suggest ones that, like – the handful you said have been around for a little while. But when you see – I often say – like, when you see some cool, new thing, make sure you understand what it's for and try to figure out how long it might be around for. Because otherwise you just get burned on using something and then it disappears.

>> Yeah. And that's why too, like, our approach tried to take a – like, we, obviously we teach tools and are in classes and things like this. It's important to know the tools like this. But it's a non-tool-centric approach. Like, The Data Culture Project is really not about learning a particular tool like an Excel or a Tableau or something like that. And it's not because we don't think tools are valuable but it's because if you have a data mindset and if you have a sense of, like, what you want, like how to design a nice project with data, how to do creative things with data with other people, then you can port that mindset from tool to tool as these new tools come out and they go away. So you can bring that along and it will be much faster to learn the tools in the process. So maybe we have time for –

>> Oh, I like this one, actually. Can I respond to this one?

>> Go for it. Yeah.

>> So, Lisa Quester is asking about – oh, sorry, no. Gaia Marcus is asking about working with frontline workers. So doing this work with people with low data or digital literacy or who are just putting stuff in forms. So I care a lot about that. And that's why I've done things like the data murals. So an example is we stitched together these activities and I've done things like do workshops with Head Start which is early childhood education in the US. And it's a public program that primarily serves, like, people of low socioeconomic status. And so I've got people like government funders, staff that work with parents, and parents that have very low data or digital literacy in a room together to do a series of these activities to – in that example we looked at data about childhood obesity and healthy patterns in the US. And they found a story all together and then we designed a visual to tell that story and then they painted it in the lobby of that department. And that's on – if you visit datamurals.org, that's an example of a data-informed story that was produced by a combination of people that were very sort of people that didn't have much data literacy and some people that had higher working together. So I care about that a lot and I think a lot of these invitations are things that when you get off the screen you find ways where you can be creative, whether it be with sort of craft materials

or local materials. And there's a couple other examples I have that I can share later but I like that question because I care about it a lot.

>> Yeah. Also, I think maybe what I'll do is I'll ask Maryna and Andrés to just give us any kind of closing statement because we're reaching a little bit the end of this webinar. So maybe any final reflections that you might have to share on The Data Culture Project and any impacts that it's had on your organization. Maybe first to Andrés.

>> OK. What I would say as a closing statement is that everything I have done so far has been because I have embraced my limitations and this has been the starting point of everything I have been able to accomplish because I know that I don't have much resources. I don't have much income. I don't have much of this. I have been trying to learn and learn in different countries. So this was the starting point of all of this. And that would be my suggestion for everyone. For thinking in a data culture, embrace your limitations but do not think that this is your limits. Move forward. Move forward and connect with different people. Connect with different things. If the organization ends, move to a different organization. If the organization ends and if the country ends, move to a different country.

[Laughter]

We have this opportunity nowadays. So basically this is an opportunity and I think this is the starting point of something beautiful.

>> [Laughing] Thank you. Maryna?

>> Yeah. I would definitely recommend The Data Culture Project to other organizations. I think for us it was a very good starting point to begin dialogue around data culture and to really bring very diverse stakeholders around the table and start talking about data beyond the tools really and to have a cross-functional conversation which is not something we have happen very frequently in very large organizations. So I – actually I'm planning on continuing to run a lot of these activities whenever I visit country offices or other regional bureaus. And I have to say that almost every time we ran the activities there was a very different conversation that took place depending on the stakeholders sitting around the table. So I don't think it ever gets old.

[Light Laughter]

>> Excellent. Well, thank you so much. So this – basically this wraps up our time for today and many thanks to Andrés, Maryna, us [laughter]. And thanks to all of you, the attendees for joining us. For those of you who made data sculptures, we really appreciate those and we're going to go enjoy those on Twitter after this. So if you missed any part of this conversation or if you want to share it out with your colleagues, we'll be releasing it through digitalimpact.org and the Digital Impact podcast on iTunes. And if you'd like to learn more about how Rahul and the MIT Center for Civic Media and myself and the Engagement Lab innovate together with communities, you can visit our

websites. So the MIT Center for Civic Media is civic.mit.edu and the Engagement Lab website at Emerson College is elab.emerson.edu. If you want to see how Maryna and the World Food Programme are fighting hunger worldwide, please visit wfp.org. And for a closer look at Andrés's work with El Radioperiódico Clarín, visit radioclarin.co. So be sure to stop by digitalimpact.org for tips on how to advance the safe, ethical, and effective use of data. Please join us for more virtual roundtables in the coming months. And again, if there's a topic about data, civil society that you'd like to explore, please send us an email at hello@digitalimpact.org. And once again, I'm Catherine D'Ignazio of Emerson College. Thank you so much for joining us on this Virtual Roundtable and goodbye.

>> Bye!