

The Data Ethics Canvas is a tool for anyone who collects, shares or uses data. It helps identify and manage ethical issues – at the start of a project using data, and throughout. It gives a framework to develop ethical guidance that suits any context.

What is the Data Ethics Canvas?

The Data Ethics Canvas is a tool for anyone who collects, shares or uses data.

It helps identify and manage ethical issues – at the start of a project that uses data, and throughout.

It encourages you to ask important questions about projects that use data, and reflect on the responses. These might be:

- > What is your primary purpose for using data in this project?
- > Who could be negatively affected by this project?

The Data Ethics Canvas provides a framework to develop ethical guidance that suits any context, whatever the project's size or scope.

Original source

The Data Ethics Canvas is based on the Ethics Canvas, a higher-level framework for assessing the ethical implications of any project, developed by the ADAPT Centre for Digital Content Technology. The ADAPT Centre's Ethics Canvas is itself based on the original Business Model Canvas by Alex Osterwalder.

What is data ethics?

The Open Data Institute defines data ethics as:

'A branch of ethics that evaluates data practices with the potential to adversely impact on people and society – in data collection, sharing and use'

Data ethics relates to good practice around how data is collected, used and shared. It is especially relevant when data activities have the potential to impact people and society, directly or indirectly.

For example, an automated data model might make decisions about whether someone is eligible for a mortgage, or what insurance they can be offered. And decisions about what data to collect – and what to exclude – might affect groups in a society.

Data ethics should be addressed at all stages:

- > **Stewarding data** – collecting it, maintaining it and sharing it
- > **Creating information from that data** – in the form of products and services, analysis and insights, or stories and visualisations
- > **Deciding what to do** – informed by information from multiple sources along with experience and understanding

For more information see ODI's Theory of Change diagram on p3 of this document

Why use this tool?

Improve project planning

The canvas helps you to consider potential risks and impacts from the start of your project. It prompts debate about project objectives, intention and impact, and helps you consider wider ethical issues, relevant laws and regulation.

Grow impact and trust

Using the canvas, you can design better products and services while addressing bias. It helps you examine the impact that your data activities can have, and mitigate any harmful impacts for people and communities.

Complement other ethics guidelines

The canvas helps to tease out risks around a project, without predisposing an outcome. It illustrates how one type of data activity can have many outcomes and consequences, depending on context, purpose and organisations involved.

Manage data ethics in the long-term

The canvas guides how you manage and discuss data ethics, and how you develop ethical frameworks and guidance around your project. It also helps you raise awareness of data issues in your organisation.

Before you get started

Think about who to involve

We recommend involving people with a range of perspectives – from people within your organisation (if you have one) to people who may be impacted by your project.

Get leaders onboard

Engage senior people in the process of completing the canvas, to support any decisions or changes that might emerge.

Consider data literacy

You could run an introductory session about data ethics and key terms before completing the canvas, to help people understand the context.

How to use this tool

You can start anywhere on the canvas and complete the sections in any order.

For each section, take time to consider your answers. It helps to note them on sticky notes and stick them to the sections as you go. Where you can, share and discuss your responses with others.

When you have completed the canvas, outline next steps and ensure there is a person responsible for each action.

Share notes about the discussion more widely if you can.

Tips:

- > Use the ODI's online template to record your notes and actions
- > Complete the canvas in a group with a range of people
- > Be sensitive to any power dynamics that might be in the room

What next?

Completing the Data Ethics Canvas is a starting point for transforming how your team or organisation handles data. To get the most of the tool, we recommend the following:

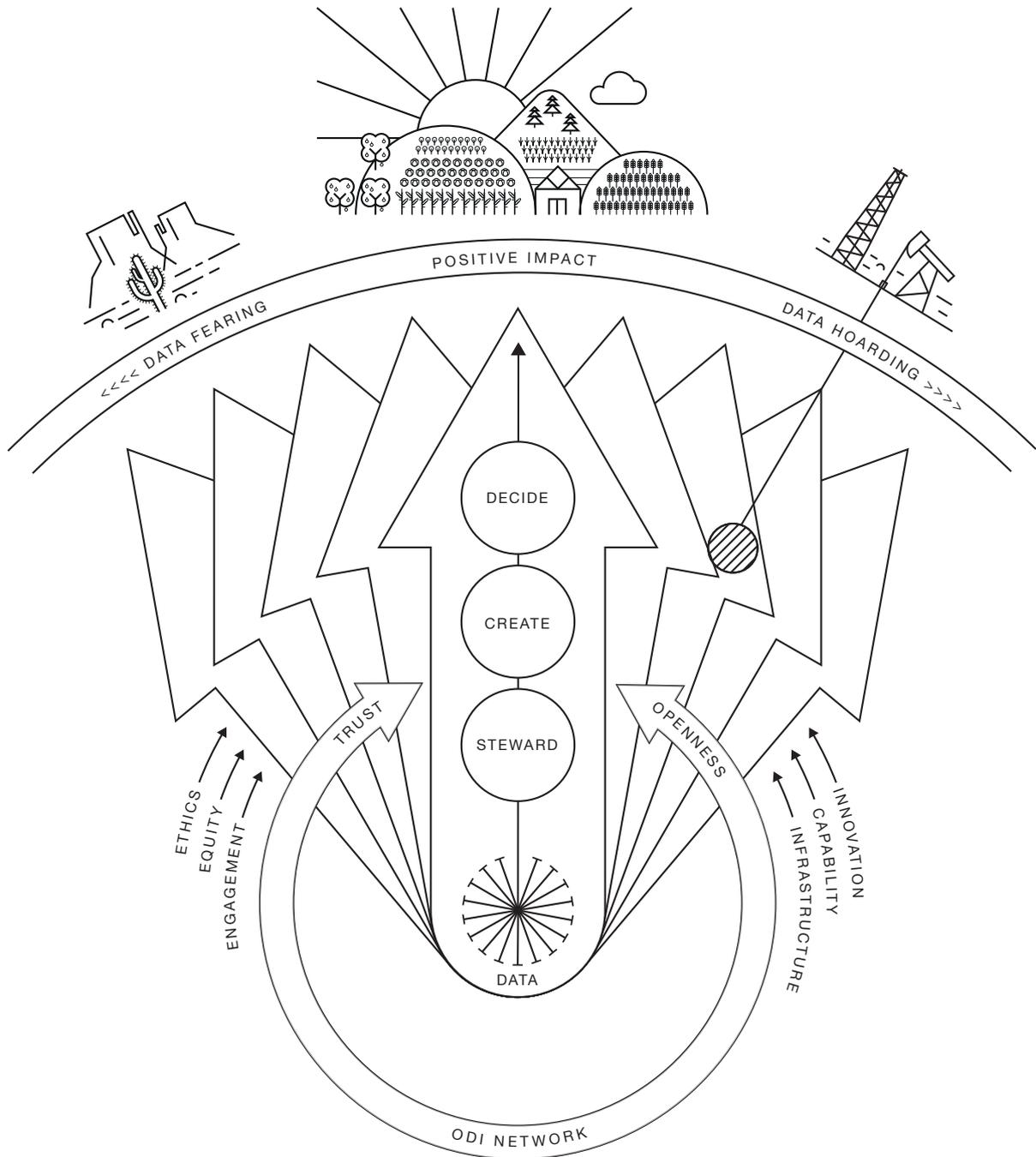
- > **Share your notes and actions** from completing the canvas as widely as you can, particularly with people affected by how your project collects, shares or uses data
- > **Review progress made** towards your actions
- > **Monitor the ongoing impact** of your work on individuals, groups and society
- > **Review and update your answers** on the canvas, eg quarterly or at project milestones
- > **Run a retrospective** or evaluation at the end of your project, to review your answers on the canvas and inform future work

You can share feedback, thoughts and ideas about the Data Ethics Canvas with the ODI at policy@theodi.org

The Data Ethics Canvas is also available at theodi.org/data-ethics-canvas

There you can access:

- > An online template to use alongside or instead of this hard-copy canvas



The ODI's Theory of Change

We want people who **steward** data, and people who **create** things with it, to act in ways that bring about **positive impacts**.

Ethical use of data helps to improve trust, and bring about the best economic and social outcomes.

We want to avoid a future where data is **feared** or **hoarded**. We want data to work for everyone.

Find out more at:
theodi.org/theory-of-change