ENHANCING DATA GOVERNANCE IN TRUSTED RESEARCH ENVIRONMENTS

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Agenda

Setting the scene

the five safes as a review mechanism

the review process

key comments & recommendations

what did we learn?

SETTING THE SCENE

- Secure Data Center provides onsite & remote access to sensitive data
- Developing Trusted Research Environment
- Several internal & external pressures that have necessitated a review of our services
  1. Our increased participation and visibility in international projects centered around sensitive data and data access
  2. New forms of data that bring additional considerations in terms of technical requirements and statistical disclosure risk
  3. Strong desire to expand our service offering to include a remote desktop option.

THE FIVE SAFES AS A REVIEW MECHANISM

- Developed in 2003 in the UK
- Widely used to frame how we think about making sensitive data available
- Made the decision to test this as a mechanism to review an established service

| Safe Projects	• Is the project statistically valid? • Is the project lawful and ethical?
Safe People	• Do researchers have the knowledge to work with the data safely?
Safe Data	• Is the level of detail in the data appropriate for the access conditions?
Safe Setting	• Is the working environment secure? • Does it prevent unauthorized use?
Safe Outputs	• Is the output disclosive? • Is it within the scope of the project?

THE REVIEW PROCESS

- Review panel of experts

- Review undertaken in November 2023

- Main objectives of the review:
  1. To open up the Secure Data Center to external, expert audit
  2. To map out existing processes and map the journey of data from ingest to output
  3. To identify pinch points and inefficiencies and recommend solutions
 4. To identify weaknesses in the current security model

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- „It's complicated!"
- Based on control not trust
- Some inefficiencies & inconsistencies
- 3 key areas:
  - Technical, organisational & people
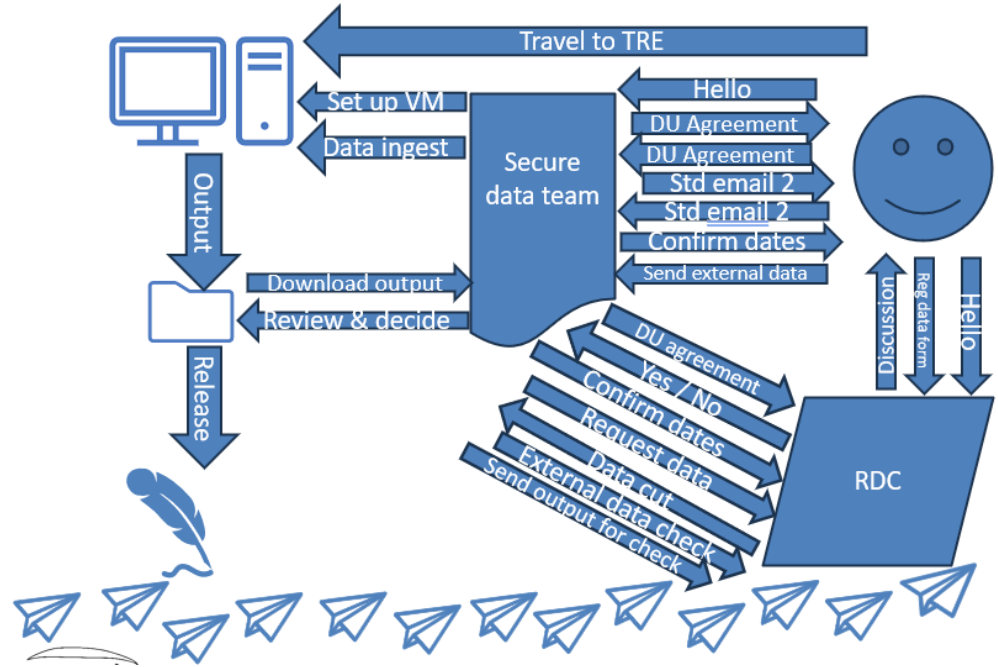
Safe settings

- Key Comments & Recommendations
  - Moving from on-site to remote desktop increases importance of other Safes
  - Need to increase capacity, software, etc.
  - Unable to include the technical setting in the review
  - But identified limited technical & developer capacity
 - Exploring external infrastructure providers
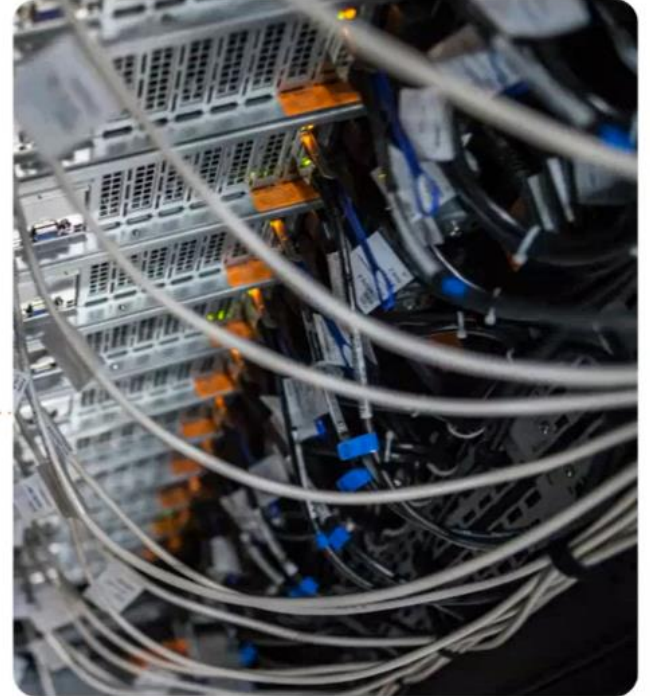
Safe projects

- Key Comments & Recommendations:
  - Review the concept of what a project is - current focus on a single paper
  - Assess the project as a whole
  - Currently assess feasibility more than quality
  - More emphasis on assessing disclosure risk & T&Cs of external data
  - Consider ethical review or assessment of the public good

Safe people

- Key Comments & Recommendations
    - Researchers often don't have enough knowledge for working with sensitive data
    - Staff also receive little or no training
    - Leads to lack of confidence & mistakes
    - ASSURED project will provide training & accreditation for researchers & staff
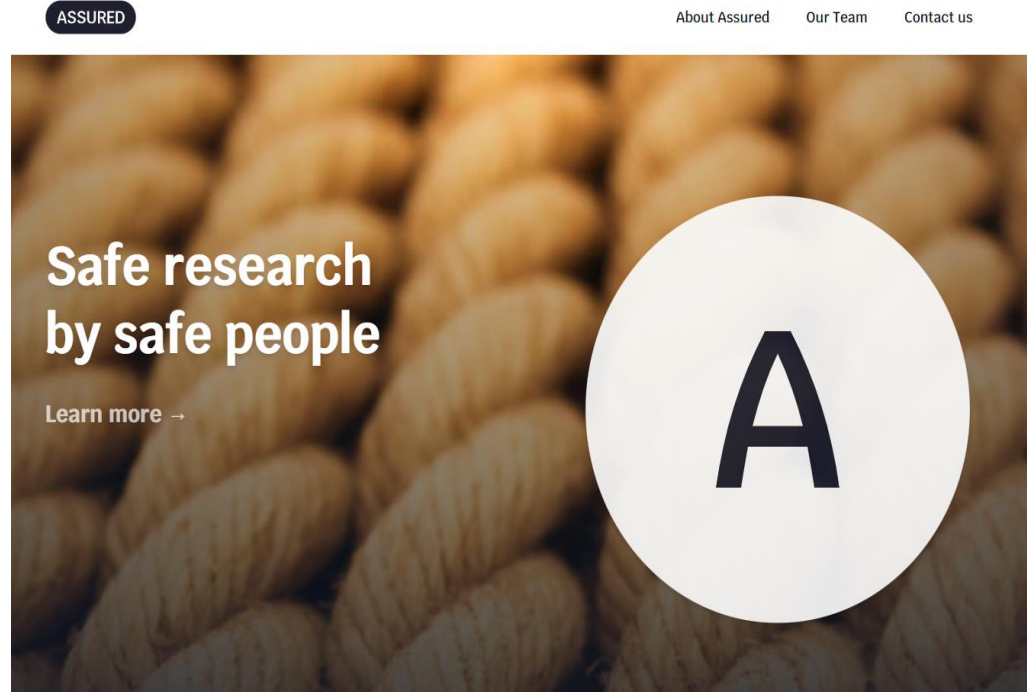
WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- The Five Safes works well as a mechanism for reviewing services

- Some areas we couldn't assess in depth

- The success of any review rests on the availability & willingness of team members to participate

- Transparency is key to demonstrating good practice & building trust

- Honest self-reflection can be uncomfortable but is key!

- Opening up to external review is highly valuable & a good proxy for external accreditation & audit

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