Making Data Management Manageable:
A Risk Assessment Activity for Managing Research Data

The Research Data Service at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign developed this risk assessment activity to encourage researchers to think about the risks associated with unmanaged data. The goal of this activity is for researchers to feel empowered to prioritize their data management activities and motivated to tackle data management in focused phases.

Please use this activity to apply risk assessment concepts to your research data management and other personal information management needs.

RESEARCH
DATA SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Risk Assessment Activity

Step 1: Identify your projects and audiences who might care about the data from your projects
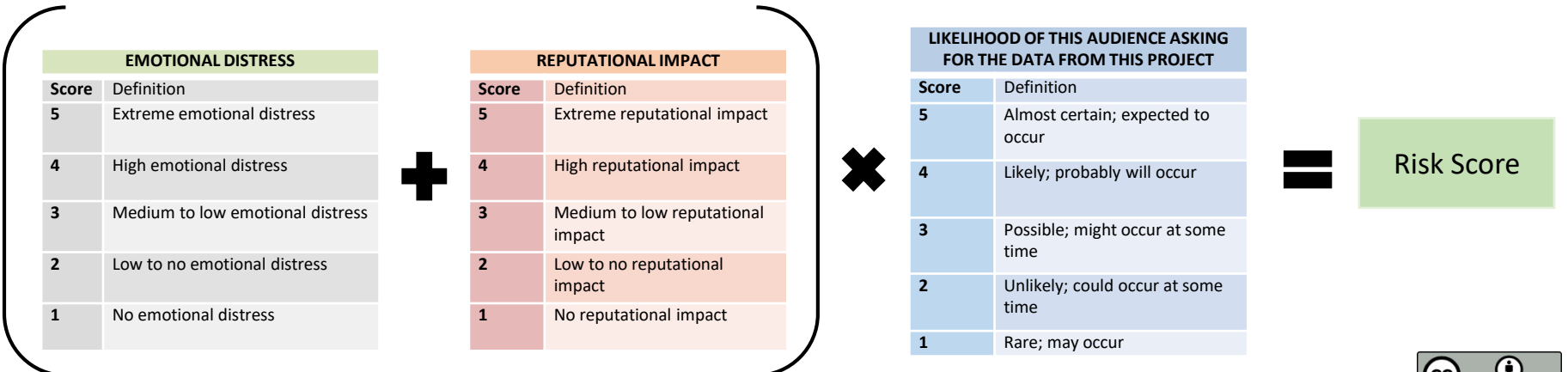
My Projects: Past, Present, or Future

Project Name	Audiences who Might Care About Data From This Project (e.g., boss, funders, journalists, peer reviewers, research integrity office...)

Risk Assessment Activity

Step 2: Calculate your risk scores

		What if someone from this audience requested your data for this project and you could not locate or interpret it? **Rate your risks and concerns** for each group using the scales below. Then use those ratings to **compute your risk score** for that project. **(Emotional Distress + Reputational Impact) x Likelihood = Risk Score**			
Write in the project names and audiences you thought of in Step 1. Write only one project and one audience per cell. You can repeat projects in multiple rows.					
Project	**Audience**	**Emotional Distress**	**Reputational Impact**	**Likelihood**	**Risk Score**

EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

Score	Definition
5	Extreme emotional distress
4	High emotional distress
3	Medium to low emotional distress
2	Low to no emotional distress
1	No emotional distress

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REPUTATIONAL IMPACT

Score	Definition
5	Extreme reputational impact
4	High reputational impact
3	Medium to low reputational impact
2	Low to no reputational impact
1	No reputational impact

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LIKELIHOOD OF THIS AUDIENCE ASKING FOR THE DATA FROM THIS PROJECT

Score	Definition
5	Almost certain; expected to occur
4	Likely; probably will occur
3	Possible; might occur at some time
2	Unlikely; could occur at some time
1	Rare; may occur

= Risk Score

Risk Assessment Activity

Step 3: Find out what to do

Risk Score	What to Do
Very High Risk (41-50)	Prioritize data management and data documentation above all other activities. Establish and implement a plan immediately.
High Risk (31-40)	Setting aside time to address data management and data documentation is a priority. Establish and implement a plan as soon as possible.
Moderate Risk (21-30)	Setting aside time to address data management and data documentation needs is desirable. Risk should be monitored.
Low Risk (11-20)	Generally does not require action, but should be reviewed periodically.
Very Low Risk (1-10)	No action required.

Risk Assessment Activity

Step 4: Make a Personal Action Plan for High Risk or Very High Risk data

Data Management Personal Action Plan for Project: _____

Task	Deadline	Accountability buddy	Ramification	Reward	Check when task completed
Task should be specific and possible to complete in one sitting. *Ex: Set up one automated process for backing up my files to remote storage.*	*Choose a deadline that is appropriate given your risk score and possible given your other priorities.*	*Write down the name of someone you trust. Ask this person to check in with you during the week of your deadline to ask for a progress update on this task. If you wish, offer to do the same for them.*	*Write down a worst-case scenario that could realistically occur if you do not complete this task.* *Ex: My hard drive could crash, causing me to lose all of my work.*	*Write down a plan to treat yourself when you accomplish this task.* *Ex: I will take myself out for ice cream.*	