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User support for and maintenance of SDC tools

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under
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Work Package 2

Set Up

Deliverable D2.3

Description an SDC Tools User Group

Sensitivity

Available to project group

Subject:	Description of an SDC Tools User Group
	Specific Grant Agreement N° 11112.2015.002-2016.076
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Description of the sdcTools User Group

1. Introduction

The governance structure for SDC tools was discussed in the 7th meeting of the Working Group on Statistical Confidentiality as item 4.3 of the agenda. The proposed governance structure is composed of a Steering Group (the Expert Group on Statistical Disclosure Control, EGSDC), a Core Developers Group and one or more User Groups.

Obviously, users are important actors in the support for and maintenance of software tools. They are the people that really use the software, that will find bugs and have ideas on future developments and desired features, as indicated by their daily practice.

In this SGA "User Support for and Maintenance of SDC tools", the sdcTools User Group is established. In the current document we will describe the set-up of this User Group, its main goals and how the communication to and from the User Group will be organised.

2. Set up of the sdcTools User Group

The sdcTools User Group is an informal body. That is, there are no official representatives of the different member states foreseen. Anybody that makes use of any of the SDC tools supported by the SGA "User Support for and Maintenance of SDC tools" can become member of the sdcTools User Group.

To become member of the sdcTools User Group, one simply has to register on the JoinUp webpage of the sdcTools project: https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/software/sdctools/home. Once a member, it is possible to join the mailing list sdctools@joinup.ec.europa.eu. This mailing list will be used to provide information from the Steering Group and the Core Developers Group to the User Group, e.g., announcements on workshops, meetings, new releases, etc. Alternatively, this mailing list can also be used by the members of the User Group to communicate between themselves.

3. Goals of the sdcTools User Group

The main goals of the sdcTools User Group are:
- Indirectly test the software by using the SDC tools in their daily practice
- Report bugs, encountered using SDC tools
- Exchange information and good practices between users
- Suggest improvements and desired new functionalities

Indirect testing
By making use of the SDC software, the users will test its functionality indirectly. However, at certain stages, the Core Developers Group may ask (a selected number of) members of the User Group to actively test (specific parts of) new releases (direct testing).

Reporting bugs
When users are actively using SDC software, they may encounter strange or unexpected behaviour. This anomalous behaviour may be the result of a bug in the software. The members of the User Group are encouraged to report any strange or unexpected behaviour to the Core Developers Group, making use of the Helpdesk Portal as described in deliverable D2.2 "Description of the management of the User Support" of the SGA "User Support for and Maintenance of SDC tools". Members of the Core Developers Group will assess all issues that are raised at the Helpdesk Portal and decide whether it really concerns a bug, whether it concerns an unexpected consequence of the underlying methodology or whether it concerns a desired new feature.

Exchanging information and good practices

To improve their experience with SDC software, it is convenient for users to exchange information among themselves on practical issues concerning the software. In case a user is experiencing some problem using the software, other users may have seen the same problem. Sometimes other users may have solved the problem (either completely or by using a work around), sometimes several users may have experienced the same problem and hence it likely concerns a bug or a desired new feature.

Suggesting improvement and desired new features

Using software in a real production environment differs from using software in a developers environment. Therefore, experiences of "real" users are essential to suggest improvement of the existing features and desired new features. The User Group can suggest improvements and desired new features to the Steering Group. The Steering Group[1] will decide whether those suggestions should be taken into account in future releases. Practical issues like manpower and budget then should be dealt with, to have developers (either from the Core Developers Group or from outside that group) actually implement the desired improvements and/or new features.

4. Ways to communicate

To facilitate the sdcTools User Group in achieving their goals, several ways to communicate are set up:

- Website
- Mailing list
- Helpdesk Portal
- Meetings

Website

The website that is dedicated to the sdcTools User Group can be found at https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/software/sdctools/home. At this website people can register to become a member of the sdcTools User Group, information on the sdcTools project can be found, new releases will be announced and information will be provided on oncoming meetings. Through this web site, members can also join a mailing list.

Mailing list

Members of the sdcTools User Group can join the mailing list sdctools@joinup.ec.europa.eu. This mailing list will be used to provide information from the Steering Group and the Core Developers Group to the User Group, e.g., announcements on workshops, meetings, new releases, etc. Alternatively, this mailing list can also be used by the members of the User Group to communicate between themselves.

Helpdesk Portal

The Helpdesk Portal can be found at https://github.com/sdctools/UserSupport/wiki. Through this Helpdesk Portal, members of the sdcTools User Group can report bugs, encountered strange or unexpected behaviour of the software and suggest improvements or new features by making use of the facility to raise issues. See deliverable D2.2 of the SGA "User Support for and Maintenance of SDC tools" for more information on how to actually raise issues.

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[1] The Working Group on Methodology (WGM) will officially endorse decisions done by the Steering Group on future releases and additional new features. Especially matters concerning manpower and budget should be approved by the WGM.

Meetings

Even though the website, the mailing list and the Helpdesk Portal are convenient ways to communicate, it is sometimes desirable to bring together members of the User Group in a physical meeting. In those circumstances it is even easier to set up your own network of fellow users and to directly discuss the issues you encountered.

To that end, workshops could be organised. A first workshop will be set up by the SGA "User Support for and Maintenance of SDC tools" in the beginning of December 2016. During that first workshop, it will also be discussed whether it is appropriate to repeat such workshops in the future. However, then also financing of facilitating such workshops should be discussed.