An experiment in form and content, its aim is to be a guide and map of some of the opportunities to develop more open and networked practices while navigating the potential downsides of social media, including perceived loss of privacy and amplification of disadvantage and abuse. It is an excellent and accessible starting point for, as well as route to, a deeper understanding and a more sophisticated use of social media.

—Prof. Shân Wareing, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, London South Bank University

How does social media affect working life in Higher Education? How are universities harnessing its power to aid student learning? This innovative collection brings together academics and those working in professional services to examine these questions and more. The diverse and expert contributors analyse the many ways social media can be used to enhance teaching and learning, research, professional practice, leadership, networking and career development. The impact of social media is evaluated critically, with an eye both to the benefits and the problems of using these new forms of digital communication.

This is the first volume to give such detailed attention to this area of high interest. Its innovative approach extends to its creation, with contributors found via their presence on Twitter. The short and impactful chapters are accessible while retaining an academic focus through their application of relevant learning theories and educational context.

Social Media and Higher Education is essential reading for any professional working in higher education, including lecturers teaching education courses. It is also significant for researchers looking at more recent developments in the field and what it means to work in a modern higher education environment.

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher’s website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com

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Chris Rowell (Ed.)

Social Media in Higher Education

Case Studies, Reflections and Analysis

Edited by Chris Rowell
Introduction

The sound of one person talking is not, obviously, a conversation. The same applies to organizational conversation, in which leaders talk with employees and not just to them. This interactivity makes the conversation open and fluid rather than closed and directive. It entails shunning the simplicity of monologue and embracing the unpredictable vitality of dialogue. (Groysberg and Slind, 2012)

Since 2015, together with a team of colleagues from Jisc, we have been developing and delivering the Jisc Digital Leadership course. This course is designed to give institutional leaders the opportunity to explore how the digital world impacts on their personal practice and how they can make effective use of digital tools, places, and platforms in their organisations. Within one particular module of the course, we facilitate conversations with leaders to explore the implications of social media practices beyond concerns about platforms and literacies. We approach social media as a set of practices, and the Internet as a place, to make room for considering the opportunities presented by social media and other online places for leaders (Lanclos et al 2016). This chapter will start with a discussion of the motivations of leaders to come onto the course, and the major concerns they express during the run of the
course. Then we discuss what authenticity and credibility mean to the leaders on the course, and explore the ways that personal identity has an impact on their approaches to their work, including digital aspects of their work. Finally, we discuss the methods we use to elicit the necessary conversations within this part of the course, focusing on behaviour mapping rather than trying to define and identify ‘types’ of individuals.

Motivations to Engage

Before the delegates arrive to the Jisc Digital Leadership course, they submit their motivations for attending, as well as their own definitions of leadership. Over the six iterations of the course thus far, we have had approximately 200 delegates attend, and consistent themes emerge from the stated motivations. Some of the motivations are intrinsic, and some are extrinsic — we have delegates who sign themselves up for the course, because they think it will benefit them personally or their organization, and others who are told to attend by their supervisors because of organisational priorities.

Perhaps most obvious motivations are those of delegates that focus on operational aspects, those who wish to gain more understanding of the potential of the digital, and how and why it can be implemented. They also wish to have opportunities to challenge themselves and push their own practices. Having a chance to gain insights from their peers, and to build a network they can call upon in the course of their leadership challenges, is another primary set of motivations. Delegates are also intent on acquiring strategies for leading or affecting change. There is a significant desire to have chances not just to reflect on practice, but to acquire the confidence to challenge and change what they are doing, and bring those changes to a wider set of people in their organizations.

During the course, it is clear from the conversations that delegates are aware that there are things they should be doing in and around digital and social media, and also things that they do not wish to engage in, because they think it will distract from the work they need to accomplish. In addition, they talk about things they want to do with their personal online practices, in particular to connect with people who they would not otherwise encounter face to face. They wish to find enjoyment in their practices, and in the connections they can make.
These motivations and concerns that delegates bring with them on the course form part of the larger context for the specific conversations we want to elicit. While the Jisc Digital Leadership course is delivered over four days, the module where we have people map, reflect on, and strategise about their individual and organisational practices takes place over only one day. However, the drawing of those maps, and the reflections on them at the outset of the course, are key to understanding and developing the leaders’ practice and strategies, and links are drawn from subsequent modules back to those maps (Phipps and Lanclos, 2017).

**Being and Leading Online**

It is important at the beginning of our discussions of social media during the leadership course to be clear about what we mean by ‘social’. Too often this is taken, especially in the UK, to mean ‘unprofessional’. Key to our discussions around digital leadership is that when we talk about ‘social’, we are talking about it in the sense of ‘connecting with people’. We are also clear that we are not approaching social media within one particular platform or digital place, but as a collective set of places and practices, which can accommodate a wide range of people and motivations.

In initial iterations of the course, we had delegates map themselves and their digital practices on the Visitors and Residents continuum (White and Le Cornu, 2011). The utility of this framing was several-fold: 1) it moved people away from negative and essentialising narratives around ‘digital natives’; 2) it gave people a technique with which to describe their digital practices that allowed for a visual approach, rather than one bound by text; 3) it provided a framework that allowed for the discussion of digital places, rather than just tools, accounts, or platforms. In conceiving of the digital as a place, we gain the ability to talk about where academic work can and does happen, and include the digital in the range of possibilities. Core to these discussions of practice were motivations to engage. There was no one correct way to do this mapping, as individual variation in motivations is a crucial factor in understanding practice.

It is in our discussions of motivations, both to be present and highly visible online and also to be absent or less visible, that we elicited
notions of what it means to be ‘authentic’ and ‘credible’ while online. We ask the delegates ‘where are you online’ so that we can also ask the questions, ‘What does “Identity” mean?’; ‘What are the implications of “being yourself”’; and ‘Who are “we?”’

In higher and further education, ‘we’ does not circumscribe a homogeneous group anymore (even if senior management roles continue to be held largely by white and male people). Frequently ‘leadership’ acts much like the word ‘professional’ does, as a means of stripping our individuality away from us (Walker, 2013). Who we are in society follows us online (McMillan Cottom, 2015). Who we are also has implications for what we feel we can or should do when we are online. Concerns about identity are shot through discussions of online practice.

We have a sense from the conversations that delegates have while in this part of the course, that leaders are aware that they perform aspects of themselves, with notions of what is ‘appropriate’ in mind. ‘Being yourself’ online can mean a range of things, and during the course we do not propose a monolithic model of online behaviour. People show different parts of themselves in different places, and that is a human phenomenon that we attempt to frame as perfectly acceptable. We also warn them to be mindful about how much or how little of their authentic selves they choose to perform online. While ‘... we value those moments where we find the antidote to the uncanniness of the disembodied Web in what we perceive to be indisputably human interactions’ (Lanclos and White, 2015), there are risks to being online that impact disproportionately on women, people of colour, or any category of person who has less access to the cultural and social privileges that accrue to white men.

Pseudonymous accounts, or separate personal and professional accounts, emerge in the mapping practices as ways to manage some of the perceived risks of being ‘too human’ (and therefore vulnerable) online. But Stewart (2012) makes the salient point that ‘on the Internet everybody knows you’re not a dog’, that is, it is increasingly difficult to actually hide who you are from the people who want to find out:

Contrary to much of the digital identity scholarship of the 1990s, which tended to emphasize the fluidity of identity uncoupled from the gendered and signified body — the “on the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog” theme — the concept of networked publics has given rise to a far more enmeshed notion of reality. (Stewart, 2012)
We also facilitate discussion around the fact that whether they choose to be online or not, some aspect of their identity is being put online, either by their institutions or in the ‘data exhaust’ that their voluntary online activities leave behind, to be harvested by corporations such as Google, Facebook, or Amazon. If we assert that a key part of leadership is a conversation, and accept that online presence is a necessary part of being able to engage in conversations, then who you are (perceived to be) online is a crucial component of successfully engaging with people, not just broadcasting information. If leadership is a conversation, this needs to be considered in both physical and digital places, with a critical understanding of what engagement and conversations looks like, and the role of identity and notions of authenticity within them.

**Visualising Practice and Change**

We built the individual digital practice elements of that first programme around what delegates gained from doing the Visitor and Resident mapping process (Lanclos et al 2016). At the time, we were intent on getting people away from assumptions that digital capability was defined by their identities, especially their ‘generational identity’ (Lanclos, 2014), and thought that the V&R model gave them a new place around which to orientate the conversations we wanted people to have about their practices.

For the most part, we were correct. We did have, and were able to facilitate, conversations that went beyond both top-ten tech lists and ‘I am X identity,’ and brought people together for conversations about what they want and need to do, and what their motivations are. In the setting up of the V&R model we were careful to discuss them as modes of behaviour, not identity types. However, we have continued to see, through three years of iterations of the course, an impulse to pigeonhole, to identify themselves and others as ‘visitors’ or ‘residents’; creating a barrier to freeing themselves up to having new conversations around the digital.

As much as the metaphor freed us from the tyranny of generational stereotypes, it opened up a debate around the nature of what it means to be ‘resident’ or ‘visitor’, with participants asking what is ‘right’, what is best, and how to become more of one or the other. This was never
our intention. Substituting the stereotype with a metaphor still, to some extent, obfuscated the real aim — to discuss practice in context. It is difficult to move people away from value judgements around practice, and harder still when they are using language that seems to involve personal identity.

On the programme, we want our leaders and future leaders to have a more nuanced understanding of what it means to practice in a time of ubiquitous digital. We have arrived at the point where we need to go beyond metaphor (White, 2018). Rather than annotating a metaphorical model with allusions to practice and motivation, we will start with the practices, behaviours, and motivations we want people to reflect upon.

The use of tension pairs to uncover behaviours and practices has proven effective as a baseline for change; a visual tool for identifying where both individuals and organisations are in their digital practice and their motivations, and — most importantly for the digital leaders programme — where they want to move their practice on to. The new iteration of this element of the workshop will be more tailored to support delegates in identifying the most appropriate tension pairs for their context.

Rather than using the visitor-resident continuum as one axis, we intend to provide a range of continua composed of actions and behaviours — instead of identities. For example, we might suggest that leaders map themselves against a broadcast — engagement axis. We might even solicit tension pairs from the room. We think this small modification to the leadership course format will make it easier to dig into the important content that has always been a core part of the program: an engagement with practice and current behaviours, developing the delegates’ strategic thinking about the ways they want or need to change what they are doing, and what role, if any, digital tools and places can play in those changes. We think it is time in our work in the first place to give people opportunities to visualize and develop their approaches to and within digital environments, in order to focus on what people want to do. Identity is always an important part of why and how people do what they do, but it doesn’t have to over-determine their practices. Our intention is to open doors, not close them by making people think that certain paths are closed because of who they are.
In between the running of the last course we facilitated (in late winter 2018) and the writing of this chapter, we have piloted a different practice mapping template, one that tries to centre people’s practices as a way of initiating discussions around modes and motivations.

![Mapping Triangle](image)

Fig. 13.1 Laurie Phipps and Donna Lanclos, Mapping triangle (2018), CC BY 4.0. The interior of the triangle is where people map the practices that are bounded by their institution and the work they do in institutional digital platforms and places. The exterior of the triangle is where they can map everything else — what they do that is not bounded by the institution. This can be their personal lives, or their work that does not take place in official channels, but rather on the open web, in self-hosted or commercial platforms

As of April 2018 we have run 4 different workshops using this template, and we found that in a swift hour’s workshop we did not struggle with conversations trying to figure out ‘which thing am I?’ and could instead fast-track the discussion to what doing academic work, and otherwise being, in online places meant for them.
As with the earlier mapping techniques, we still have people annotating their maps — we have lately been having success using emoji stickers so that people can signal how particular web spaces and tools make them feel, which then leads to discussions of the difference between the kinds of things within and around the digital that people have to do, and what they want to do. The intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to engage with email, social media, blog posts, and other web places are part and parcel of any individual’s digital presence. This kind of annotation process helps create a space in which people can examine what practices do and don’t serve them particularly well, and then consider what, if anything, they might be able to do to change things.

**Modelling Behaviour — Leading Change**

Running the leadership course in a way that focuses on practice, process, culture, and motivations (rather than tools and skills) has yielded a
valuable perspective on leadership and the digital in higher education. We see in the feedback about the course that people appreciate the chance to engage in something more than ‘how-tos’ and ‘top-tips’ (even if that might have been what they were initially expecting when they signed up for the course). Many of the conversations around digital practices in higher and further education tend to be fairly operational, despite all of the things we do to enable discussions around motivations and meaning behind why they do social media.

There are still not enough places to talk about the ethical implications of human processes happening online, and we struggled even as we ran the course to provide time for such discussions. Being online cannot fix, and often amplifies, the problems of racism, sexism, bullying, and abuse of power among the people who are in those online spaces. It is incumbent on institutions to make sure that conversations about online presence are not simply about concerns such as ‘where can I also have conversations with my students’. During the leadership course, we try to also create a space for addressing the continued care we need to take with vulnerable populations who don’t necessarily have the same license to ‘simply’ be themselves and have the same conversations online than a white cishet man would. There is a lot more at stake, and a lot more risk for a black woman on Twitter than a white man, even when they are saying the same things.

As a sector, education has a responsibility to pay attention to the human problems that also exist online, and need to actually do something about it — not just recognise it, but take action to protect structurally vulnerable people. For leaders in higher and further education it is important that they model the behaviours they we want to see, not just within their institutions, but across society. That means we have to develop our leaders, and indeed all staff in higher and further education, not just to be able to use social media in an operational sense, but also understand the deeper ethical and political ramifications of being visible and active online.
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