WORKING OUT LOUD: A STEP TOWARDS BUILDING YOUR DIGITAL CAPABILITY

BY DR ANNE BARTLETT-BRAGG

Increasingly, as more organisations adopt enterprise social networks (ESNs) as a key platform for collaboration in a digital workplace, the question we are constantly asked is: How do we make people adopt these tools?

Firstly – let me put a line in the sand – you can't *make* people do things and improve collaboration. People need to learn how to change their work practices, and understand why it is of value to them and their organisation. This is not always a comfortable transition.

Secondly – there is no single magic formula for adoption. However, we are entering a period of maturity with ESNs and have sufficient case studies and research projects that have enabled the development of informed frameworks and practices to support people coming to terms with new ways of working (and learning).

Working out loud (WOL) is one of these frameworks and a valuable approach for building organisational and personal digital capabilities.

Implementing the WOL framework into your learning and development strategies can enhance digital capabilities both personally and for others in your organisation.

Currently, there is an extensive range of research being conducted into digital transformation of organisations and their business models with McKinsey (2015) referring to an organisation's Digital Quotient (DQ) based on digital maturity evaluated by measuring practices against their digital strategy, capabilities and culture.

Despite these organisational studies there is inadequate research addressing the identification of the digital capabilities for individuals within these organisations. To this end, together with my team at the Ripple Effect Group, I have commenced a global project to engage with practitioners to determine what they consider essential capabilities in a digitally mature organisation, and how do we provide support for those skills to be enhanced.

Most contemporary digital skills definitions focus on software skills - a narrow perspective when we consider how quickly technology changes and that every update involves a period of disorientation as we adapt to the new features. To review the prevalent digital capability research, I have combined the recurring themes, including my own doctoral research, to encompass three broad elements: information literacy; network literacy; and a participatory mindset.

Each theme includes a series of subset capabilities:

DRAFT DIGITAL CAPABILITIES FRAMEWORK

INFORMATION LITERACY	NETWORK LITERACY	PARTICIPATORY MINDSET
Attention: Ability to manage distractions, determine relevance, use filtering mechanisms, manage cognitive load.	**Social literacy:** Develop a digital identity through self-representation, relationship formation and reputation.	**External horizon:** Awareness of others knowledge and interests.
Data analytics: Use data to inform further actions and provide feedback on activity.	**Network structures:** Knowledge of social network concepts such as strong and weak ties, nodes and hubs.	**Network ecosystem:** Ways of contributing to add value to the network.
Writing and publishing: Selecting appropriate style and voice for different audiences.	**Technical structure:** Knowledge and use of features, such as hashtags.	**Feedback loops:** Actively provide and receive feedback on contributions.
Reflective practices: Meta-cognition, curation, collecting and sharing knowledge on topics to develop sense-making and shared meanings.		**Collaboration:** Ability to contribute to projects and work transparently with others.

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The Ripple Effect Group's experience, spanning more than 10 years of digital workplace transformations, acknowledges that for many people, even those familiar with using social media, the activity of publicly publishing their work can cause a degree of discomfort and resistance. Introducing new ways of working requires approaches that reinforce desired behaviours, while taking initial steps towards build digital capability.

In particular, as the name suggests, the WOL framework pays attention to the process of working more transparently through sharing and participating with others online. John Stepper outlines five elements in the WOL framework: purposeful discovery; building relationships; leading with generosity; making you and your work visible; and a growth mindset. Each element of the WOL framework can be mapped across the digital capability themes and subsets above.

The four activities outlined in the next article *Working out loud with intent: Getting Started* by Jakkii Musgrave cover examples of introductory actions based on the WOL framework. Each activity has been informed by underpinning theoretical influences from social learning theories of Bandura and Vygotsky.

Activity Guidelines

By following these guidelines you will provide novices with the support and opportunities required to get them started with the least amount of anxiety and resistance.

Scaffold experiences

Ensure your activities build in a logical sequence from simple to more complex concepts. This includes from a technology and information perspective – guide people to create connections between concepts. Vygotsky refers to people's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) or the boundaries of a person's knowledge, in a given situation, while they are completing a process or task

that will require further knowledge, expertise, and participation with others – pushing beyond their ZPD limits will result in potential withdrawal from further participation.

Lead by example

Bandura's social learning theory emphasises the importance of observation and modelling – use activities that provide steps towards desired outcomes, while modelling these yourself.

Create achievable actions

Self-efficacy, the belief or expectancy that you can achieve a given task, is critical to maintaining motivation to continue and progress. People will abandon tasks they believe are unachievable and will be resistant to further engagement.

Create feedback loops

Pay attention to the need for feedback. During initial stages of WOL and online participation, people value the presence of others and will be supported by their comments and contributions.

Ongoing reinforcement

To encourage continuing participation consider ways of providing ongoing reinforcement not only through feedback but also through suggested activities. The aim is to assist people to create new work habits or self-regulatory behaviours.

Why use Working Out Loud?

The potential benefits to ourselves, our peers and colleagues, and our organisations of working out loud are many. These include discovery of duplication, alignment of work, collaboration across projects, personal and professional development. At a minimum, working out loud with intent forces us to consider the value of our work and insights to others, and to curate and share judiciously. Making these types of activities habitual (like reading your email) provides the basis

of sustainable, meaningful practices that embed work-based activities into digital and physical environments seamlessly.

So many of our approaches to establishing digital capabilities have been developed under circumstances that represent a totally different organisational landscape. The current shift to a digital workplace constitutes one of the fundamental changes to society as a whole, where existing practices are no longer sufficient to meet people's needs.

And remember - it's not about the tools or technology - it's about how you integrate them with the information and context that builds your digital capability.

References

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Dr Anne Bartlett-Bragg (@AnneBB) is the Managing Director of the Ripple Effect Group in the Asia-Pacific region. She completed her PhD in 2013 that investigated the learners' experience of self-publishing with social technologies.