SOCIAL LEADERSHIP

BY JULIAN STODD
AND JO LOUDON

Julian Stodd is a writer and consultant on the Social Age. He explores the strategy and implementation of learning, leadership and cultural change. Julian specialises in exploring learning design, the role of communities, social collaborative technology and social leadership. Author of eight books and over a thousand articles and blog posts, Julian works on strategy and delivery with many global organisations.

Jo Loudon interviewed Julian Stodd, to learn about Social Leadership and how to get involved.

What is social leadership and why is it important?

Social Leadership is a type of authority granted to us by the community: it's based upon a reputation earned over time. It's contextual and consensual: whilst the formal organisation can give you formal power, it's only the community around you that can give you social authority. Why is it important? Because we live in the Social Age, a time of constant change, where the democratisation of technology and emergence of new forms of power, socially modified and amplified, have meant that communities sit at the heart of our success. They help us make sense of things and be more effective. Social Leadership is authority given to us by the community: it's important because it enables us to be highly effective.

What are the origins of Social Leadership?

I guess the origins of Social Leadership lie in the roots of our own interpersonal psychology and development as a species: we collectivised into communities because together we could: achieve more, be safer, and be more effective. We are now connected by new and emerging technologies, those fundamental precepts remain. If we earn the right to be within a community, then that community will keep us safe and make us stronger.

In many ways I would say that the notion of formal leadership is the artificial one: a recent construction allowing for the concentration of power and control to a small number of individuals. Historically it was the community which was prime, and in the Social Age once more this is true.

How did you get involved in Social Leadership?

I am an explorer of the Social Age: my writing and research cover many aspects of the world we live in today, from new models of knowledge and learning, to the ways that culture is formed and eroded, types of leadership and power, emergence and impact of new technologies, the role of trust, and so on. Understanding Social Leadership is a key part of this work.

The origins of my own writing about Social Leadership come from a large piece of work I was writing, and have not yet published, on music and learning. It is based on interviews with 40 musicians about the creative and performance processes. The book looks at the psychology and neurology of music and at co-creation and performance. In writing this book I became fascinated by the internal dynamics of creative partnerships. This led me to write more about co-creation and performance. From there, the model of Social Leadership pretty much landed fully formed in my mind. Indeed, you will see that co-creation still sits as one of the nine components in my work, although probably few people realise that it has an origin in my research on music.

What are the elements of Social Leadership?

In my own work I focus on nine components of Social Leadership: we *curate* a space and choose what will be known for, we strive to become effective *storytellers,* shaping and *sharing* magnetic narratives, and we learn to
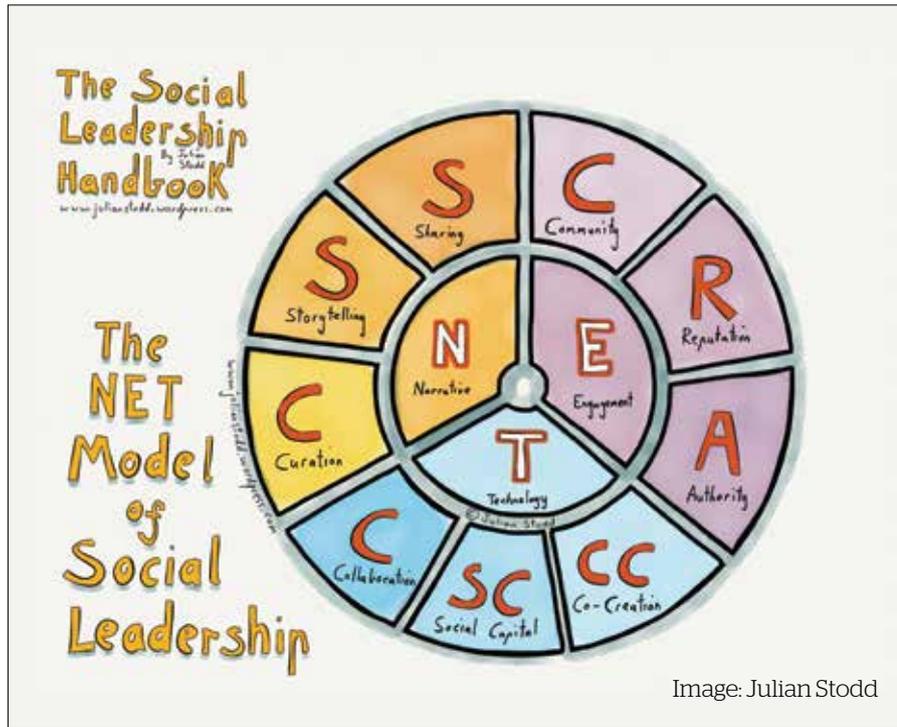
The Social Leadership Handbook
by Julian Stodd
www.julianstodd.wordpress.com

The NET Model of Social Leadership

Image: Julian Stodd

share those stories wisely, adding to the signal not simply the noise.

Social leaders understand *communities:* they inhabit many but take fluid roles in each. They work to support those communities, acting with humility and generosity to support others and enable them to be successful. Through those actions they earn *reputation.* It is the reputation which leads to *social authority,* the authority granted to us by the community.

Social leaders *co-create* within those communities: they have high *social capital* themselves, and ability to survive and thrive in this new world, and they build high social capital in others, ensuring that nobody is left behind, disempowered or disenfranchised by lack of equality. Social leaders are able to *collaborate* widely because they rely on their social authority, not simply the formal.

How is working out loud linked to Social Leadership?
Social leaders work out loud because

they are not presenting a fully formed version of reality to the world, but rather working with humility within and alongside their communities to make sense of the world, to be successful, and help others succeed. It is a sign of a healthy organisation that is able to hear both stories of success and failure. Working out loud is central to Social Leadership.

Is there an assumed level of social-media savvy for Social Leadership?
I don't focus on specific technology skills, or indeed social media specifically, but rather with the notion of social capital: that social leaders can survive and thrive in the space. Certainly a strong capability with social media is important, but more important than the technology skills are the social ones. Hence my focus tends to be on storytelling, kindness, fairness, equality, and acting with humility.

So I would not say there is an assumed level of social media savvy in social leaders, but rather that Social

Leadership is far, far more than simply understanding these media. Social Leadership is about communities, connected by technology, but facilitated through the actions of individuals, the ways we treat each other.

Can you give examples of people or organisations that do Social Leadership well?
There are many individuals within many organisations that do this well, and all organisations react with a response that varies from overwhelming fear and control, through to active empowerment and enablement.

Because Social Leadership exists within communities, organisations cannot demand or control it, rather they can create spaces and award the permissions for it to be earned. However if they deny the spaces, and remove permission, Social Leadership will still exist, it will just be out of sight and in opposition to the organisation.

Social leaders are the nodes within the network: if you can think of one, it's because they are visible. A visibility that they have earned. The key thing to remember is this: the organisation can give you formal leadership, and formal leaders may be social leaders too, if they earn it. But anybody can be a social leader, those who have no formal authority or power. And Social Leadership can always fully subvert formal. If you are interested in the conditions under which we can build high levels of Social Leadership, my more recent work on the Socially Dynamic Organisation covers just this.

Do you have any strategies for introducing Social Leadership into a business culture that's resistant?
This is a big question: I'm just in the process of completing my next book on organisational change, so far I have 65,000 words written on just this! I talk about three types of culture: resistant organisations that actively deny and try to kill off Social Leadership and change;

The foundation of Social Leadership is helping others to succeed, so a good place to start is to turn to somebody and ask how you can help.

constrained organisations, which are well-intentioned and well-meaning but ultimately ineffective because they failed to increase control; and Socially Dynamic Organisations, which are fully adapted and agile. I identify 16 specific aspects of resistance and strategies to overcome them.

If I had to summarise I would say this: you cannot force Social Leadership, if you wish to maintain a productive tension between the formal and social elements. The best thing that an organisation can do is create spaces where the two can meet: build and ability experiments, using both formal and social power.

This is the type of work I do in complex organisations around the world and it is not easy: it is not easy because resistant pressures are based in existing power structures and seek to kill the change.

Be bold: the Social Age is a time of constant change. Those organisations that fail to adapt will be swept away.

Are there ways in which you have seen Social Leadership fail? What are the risks of social leadership?

There are no risks in Social Leadership because social leaders strive for fairness and equality, they seek to make the world better, and to help others to succeed. The risks lie in organisations that deny or seek to control the social forces within them. The age of formal hierarchy alone is over: we need Socially Dynamic Organisations that are able to hear the wisdom from within their communities, and which create fair and equal environments in which to work.

Many of the good organisations that we see around us today will fail, because they will fail to adapt fast enough. Instead of worrying about the failures of Social Leadership, they should recognise that the existing system has substantially failed and seek to do better.

I saw your Kickstarter campaign for a new book *Social Leadership: My first 100 days* was successful. Can you tell us a little about the book?

My last book was the *Social Leadership Handbook:* it's a comprehensive guide to the foundations of the Social Age, and Social Leadership itself. It takes a tour through the nine aspects and looks at how we can develop them.

The new book, *Social Leadership - My first 100 days,* is a practical guide to developing Social Leadership. It lays out 100 practical activities that you can do on a hundred sequential days to develop your Social Leadership capability. It's illustrated throughout and will form a practical companion to the *Handbook*.

What is a good place to start for someone who has just heard about Social Leadership?

I would have to start by saying that the *Social Leadership Handbook* is a good place to start! I say that not to sell books, but because it is my most comprehensive exploration of that question. I work out loud and share every aspect of what I do, so all of the contents of the book is available freely on the blog as a series of over 70 articles.

The foundation of Social Leadership is helping others to succeed, so a good place to start is to turn to somebody

and ask how you can help. Social leaders drive change not by looking at others and seeing what they could do differently, but by looking at themselves and starting with the change there.

What do you see as the future for Social Leadership?

I believe that successful organisations will manage to maintain a dynamic tension between formal and Social Leadership: they will learn to become Socially Dynamic. Those organisations that adapt to maintain strong pillars of formal leadership, alongside strong pillars of Social Leadership, will succeed. Those that fail to do so will simply fail.

The future for Social Leadership is to help organisations to be better. I hope they are ready to listen.

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