

Being an academic today: The dynamics of knowledge creation in the contemporary University

The Dynamics of Knowledge Creation project team: Sharon McCulloch (presenting), Karin Tusting, David Barton, Mary Hamilton, Ibrar Bhatt.

Literary Research Centre, Lancaster University
Departments of Linguistics and of Educational Research
Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, UK



Being an academic



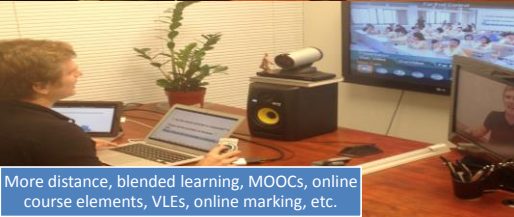



Being an academic








Teaching




More distance, blended learning, MOOCs, online course elements, VLEs, online marking, etc.




Research




Skype and video conferencing, file sharing, online library resources



Impact and metrics



Social networking, public online persona required, metrics

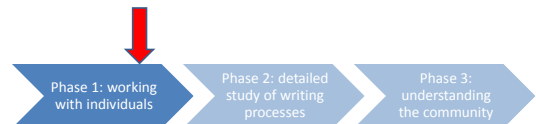


Research sites

	Maths	Marketing	History
University A: research-intensive, non-Russell group	UniA-Maths	UniA-Marketing	UniA-History
University B: Russell group	UniB-Maths	UniB-Marketing	UniB-History
University C: post-1992 university	UniC-Maths	UniC-Marketing	UniC-History

- Plus pilot work in our own disciplines, and auto-ethnographic work

We are here



- Interviews with individuals about their work practices, technobiographies, and typical days' practices

- Recording the detail of writing processes using screen capture, digital pens, keyboard tracking, informed by interviews

- Interviews with managers, administrative staff, colleagues and collaborators

The technobiographic interview

A way to research lived experience with digital media, phases of change over time, and how and why particular habits of use emerge

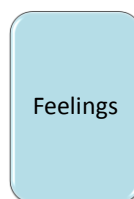


SOME PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Huge range of digital platforms used

- Many digital platforms referenced so far in interviews:
 - Writing: Word processing, LaTeX, reference management software
 - Filesharing
 - Research: CAQDAS software, spreadsheets
 - Electronic submissions systems
 - Institutional: repository, student records system, VLE
 - Video conferencing, Skype
 - Social networking: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, ResearchGate

Social media in academic life



Resistance
Pressure / coercion
Fear of exposure

Resistance

David, Professor of Statistics:
I don't necessarily approve of Twitter and Facebook so I tend to avoid them. It doesn't mean to say the people that I work with don't use them but I would probably not engage with them, I don't know.



Pressure

Verity, Professor of History:
That LinkedIn thing is there, and I sort of dutifully filled it in when it first appeared. Then my colleagues all said, "Oh, no, we're not bothering with that. It's a waste of time." So I just discard it now. I don't think it pops up anymore. Anyway, I just sort of delete it now.



Coercion

Mary, Professor of Education:
...they always send you a message of somebody who is in the department who has joined, and they say, you know, 'so-and-so is inviting you to join ResearchGate,' and I thought, 'oh, well maybe if the department is doing it, so I'll join too'.



Resistance

Charles, Senior Lecturer in Marketing:
I think the other one is ResearchGate. They keep banging on about how many views you've had and how many – I mean to what end? I'm not a big fan of counting stuff...



Fear of exposure

Charles, Senior Lecturer in Marketing:
I find the whole tweeting thing – was it Abraham Lincoln once said, 'It's better to remain silent and for everybody to assume that you're a fool than to open your mouth and confirm the fact'.



Social media in academic life



Self-promotion
Reaching out
Learning
Venting frustration
Making a contribution



Self-promotion

Don, Senior Lecturer in History:
...with the explicit purpose of using it to publicise a book ... and to increase its sales



Reaching out

Don, Senior Lecturer in History:
...made more visible among academics ... not so much [fellow] historians but sociologists.



Self-promotion

Collin, Professor of History:
...a book of mine came out in paperback and I wanted to try and advertise the fact so I thought I've got other ways of doing that but why not tweet about it.



Self-promotion

James, Senior Lecturer in Business:
Twitter is meant to disseminate to the masses. That doesn't happen with me, because I haven't pushed to be really popular or anything, and I don't come out with anything really pithy or momentous.



Frustration

James, Senior Lecturer in Business:
Some of the tweets occasionally are borne of frustration and anger, where somebody will say that this and that is a wonderful idea and we should all follow it. "Are you out of your mind? No, because it's going to have this problem and this problem", and then I run out of space.



Reaching out

Charles, Senior Lecturer in Marketing:
I don't want to be too old. I want to engage with technology hugely and I have been considering moving into the Twitter domain purely because of the extent of the ability and the reach that you have.



Learning and making a contribution

Mary, Professor of Education:
I learn loads from it [social media], and sometimes I can contribute resources, so it's therapeutic.



Conclusions

- Most participants used social media, but usually with some ambivalence
- No one was forced to use it, but peer pressure was often a catalyst
- Sense that resistance is futile?



Conclusions

Social media can:

- facilitate the dissemination of research
- engender sense of collegiality and solidarity
- reveal academics' insecurities
- be seen as trivial or self-aggrandizing
- be viewed as symptomatic of new managerialism



Further explorations

- Phase 2, detailed observations of writing practices, will begin this autumn
- To follow the project's progress:
– <http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/acadswriting/>

