

Networked Publics

This week I found that I was intrigued by the idea of networked publics and the role that they could (and do?) play within an enterprise. Most enterprises incorporate aspects of social networking through a variety of tools. And as Boyd highlights: "...social network sites are a type of networked public with four properties that are not typically present in face-to-face public life: persistence, searchability, exact copyability, and invisible audiences. These properties fundamentally alter social dynamics, complicating the ways in which people interact" (Boyd, 2007, p.120). And in an enterprise, these possible interactions could include collaborating, learning, problem solving, creating, and so on.

Generally, I work to try to connect groups from different publics (with difference within and across publics). Silos form in organizations – inhibiting interactions between the publics. So, while the organization as a whole, could be considered a public, there are smaller publics within.

Tools such as Slack, MS Teams, Delve, and others provide opportunities to share thoughts, lessons learned and to pose questions. I'm often surprised when I use Delve – as it highlights files that co-workers have shared. When I see these files, I wonder if my colleague intended to share that material. In this scenario, I see myself as part of the invisible audience. The exact context of the sharing is not available to me and I'm left to make assumptions and guesses.

Taking things a step further, an enterprise typically has employees that span many generations. Each generation has perspectives on their interactions and what constitutes public (and how many publics are within the organization) and also what is considered private. And perhaps each of these individuals has different abilities for recognizing the affordances of the tools at hand and the implications of the tools' capabilities? In addition, many enterprises have a presence in many countries. The cultural traits brought forward from each geography further complicates these views on interaction.

The ability to recognize, understand and take advantage of the networked public within an organization could be a key step in helping organizations become flatter (moving away from hierarchies), reconfigurable, and help push decision making closer to work.

References

Boyd, D. (2007). Why youth (heart) social network sites: The role of networked publics in teenage social life. *MacArthur foundation series on digital learning—Youth, identity, and digital media volume*, 119-142.