

The defining characteristics of true innovation are the courage to change and widespread adoption of that change to realise the benefits -- what's to be a real innovation ? Joan Mulvihill , CEO of the Irish Internet Association, shared her passion for technology and the internet of things, and for digital innovation at the 4th ENoLL Summer School Conference on Aug 30th, 2013.

Are we at the era of Digital Colonialism? In such a new way of life, great responsibility, courage and trust will move us from being colonialists of others to co-creators.

Read the full inspiring speech below:

***“Digital Colonialism, Courage and the Protocol of Trust”***

***Joan Mulvihill***

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From the outset I need to be emphatic on a single point – I am a huge fan of technology and the benefits that it can and does bring to society. You would think that that goes without saying but I suspect that there will be times over the next 20 minutes when you may doubt me but please be assured, it is true.

I became CEO of the Irish Internet Association four years ago. Naturally you’d assume that I have fifteen years of solid tech industry experience under my belt and was an avid weekend blogger and the kind of person who joined the midnight queues for the latest hardware. Not so! It was just four years ago when I first heard the terms Digital Native and Digital Immigrant – all those young ones with no concept of life before email and the ubiquity of mobile phones and then all the rest of us who have willingly migrated our lives on line. In truth I was more of a Digital Stowaway. I had worked previously in retail, manufacturing and professional services and after the collapse in 2008, I found myself floating jobless at sea until I got washed up ashore this digital world and got up and got on with it. So far so good!

The natives are a little cool at first but once you get to know them and prove your cred in converse it’s all okay and they are in fact pretty 'cool-cool'. The climate (economic) is a lot better than where I used to be, the ecosystem is robust and with each passing IPO, yields are high.

Like all emigrants, the natural instinct is to write letters home telling everyone how great it is here and encouraging them to leave home and come join us. I’m no different. The mission of the IIA is to make Ireland the leading web enabled economy in the world. My job is to get businesses trading online and operating in the cloud, to get citizens embracing technology to enhance relationships, knowledge, connectedness and service. We’ve done so through great initiatives like Digitise The Nation, Clicktailing and OpenData and it’s been the most rewarding and energising period of my

career. I'm effectively the Foreign Affairs Ambassador for tech land, reaching out to the people from my old 'home' and enticing them to come join me in my new one, a land of openness, innovation and adventure and indeed untold opportunity and wealth. What's not to love?

So it's been surprising to find it such a tough sell. Why so? Why is it so difficult to get businesses to move online, to put their operations in the cloud? Why is it so difficult to get my dad to check cattle mart prices online and get my sister to Facebook me? Why don't they just buy it online, watch it online later? Why do people not want to move? It's so much better here and their reluctance to move is baffling.

How quickly we forget. Prior to working for the IIA, I spent most of my career working on one kind of Change Management project or another. And fundamentally people don't like change and they especially don't like change when it is thrust upon them - by people that they don't know or trust. As an industry we have been generous to ourselves in the use of terminology like natives and immigrants. Their use infers that that if you are not one or the other, we are simply leaving you alone, at home in the comfort of familiar surroundings. It implies that we act benignly in relation to others and having not convinced them to move we are happy to wait for them to catch up and realise what they've been missing out on. But is that really the case? Have we really built a utopian world of digital democracy just for those who want it? Or in truth have we not in fact been invading and colonising them.

Think about it. How different are we to powerful colonising nations of the past? We have our own 'language', culture, belief systems, societal structures, physical infrastructure, we have even got our own viruses. And we are bringing all of these to bear on every citizen, business, country in the world saying that this is a better way to live. Is this not the era of digital colonialism?

Of course we believe that the benefits we bring to these people are greater than the price they may pay for losing their old way of life. And for the most part, we're probably right – technology supports education, enables effective healthcare management, 'democratises' access to information not to mention its impact on energy costs and consumption. I told you. I am a fan.

With such great power though comes great responsibility. There are instances of over eager governments maybe recording and amassing more than we're comfortable with. There are calls for filtering and greater copyright protection. There are concerns of cyber-bullying and general online ASBOs. Each of these issues is serious for sure but it seems that we are happy enough to deal with them in a piecemeal kind of way, resolving them with a little tinkering to current laws.

Is this enough? Will we succeed in widespread adoption of technological innovation if citizens feel vulnerable and coerced? The government used to be the highest authority in the land, the ones with all the info on you. We don't always like it but there is a sense that as long as you live in a democracy, the government more or less is there to act in your best interests. But as governments are overtaken by technology giants for knowledge and influence then consumers have a legitimate right to feel discomfort and suspicion.

Technology has the ability to disrupt the very essence of how we define ourselves as people, our identity and sense of place in the world. How relevant are national boundaries anymore? When

you think about it they are just arbitrary lines in the sand that say that everyone within these lines are like this and bound by these rules and everyone within those lines are like that and bound by those rules. People are connecting and aligning across national boundaries and the concept of citizenship has less to do with where you are born and more to do with who you are connected with. Technology allows people of shared interests and ideologies to assemble and mobilise to effect change across the planet irrespective of those lines. The Arab Spring. That works out pretty nicely when we agree with the ideology of the mobilised and we disagree with the ideology of those they seek to overthrow. But what happens when it doesn't work out so nicely? What happens when it's the London Riots?

On a micro level, those being colonised are feeling isolated and marginalised. Their culture, their very sense of identity, their means of making a living, their need and desire for privacy and independence is under threat – by me? Am I so under the spell of the magic that is technology that I don't think about people anymore?

If we are part of creating a new age and a new world where technology and the internet of things binds us then perhaps it's time to write its constitution. In a world of good guys and bad guys and well-meaning but misguided guys it might be good to have something in writing.

Dorothy lands in Oz. It all looks so pretty at the start – lollipops, munchkins, rainbows and a yellow brick road, flowers and catchy song. At the end of the road is the all-knowing Wizard of Oz. Simply ask him any question, anything at all and he will provide the answer. It wasn't until Toto yanked on the curtain that we realised it was just one crazy dude making it all up and telling Dorothy what she needed to hear. I'm not suggesting for a second that when you type a word into the little box in the middle of your search engine screen that someone is making it all up. I don't subscribe to that conspiracy theory but when a few oligarchic entities have the power and ability to answer all the questions in the world or connect you with anyone in the world then you have to ask the question, to whom are they accountable? Wall Street?

Colonialism was motivated by a need for control of trade routes and economic gain. The colonising powers arrived bearing gifts of modernity and development for the poor natives and when the natives didn't buy into it, they took what they wanted anyway and left the indigenous populations disenfranchised and isolated, living in cordoned off reservations without a voice much less a vote. Colonialism has never ended terribly well. And most countries have spent years regretting, apologising and making up for their colonialist past.

I did tell you that you'd start to doubt me. But it's because I love my new tech land homeland so much that I feel that I can talk to them, to you, about this. I mean seriously, if I didn't trust them would I have the courage to dare question them on a public forum such as this?

So here it is. This is what I propose. I would like to find a way that works for everyone - that delivers the immeasurable benefits without fear of the costs so that we can continue to innovate for the good - because I do believe that it is for good.

I found inspiration at the Open Innovation 2.0 conference in May. The defining characteristics of true innovation are the **courage** to change and widespread **adoption** of that change to realise the

benefits. There are many creative people with great ideas but it takes courageous people to be innovators. These are the people who dare to do and it is the adoption of that idea by its customers that makes it a real innovation and not just an idea on a shelf with a patent number. So we need lots of courage – the courage to do and the courage to adopt!

The lion asked the Wizard for courage. Of course the wizard pointed out that he'd had courage all along but he only discovered it when he teamed up with Dorothy and the others. We find our courage when we are fortified by our trust in those around us. I'm no wizard but I think the magic ingredient for courage is trust.

Great ideas more often than not come from the cross-pollination of thoughts, concepts and experiences across sectors and disciplines. Wider stakeholder engagement and collaboration creates a more 'honest-broker' style of innovation. Would you not be more inclined to trust something that comes from a partnership than a monopoly? And imagine if you were part of that partnership yourself?

Our ability to build real relationships across the parties of the Quadruple Helix of Innovation; governments, businesses, academics and citizens will shape our future. A determination for co-creation based on trust between all stakeholders will allow us to innovate in such a way that great ideas will actually become great innovations.

This kind of trust will move us from being colonialists of others to co-creators with others of our joint future, one that is good for everyone and not just those who provide it or bought-in early!

Colonialism occurred where one country, usually whoever got their first, assumed control over another's population. It was their laws that became the law, their governance that ruled, their language that was spoken and if they really succeeded their god that was believed.

Old world legislation and structures are struggling to keep up with a new world where rules are considered archaic and regulation is the kryptonite to creativity. We have an industry where some people believe that everyone should have access to everything and openness is our king. Anonymity and privacy is increasingly impossible to safeguard. Six degrees of separation is likely to be halved by the time we join all the data dots and in fact where anyone can connect with everyone then you could argue that there is no separation at all! The world has indeed become a smaller place.

What if all the algorithms go unchecked and we all end up with the same answers based on a combination of global group think and the limitations of our localised, personalised past? What if they change the algorithms so that we end up seeing only what they want us to see? What if in my searches for more, I am presented with less and less? Isn't it ironic that in our search to think outside the box, we start all of our searches in a box?

Even in my own life, I've succumbed to the belief that if I can't find it online then I question its very existence. I lost someone two years ago and in my confused grief I googled 'heaven' so that I could find where he had gone and find comfort in the sense that if he was somewhere real then he wasn't really gone at all. So much trust for me to place in an algorithm's version of the world - that an online presence verifies and validates our very existence?

Of life and death, at the end of the two great wars we saw the founding of the League of Nations and then the United Nations, agreements between responsible countries that no one should seek power over another, that democracy would be protected and that the participants would be guided by some over-arching principles of what is right and what is wrong. Above all, they signed up to protect people.

Where companies are now bigger and more powerful than governments in terms of their influence on what we think about and how we think about it, then could we ask them to consider the same? I mean, we are providing the content to them, we are the raw materials for their product so it doesn't seem a lot to ask. How many people really read the endless small print pages of T&Cs? And maybe we should think of asking for some T&Cs of our own. A summary term sheet where a business says "We've signed up to the Protocol of Trust" would be infinitely more efficient and citizens would likely feel a lot safer and much more likely to engage online.

I propose that such a Protocol of Trust could be designed by the parties of the "Quadruple Helix of Innovation" so that we might trust more, fear less and realise the benefits that all of technology has to offer.

The mission of the IIA is to make Ireland a leading web enabled economy. I want to achieve this mission because I believe that it is the right thing to do – it will take us out of recession and back to growth, it will provide jobs for people, better education and healthcare, renewable energy and a sustainable environment.

Technology is indeed a wonderful thing but is digital democracy still just an aspirational slogan? It will take courage to make it a reality and courage is just a feeling. We need trust for that and we can earn it the long way and lose it the hard way or we can shortcut the process and consider that a Protocol of Trust might not be so crazy. And as for finding heaven, it's not on GoogleMaps. Some things just take blind faith!

Joan Mulvihill appointed as CEO of the Irish Internet Association in November 2009 and is privileged to work with the best and brightest of technology start-ups as well as supporting more traditional businesses in the adoption of web-based technologies. Over the past three years, the IIA has led new initiatives such as Digitise the Nation to bridge the digital divide, as well developing policy on Digital Skills and Open-Data and driving business growth through Digital Marketing, eCommerce and Cloud Computing. Prior to joining the IIA, spent 8 years working in retail within the Kingfisher Group in London and Amsterdam before returning to Ireland in 2002 to work with Becton Dickinson's global sourcing team with procurement responsibilities across Europe and the US. From there moved to a senior consulting role within leading international professional services firm, BDO International.

Winner, 2011 "Professional Business Woman of the Year" Award, Image Publications

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