

The logo for the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) and Mhor Collective is centered in the upper half of the page. It consists of a dark square with a glowing blue border. Inside the square, the text "UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST of SCOTLAND" is at the top in a small, white, sans-serif font. Below it, "UWS" is written in a large, white, serif font. At the bottom, "mhor" is written in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font, with "collective" in a smaller, white, lowercase, sans-serif font underneath it. The background of the entire page is a dark blue with a complex, glowing circuit board pattern in a lighter blue color.

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Exploring Digital Ethics through a Digital Inclusion Lens

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1.0

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

The consequences of the digital transformations of the last two to three decades have been profound and far reaching. Their impact – magnified by swift deployment and far-reaching societal uptake – has wrought significant changes upon our sense of self, relationships and interactions with others and with our wider environment (i.e. Burr et al. 2020). Furthermore, these same factors have meant that ‘our individual and social wellbeing is now intimately connected with the state of our information environment’ (Burr et al. 2020:2313). A plurality of interrelated social, cultural and technological issues arise from this state of affairs. In turn, this has meant that ‘for what was originally conceived as an open and unregulated space, the internet has become the focus of a great deal of policy, law and governance’ (Whiting & Prichard, 2017: 6). In the notional societal space created by our rapid digital development, we must navigate a range of issues that encompass data big and small, privacy, good behaviour from a variety of standpoints. As Richards and King (2014) point out, the views and interests of those occupying the foremost positions of leadership in big tech do not always echo the foremost interests of their service users. Meta’s Mark Zuckerberg, for example, is not the only Silicon Valley guru to express the view that ‘we must yield our expectations of privacy’ to make way for the inevitable and get out of the way of technological innovation’ (Richards & King, 2014: 409; also, Véliz, 2021:10; Bélanger & Crossler, 2011:1030). Yet, the variety of ways in which both interaction with, and abstinence from, digital realms impact our lives means that even the acceptance of this position has multiple consequences.

As Rogerson (2020) – among others – points out, the advancement of digitisation into all areas of our collective and individual lives ‘requires a greater emphasis on, what we should now call, Digital Ethics.’ Further, Rogerson cautions that the failure to address this challenge will pave the way towards a miserable and inequitable future; a ‘world of privileged digital natives and an underclass of digital outcasts, a world of danger, domination and despair’ (Rogerson, 2020). Navigating away from this dystopia requires new realisations of long settled notions. For example, Richards and King, in their lengthy consideration of Big Data Ethics, note that ‘privacy should not be thought of merely as how much is secret, but rather about what rules are in place (legal, social or otherwise) to govern the use of information as well as its disclosure’ (Richards & King, 2014: 411; Sarathy & Robertson, 2003; Poças Rascão, 2020; Whitehouse, 2010). The growing use of digital tech and social media requires us to rethink the ways in which our social relationships are constructed. As O’Reilly et al. observe, and as is perhaps particularly the case for younger people, ‘initially, scholars differentiated ‘real’ lives from ‘virtual’ lives, but this rhetoric has shifted, with recognition that adolescents’ [and many others] lives are blended on and offline’ (O’Reilly et al. 2021:91)¹.

Rogerson provides a useful definition of Digital Ethics thus: ‘Digital Ethics can be defined as integrating digital technology and human values in such a way that digital technology advances human values, rather than doing damage to them’ (Rogerson, 2020). The way in which this process is carried out is also of importance. The subject of digital ethics is large in scale and continuously evolving in response to a fast-moving field. It is useful to keep in mind Floridi’s caution that while digital governance, digital regulation and digital ethics are connected and complimentary, they are distinct areas and should not be confused (Floridi, 2018:3). While, for example, the role of legislative regulation is/ will be significant, the development of ethical principles and best practice on the ground is also crucial (Richards & King, 2014:397).

In this report, UWS and Mhor Collective respond to SCVO’s commission to better understand how a digital ethics lens can be applied to digital inclusion settings. Specifically, in responding to the SCVO brief, in this report we include:

- A brief literature review of current understanding of how digital ethics relates to the context of digital inclusion;
- A summary of learning and insights from engagement with SCVO funded organisations working on digital inclusion projects;
- Conclusions and recommendations that will help SCVO develop its understanding of how community-based organisations in Scotland can understand and embed ethics in digital inclusion work.

¹ Floridi (2018) christens this ‘seamlessly analogue and digital space’ or infosphere ‘onlife’.



2.0

Literature
Review

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Context

In the following literature review, some of the most pertinent thematic discussions that emerge at the forefront of thinking about digital ethics are relayed and explored. These areas are Privacy, Public and Private Space, Wellbeing and Inclusion. And, though the literature discussing this issue directly is sparse, it is useful to briefly examine the ways in which some of these issues interact in the charitable/ third sector space. The review serves to highlight the complexity of the digital ethics space which encompasses big data (i.e. Richards & King, 2014) and AI (i.e. Floridi, 2021) alongside individuals' online conduct (i.e. O'Reilly et al, 2021, Flores & James, 2012), environmental impact concerns (Scott, 2022), privacy (i.e. Poças Rascão, 2020; Bélanger & Crossler, 2011; Whitehouse, 2010), trust (i.e. Kelton et al. 2008) and much more besides.

2.2 Literature Search and Review Methods

Search Terms: Digital Ethics; Digital Ethics AND Wellbeing; Social Media AND Ethics; Digital Ethics AND Inclusion; Digital Ethics AND Third Sector and Digital Ethics AND Charity, Digital Ethics AND Trust were used; no date limitation was applied to searches. Literature was drawn from the accessible resources among those returned. The reference sections of sources included in the scoping of literature were also examined for relevant material.

2.3 Notions of Privacy

The development of the web and, subsequently, the increasing reliance upon it for a range of services and social opportunities has profound consequences for our understanding of privacy. Where is a simpler world, an individual might be able to make a roughly correct estimation of the uses to which any personal information they shared might be put and, to make a fairly accurate cost/ benefit analysis when consenting to its collection and use, this is no longer the case (Richards & King, 2014: 414). Moreover, the same authors argue, 'binary notions of privacy are particularly dangerous in our digital era' (Richards & King, 2014: 414); they point out that private information can remain confidential even once it has been shared, the notion that once shared with consent information 'can no longer be private' is erroneous (Richards & King, 2014: 296). It is interesting that in the National Digital Ethics Public Panel², participants recognised that data harvesting happened and that there were potentially some benefits to be accrued to a customer or service user therein (Scott, 2022: 41). However, they also questioned whether all the data collected is of genuine necessity and expressed a degree of resignation about a perceived inevitability of data harvesting and an associated lack of control over the potential further distribution of the shared information (Scott, 2022:42 & 42). Further complexity is encountered as Sarathy and Robertson point out because regulatory attitudes to privacy concerns vary according to jurisdiction. In America, for example, the preference has been to permit self-regulation whereas European approaches to the same issue have been rooted in a sweeping legislative approach (Sarathy & Robertson, 2003). This variation in outlook means that 'firms may find themselves with divergent approaches to privacy protection, for the same data scenarios, in different countries' (Sarathy & Robertson, 2003: 123). Concomitantly, customers or service users may think they know what to expect in terms of privacy and data sharing when engaging with an enterprise, only to find that this is not the case if they have crossed a virtual border in regulatory terms. Privacy, however, remains important as Véliz notes, because 'privacy losses disempower citizens and often lead to further abuses of power' (Véliz, 2021:10), the routine reselling³ of data gathered for one purpose to other stakeholders in the digital information market is an example of this (Véliz notes that 'companies collecting data for pubs and restaurants for contact-tracing purposes have sold on that information' (Véliz, 2021:10)).

² The Public Panel was 'convened as a long-form, deliberative mini-public to address the overall question: How should Scotland best respond to the digital revolution in an ethical way?' (Scott, 2022). Panellists met on 6 occasions between September 2020 and June 2021 to meet for a total of 8 hours over a week to deliberate and discuss a range of topics in an information rich, facilitated environment. Topics covered were: What is digital and what is digital ethics? In an ethical digital Scotland how should we protect or mitigate digital risks & harms at individual and societal levels (and what are the constraints)? How do we strike a balance between the economic and social benefits from digital innovations, while also preventing negative effects? Can Digital Technologies help to reduce inequalities for individuals and provide opportunities for society to become more inclusive? Can the ever-increasing use of digital tech in Scotland be balanced with environmental responsibility? In an ethical digital Scotland, how far should public and private sector bodies be allowed to go in the use of digital technologies and surveillance to make decisions and direct services? What are the outstanding challenges, opportunities and tensions for becoming an ethical digital nation? (Scott, 2022).

³ As Sarathy and Robertson observe, 'Individuals have different preferences for privacy for different kinds of data and depending on the context in which this data is disclosed.' People might, for example, be much more reticent regarding disclosure of information about their political or sexual preferences, health or financial status. They may be less concerned when it comes to 'likes and dislikes in entertainment' or their 'current consumption preferences, likes and dislikes' (Sarathy & Robertson, 2003:115).

Further, she notes that a particular side-effect of the COVID19 pandemic – which motivated many to develop ever deeper reliance on digital platforms – has been to dilute the ‘techlash’ against the encroachments on privacy made by the large, and largely unavoidable, tech platforms. Both scholars (i.e. Richards & King, 2014; Véliz, 2021) and members of the general public (i.e. Scott, 2022) recognise that privacy is not only a matter of legal regulation; privacy can – and arguably should – be designed into digital platforms by default, becoming a standard expectation of the way in which companies do business (Richards & King, 2014; Scott, 2022, Véliz, 2021).

2.4 The Elision of Public and Private Space

Arguably, the erosion of privacy that has characterised/ become synonymous with the increasing encroachment of the digital into and across many aspects of our lives is further accelerated by the elision of public and private realms that is apparent in the digital context. The question of what constitutes the public and, where it stops and, where the private begins, is central to a number of ethical issues in the digital world. Writing from the viewpoint of internet focussed academic researchers, Whiting and Prichard note that these issues determine ‘whether material can be used as data in research, particularly without explicit consent.’⁴ For these authors, the crux of the issue is ‘that much engagement with the internet takes place simultaneously in places regarded as private, such as the home, and in public, such as [an] open discussion forum’ (Whiting & Prichard, 2017:11). The blurring of distinctions between public and private spaces/realms of activity has consequences for conduct within digital spaces. For example, in their examination of young people’s digital perspectives, Flores and James propose that ‘the public nature of the internet – the fact that one can never know who is behind the screen – suggests that ‘ethical thinking’ is vital’ yet, as interactions take place remotely, ‘they may be susceptible to ‘disconnect’ meaning that even those who are predisposed to conduct their interactions ethically, may not always follow through (Flores & James, 2012:847). Yet, as these authors also observe, different actors operating in the same space can view it in a variety of ways. Indeed, studies reveal that while some video gamers understand the gaming realm as a ‘magic circle where morality and ethics are suspended,’ there are others who perceive gaming spaces (and specifically massive multiplayer games (MMG)) as communities (Flores & James, 2012:837). Flores and James argue that digital media can disrupt relationships in two ways. Firstly, by promoting a ‘convergence between self and other’ as a result of uninterrupted connection with others and, secondly, through a process of ‘othering’ which causes/ enables an actor to distance themselves from the consequences of their online actions (Flores & James, 2012:836). This finding is echoed in O’Reilly et al.’s (2021) work investigating adolescents’ sense of responsibility on social media.

In their work on adolescent’s understanding of their responsibilities online, O’Reilly et al. observe that, as digital platforms are so central to social lives for this group, ‘social media plays a pertinent role in facilitating interaction and caring relationships. Notably, the adolescents surveyed demonstrated awareness of their own responsibility for their conduct online and they acknowledged that poor conduct had adverse effects for others (O’Reilly et al, 2021:96-7). Summarising their research, these authors observed that ‘there was evidence of our participants placing a reciprocal and mutual nature of their caring relationships at the heart of their digitally mediated interactions’ (O’Reilly et al, 2021: 105) and, that this approach was applied both to their networks of friends and acquaintances as well as to ‘proximate strangers’. This research demonstrates that ethics and ethical conduct generated within grassroots/user groups exists and arguably does much to govern a variety of online contexts.

Interestingly, in their research within a similar age group, Flores and James identified three vectors for thinking about use of social media and MMGs; among their study participants, they found that individualistic thinking – where the foremost concern is for the consequences of action or behaviour for oneself – predominated. Furthermore, even those in the study group who demonstrated more nuanced and ‘ethically responsible’ comportment online, were not immune to lapses in conduct⁵. This finding chimes with the view of the public panel whose deliberations are reported by Scott (2022). For this group, the indifference and lack of accountability that can characterise online interactions arises as a result of disinhibition and reduction in empathy which can derive from the anonymity of online spaces (Scott, 2022:34, also Whitehouse, 2010:317).

⁴ Also see Whitehouse who relays the findings of a British Press Complaints Commission survey in which ‘more than three-quarters of adults online would change information that they had digitally published about themselves if they thought it would end up in mainstream media’ (Whitehouse, 2010:310).

⁵ Also see Milmo (2022) who reports findings from EU funded research that ‘risky and criminal online behaviour is in danger of becoming normalised among a generation of young people across Europe... one in four 16- to 19-year-olds have trolled someone online and one in three have engaged in digital piracy.’

2.5 Digital (Ethics) and Wellbeing

While issues of privacy and online interaction can be examined and understood at an overarching, big data, level, it is notable that wellbeing consistently emerges both implicitly and explicitly in discussions around digital ethics (see for example: Gluckman & Allen, 2018; Sixsmith, 2022; O'Reilly et al, 2021; Flores & James, 2012, Burr et al, 2020).

A notion of wellbeing in the digital space can be considered from a variety of standpoints. Wellbeing is the implicit underpinning of the research undertaken by O'Reilly et al (2021) and Flores and James (2012), it is more forthrightly evident in the work of Gluckman and Allen (2018) and Sixsmith (2022). In their effort to better understand wellbeing within the context of rapid digital transformation, Gluckman and Allen argue that the change brought about by digitisation is so swift and profound that 'policy agendas and tools as well as measures for monitoring and sustaining human wellbeing must therefore adapt to take into account the impact of digitalisation and associated technologies' (2018:4). To this end, their work focuses on efforts to develop a guiding framework for the developing research and policy agendas. Noting that, digital transformation may even alter our 'views of what constitutes wellbeing' (2018:9), they contend that it is no longer sufficient to focus almost exclusively on 'individualised concerns' with regard to wellbeing. Instead, the collective dynamic must also be duly considered (2018:18⁶).

Sixsmith (2022) argues – particularly with regard to older people and the potential of AgeTech⁷– that, while potentially hugely beneficial, without attendant personal, cultural and social adaptations, advanced service provision such as that provided by AgeTech can nevertheless function in troublesome and undesirable ways that 'therefore, become ethically questionable' (Sixsmith, 2022:533, also Rogerson, 2020; Burr et al, 2020:2328; Brignall, 2022). In order to counter this ethical challenge, Sixsmith proposes that a focus on equality and, particularly, 'the use of an intersectional lens together with social justice and human rights approaches to research, design and development' is a necessity if loss of dignity, dis-empowerment and social exclusion are to be avoided (Sixsmith, 2022: 534). This notion of required/ circumstantial digital adaptation is also reflected in the work of scholars interested in intercultural digital ethics (IDE), who argue the importance of acknowledging the primacy of western values in the ethical perspectives that dominate understandings of digital ethics. IDE scholars note that the failure to acknowledge the differing ways in which digital technologies may impact other social and cultural groups risks bringing about ethical harms (Aggarwal, 2020).

Burr et al (2020) note the need to appropriately instrumentalise wellbeing in order for it to function as a useful concept in the discussion. These authors record (citing Krutzina, 2016) that 'wellbeing is often deployed as a somewhat vague concept and thus imposes too few practical constraints on an individual's decision making' ... 'how should one design and implement technology when faced with conceptual and normative uncertainty about the consequences of specific choices?' (2020: 2327). To further illuminate some of the complexity enmeshed within these questions, it is useful to look specifically at some of the discussion taking place in the space of digital inclusion/ exclusion and, to consider more fully, the implications that this has for digital ethics.

⁶ Broadly, this is reflected in Whitehouse's discussion of newsgathering and privacy which charts the changing boundary between the individual right to privacy against the development of journalistic regulation in the digital media age (Whitehouse, 2010).

⁷ AgeTech is 'emerging and advanced technologies and the relationship with older people'. This can comprise 'e-health, robotics, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, and mobile technologies' (Sixsmith, 2022: 532).

2.6 Inclusion and the Digital

Digital inclusion is increasingly recognised as being of crucial importance for active and beneficial membership of civil society (Esenowo, 2012). Digital inclusion – rather like digital ethics – is multifaceted. Difficulty encountered in gaining and maintaining access to digital space can result from challenges associated with skills and confidence to engage, or the affordability of reliable broadband and up-to-date hardware or, the absence of desire to take many elements of life online as necessitated by ‘digital by default’ approaches (Royal Academy: 2022; also see Van Dijk, 2006). As the Royal Academy highlight in their recently published work on the topic, digital poverty is a catchall for various dimensions of digital exclusion, one which ‘can be thought of as a condition that people can fall into throughout their life which can be prevented or addressed through maintaining appropriate mechanisms and support networks⁸’ (Royal Academy, 2022:7). However, findings in the same report – and elsewhere – illustrate the difficulties that can be encountered in such efforts.

For example, in some new build housing residents are limited in their choice of broadband provider where developers have entered into agreements with specific telecoms suppliers, ‘potentially leaving a choice between unfavourable terms and unaffordability or no home broadband’ for any residents (Royal Academy, 2022:21)⁹. For those in straitened financial circumstances, social tariffs may offer a plausible option in terms of increased affordability but they ‘provide slower connection speeds than regular tariffs and can be inadequate for households of more than one person or, for video calling or streaming purposes’ (Royal Academy, 2022: 20). Furthermore, from the standpoint of the hardware required to engage digitally in a beneficial way, the issue of planned obsolescence is another significant hurdle, especially for those on lower incomes. This is particularly so as updated software platforms exclude those who cannot afford a compatible digital device (Royal Academy, 2022: 23). Such circumstances evidence the ways in which digital poverty/exclusion risk is often amplified by and entrenched in other forms of offline, economic and social disadvantage¹⁰, a so-called ‘double loop’ (Royal Academy, 2022: 26).

The double loop phenomenon is very much in evidence in (some areas of) the third sector. In their study investigating the challenges of digital transformation in the charity sector, Doná et al (2022) trace the ways in which refugees’ exclusion is magnified by the reliance on digital brought about by the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic¹¹. These authors found that, while COVID meant that interactions moved online, the socio-economic ‘status of unaccompanied asylum seekers limits digital participation’. In addition, many in this group found themselves in the position of engaging with technologies and platforms that were new to them in a language that was also unfamiliar. Furthermore, their journey to asylum makes it much more likely that, prior to their arrival, their education has been disrupted (Doná et al, 2022: 2). An additional issue deriving from the ‘forced’ transition to digital space discussed in this study is one of potential erosion of trust brought about by the absence of face-to-face interaction as the opportunity to ‘read non-verbal behaviours which is key for communication when language skills are limited’ and, for avoiding the pitfall of becoming ‘just a[nother] voice over the phone or an anonymous interlocutor’ was keenly felt (Doná et al, 2022:4).

While the case study discussed in this research related specifically to young, unaccompanied asylum seekers, the authors were able to draw some wider-ranging conclusions regarding the challenges faced by the charitable sector in an increasingly digital world. While the potential opportunities of digitisation and online service delivery in the sector are clear (i.e. access for service users living in remote areas;

8 As noted in the Lloyds Bank annual Consumer Digital Index for 2022, on the one hand current digital engagement figures are as high as they have ever been with large increases for those ‘demonstrating the highest levels of digital capability’. While 24% of the population can be bracketed here, on the other hand, a very significant 14 million (or 27%) are found in the ‘lowest digital capability’ category and 13% in the ‘ultra-low capability’ banding (Lloyds Bank, 2022: 9–10). Further, there are significant regional differences; London has far and away the most digitally capable population. Across the UK, approximately 500,000 (1%) are offline; defined as not having been online for 3 months or more. For the vast majority (86%) of these people, this is a matter of personal choice. For others, concerns about privacy and security and the potential uses to which harvested data might be put take primacy (Lloyds Bank, 2022:11–14).

9 Also see: Sweny (2022) Labour calls for crackdown on rip-off UK Christmas broadband and mobile ads; Watchdog must stop misleading ads locking consumers into deals up to £240 more than thought, says opposition party.

10 It is interesting to note that while categories such as ethnicity, minority cultural background and income bracket are significant here (Royal Academy, 2022) so too is gender as women – wherever they are in the world – are less likely to be online and more likely to have fewer digital skills as well as being persistently underrepresented in the tech world (Doná et al. 2022; also see: Jolly, 2022).

11 Also see: Finlay et al’s (2021) study on the impacts of COVID 19 on asylum seekers and refugees, in addition to the challenges presented by financial constraints, ‘housing for asylum seekers is not provided with Wi-Fi, and asylum seekers are typically unable to sign up for broadband contracts’ as they are not permitted to enter into contracts per-se (Finlay et al. 2021:14).

facilitation of communication; more streamlined operations), charities need support and guidance in order to capitalise fully on this potential. This process should comprise recognition of the realities of organisations working with service users who are 'often at the margins of digital innovations;' affording assistance to them to '[ground] their digitisation in the specific needs of their client[s]' (Doná et al, 2022: 1-5). Such steps are necessary for a digital equitable society in which charities must play a role (Doná et al, 2022).

The role of digital inclusion as a prerequisite for digitally ethical conduct is reflected in the above, it is also recognised as a foremost requirement for Scotland to be(come) an ethical digital nation; the panel discussions led and reported by Scott (2022) foregrounded the significance of inclusion for digital ethics. Group members also underscored the leading role that government – in terms of regulation – should fulfil here, alongside businesses in the tech space to provide software, data and devices; including 'basic devices and supporting older devices on a continuing basis,' thus reducing planned obsolescence (Scott, 2022: 22-3). The foregoing is not an explicit framework for digitally ethical conduct. Rather, it is an exploration of the discussions and debates about digital ethics that demonstrates the complexity of the term but also its importance. Themes generated from this review feed into the remainder of this report.





3.0
Research
Methodology

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

While issues of privacy and online interaction can be examined and understood at an overarching, big data, level, it is notable that wellbeing consistently emerges both implicitly and explicitly in discussions around digital ethics (see for example: Gluckman & Allen, 2018; Sixsmith, 2022; O'Reilly et al, 2021; Flores & James, 2012, Burr et al, 2020).

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Include Me 2

Include Me 2 is a registered SCIO offering a range of social clubs for people of all ages and abilities. These clubs are a mix of targeted activity (employability-focused, for example) and general social events., offered both online and in the digital space. As part of this wider work, Include Me 2 is also interested in supporting those who use their services to better understand the wider use of devices beyond social media and help to engage learners in productive internet use. The programme would continue the current provision of clubs to all ages, with a specific focus on online behaviours.

Those working in the organisation recognise that the younger people using their services primarily engage with social media, rather than more widely to unlock opportunities, an example highlighting wider issues of digital inequality, and, in particular discussions around tangible outcomes (see Helsper, E.J. & Smirnova, S. (2019) . Reference was made

to cyberbullying, for example. Include Me 2 Club seeks to break the disconnect between online and real life, and help young people to understand that online actions have real consequences for people and communities. In order to do so, they are keen to help young people understand the 'other side' of the internet, and see how digital can be used as a force for good and/or productivity. The organisation used the example of a 'Brick It' app which helps users build Lego models by analysing the number and size of Lego bricks in a pile. The project will support an understanding of ethical internet use by reinforcing broad use and challenging abusive online behaviours.

Leuchie House

Leuchie House supports people who have MS, who have had a stroke, or who are living with a number of other neurological conditions, offering greater independence by introducing them to technology enabled care. They use mass-market consumer technology such as Amazon Echo to demonstrate how people with physical impairments can stay in their own homes for longer. They are partnered with Ability Net to help users learn and troubleshoot with devices after they leave the respite centre. At project inception, Leuchie noted a particular commitment to developing a better and more fulsome understanding of the ethical implications of the technology they use. They noted a particular interest in issues around data aggregation and privacy for vulnerable people engaging with technology enabled care and intend to develop a clear policy around digital ethics. Similarly, Leuchie hoped to explore the ethical considerations for practitioners in terms of privacy, security and safety, thinking about organisational ethics as well as the trustworthiness of systems and platforms used.

PKAVS

PKAVS is a Perth based local charity, which supports the wellbeing of people and communities in Perth and Kinross. The organisation supports unpaid carers, those recovering from mental ill health, minority communities, older people, the local third sector and volunteers. For this particular project, PKAVS was leading a digital inclusion project taking the form of a 10 week employability course to BME communities in addition to a digital drop in and communal access to laptops at a hotel for refugees and asylum seekers. The project worker embeds digital learning, ESOL and finding "the hook" in the digital course, but the drop in is a mix of case work, essential digital skills work and building trusted relationships.

From an ethics perspective, the work at PKAVS intersects with digital ethics in a number of interesting ways; most of the single male refugees in the hotel drop ins are from countries with heavily censored internet and social media and so the project worker was very keenly aware about the quality of information they are exposed to. Some of the work will focus on what is trusted information, where are those sources and how can they be identified. Consideration was also given to the increasing institutionalism within the hotel environment; young men without autonomy who are expecting everything to be done for them and feel they do not have the rights or agency to act for themselves. Understanding their digital rights was also deemed important; examples included how hotel staff are viewed in a position of authority and therefore the young men give them access to all their digital information, or access to their devices on request without considering their rights. PKAVS also spoke about how refugees often sacrifice much of their digital privacy to keep in touch with their loved ones in other countries, and this included apps like Snapchat with location settings on in case they needed to prove their location to someone in authority.

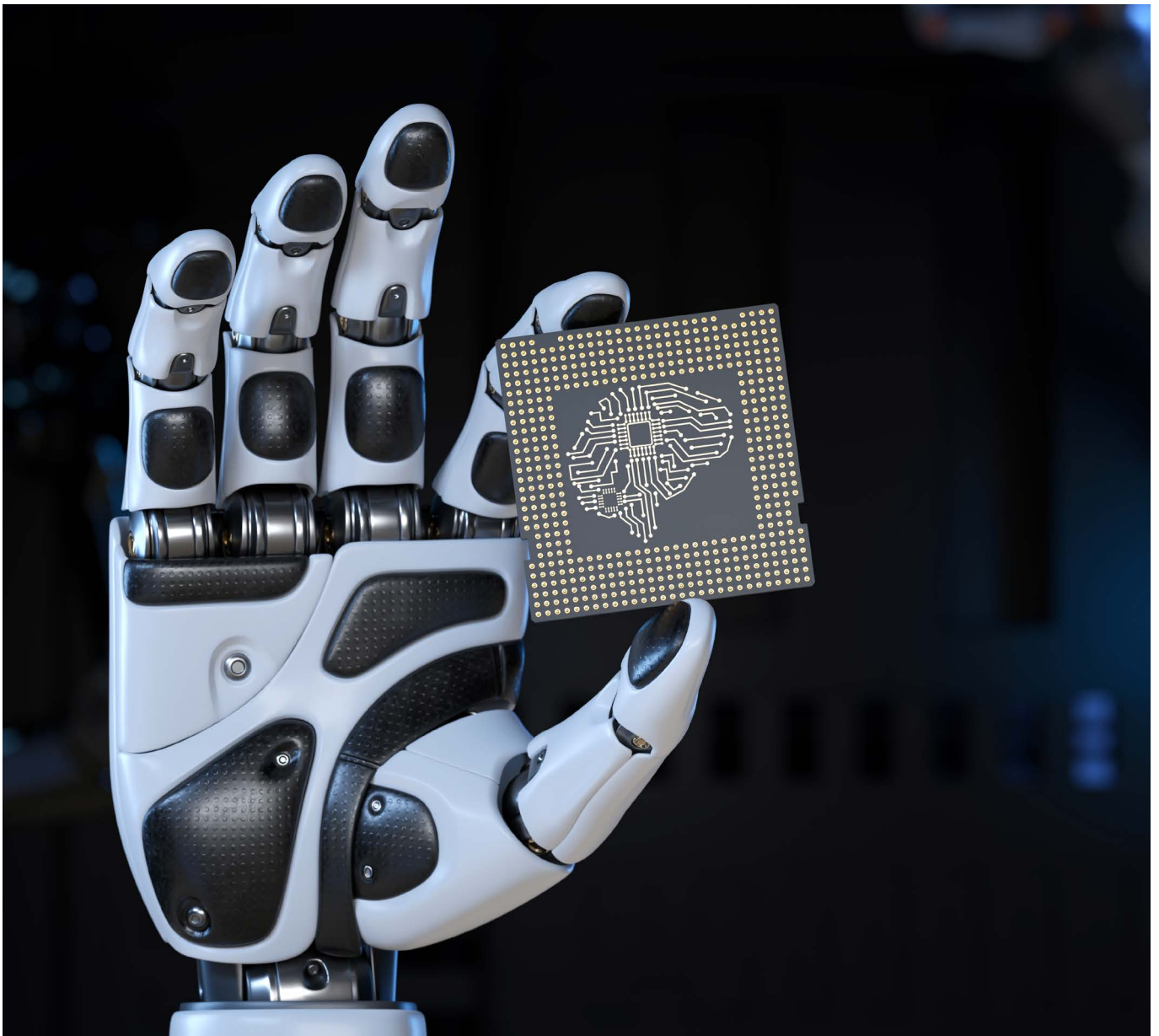
Glasgow's Golden Generation (GGG)

GGG works with a range of older people across different parts of Glasgow, including operating day centres and digital cafes. Their service focuses on 1:1 support, having supported 180 clients through Connecting Scotland and the development of a bespoke app. They have exciting developments ongoing with Sky, as Scotland's first 'Sky Up Hub' providing connectivity support through provision of superfast broadband. At project inception, GGG stated that their interest was to focus on organisational issues relating

to digital ethics, principally the ethics of how digital practitioners engage in sensitive discussions with their learners, including passwords and protecting clients when setting up passwords; transacting online and how this can be done safely; and putting more stringent controls into place around volunteers in this scenario. There was a clear ambition towards understanding the space between the necessity of moving people online, and the ethical implications this has for organisations providing that support.

The Hub, Dumfries and Galloway

The Hub D&G provides a series of four digital up-skilling workshops that focus on the Essential Digital Skills framework. These workshops are part of services that the Hub offers as a community information and resource point. Prior to project inception, the Hub D&G had been seeking an opportunity to test a new approach to their upskilling workshops for some time. The aspiration of the ethics project was to better understand responsible online behaviours including what has traditionally been referred to as 'netiquette', curating an online persona and understanding your digital footprint. They are important components of the online experience and the Hub would like to understand if messaging around this works better as a standalone course or whether it should be embedded into existing learning workshops. They intend to test both and use a system of baselining/ impact to understand which worked best, increasing their capacity and understanding what service users need. There is also an implication that there is a responsibility on service providers to enable service users to act in an ethical way.





4.0
Findings

4.0 Findings

In this section of the report, we focus on the principal insights generated from the action research approach. Structurally, we begin by outlining participating organisation's experience of the action research approach, before focusing on how they defined digital ethics in their own terms. We then outline participants' perspectives on the Objects of Trust framework that has been recognised as a useful way of thinking about digital ethics at a national level.

4.1 Collaboration, Connection and Research into Action

I don't really know what I was hoping to achieve but I think after the initial meeting it was clear that it was going to be good getting different opinions and stuff from other people who work in sort of Digital Inclusion sector' (GGG)

The action research approach was viewed a positive model for all research participants who reflected that the opportunity to explore the topic across organisations was particularly helpful:

I would say that it did help, chatting about stuff, realising people have the same issues and bringing in the Objects of Trust, I had never seen that before or my colleagues so that was certainly helpful...Time is always a issue for us, so we took seven hours each, so we could both have time to do things with it and that really helped (Leuchie House)

The collaborative approach also helped to collate discussion and focus on a more unified approach which could be a model to inform wider work on digital ethics across the third sector. One participant noted that, 'It has really progressed for us, and we would have done it anyway but not to the same degree and we would have made our own structure of it, but now we can have something that is more recognised and translates to other contexts.' (Leuchie House). Furthermore, participants were asked to share research discussions beyond the immediate research group, and seek insights from colleagues within their own organisations, and also from those people accessing services. It is interesting to note the level of active engagement in the participating organisations:

it's been good having discussions with both members of staff from the Digital Team who do the same job as me, but also, members of staff from different teams, say who work in the Day Centres, who it's not particularly their job doing Digital Inclusion but it comes up all the time anyway because people have phones or see people using phones and asking what they are or that type of thing (GGG)

We're now having a bit of a debate and a conflag about digital ethics more widely in our other projects that we run - one of which is a social prescribing project. I think it's really important we think about that for that. And also look at what our organisational capacity is to stress test every project we do against a kind of filter of digital ethics. Will that take a lot of time what are the implications to that we've already had a few with the getting connected in sense of our iPad and free Wi-Fi loan that we give people who haven't got equipment while they're doing the sessions. So it's just broadened things out a lot more and brought it much more further up the agenda for us to think about it in terms of our projects (The Hub)

One particularly welcome outcome of the research approach was the direct implementation of action by research participants in their own organisations, following both group discussions and specific focus on elements of the Objects of Trust. Examples of action include:

We have reviewed our resources in terms of plain English and easy to read formats i.e. more graphics, larger text, shorter sentences. We have incorporated digital ethics concepts and practice in our resources accessible to all participants. We have reviewed and amended our agreement with participants to include a responsibility to consider their digital netiquette as part of their learning about internet enabled equipment and using the internet.' (The Hub)

“As a result of engaging with the ethics project, already having a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) and informed consent form in place, a big change is doing the Object of Trust document, which has led us to listing what things we would like as objects from these e.g. documents, policies. We had questions we needed to answer too, and the project gives us the categories to put these under, so we can say we know we have looked at all these topics, these Objects of Trust. (Leuchie House)

Staff also reflected that the focussed time was of particular importance, that the monthly sessions offered a focus for action and implementation, ‘I think it’s been a great opportunity you know, (...) without this I’m pretty sure we would not have been thinking about this.’ While the focus of this project was not to assess implementation of digital ethics within participating organisations, it is encouraging that participants were already translating learning and insights generated from collaborative sessions into their organisational practice. We return to how these learnings can be shared more widely in our conclusions and recommendations.

4.2 Defining Digital Ethics in Practice

Drawing on the preceding review of literature, it is clear that there are many different definitions of digital ethics. In our research, there was recognition that definitional ambiguity creates a challenge for organisations working in the third sector. Outlining the key characteristics of digital ethics was discussed extensively in the first group session, with one organisation also carrying out extensive discussion in-house, both with frontline staff and with those people accessing services. For both frontline staff and those engaged in the research, digital ethics encompassed a number of areas of activity. These included digital devices, apps and platforms; digital systems (both internal and external); data privacy and security; non judgemental equality of access and opportunity; policies, duty of care and safeguarding. The identification of these specificities were helpful as the group moved through further research, and, in particular the Objects of Trust.

“Digital Ethics can be defined as integrating digital technology and human values in such a way that digital technology advances human values, rather than doing damage to them.” (Rogerson, 2020)

In our second session, the research team explored some of the definitions proposed in the academic literature, and all felt that two statements in particular best represented an overarching definition of digital ethics and also highlighted the reason why such exploration was a necessary element of digital inclusion work, in particular. Firstly, the group agreed that Rogerson’s values-led definition, that ‘Digital Ethics can be defined as integrating digital technology and human values in such a way that digital technology advances human values, rather than doing damage to them’ (Rogerson, 2020) strongly matched their understanding and experience of this issue. The group agreed that any definition that might be used in the field of practice should seek to reflect a commitment to this advancement. Some suggestions offered in this regard included, ‘In general, I would say digital ethics means utilising the digital to support or enhance human interaction and pursuance of knowledge, rather than replace it all together.’ Secondly, the group also felt that Rogerson’s (2020) statement on necessity was also important, ‘The failure to address this challenge will pave the way towards a miserable and inequitable future; a world of privileged digital natives and an underclass of digital outcasts, a world of danger, domination and despair’ (Rogerson, 2020). Our Research participants explored how they might define digital ethics in their own organisations and with frontline staff, generating a range of interesting insights:

- *My immediate thoughts about digital ethics are on the lines of keeping to our policies on data protection and being transparent to those involved what the policies are. I am sure there are other policies that have to be adhered to but I can only think of the data side of things and the requirement to be confidential and respect privacy.*
- *Digital ethics means utilising digital channels and equipment to support or enhance human interaction and pursuance of knowledge, rather than replace it all together.*
- *To hazard a guess I would say it relates to how we collect and use the information we store digitally. Developing and using policies and procedures around this to ensure safe storage and management of the information?*
- *Digital ethics to me means a code of conduct around accessing and using digital systems.*
- *Digital ethics means to me – that the information we have collected is used with care and what it is designed for.*

Based on these insights and feedback received from staff and services users, it is possible to draw out some key characteristics of digital ethics, as they relate to digital inclusion work, in particular. These include the need to be person-centric and for them to be designed into systems and practices.

A person-centric approach

When asked to define digital ethics, participants often reflected the fact that questions of ethics are highly variable and context dependent, unique, almost entirely, to the people accessing services. It was suggested that people are placing trust in the serving organisation, and their own capacity, digital skills and digital understanding, as well as their own social context impacting heavily on their ability to explore the space of digital ethics. This situation can mean that the organisation is faced with an additional duty of care. Examples drawn directly from participant feedback include:

- *Not taking advantage of a service user whilst helping them with their device, not storing their personal details insecurely.*
- *Not going to persuade service users to buy things online that they don't need or want or influence them to buy something online for someone else.*
- *Not making service users do things online they don't want to. Be mindful about what they're being signed up for. e.g. dating sites, be cautious and explain how they work, giving safety information about the possibility of getting scammed.*
- *Being aware not to share passwords if they share with you. Giving online safety information about sharing passwords.*
- *Not to blur the line between being a service user and outside work, e.g. adding them on social media.' (GGG)*

Given the focus of this research was to explore digital ethics through a digital inclusion lens, these insights are of particular importance. The nature of digital ethos concerns are accentuated in some settings and with some users or clients. While the majority of participants had complex insights as to how we might define digital ethics, this was not always matched by those accessing services. For example, Leuchie House carried out extensive exploration with their residents, the vast majority of whom when asked 'What does 'digital ethics' mean to you?' stated that they were not sure, or had no idea at all. A few offered suggestions, including 'Is it one of those tick box forms where you have to check ethnic minority?' and 'Computers. Not for me, social media'. Such insights, again, demonstrate the 'outsourcing' of these considerations to trusted intermediaries in the space of digital inclusion work.

Foregrounded in Systems and Practices









Participating organisation staff also reflected that consideration of digital ethics needed to be effectively designed-into the systems and platforms used to deliver services. There was a recognition from participants that this can be difficult when organisations are forced to use third party software or national systems that lack flexibility or the ability to amend design. There was a clear focus on digital data, privacy and security, each of which can be difficult to uphold if systems or practices do not match. Participants summarised their understandings as:

- *I guess it means taking care of people's digital data. Although from very recent experience, I would now add to that to say that professionally, it now also means that the duty of care I owe to my patients (our guests) includes a responsibility to ensure that any new tech we use to deliver services will provide the same duty of care as if I were providing the service myself.*

- To me, digital ethics means making sure that technology is accessible to everyone and developed with a wide range of people in mind. That it doesn't exploit people. That information collected is stored, shared and maintained responsibly. I think it's also about honesty and transparency!
- A framework which considers the accessibility of digital technologies from an equalities perspective. A framework for determining protections for individual users of digital technology from harm or exploitation.

4.3 Framing Digital Ethics through the Objects of Trust

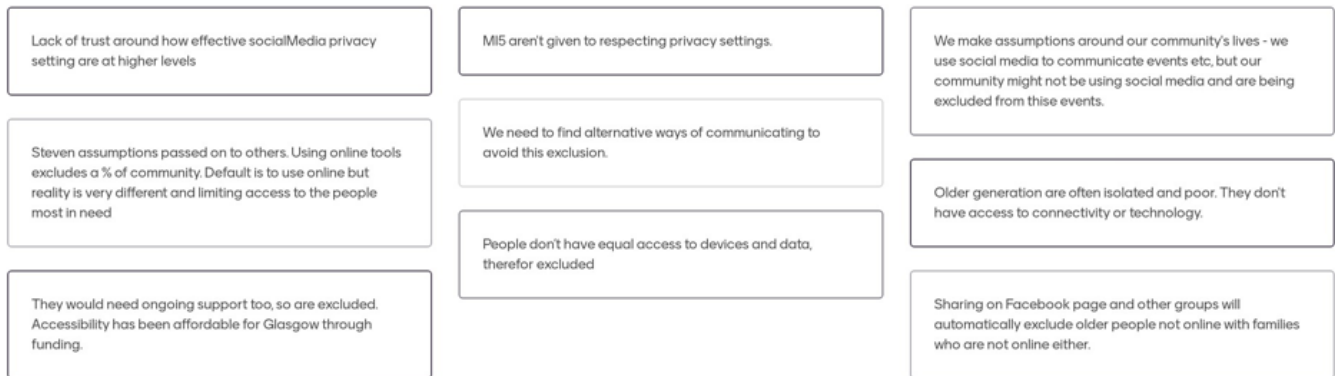
Much of the research phase was framed by an exploration of the eight Objects of Trust. This framework sits within the Government priority of An Ethical Digital Nation. It was felt by all group participants to be a highly useful framework, with immediate possibilities for application.

 <p>Technology</p> <p>Is it reliable? Is it robust? Is it safe?</p>	 <p>Usefulness</p> <p>Is it necessary? Will it help? Is it worth it?</p>	 <p>Privacy</p> <p>Is my information confidential? Are there laws/regulations to protect me?</p>	 <p>Choice</p> <p>Is it optional? Would not using it prevent me from doing important things?</p>
 <p>Fairness</p> <p>Is it accessible to and useable by everyone? Who could benefit? Could it be used for discrimination? Is it exploitative?</p>	 <p>Transparency</p> <p>Are the people behind it being truthful about its purposes and beneficiaries? Are there other motives?</p>	 <p>Institutions</p> <p>Are systems in place to ensure effective governance, oversight, compliance and accountability?</p>	 <p>Users</p> <p>Could it be misused to hurt others? Could it harm others? Could it inconvenience others?</p>

As one research participant responded, 'I think the objects of trust themselves are not onerous - yeah it seems quite a few of them I think that objects of trust terminology might be a bit off-putting for people but I think they could be very easily integrated into their digital charter in the framework. I do.' (The Hub). Throughout the active research phase, participants suggested that the framework was extremely helpful in informing practice and service implementation. Participants also noted, however, that the contextual scene setting and consideration of how this might be used in work to address digital inequality should be given greater consideration to ensure that the focus remains person-centred, rather than organisation focussed. Unique situations, and unique challenges, require unique consideration, 'I think it's the context of these things that is very, very important. I think a general note on top of each topic (environment) to say that needs to be looked at from *insert context/viewpoint/angle* not generically in the outside world. An answer may not have to be just Yes/No as it needs context.' (Leuchie House). In the next few sections, we reflect on each Object of Trust in turn and illustrate how our participating organisations responded to working within this framework.

4.3.1 Fairness

Group discussion on fairness



Building on participant's commitment to Rogerson's (2020) definition of digital ethics that foregrounds human values, fairness was clearly an important consideration. particularly as our research participants are actively working to address digital inequality through the delivery of digital inclusion work. As one participant suggested, 'we have reviewed our resources in terms of plain English and easy to read formats ie more graphics, larger text, shorter sentences. We have incorporated digital ethics concepts and practice in our resources accessible to all participants' (The Hub). PKAVS offered some particularly helpful insights related to fairness, stating that:

Language is our key barrier in making tech usable and accessible - for example all of our laptops have QWERTY keyboards with the latin alphabet, so being able to read latin characters becomes a requirement for using the device. We get around this using tablets, which have their drawbacks but are easier to download different keyboards for' (PKAVS)

Some organisations, however, also noted that access to the internet opens up the converse possibility of people being treated unfairly. PKAVS noted that:

Access to the internet naturally leads to more opportunities for exploitation, as well as the positives. For example, we know that social media is the main channel for those seeking asylum seekers for illegal cash in hand work, and there's no real way to protect people from the exploitation associated with that without restricting their other freedom. Most technologies can be used for discrimination. Minority ethnic communities are underrepresented in user testing for the majority of tech solutions, with consequences such as facial recognition software being less effective which can have huge consequences as well as creating more minor inconveniences such as with lock/unlock features. (PKAVS)

4.3.2 Usefulness

Our second object of trust

USEFULNESS

Usefulness (GGG)

There are lots of things to consider when we do digital inclusion work at GGG, and whether the topics we cover and the things we help with are useful. I would say that everything we do is useful to some degree.

This could range from something that is very practically useful, such as helping someone with filling out a form online. For example, a blue badge application. The process is a lot quicker if done online, and the blue badge gets to the user faster. This enhances their life in a huge way, giving them easier access to places. They may have still got to the end goal if doing traditionally on paper, but the process was hugely sped up due to the benefits of using technology.

An example of something useful, but not necessarily practical, could be helping someone to download a game to their device. For someone who is isolated and lonely, providing new experiences, such as playing an online game, could have hugely beneficial effects on their life and mental health. If they are housebound, it provides them with a new and exciting way of occupying their time.

I could give many examples of things our digital inclusion officers go over in one-to-one sessions and digital cafes, and each example could be thought of to varying degrees of necessity and benefits.

However, I think it comes down to the individual and their own specific needs. For someone who is very active and out and about all the time – being able to access live bus times on their device is a huge benefit, and could save them plenty of time waiting. For someone who is isolated, being able to download Zoom and video call is of a huge benefit and necessary for their quality of life and still being able to engage with others.

Is it worth it? Again, this comes down to an individual's circumstances. If a service user is open to learning new things and downloading new apps on their device, then the world is their oyster. They may be happy to try all sorts of experiences with their device and even enjoy the process. However, if someone is a bit more closed off to learning new things, then that has to be considered. Is it worth pushing them into doing something online that they do not want to? It can sometimes be a fine tightrope to balance, especially when the trainer knows that learning something small could have a massive benefit to their life.

For example, I met a service user for the first time last year and she was private and very closed off to technology. I visited her to give her a tablet, and she was unsure at first. I spoke to her and learned a bit about her and that she used to holiday in Millport. We watched YouTube videos of Millport and she gradually became interested in the device. However, the next time I visited her, a few weeks later, she had packed up the tablet and said it wasn't for her. We had a chat and I found out more about her likes – she loves watching TV programmes and films, so I told her about BBC iPlayer. She seemed more interested and by the end of that session we had created an account and she knew the basics. Fast forward a few months and she told me she was so happy she had stuck with her tablet, and she doesn't know what she'd do without it. This definitely made my persistence worthwhile. I knew of the benefit to her, it was just relating them to her in a way that would keep her interested.

Ethical Digital Nation – Usefulness

Reflections - Is it worth it?

One of our challenges with service users with limited digital experience is the level of anxiety which a new form of technology can bring – especially for those from authoritarian states.

One example of this was with the asylum seekers, we tried to set up a discord server for the group (rather than a WhatsApp chat) with the rationale that this can be done without sharing phone numbers or any other personal data with the group as a whole.

The server failed dramatically because we were introducing a new technology which folks weren't familiar with. They liked WhatsApp, and on balance preferred to share their numbers than install and adjust to a new app. We thought it was necessary, but our service users disagreed. If we'd asked them first, we would have known that – lesson learned!!

Considering the second Object of Trust, usefulness, participants were asked to consider whether the digital activities and tools they used were necessary, would they help and were they worth it. There was general agreement that a test of usefulness was applied in their organisational thinking. For example GGC suggested that:

This could range from something that is very practically useful, such as helping someone with filling out a form online. For example, a blue badge application. The process is a lot quicker if done online, and the blue badge gets to the user faster. This enhances their life in a huge way, giving them easier access to places. They may have still got to the end goal if doing traditionally on paper, but the process was hugely sped up due to the benefits of using technology. (GGG)

Another research participant highlighted that to understand if a digital initiative is necessary it is imperative that those being viewed as the beneficiaries are consulted. As they stated:

One of our challenges with service users with limited digital experience is the level of anxiety which a new form of technology can bring – especially for those from authoritarian states. One example of this was with the asylum seekers, we tried to set up a discord server for the group (rather than a WhatsApp chat) with the rationale that this can be done without sharing phone numbers or any other personal data with the group as a whole. The server failed dramatically because we were introducing a new technology which folks weren't familiar with. They liked WhatsApp, and on balance preferred to share their numbers than install and adjust to a new app. We thought it was necessary, but our service users disagreed. If we'd asked them first, we would have known that – lesson learned!! (PKAVS)

Finally, there was recognition that necessity is a judgement based on a number of complex factors and considerations. What is necessary for one service is desirable for another. An organisation working with vulnerable adults experiencing the asylum and immigration system provided a valuable perspective on the difficulties of systematising the question of necessity and usefulness:

Any new technology we introduce to service users will involve a lengthy process of training and embedding – so it has to be necessary and worth it! But necessary has a big scope. Necessary can mean required to access essential services and support, such as helping someone get set up with email to sort out their immigration status. But it can also mean that it supports someone to improve their quality of life, such as supporting someone from a closed dictatorship to understand the possibilities and dangers of the internet, and research what they couldn't find out about their home nation from the inside. That freedom can feel very necessary to the individual, even if structures and systems wouldn't recognise the necessity of it. (PKAVS)

4.3.3 Technology

Participants were asked to consider whether the technology they used was reliable, robust and safe. Some of the participant organisations were working at an 'entry level' in the consideration of technology, that is, primarily seeking to ensure access to tablets and enabling connectivity. At this level, one of the first challenges in the digital inclusion space is around equity of access, that is, ensuring that everyone has access to a device that is safe, reliable and appropriate, with dependable connectivity. Glasgow's Golden Generation reflected the following:

Tech is something that plays a huge role in our digital inclusion work. First of all, do our service users have access to tech such as a tablet? Most of our service users do not have their own devices, and they are supplied by our organisation. (GGG)

The impact of cost was an immediate consideration for participants, and also the way in which refurbished, older devices can impact on those accessing services:

Quite often these days I may be getting a phone call or somebody is going into the Day Centre saying that their tablet has stopped working and when I look at it it's just full and very slow. And even when I try to clear it all and reset it, it's still not working and when I clear it that means all the person's log-ins and stuff are gone and it feels like a different device. So that's a hard one because being a charity you don't want to spend too much money or if you had a budget of £1,000, do you get 10 tablets and get them out to 10 people but then the end up going really slow after a year or two or do you buy 5 tablets and they last a lot longer? (GGG)

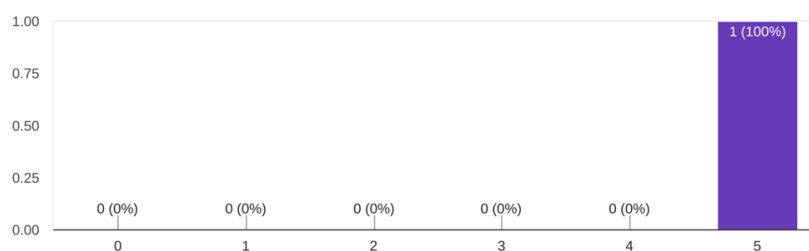
If we're giving second hand devices to service users – eg phones for asylum seekers – the reality is that any issues with reliability become a capacity issue as we seek to solve them with individuals who don't yet have the technological skills to troubleshoot issues. If devices don't last, then we are back to square one too quickly with folk in need of another device, and we need to find the resources for that. (PKAVS)

We regularly ensure that our members' technology and devices remain suitable for their needs. We often find that many don't understand phishing or online scams. For this we regularly advise to members to keep software and anti virus software up-to-date to allow devices to be safely used. (GGG)

The level of basic device access contrasts with other organisations, who are working within a technology enabled care environment. For instance, Leuchie House was able to offer interesting insights into the ways in which they reflect on technology specifically. During the research project, Leuchie House undertook extensive ethical reflections on the many types of technology used in their services. This included Assistive Technology such as Qwayo and Freeway and devices from Possum along with several associated input and controlled devices, Smart Technology at Leuchie centres around the Amazon Echo (Dot and Show) and the Fire TV Cube products. Other items include bulbs (Philips Hue), sockets (TP Link) and curtains (Tuya).

Thinking about this 'object of trust', how relevant do you think this is to the work above?

1 response



4.3.4 Privacy

In many of the definitions of digital ethics, the issue of privacy features strongly. This concern was mirrored in our participant organisation's consideration of digital ethics. The first issue encountered was the importance of privacy and trust within the 'trusted intermediary' relationship. Several of the organisations involved brought up the many complexities and blurred boundaries when supporting people in the digital space, and in particular when supporting people with lower levels of digital skills, or those with cognitive impairments.

Safety is a big factor when it comes to the tech we support people with. Regarding passwords – having secure and safe passwords is very important. But many of our service users have dementia and most are relatively new to tech. Our official advice on passwords is having a unique password for everything, three random words plus a character, number, upper case, etc. But working with people with memory difficulties poses a problem. Password managers are great, but they are also brand new to most of our service users and can be hard to explain. Do we turn a blind eye as service users write their passwords down? As technically, in an ideal world, they shouldn't even be sharing them with us. (GGG)

Another issue that arose was about the need to protect the privacy of individuals. As one participant stated:

We have worked with a service user who was encouraged by his lawyer to share stories of life in Iran on social media, because this makes it harder for the Home Office to justify returning them there due to the enhanced risk of having spoken out. This individual sought advice because they have family in Iran who may be at risk if they did this. We genuinely cannot advise – the best way for this person to keep themselves safe is to follow their lawyers advice. But the best way to keep their family safe is to do nothing. There is no right answer. (PKAVS)

In the context of organisations working with asylum seekers or those experiencing the immigration system, issues of individual privacy are even more complex, especially when enmeshed in systems that represent state surveillance:

laws and regulations in the form of state surveillance can work against those we are supporting, particularly if their immigration status makes them vulnerable eg not yet decided or undocumented. (PKAVS)

The wide spectrum of understanding of privacy in the digital world is further represented by Leuchie House who suggested that 'We know many of our guests are unaware of how their data is used. Mirroring the general population, a few of our guests are so paranoid about the use of their data, it stops them using technologies that would benefit them, while others have no thought to security.' Digital inclusion practitioners are meeting this far reaching need. Finally, we also know that some technological products and solutions can exacerbate concerns over data security and identity:

Technologies offering voice recognition, replication and cloning have opened a doorway to potential fraud and identity theft, the extent of which our society has never before confronted. Voice-data privacy and protection will be at the core of a number of commercial wars in the next few years and strictly enforced regulation of voice-data processing is critical. (Leuchie House)

4.3.5 Freedom of choice

Group discussion on choice



Within the context of digital inclusion, freedom of choice has many layers. Due to the multi-faceted nature of digital inequality and its intrinsic link with wider social inequality, the majority of those who seek the support of third sector organisations will have severe restrictions on their freedom of choice, often forced into systems whether or not this is something they have chosen to do, or even if it is the best solution for them. One participant noted that: 'The folks we work with really don't have a choice whether to engage with digital, due to the way services are delivered, particularly post-Covid. Choice around digital access is a huge privilege, and one most of our service users don't have, so our role is to help them navigate that space and choose what they are exposed to within it.' A further example was given, 'For example, we work with many Eastern European migrant families who haven't really engaged with digital, don't have email addresses etc. But they no longer have a choice as in order to gain immigration status, they have to sign up to the EU Settlement Scheme, which is an online-only application. You also don't get hard copies of your status and need ongoing email and internet access to prove your status for employment, education, services, etc. for the rest of your life.' (PKAVS)

Similarly, as an online benefits system choosing not to engage with Universal Credit is not an option for those desperately in need of benefits, and access to paper-based alternatives is not readily available. One project noted that, 'Many participants have never considered freedom of choice. They often accept things being done to them and for them. They view conformity and not asking questions as a prerequisite for being in the benefits system and/or passive recipients of services.' (The Hub).

At Leuchie House, it is clear that all technology is entirely optional, but steps are taken to ensure that guests are given the opportunity and freedom of choice to access technology enabled care, assistive technology and smart solutions to improve their health and wellbeing and increase autonomy, control and social connection. For those with lower levels of digital understanding, however, freedom of choice might be impacted by a lack of knowledge about the digital space, or fear of the unknown:

We ask guests for informed consent to use Alexa during their stay at Leuchie. There are guests who say they do not consent to or cannot use Alexa for their holiday, but when we meet them and speak with them about it, it may be because they are scared to try technology new to them, because they think Alexa is listening to and recording everything they say or because they think they cannot use it with a dysarthric voice, where we may have a solution for that. While it's absolutely fine to not want to use a smart speaker, we need to ensure guests who do not consent to use of Alexa out of fear or lack of knowledge about how we may be able to get it to work for them. (Leuchie House)

4.3.6 Transparency

One example given here around the ways in which trusted intermediaries might support individuals with lower levels of digital understanding is through the direct support they offer in their digital inclusion roles, and to encourage those they stand alongside to have more confidence to choose what information to provide and when, and demonstrate how to identify which questions they can treat as optional or not. This might also extend to how an individual can request to be removed from records under GDPR.

4.3.7 Institutions

The Object of Trust focusing on institutions was of particular interest to the research participants, and in particular when exploring the ethical consideration of institutions, and the discussion on key questions (are systems in place to ensure effective governance, oversight, compliance and accountability?) raised challenges for frontline staff, and in particular the following examples of the way in which institutions might also use compliance to control or identify individuals which then might increase their personal risk.

When giving our asylum seekers access to laptops, we have been required by the Home Office contractor to keep strict logs of who is using which laptop and when, in case anything is flagged up. It has been made clear to us that online activity is monitored and the guys could potentially jeopardise their claims by looking for the 'wrong' things online. We therefore have a duty to protect them by making sure they understand that

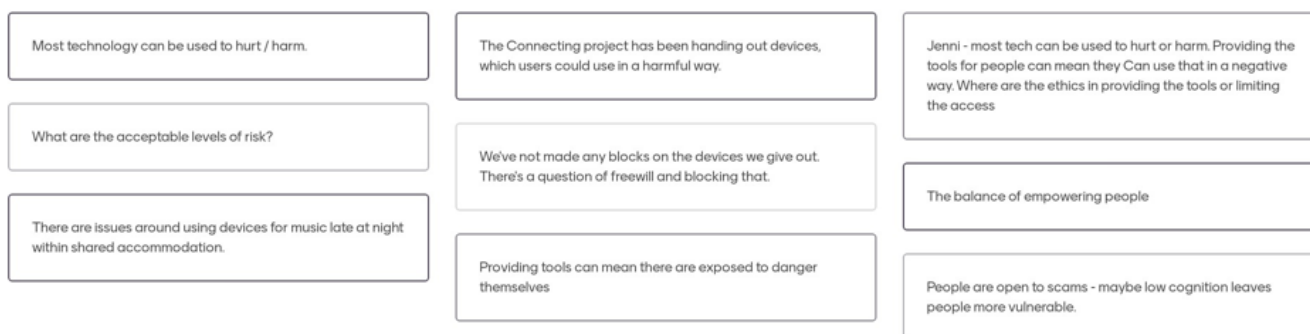
Furthermore:

State involvement around internet use makes our guys less safe, not more. Anything which is flagged up to intelligence could lead to involvement with Prevent and potential legal ramifications, and outcomes for their asylum case. Facebook privacy settings seem to be quite easily circumvented by the Home Office, for example.
(PKAVS)

4.3.8 Users

Group discussion on users

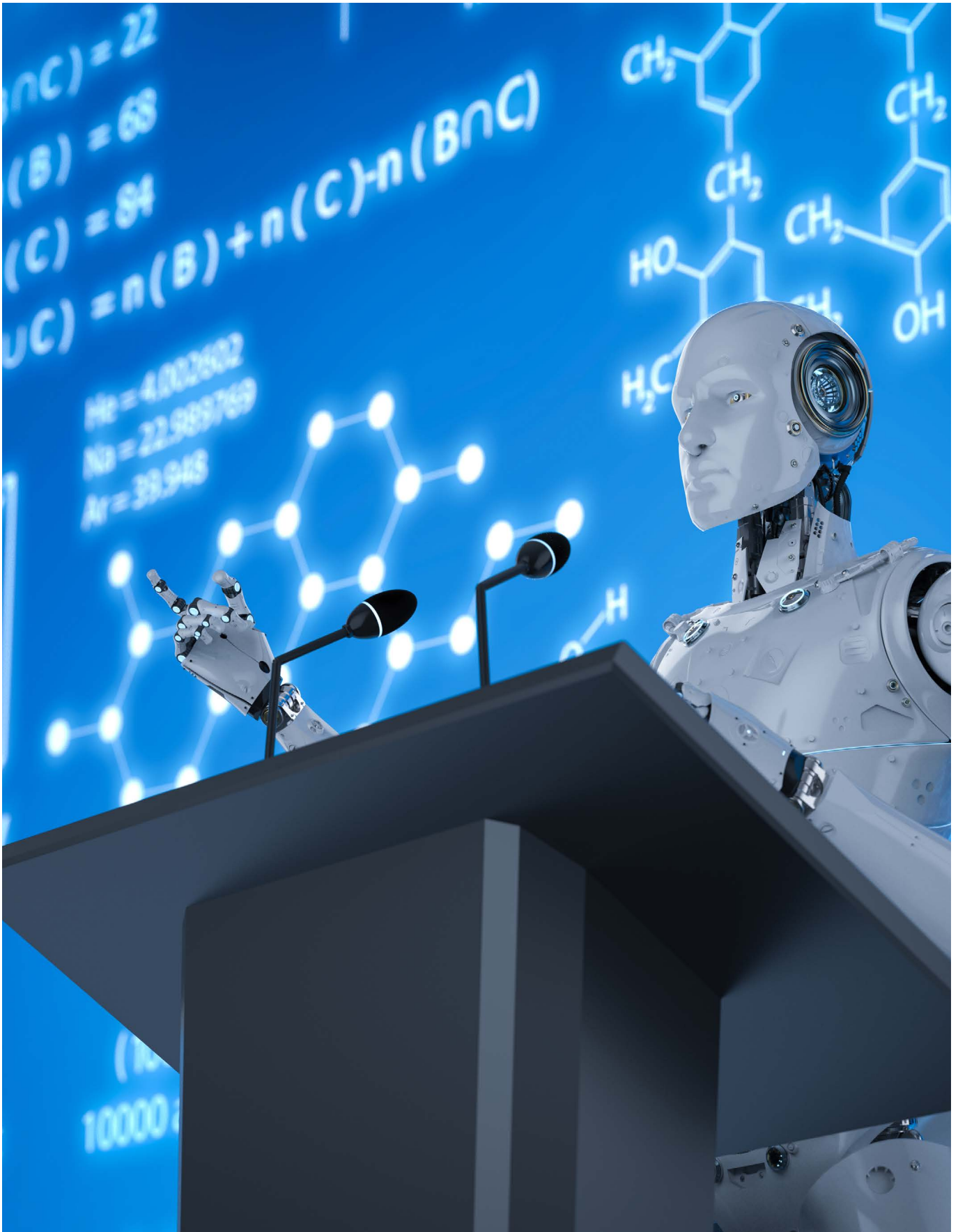
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One of the key challenges for those working in the space of digital inclusion is balancing the challenge of supporting access, and empowering the individual to use the digital space in a personal way, while simultaneously helping them to develop a level of digital understanding sufficient to keep themselves safe, without restricting purpose, or inadvertently themselves acting as gatekeepers. Two examples include:

We provide devices with internet access, so the possibilities both positive and negative are essentially limitless. We don't block any content on the devices we give to people, as those devices then belong to them to do with as they please, in the spirit of empowerment. To a certain extent, if they then use the device for example to troll online, that is their right as much as it is anyone else's, even if we don't like it. The bigger challenge is shared devices in shared spaces. We ask users to sign up to an agreement that they will not use the devices for example to access porn in that shared space, so that others can't be harmed. (PKAVS)

One of our guests asked for access to online dating site match.com. I raised concerns that she could be at risk of harm if we helped her. We have now taken this issue further and for dating/gambling or similar websites where risk of harm from other users is high, we can only help guests create a login for the site, not help them when they are using it. This was made more difficult because we couldn't find any external guidance. (Leuchie House)





5.0
Discussion

5.0 Discussion

In this section we draw out the principal discussion points emerging from our research, linking these to the insights generated in the literature review and findings from the sessions with organisations operating in the digital inclusion setting.

5.1 Foregrounding digital ethics in digital inclusion work

Rogerson (2020) emphasised the importance of the human factor in considering the implications of the digital for society. Our research found that considerations of digital ethics (including fairness, privacy, security, usefulness, users, technology, etc) need to be more effectively embedded in the everyday organisational practices of those working in digital inclusion settings. While our case study organisations were implicitly operationalising digital ethics in their everyday practices, they rarely articulated it explicitly. For example, GGG acknowledged that 'it just wasn't really something that I'd ever thought about. It wasn't really something that came across my mind, but I guess that I was probably quite privileged because I'm not digitally excluded in the slightest.' It is clear from our research that consideration of digital ethics should be an absolutely essential element of digital inclusion work. Participants collectively recognised that failure to consider digital ethics is problematic, and challenges organisations both in their core services and in their duty of care to service users.

Given the complexity and fast-paced nature of technological advancement and associated outcomes, frameworks like the Objects of Trust, together with associated resources and support, are an important means of foregrounding digital ethics discussions. Organisations working in digital inclusion would benefit from help and support to facilitate informed decision-making at the organisational and individual level, enabling stronger models of person-centred support in digital inclusion work. The importance of adopting frameworks to inform practice was articulated well by Leuchie House:

Having frameworks in place to deter unethical digital practices is needed and helpful for us to refer to or defer to. We are linked with the Scottish Government, Universities, SCVO and other organisations who set laws and new digital best practice.

5.2 A values-led, person-centric, approach to digital ethics

Our research found that organisations operating in the digital inclusion space are often working very closely with vulnerable people experiencing complex circumstances and rarely is the solution to the problem simple or without ethical conflict. Much of our discussions with participants focused on how to deal with a specific situation or scenario and how to navigate the digital space in such a way as to advance human values, rather than doing damage to them. Throughout the research, the role of trusted intermediary was highlighted as a key priority with organisations having to protect their users and clients while also trying to empower them and improve their digital understanding and skills. There was a desire amongst participants to deal with digital ethics considerations by focusing on what digital platforms and activities can do to benefit people, but that this must be accompanied by a commitment to a person centred support. Numerous examples were provided of systems being in tension with social justice concerns.

It is clear from those participating in the research that the consideration of digital ethics should also form part of a wider duty of care for both organisations and frontline staff supporting individuals within the context of digital inclusion. As part of work in addressing digital inequality, organisations and staff have to be mindful that those accessing support see both organisations and staff as 'trusted intermediaries' helping them to make decisions and choices in a context that is new and unfamiliar to them. Organisations and their staff are also on a journey to develop skills and understanding in this complex space themselves, and to this end, require investment of time, training and resources to ensure that they have the capacity and tools to operate effectively in this space.

Focusing on advancing human values and being person-centric, a human-rights approach to the digital could be advantageous. Digital ethics and digital human rights are closely related and often overlap in their concerns. Both deal with the impact of digital technology on individuals and society, but they approach the issue from slightly different perspectives.

Digital ethics focuses on the moral principles that govern the use of technology, and how it should be used in a way that is fair, just, and respects human rights. It looks at issues such as privacy, security, data protection, and the responsible use of artificial intelligence. Digital human rights, on the other hand, focus on the rights of individuals in the digital world and how they should be protected. These rights include freedom of expression, privacy, and access to information. It also includes the right to be free from discrimination, arbitrary surveillance, and other forms of digital abuse. In summary, digital ethics provide the moral principles that should guide the use of technology, while digital human rights are the rights that individuals should be able to enjoy in the digital world. Both are important in ensuring that digital technology is used in a way that is fair, just, and respects human rights.

Through extensive research with frontline practitioners, The Alliance has developed a set of five Human Rights principles for Digital Health and Social Care which are relevant to those working in the digital inclusion space. These five principles are:

1. *People at the Centre* – People should have access to inclusive and flexible digital services that meet their needs, rights, preferences and choices, with support if appropriate. This principle also emphasises that digital services should be focused on the best outcomes for the person, not the needs of the service
2. *Digital where it is best suited* – People should be involved in deciding how, where and when digital is used in health and social care, and co-create rights based digital services to ensure they are appropriate and effective. Digital services are not always appropriate and should not automatically be the default health and social care service.
3. *Digital as a choice* – People should be able to make an informed choice between using digital or non-digital health and social care services – and to switch between them at any time – without compromising the quality of care they experience. People should be fully involved in decisions made about their care. This should include information about any digital options being considered, and the non-digital alternatives.
4. *Digital inclusion, not just widening access* – People should have access to free training and support to develop the skills, confidence and digital literacy they require to make a meaningful choice whether to access digital health and social care services. Digital services should be accessible, trustworthy and inclusive.
5. *Access and control of digital data* – People should have access to data held about them by health and social care services and have control over this data and how it is used. People should give free, prior and informed consent to the use and sharing of their data, particularly outside health and social care. If consent is given, sharing should allow people to avoid 're-telling their story', be straightforward for all involved, and maintain the highest possible security before, during and after sharing. (The Alliance, 2022)

Human rights approaches are increasingly the focus of digital inclusion work, both globally and in Scotland specifically (See also the work of 5 Rights). The principles outlined by the Alliance are informed throughout by the same considerations suggested in the Objects of Trust framework. It would be helpful for those working in digital inclusion to have clear pathways and cohesion between these two models.

5.3 Achieving Scotland's aspirations as an Ethical Digital Nation

During the active research period, an independent report was released by the Scottish Government: Building Trust in the Digital Era: Achieving Scotland's Aspirations as an Ethical Digital Nation. The report set out a series of recommendations which the research team explored with participating organisations with a focus on digital inclusion. Digital inclusion is highlighted in the report as a priority and, in particular, articulates a commitment to 'helping people to acquire the skills, knowledge and confidence to navigate the digital and hybrid spaces and processes' (Scottish Government, 2022) as well as supporting access to devices and connectivity; ensuring alternative, non-digital pathways for those who need this route to services.

Our research demonstrates that the approach of embedded digital support through a trusted intermediary as part of holistic care is vital. First and foremost, as noted above, the relational aspect

of digital inclusion was felt by all participants to be a vital element of developing an understanding of digital ethics on those impacted by digital inequality. However, in order to embed many of the recommendations of the Scottish Government report, third sector organisations felt that they needed additional support. They identified a number of specific challenges emanating from the report which should be considered by SCVO.

5.3.1 Capacity

Building trusted relationships to share information and offer support will lead to a wider understanding of (digital) ethical issues, however this is slow, and time consuming. Organisations are often time-poor but there is a need to create capacity to ensure ethical considerations are foregrounded.

5.3.2 Resources: Funding and Funders

In order to maintain best practice and support people who are digitally excluded, participants noted the importance of having trusted sources and resources to access and consistent messaging to avoid confusion. As one participant put it, 'If we are being asked to self educate and help people to develop the skills, there is a need for consistent resources. Where do we go to for consistent messaging? We need training, information... resources for people doing the digital inclusion' (Anon, Padlet)

There was also recognition from research participants that there are some challenges around funding and funders that can limit the ability of organisations to effectively embed digital ethics considerations in their practice. First, participants noted that funding often focuses on devices and connectivity rather than on supporting staff time. As one organisation noted, 'we only have a small team helping with the skills and understanding and we have 230 pieces of tech but few staff so it would be really hard to develop the different ethical approaches, especially with the demographic of older adults' (Anon, Padlet). Other organisations made it clear that investment in staff time and training is required, especially when person-centric approaches are favoured and human values are being embedded. This point was supported by The Hub, who noted that 'when I say resources I don't mean necessarily financial resources, because what we have done in actual hard cash has hardly cost anything but it has taken additional staff time. I think SCVO maybe as an umbrella organisation in the third sector might be able to persuade or flag up to funders that maybe there needs to be some recognition in funding that maybe it is additional hours given on a funding application for somebody to do a review'

The time taken to support people with low levels of digital skills was also highlighted by organisations, such as Include Me 2:

Many of our members due to their disability/asn take longer to recognise the impact of their actions. Many of them need to be shown impact via sessions/workshops to make them aware. This makes the journey to ethical digital awareness a longer process. (Include Me 2)

Participants felt that the funding environment could be the best way to embed particular digital ethics thinking and behaviour. One organisation suggested that for 'projects that are going to be funded the funder would ask them to evidence how they've thought of digital ethics in how they are project planning and delivery...you might have a little section that says you know maybe one day's extra funding to pay somebody to do a review of the project plan or the procedural plan that we're going to use for this project to make sure it fits the digital . . . it embeds digital ethics.' (The Hub).

5.4 Guides and Guidance: Navigating Digital Harms

Our research participants identified a need for guidance and support, especially with complex and politicised areas of activity which those working in digital inclusion spaces often face. Some of the organisations that took part in our research support people who might be subject to online harms including racial abuse. A further challenge facing organisations is reaching those not traditionally targeted by digital inclusion work, or perhaps engaging with third sector organisations. As one participant responded (asked about an Ethical Digital Nation):

Primarily thinking about the demographic most likely to be swept up into certain online harms eg right wing extremism. In a truly digitally ethical nation, we would be reaching individuals vulnerable to this, who are not traditionally reached in this work. What work is being done to reach white men in their 30s and 40s to protect them from this harm and support them to develop critical analysis skills needed to stop them falling down this rabbit hole in the first place? (Anon, on Padlet)

Research participants also expressed a desire for external support in terms of the implementation of digital ethics for organisations supporting people with digital exclusion. Having a framework for the sector to be guided by would be beneficial. However, as well as support and guidance for the sector there must be a self service guide whereby individuals can reflect on their own online practices and seek direction from informed sources. There is no easy solution to the challenges of digital ethics and that includes the difficulty of developing a singular framework or guide to encompass all potential digital ethics issues. As one research participant suggested, 'a template is a good idea because it gives people a starter for 10, but a template could never encompass what everybody would need in the specifics for what they're doing it for.' (The Hub). To more effectively embed digital ethics in organisational thinking and practice, there is a need for additional support in training and networking to ensure all organisations in the wide spectrum of degrees of digital evolution are adequately supported, regardless of their starting point. It is here that the importance of the Digital Participation Charter becomes clear.



5.5 Digital Ethics and the Digital Participation Charter

Participating organisations were asked to reflect on the extent to which digital ethics might sit within Scotland's Digital Participation Charter. All participating organisations are Charter signatories but may have signed up to the Charter some time ago, or participating individuals had not led on the signing. Having explored the Charter, all participants felt that digital ethics did sit within it, though there was no clear consensus whether it should sit within an existing pledge, or as a freestanding pledge, supported by the Objects of Trust framework. Whether integrated or a separate pledge, there was recognition from participants that the inclusion of digital ethics had to be articulated well and be monitored (with implications) too. As one participant suggested:

There is always some reason for (...signing up for the Charter) so my point is then that maybe and I know there's not a lot of policing of it, I mean you sign up for the charter that you're going to do these things and one hopes people ethically do those things. When you renew it, you've got to say what you've done over the period...so there is some kind of arm's length monitoring of it, because when you do your renewal you've got to explain what you've done that particular year you know how you've progressed the charter's objectives. (The Hub)

The suggestion was that a digital ethics pledge could be useful if signatories to the Charter had to demonstrate (and evidence) what they had achieved when renewing. Another idea was to ensure that organisations could be awarded some form of badge or recognition for being a digitally ethical organisation, building on agreed frameworks (e.g. adoption of the Objects of Trust). As one participant suggested:

maybe sometimes when you put up posters you can get a wee stamp of this, our work is verified by Digital Ethics Scotland or something, some sort of seal of approval, a tick box sheet to make sure we do that in our work, when we are with our service users we never demand data from them, we never store their passwords anywhere for them. That would be quite nice to see something on paper, yeah we are ticking these boxes. What we are doing is ethically sound. (GGG)

Linked to discussions of training, development and support for organisations in embedding digital ethics thinking in their practice symbolically it is important that SCVO includes the language of ethics in its Charter and follows this up with activities and resources that all organisations in the digital inclusion space can (and should be expected to) access and be guided by. While recognising that the importance of digital ethics can be more pronounced in some settings than others, our research suggests that all organisations would benefit from having greater awareness of the issue and be better prepared to make informed decisions about how to navigate their organisations through the choppy waters of the digital.



6.0 Conclusion

6.0 Conclusion

In this report, we have considered how a digital ethics lens can be applied to those working in the digital inclusion space. Specifically, in responding to the SCVO brief, we have provided a brief literature review of current understanding of how digital ethics relates to the context of digital inclusion. We then presented findings and analysis from our action research work with five funded organisations working on digital inclusion projects in Scotland. Finally, in this section, we conclude the work and provide recommendations for how SCVO can develop its understanding of how community-based organisations in Scotland can understand and embed ethics in digital inclusion work.

It is clear from our research that there is a thirst to know more about digital ethics and to be supported in embedding this thinking in organisational practices, especially as they benefit service users. Our participating organisations were all proactive at using digital tools and activities to help their users, understanding the ethics of their practice implicitly, if not always made explicit with principles or policies. There was broad agreement that working to an agreed framework (e.g. Objects of Trust) would help organisations deal with complex and sensitive issues generated in the digital space, as long as theory (the framework) is complemented with practical guidance, support and resources. Organisations need to be able to discuss challenging ethical scenarios with others in safe spaces so that awareness is raised and solutions found and shared. SCVO can play an important role in leading a digital ethics for digital inclusion agenda with third sector and charitable organisations, delivered in line with its Digital Participation Charter.



7.0

Recommendations

7.0 Recommendations

In order to take the next steps and work towards community-based organisations in Scotland understanding and embedding ethics in digital inclusion work, SCVO could consider the following recommendations.

1. Expand the research base to ensure there is greater recognition of the digital ethics issues facing a wider segment of organisations working in the digital inclusion space. For example, it is important to understand more about the experience of organisations working with young people who are digitally excluded, and who will have particular challenges. Furthermore, while this research has engaged with the organisations and explored their role as trusted intermediaries, it would also be helpful also for further research to engage those accessing such services directly. Furthermore, all participants reflected that action research was a particularly helpful model of inquiry, allowing organisations to immediately both apply and explore research discussions in the field of practice.
2. While the Objects of Trust framework was viewed as a useful framework for exploring digital ethics, it needs to be contextualised in a person-centred way, foregrounding human values. Additionally, it would be helpful to dovetail such a framework with wider work around digital human rights, such as that already undertaken by 5 Rights (Children and Young People) and The Alliance. It would also be helpful if work cut across public, private and third sectors to allow for greater clarity.
3. Organisations across the third sector require time and space to explore and embed digital ethics, ideally with expert facilitators with an understanding of the wider context and discussions of issues related to digital ethics/digital inclusion. It would be beneficial if these sessions were multi-organisational/sectoral, to allow for shared discussion and insight.
4. There is also a need for more resources (linked to the Objects of Trust, or similar framework) and support around awareness raising, implementation and evaluation so that digital ethics is fully embedded within the digital inclusion space. Resources related to staffing are as important as monetary investments.
5. Digital ethics should form a more significant part of the Digital Participation Charter for Scotland, but there should be checks and balances on the implementation, and possibly some sort of supported accreditation pathway.
6. Consideration of digital ethics needs to be extended from the organisational to the personal realm so that service users are more effectively supported to make informed choices and demonstrate personal responsibility in their digital practices.



8.0

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