The Firm as a Collaborative Community: Reconstructing Trust in the Knowledge Economy
Edited by Charles Heckscher & Paul S. Adler (2006)
Oxford University Press, £24.99

When I got this book through the post, I left it for a while. It looked like a daunting read. I prefer books with pictures. Books with advertising and creativity in the title. Or books that at least allude to advertising or having pictures. My deadline inched closer and I needed to break the stalemate. I went to hear Professor Paul Adler give a seminar at the University of Edinburgh. Relief – hearing him talk on the emergence of the collaborative community made the connection to the advertising industry and creativity clear. The book is particularly relevant to those seeking to understand the ongoing changes in the advertising industry. And particularly interesting to those who consider that advertising is now part of a client’s ‘collaborative creative community’ (Wright 2006).

This edited volume explores the changing nature of community in modern corporations, working in a knowledge-intensive and solutions-orientated economy. The authors are drawn together by their belief that a distinct and new form of community is successfully being created in many ‘leading edge’ business organisations. The book argues that the economic turbulence and restructuring of recent decades has diminished traditional forms of trust between firms. A new and flexible form of trust has developed that overcomes the rigidities of traditional communities. Rather than hierarchy or market forces, community is emerging as the new dominant organising principle. It is governed by a set of value orientations shared among members of a group, which forms the basis of trust among individuals: the collaborative community.

This community is founded on three main principles. First, an ethic of interdependent contribution, the essence of which is captured by the values of collective purpose and contribution to the success of others. The second principle is interdependent process management. This involves processes for building a shared purpose, and processes for coordinating individuals who have a common goal but different sets of skills and knowledge. The third principle is an interdependent social self. Social character is the core aspect of character produced within social groups. Character is central to the generation of trust. Common
socialisation mechanisms – for example, the internalisation of common motives – enable people to count on the fact that others will react predictably.

The book is divided into four sections. The first contextualises the theory and research which underpin this volume and introduces the main concepts explored within subsequent chapters. The second explores the internal structure of firms. The third focuses on the trust systems that cross firms and industry boundaries, when multiple firms need to collaborate with each other. The final section discusses the difficulties involved in the creation of collaborative corporate structure and culture.

The book itself is a collaborative affair, with chapters from academics and practitioners who have spent ‘considerable time’ in their respective worlds. The theoretical–real-world balance is reflected within the content of the book. The theory is combined with case studies of leading American organisations, strengthening the book’s arguments and offering insights into how the flexible collaborative community is being applied and developed in organisations such as financial services, healthcare and software. These insights also make the book readable for those (i.e. me) who may be put off ‘going the distance’ by the theory contained within the long and detailed first chapter. A good rummage through the book, particularly Maccoby’s excellent chapter on character and identity, encourages persistence. This chapter discusses how the social character is changing to fit with the new economic and social climate. Of particular interest is Maccoby’s analysis of the interactive social character and the way in which it develops through a life cycle.

For me, further encouragement would come from a study exploring the perceptions and experiences of the change among ‘grassroots’ workers – a perspective that is missing in this volume. This aside, the breadth of industry case studies illustrates the broad and practical applicability of the book’s arguments. Advertising is not one of the industries explored in the book. However, the book’s themes resonate with the changing nature of the industry. In recent years, the success of the creative independents and their clients has led to an infusion of collaborative and networked working practices. Collaborative creative development involving clients and creatives builds up the trust necessary for the production of quality work. For client–agency partnerships to be mutually successful, trust is essential: ‘in the total media age creative ideas are the vital glue that holds together and provides coherence and coordination’ (Grimes 2004, p. 53). Collaboration across a network of agencies is now at the heart of successful integrated marketing communication campaigns. As alluded to by the book, the growing demand for connectedness and integration is driven in part by clients whose businesses have become increasingly ‘joined up’ over the past two decades. Clients look for strategic partners to help them establish a clearly differentiated position and brand personality across all media channels. The complex network of relationships is now inherent in the advertising planning
This is the ‘collaborative creative community’. As such, I would suggest that academics interested in current agency practice would benefit the most from reading this book. It should also offer food for thought to senior practitioners responsible for agency management and structure, although its style is more dense than the business books that usually cross their path.

References

Grimes, J. (2004) Creative inspiration, in J. Saunders (ed.) The Communications Challenge: A Practical Guide to Account Planning. London: Account Planning Group, pp. 53–80.

Wright, A. (2006) Digital essays: media matters. Campaign, 30 June, www.brandrepublic.com.

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The Online Advertising Playbook: Proven Strategies and Tested Tactics From the Advertising Research Foundation

Joe Plummer, Steve Rappaport, Taddy Hall & Robert Barocci (2007)

John Wiley & Sons, £19.99

In a world where digital media are always on the business pages, business people often struggle to understand why and how they should best use the plethora of new media. Every day we talk to CEOs, CMOs and CFOs, who all want to understand how Google and Facebook affect their business – and how they should have their brands behave as a result.

Unfortunately many of the people they’d naturally turn to for help and advice (their marketing partners in agencies of every type – advertising, media, direct, PR and promotions) are often equally bemused. While they all use these new brands as consumers, many traditional agency people still think of online as just another, or even a supplementary, channel; however, all the evidence points to the fact that digital can and should play a major role in any activity.

In such a confused world, any book that promises to be a benchmark for best practice should be seized upon by agencies and brands alike. With The Online Advertising Playbook people’s hopes will be realised. For someone whose exposure to US sports is limited to the occasional Knicks game, the idea of a playbook is a little alien (it’s what US sports coaches use to note down various tactics – so if the captain shouts ‘42’, everyone knows what they’re supposed to do). There is little doubt this book will prove hugely useful to marketers, agencies and everyone else who wonders whether they should be trying new approaches and new media.

This book is packed with great examples of how major brands have used digital media, usually backed up with excellent research. And recognising that, like other people’s children, other people’s campaigns might be of limited interest, the book’s authors focus on the principles and proven strategies that underpin these campaigns. It also has a very good reference section, allowing the reader to dig
deeper where desired, and a pretty comprehensive glossary, which might be useful the next time someone tries to blind you with buzzwords.

Written by four key players from the US Advertising Research Foundation and supported by an advisory board featuring senior people from brands such as Unilever, Gillette, Colgate, VW, Time Warner, Google and DoubleClick, as well as agency and research luminaries, this is a book with real authority. It gathers evidence from many experts across many sectors – valuable learnings that would normally be locked away in marketing departments so as to deny the competition the benefit of their experience.

Inevitably a book suffers when it tries to cover a subject that moves as quickly as this one – Facebook doesn’t get a mention and MySpace is mentioned only cursorily in one case study. But look at topics like pay per click or email and you get good practical advice supported by case studies.

As new media begin to be recognised as ‘now media’, and as responsibility moves from the specialists to the core marketing team, MindShare Interaction believe that constant experimentation is the best way to learn how to gain real business advantage. Putting those experiments together is time-consuming and challenging. This is certainly a book I’ll be keeping close at hand to help inform our thinking, and one I’ll be encouraging all our people to read and absorb.

*Simon Andrews*
Chief Strategy Officer, Worldwide MindShare Interaction

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**Adland: A Global History of Advertising**
Mark TunGate (2007)
Kogan Page, £18.99

TunGate’s book doesn’t quite pass the Ronseal test. Rather than offering a global history of the advertising industry, as it says on the tin, he focuses on key players and some key moments in the US, UK and France (where the author is based). This is supplemented with some forays into other parts of Europe, a chapter on Japan and a whistle-stop tour of advertising in other parts of the world; only 15 of the book’s 268 pages are devoted to Brazil, China and South Africa, for example. Such patchiness is hardly surprising. As TunGate notes, he set himself a hugely ambitious task in the first place, and he takes comfort in a history professor’s argument that no history can ever include more than it omits (Jones 2004).

The first seven chapters take readers from the early days of advertising in the US and UK to the extravagant ’80s. The book’s flow then becomes less clear, with chapters on particular countries or regions intercut with key developments in the industry, such as media spin-offs, agency consolidation and the bursting of the dotcom bubble. The history and role of the Cannes festival also receives a chapter, as does the agency of the future. The ideas-based, media-agnostic approaches of Naked Communications, and others such as Anomaly and Droga5, are seen as the prototypes, fit for a media landscape characterised by diffraction rather than convergence.
Tungate is a wonderful storyteller, offering a treasure trove of tales about the great and the good in Adland, together with many observations from the living legends he has interviewed. Some of his stories bring familiar names to life, offering fascinating details about their key work, personal background or the era in which they worked. The faith Claude Hopkins placed in ‘scientific’ advertising is well known, for example, but it seems that he was also an early advocate of integrated marketing communications: applying his ‘dramatized salesman-ship’ ethos to the promotion of a brand of butter substitute, he arranged for a giant cake to be baked in the window of a department store to promote a butter substitute, using newspaper ads to complement the stunt and drive the product benefits home. Another anecdote demonstrates Leo Burnett’s loyalty to his clients (or perhaps his sense of humour): apparently when he collapsed from low blood sugar prior to a meeting, he ordered the colleague rushing off in search of a chocolate bar to ‘make sure it’s a Nestlé’s’ (p. 70). The list of dramatis personae extends well beyond the usual suspects, including characters such as Théophraste Renaudot, a 17th-century writer and thinker (and official doctor to Louis XIII) who invented the personal ad (pp. 10–11), and Masako Okamura, one of the first female creative directors at Dentsu, a soccer fan who limits her team’s meetings to the 90 minutes it takes to play the beautiful game. We also hear about South African Reg Lascaris, whose agency ran the ANC campaign prior to the first multiracial elections and also increased its profile in the 1990s with a BMW spot featuring the same curving coast road as a Mercedes-Benz ad, and ending with the cheeky tag line ‘Beat the Bends’ (pp. 229–230).

If advertising is capitalism’s way of saying ‘I love you’ to itself (Schudson 1984), this book is a journalist’s love letter to advertising – an affectionate and engaging account of the industry’s iconic figures and some of its great campaigns. Tungate’s stories serve not only to entertain, but also to humanise and contextualise the work of advertising’s key figures. The book also traces how they shaped each other’s careers and thinking, with the influence of Bernbach in particular reaching over time and across continents. It’s not difficult to see its appeal to practitioners: there is plenty here to gladden their hearts and inspire their work. For academics, the largely descriptive tone and patchy referencing may be frustrating. It’s a great read nonetheless, with the potential to ground and enliven academic papers or lectures on advertising.

References
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Space and Time, Beauty and Inspiration

I want to be inspired by what I read. And I want to inspire people too – writing books, motivational speaking, coaching executives, running seminars, facilitating workshops. I have a thirst for new ideas and insights which I can embrace and share with people around the world.

I seek books and articles that engage and challenge my mind, stretch and enable my actions. Yet too many business books are designed to do the opposite. No information architect or educational psychologist would design a book with 300 pages of dense text, where the best ideas stand out like a needle in a haystack.

In our world of speed and spontaneity, of knowledge and innovation, we don’t have the time or patience to search for the needle. Sometimes, as in the better business fables, the ideas demand a story to capture their magic. But too often the author, or publisher, fails to articulate or visualise their thoughts in clear and interesting ways, and rarely is a business book a compelling experience.

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The conventions of academia can often diminish what might otherwise be ground-breaking thinking – few academic papers make a good read – with a focus on analysis that can often lose sight of the bigger picture, and introverted, intellectual proofs that are rarely actionable by practitioners. Surely there are better ways, a blending of media, more creative formats, to bring this all to life.

We need to make better connections between ideas, and between ideas and actions. It is one thing to understand customers better, but quite another to ensure that these become deep insights, and that these insights flow through organisational processes, business cases and into communication programmes and customer experiences.

I want to learn from the best and emerging practices all around the world, from different sectors and even completely different disciplines. I want to be inspired by the people who make the new ideas happen, how they did it, not just what they did, and to understand how it can be replicated.

In recent months I have done much work in developing markets in which I find by far the most interesting case studies and innovative practices – Natura from Brazil, Podravka from Croatia, Li and Fung from China, Marmara from Latvia, Umpqua from USA and Garanti from Turkey are examples.

I seek the perspective of Monocle with the thinking of Trendwatching, the visualisation of Xplane with the format of Dorling Kindersley, the insight of Contagious with the rigour of Wharton@Work, the richness of YouTube with the interaction of Facebook.

As authors, editors and publishers we also need to be better at articulating ideas and insights. If we are to add
real value to the practitioner, we need to start with their world and then think about the context and environment, formats and media through which to engage them.

So here are 10 books that have inspired me, both in content and format:

1. *The Cluetrain Manifesto* – ‘a new conversation that is transforming our world’, written a decade ago, online and in print, but more relevant and inspiring than ever
2. *Einstein Picasso* – space, time and beauty lie at the heart of Arthur Miller’s biography of the two great minds that inspired my first book *Marketing Genius*
3. *Good to Great* – profitable growth remains the holy grail of CEOs, but Jim Collins remind us that it is a complicated journey, and there is no simple leap to greatness
4. *The Innovator’s Dilemma* – the most technically advanced companies will often be beaten by the low-cost, low-tech upstart, as Clay Christensen explains.
5. *The Letters of Warren Buffett* – the Chairman of Berkshire Hathaway writes a letter to his shareholders each year, and together they tell you how business really works.
6. *Lovemarks* – the best collection of anecdotes why real people love the brands they do, supported by the two beautiful books from Kevin Roberts and his agency team.
7. *The Monk and the Riddle* – a monk rides off into the desert, then returns to tell of his journey, in Randy Komisar’s tale of entrepreneurship, start-ups and passion.
8. *Orbiting the Giant Hairball* – creative books should be different, and that certainly goes for Gordon Mackenzie’s fusion of art, poetry, innovation and business growth.
9. *Value Based Marketing* – great ideas and communication are useless unless they focus on what matters most, and deliver returns demanded by the late, great Peter Doyle.
10. *World Changing* – from ethics to environment, poverty to human rights, business needs to embrace a bigger agenda, that delivers results but in the right way.

There are many great books and journals, articles and resources. However there are many more great ideas and insights that get lost or ignored because they are poorly communicated. The marketing profession, of all people, should be able to find more innovative and effective ways to articulate its craft and inspire its colleagues to deliver great results.

Peter Fisk is author of *Marketing Genius* (Wiley 2004) which has been translated into 25 languages. He is a vastly experienced marketer, entrepreneur and advisor, was CEO of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, and is founder of The Genius Works. See www.thegeniusworks.com. His new book *Business Genius, a more inspired approach to growth* (Wiley) is to be published in Spring 2008.