



BOOK REVIEW

Collaborative Society The MIT Essential Knowledge Series

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Abstract

The MIT Press Essential Knowledge series provide the reader with accessible, concise, yet interesting and completely up-to-date information. (Some examples: Neuroplasticity, Critical Thinking, Anticorruption etc.) Each part was written by excellent experts on the subject, in a language understood by non-experts, too. In this way, the current research data and results in the field of each topic can be really used. Nowadays, it is not easy to find in the endless set of information obtainable on the World Wide Web those that essentially provide the fundamental knowledge on a particular topic. The MIT series fill a gap in this. The topic of the present volume of the series is the Collaborative Society by Dariusz Jemielnaik & Aleksandra Przegalinska. And where does human cooperation come from? ‘Being collaborative distinguishes us as human even more than our opposable thumbs; the drive to cooperate significantly sets us apart from chimpanzees, our closest cousins in terms of DNA similarity, and this difference is already visible in young children. In fact, cooperation with nonkin, so typical for humans, is relatively rare in the animal kingdom.’ (Jemielnaik & Przegalinska, 2020).

Whether new technologies, for example online communication tools, help to develop a more positive and stronger human cooperation or amplify the currently existing social differences? The authors examine these key important questions.

Keywords: cooperation, new communication technologies, social differences, online communication, collaborative activism

Preface

The authors have been examining the impact of network technologies for years on humane cooperation. In this outstanding book, they published the results of this research. Dariusz Jemielnaiak is a Professor of Organization Studies at Kozminski University, Poland, where he leads the Management in Networked and Digital Societies Department. He is also the author of *Common Knowledge? - An Ethnography of Wikipedia – 2014*. Aleksandra Przegalinska is an Assistant Professor at Kozminski University since October of 2013 and a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Collective Intelligence (MIT), Boston since June of 2016. She is the author of *Wearable Technologies in Organizations – 2019*.

Review

The book consists of 240 pages and nine chapters and reveals the various segments of human collaboration throughout history. With particular regard to the new network technologies and new virtual environments of cooperation. *'We perceive this phenomenon to emanate from what we call collaborative society: an emerging trend that changes the social, cultural, and economic fabric of human organization through technology-fostered cooperative behaviors and interactions.'* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020). The book also introduces the most significant effects of the changed environment of cooperation. *'Emerging technologies, thanks to their direct collaboration enabling features and engagement of much broader populations, act as super-multipliers for many effects of collaboration that would otherwise be less noticeable.'* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020).

Summary of the chapters

In the introduction, the authors determine the concept of Collaborative Society in several ways. One of the most complex way is the following: *'Collaborative society can also be viewed as a series of services and startups that enable peer-to-peer exchanges and interactions through technology. Although it maybe a relatively recent new-technology-enabled phenomenon, collaborative society in its entirety is a system with good old sharing and collaboration at its heart.'* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020).

The next chapter is: Neither 'Sharing' nor 'Economy.' In this chapter the writers demonstrate two open or free sources projects from view of the collaboration

and economic aspects. *'Open collaboration is a form of organization and cooperation in which participants share a common goal but are loosely coordinated, yet together they create a product or service and make the final result available to anyone interested.'* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020). The authors explain open collaboration via Wikipedia and the Linux operating system. Both started as open-source projects, but after a long time, Linux (Red Hat) was bought by IBM. And Wikipedia is used by Google Knowledge Panel. *'Overall, commercial enterprises adapted to the free/open source and open collaboration environment by taking advantage of them rather than giving much back.'* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020). The sharing economy covers Uber and Airbnb. Linux and Wikipedia belong to the peer products. The former one costs money for users, while the last one is free of charge. The third chapter is devoted to Peer Productions. By definition: *'peer production (also known as mass collaboration) is a way of producing goods and services that relies on self-organizing communities of individuals. In such communities, the labor of a large number of people is coordinated towards a shared outcome.'* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020). The people who work on a certain peer production are generally well known and admitted members of the virtual community, such as the Linus Torvalds¹ etc. Thus, these projects and products are created by available people against industrial products. Peer projects usually grow fast. And sooner or later they need some background organization: *'Notably, many peer production communities establish supporting organizations, often in the form of foundations, to address their most basic needs and general development; these organizations can adopt more traditional governance.'* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020). On the other hand, these communities reach a high level of efficiency at work because of the lack of formal hierarchy. The top peer productions are Linux, Project Gutenberg, Mozilla, Wikipedia. All these projects require professional skills. *'It should not come as a surprise then that peer production challenges conventional economic theories of motivation because it lacks clear extrinsic incentives.'* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020). The fourth chapter examines collaboration in the fields of media. (Collaborative Media Production and Consumption). Collaborative media means: *'the process of collaborative media production, sometime called commons-based peer production (or consumer coproduction), results in a radical redefinition of many professions and industries outside of knowledge or software production.'* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020). The technical revolution has decreased the level of skills and required professional knowledge which need to

1 Linus Torvalds is a Finnish-American software engineer who is the creator and, historically, the main developer of the Linux and other operating systems such as Android.

create a media product. Today the quality is not the main feature of the costumer co-production. The key is the acceptance, which overwrite all former features.

The fifth chapter is about collaborative activism and hacktivism: *‘Both social activism and hacktivism are collaborative to the bone: the success of their actions and movements relies on an ever-increasing number of people who join and take part’* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020). *‘And a more concrete definition of hacktivism is: Hacktivism is the underground use of technology to promote political causes, whereas collaborative social activism relies on collaboration without implicitly being against ‘the system.’* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020). The authors introduce many examples of both social activism and hacktivism such as GEO-bombing, Anti-surveillance efforts, Recap, or Coding, etc. Furthermore, they introduce the most significant and well-known activist and hacktivist organizations like Hactivismo, Cult of the Dead Cow and, of course Members of Anonymous. The next section (chapter 6) of the volume is about collaborative knowledge. The authors’ definition of collaborative knowledge is the following: *‘The collaborative society to emerge now allow people organize into communities that challenge the traditional methods of scientific discovery, and even the scientific method itself; they aim not only to codify and distribute knowledge but also to create it.’* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020). Knowledge has become more accessible for non-scholar people, and the scientists had to come out from their ivory towers and move towards a more practice-oriented scholar attitude. This type of knowledge is distributed without delay, for example WikiLeaks, etc. On the other hand, this process has handicaps too: *‘The trend to participate in knowledge replication, distribution, and active usage spreads widely, even to areas of knowledge that seemingly require very high qualifications and professional training, such as medicine.’* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020). The seventh chapter is about collaborative gadgets. The gadgets are everywhere in the online space: collaborative technologies, Mobil technologies, Big Data analytics, etc. Most of these gadgets are based on tracking technology. *‘Arguably, the development of new tracking technologies has not only altered the ways individual humans think, and how they identify and express themselves, but it has also enabled revolutionary cultural change, sometimes transforming practices that have been central for centuries or even millennia.’* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020). Furthermore, tracking the dark side of collaborative activities. The collaborative society had given up control over their private data. In the online space, we try to protect ourselves through ad-blockers, track cleaners, vpn connections, etc.

The penultimate section of the book is about social media titled *‘Being Together Online’*. The social media platforms in the beginning functioned as personal

profile sharing sites, for instance Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, and several local non-English language sites. These *'platforms that were not designed for collaboration may unexpectedly facilitate collaboration tools, and being with other people online can introduce users to new skills and experiences that allow collaboration to thrive.'* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020). Among other things, it provided public space for lots of anticorruption activities, e.g., the result of investigative journalism in real time (Németh, 2021). Next to social media, online games are outstandingly important in the online space. *'These examples show that modes of being together online, particularly in very immersive environments, may have an additional cognitive and perceptive layer that is yet unexplored.'* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020).

The last chapter of the book is about the controversies and the future of collaborative society: *'Who do we talk to and collaborate with on the internet? Here again we raise a legitimate question: Who counts as part of collaborative society?'* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020). Whether the AI bots belong to a collaborative society or not? The economic effect of the digital revolution could be under control, or will it increase global economic inequality and environmental crisis? *'Technologies that enhance collaboration come to consumers in the wealthier parts of the world as finished products. This hides the reality of costs incurred in poorer parts of the world where most of our devices and IT tools, whether desktop or mobile, are manufactured. These costs include pollution as a direct result of extracting raw materials or disposing of waste related to manufacture, as well as the emission of fossil fuels during the transport of an ever-increasing supply of goods around the world, from factory to warehouse to consumer.'* (Jemielnaiak & Przegalinska, 2020).

Summary

In this volume of the MIT Essential Knowledge, the two authors collected a wild range of aspects of collaborative activities. Furthermore, not just describe these new phenomena, but also examine their effect on different groups of society. In addition, they collected the handicaps of the collaborative activities in both technical and social aspects too. This book is really up to date and contains essential knowledge about this continuously renewing digital world.

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