

ESSENTIAL READS: ALGORITHMS, POSITIVITY, AND THE WORK OF CCOS

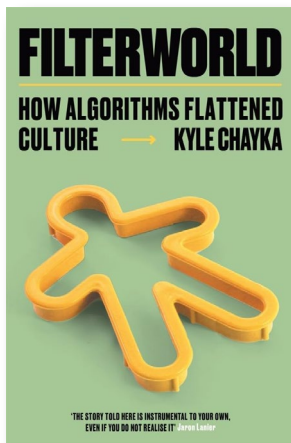
*REVIEWERS: SWARAN SANDHU, HOCHSCHULE DER MEDIEN STUTTGART; STEPHEN WADDINGTON, LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY;
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Professors Swaran Sandhu (Hochschule der Medien Stuttgart) and Daniel Wolfgruber (University of Southern Denmark), along with editorial board member Stephen Waddington, take a closer look at three notable books. In this article, they share their key insights and takeaways, highlighting the ideas that resonated most from their reading.



Chaka, K. (2024).
Filterworld: How algorithms flattened culture. 304 pages.
ISBN 978-1788706971

FILTERWORLD. HOW ALGORITHMS FLATTENED CULTURE BY KYLE CHAKA (SWARAN SANDHU)

When were you surprised the last time you read a book, saw a movie, listened to a new album, or tried a new meal? I mean really surprised – the kind of surprise you cannot stop thinking about for days. Has it been a while? You are not alone. In *Filterworld*, Kyle Chayka argues that algorithms are quietly standardizing culture. Platforms like Spotify, TikTok, Netflix, and Instagram do not just recommend content – they shape taste itself.

Chayka describes a cultural environment where recommendation systems steer millions of users toward similar aesthetics, formats, and narratives. The result is a subtle but powerful convergence. Cafés around the world start looking alike, playlists revolve around the same moods, and travel feeds serve up identical sceneries. There goes my matcha latte.

This argument echoes the cultural critique of Theodor W. Adorno from the mid-20th century. In his theory of the culture industry, Adorno argued that mass

media standardizes cultural production to maximize consumption. Chayka updates that idea for the algorithmic age. Instead of radio and film studios producing sameness, recommendation systems now steer both audiences and creators toward predictable formats. The more we rely on and feed these engines, the more difficult it is to game the system and create something truly surprising.

Most useful insights

For communicators, this matters because messages increasingly circulate inside these algorithmic ecosystems. Visibility depends less on editorial gatekeepers and more on systems optimized for engagement – and familiarity. One of Chayka’s insights is that algorithms amplify similarity. Content that resembles what people already engage with is more likely to be recommended (if you want to dig deeper, check out the concept of homophily which surprisingly does not get any coverage in the book).

For corporate communication, this explains why digital content often converges toward the same formats. Think about the standard LinkedIn post: a short personal anecdote, then a management lesson, and an inspirational takeaway. Are you also already tired of reading those? This structure spreads because it performs well within the recommendation algorithm.

Chayka’s argument therefore complements research on algorithmic gatekeeping in strategic communication. Platforms influence not only distribution but also the form of corporate messaging. The risk is what Adorno would call standardization: If every organization optimizes perfectly for algorithmic visibility, communication strategies become interchangeable.

Who will benefit most from this book

Chayka knows his trade as a journalist and storyteller: It is an easy read on the train, loaded with anecdotes and a bit light on the scientific side. *Filterworld* is valuable for senior communication strategists navigating platform-driven media environments and decision makers. If you oversee thought leadership, corporate storytelling, or social media strategy, Chayka offers a helpful lens for understanding why so much digital communication increasingly looks the same. The book connects technological infrastructure (algorithms) with cultural outcomes (homogenization).

It also raises an uncomfortable question in the age of GenAI. If everyone uses AI tools to produce brand narratives, or LinkedIn posts, the same dynamic appears again: Language becomes polished, competent – and strikingly similar. In other words, AI risks accelerating the very cultural flattening Chayka describes.

For communication leaders, the takeaway is almost paradoxical: The more powerful algorithmic and AI tools become, the more valuable distinctly human judgment, voice, and perspective will be. For CCOs, the strategic challenge is clear: Understand the logic of the feed – but maintain enough editorial voice and creative friction to avoid disappearing into the algorithmic sea of sameness.

However, I do think that the book’s relevance for communication managers in companies and institutions will extend into the future. As operational managers gain the ability to perform many communication tasks themselves using AI, communication departments will face increasing pressure to demonstrate their distinct value and sharpen their strategic focus. The book provides guidance for communication professionals in navigating the various stages of AI development.



Andersson, T. (2025).
Chief Communications Officers at work.
296 pages. ISBN 979-8868818554

CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS OFFICERS AT WORK BY TABITA ANDERSSON (STEPHEN WADDINGTON)

There is no shortage of books arguing that communications practitioners deserve a seat at the management table. Tabita Andersson's *Chief Communications Officers at Work* does something more useful. It makes visible a role that, despite its strategic significance, remains largely unknown.

Chief communications officers shape corporate reputation, manage crises, and advise CEOs, yet few people outside the profession could name one. The book sets out to change that, drawing on interviews with 23 CCOs from organizations including Honeywell, Forbes, Intel, HPE, and the International Paralympic Committee.

Andersson is a CCO herself and conceived the project to help others navigate a journey she knows from her own experience to be opaque. The result speaks to two audiences: practitioners aspiring to senior roles, and C-level executives who need to understand the strategic potential of a high-functioning communications function.

The book's promise is practical clarity about a career path that, despite growing institutional interest in communications leadership, remains poorly understood and underserved by existing literature.

Most useful insights

The observation that lands hardest is that few of the CCOs interviewed set out to work in communications. Many describe falling into corporate communication and public relations rather than choosing it deliberately.

This insight connects directly to Andersson's broader argument about visibility: If the role is unknown to outsiders, it is also underspecified as a career destination for insiders. The absence of structured entry routes and deliberate talent pipelines into communications leadership is a persistent structural problem.

Accidental career paths bring diverse perspectives, which is a genuine strength. But they also reflect a discipline that has not yet established the formal professional infrastructure needed to consistently produce strategically capable leaders.

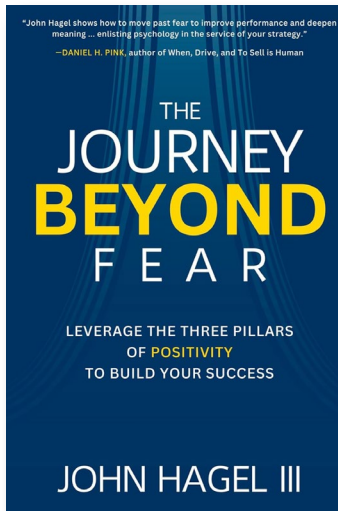
The pattern Andersson surfaces, namely practitioners proving value through relationships and intuition as much as through data, reflects a wider debate in corporate communication research about legitimacy and strategic recognition. The tension between quantifiable metrics and unquantifiable reputation is a sign of a discipline still working through foundational questions about its own identity and standing within organizations.

Who will benefit most from this book

Mid-career practitioners who can see senior leadership on the horizon but lack a clear map of what it requires will get the most from this book. The CCOs interviewed are candid about career paths, CEO relationships, and the messy reality of proving value in organizations that often treat communications as operational rather than strategic. That candor is the book's primary gift.

CEOs, board members, and chief operating officers are the book's secondary audience and arguably just as important. Andersson's visibility argument cuts both ways: The CCO role is obscure not only to the public but often to the colleagues and leaders these practitioners serve. Many organizations still underutilize their communications function precisely because senior leaders lack a working model of what a high-performing CCO actually does. This book provides one.

Researchers and educators working in corporate communication will also find it valuable. The book functions as a snapshot of practice at a pivotal moment. The questions running through these interviews about proving value, building trust, and balancing data with intuition are all signs of a discipline in active transition. That makes it a timely primary source as much as a practical guide.



Hagel, J. (2024).

The Journey beyond fear: Leverage the three pillars of positivity to build your success. ISBN 979-8990495906

THE JOURNEY BEYOND FEAR. LEVERAGE THE THREE PILLARS OF POSITIVITY TO BUILD YOUR SUCCESS BY JOHN HAGEL III (DANIEL WOLFGRUBER)

The Journey Beyond Fear argues that individuals and institutions can move from defensive, fear-based thought and behavior toward opportunity-driven growth by embracing three interconnected pillars: narratives, passion, and platforms. Hagel defines “opportunity-based narratives” as open-ended, future-oriented calls to action that mobilize other like-minded people. Unlike closed stories, such narratives focus on what is yet to be achieved and exist at multiple levels – personal, institutional, geographic, and movement-based. They help people develop clarity, enthusiasm, and agency; build community; and navigate accelerating societal change.

The second pillar is the “passion of the explorer,” a disposition marked by intrinsic motivation, curiosity, and commitment to increasing impact. Hagel contrasts this with obsession or ambition driven by external rewards. Passion, when paired with reason, fuels experimentation and resilient relationships, enabling people to approach uncertainty with excitement rather than fear.

The third pillar, “learning platforms,” provides the structural support for scalable, fast, and collaborative learning. Hagel distinguishes them from aggregation, social, and mobilization platforms. Learning platforms allow people to share experiences, reflect publicly, and develop new practices together. Across these pillars, the book blends personal development, organizational strategy, and social commentary, ultimately arguing that overcoming fear requires collective learning, aligned narratives, and emotionally grounded engagement.

Most useful insights

A particularly valuable insight is Hagel’s differentiation between platform types, especially the distinct role of learning platforms. By emphasizing action-based learning, shared reflection, and diverse interaction, he highlights why digital ecosystems can accelerate capability-building in ways traditional institutions cannot. The notion of “second-order” network effects, where more participants increase not only access but also the potential for achievement, offers a meaningful contribution to the platform economy discussion.

Another useful insight is the argument that narratives and passion are prerequisites for meaningful learning. Hagel reframes lifelong learning as something people embrace only when emotionally engaged, a point often overlooked. His criteria for opportunity-based narratives – open participation, realistic optimism, and emotional resonance – guide leaders seeking to inspire constructive and impactful action rather than amplify threats and fear.

The book also usefully addresses narrative alignment, suggesting that mismatches between different kinds of narratives often lead to fragmentation. His recommendation that individuals “scan” their own, as well as surrounding narratives, to find or foster alignment offers a practical diagnostic approach.

Who will benefit most from this book

The book will be particularly valuable for entrepreneurs, innovators, and change-oriented professionals who operate in environments where experimentation and continuous learning are essential. Hagel's emphasis on opportunity-based narratives, intrinsic passion, and learning platforms aligns closely with entrepreneurial mindsets and start-up cultures. Readers who are building initiatives or seeking to mobilize others toward a shared vision will find the frameworks especially relevant.

Activists and movement organizers may also benefit, as the book provides a language for constructing decentralized, opportunity-driven narratives and for coordinating "creation spaces" that foster peer learning and agency.

For communication professionals, the sections about institutional narratives are highly pertinent. Communication leaders, brand strategists, HR professionals, and especially CEOs can draw value from Hagel's argument that institutional narratives should not be self-referential but should speak to the meaningful opportunities an organization enables for its stakeholders. Hagel's insistence that such narratives must be lived, rather than crafted solely by communication departments, offers an important reminder of the strategic role leadership plays in narrative credibility.

Although the book's strongest appeal lies with those comfortable with Silicon Valley optimism, which views tech as the sine qua non for our survival, its frameworks for narrative construction, passion-driven engagement, and lifelong learning offer practical value across sectors.

REVIEWERS



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