

CRAFTING WORK 2018

Hüllmann, Joschka

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Crafting Work 2018

An Annual Reflection on Work, with Words on the World.

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Crafting Work 2018

Eine Alljährliche Reflektion über
Schaften und Schreiben in der Welt.

About the Author

Joschka Hüllmann works as a researcher for the Chair of Information Systems and Interorganisational Systems at the University of Münster and is part of the competence Center for Smarter Work. Previously, he attended the IBS IT & Business School in Oldenburg, the University of Münster, and was a research affiliate at the University of Sydney Business School and at the University of Hamburg. During his earlier years Joschka worked for several companies as a software engineer in critical infrastructure domains such as energy and traffic.

His current research interests include digital traces from communication and collaboration software in organisations. In particular, he explores patterns of communication that may inform satisfying and productive work practices. He strives to promote the digital workplace and enable organisations to understand and seize the opportunities presented to them by the digital workplace.

Besides writing academic articles, he is interested in popular science, edutainment, short stories, and the craft of writing. As such, he contributes to various popular journals creates articles on his blog as well as for newspapers and other outlets.

Contents

1	Foreword	1
2	Professional	4
3	Personal	7
4	Afterword.....	12
5	Errata.....	13

1 Foreword

Congratulations! What a year. Over the last twelve months, writing has become an important activity for me, both professionally and personally. With this book, I want to reflect and relive some of my past writing endeavours.

At work, my professional role is composed of teaching and research, which both require writing: easy to understand texts for the students, but precise manuscripts to meet academic standards. Looking at the research part, the process of designing and implementing research projects is accompanied by writing that determines the quality and success of my research. I use the written word to discuss my ideas and get feedback, convincing supervisors to get approval and funding. When I get approval for a project, I will report on the project results in the form of a scientific article upon which the research quality and outcomes are judged. For my future career, crafting such articles in a compelling way is a necessity to publish them in renowned journals, from which your reputation and career success as a researcher is determined. However, writing is not only an instrument for selling research to other people. Writing is a process to sharpen my thoughts and make them explicit, for being able to precisely articulate thoughts on paper requires a deep understanding of my ideas. This process however is not easy to accomplish. It is a recurrent challenge, but doing so successfully is very rewarding. Successfully putting down the sentences means I have a clear understanding. I can use it as a means of reflection, rethinking ideas and getting back to them later. As a result, in this book, I am putting a selection of my research articles for the means of reliving, revisiting and revising my work over time and celebrating the more or less successful research.

The joy of composing great sentences is not limited to putting down scientific outcomes. Crafting beautiful sentences and paragraphs and creating something of persistence is enjoyment. Manuscripts, and thoughts written down, have a longevity superior to any other medium. It's art. For example, the Greek philosopher Plato's work is over 2,400 years old. His ideas are still relevant today, informing the contemporary debate on philosophy and inspiring authors to publish books and articles discussing his ideas as recent as 2017. Some people describe Plato as "one of the most dazzling writers in the Western literary tradition"—a guy who died before Jesus came to save us. If that is not that the most superior legacy of all.

Creating something valuable and persistent is a charm. It is fun. It is an act of creativity and engaging in controversy, both inherently linked together, whether writing fiction or non-fiction. Both require creativity to find the right thoughts

and words, and oftentimes a fictional story resembles a particular situation in the real world. Adapting such a situation into fiction is about creating a world that comes to live from semantic and syntax. It is a combination of plot, characters, and their presentation by letters, words, sentences and paragraphs. The words and the story are intricately entangled, forming a picture of the world in the readers' mind. The challenge of "thinking" such a world and finding the right words to describe it and develop the characters in the world, is what fascinates me. In particular, I am fond of finding the right rhythm to the sentences and playing with various stylistic devices, reinforced by potential rhymes. I like to implement this by addressing various writing prompts, which can be found online and challenge you to write prose in response to a particular thesis. For example, I created a poem in response to the sentence "*He would be the last person to farm these fields...possibly ever.*"

Another interesting thing is to write non-fiction articles about contemporary topics as a means to engage with the community and society about shaping our country. Specifically, I engage in political discussion, for example, by authoring press releases, writing letters in response to newspaper articles and other topics. Only through putting your thoughts out there and provoking with your arguments, you can spark a controversial discussion, which is the most fruitful kind of discussion, yielding new insights and a better understanding of the issues at hand. Discussing is fun, because you engage with different views to learn from. Besides all of this, I write about personal experiences, to relive them and because I like to put them into words and persist them—just like this book.

In the following, I have selected pieces of writing that show my progress. The goal is to have an edited collection of interesting works from 2018 that I can look back to, to reflect, to see my progress or just to relive my feelings while writing the texts, or to cherish on what I have crafted in the last twelve months. Because the style of writing is quite different in the professional and personal types of works, I have separated the collection into two categories, starting with some research works, which have been published to a larger academic audience, followed by personal works.

Enjoy the hard work that I put into these efforts.

Joschka Hüllmann

Münster, 2018-11-25.

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2 Professional

As an Academic¹, I have a core research interest that is the digitalisation. The digitalisation changes our lives in many different ways, affecting personal and professional life alike, for example in hobbies, interests, business, society, or the economy. In one way or another, it changes everything. However, I am not interested in the digitalisation just because it seems to change everything; rather I am curious about the relationship between humans, data and technology. The humans use the technology and—since storage is cheap—all their actions are persisted as data. Different parties increasingly collect this data, because they think that they can derive value out of it: be it for optimising their services, or innovating services enabled by data. The former is behind-the-scenes and often not visible to the public, while the latter is Facebook, Google, Instagram, and many others.

For my research, I am looking into two parties specifically: online businesses personalising their services using the data of their customers, and organisations improving their communication and collaboration practices using employee data.

Historically, online firms have been collecting user data for a long time, primarily for security and diagnostic purposes. Later they started to use the data to optimise their website layouts, for targeted advertisements, and for recommendation systems. These recommendation systems are commonplace in online shops like Amazon.de. The idea is to drive sales by showing customers the most relevant products. Recently, besides only personalising the shown articles for the customer, there is an interest in determining the most relevant price for each customer individually. Customer protection agencies and the German governance are wary of this development, which we took as a reason to investigate these practices in German online retail websites. I show the results in the first paper of this book. Other firms, such as publishers, are increasingly collecting customer data as well. Publishers analyse customer preferences to produce the most relevant content that drives their sales. In a second paper, this book critically assesses how Elsevier, an academic publisher, analyses customer data to provide their services.

With businesses collecting analysing customer data left and right, managers in organisations got inspired to explore how employee data can add value. Facing the challenges of the digital workplace, with employees working from home and at flexible hours, managers are concerned with ensuring business performance,

¹ First draft of this introductory sentence: „As an Academic, all aspirations are associated to authoring articles (alliterations anyone?)“.

aiming at employee satisfaction, well-being, and a productive and collaborative work environment. In this situation, managers and consultancies claim that the analysis of employee trace data can support and enable effective teamwork and lead to satisfied employees. The term “trace data” describes that employees generate the data just by using software in their day-to-day work practices. Usually, it describes when and with whom and for what purpose employees use particular software, e.g. collaboratively manipulating files with their co-workers. Originally used for diagnostics and security, I explore if and how organisations can leverage this data to add value, i.e. addressing the mentioned challenges of the digital workplace, and what risks such an analysis may entail for the organisation, and its managers and employees.

Related to the trace data of employees, three papers are included in this book. The first paper addresses the challenge of rapidly composing effective teams in a multi-project environment. When employees are assigned to different projects in rapid succession, it is important that the people chemistry between the employee and the assigned team fit together. Based on communication patterns in a social network, we predict which employees fit well to which team. The second paper focuses on the heterogeneous media landscape employees are confronted with, nowadays. Working in a multi-project environment means, having to adhere to the technological media choices of each group. In some cases, employees must use multiple different tools for the same purpose to cooperate with their peers. For example, an employee belongs to three groups, the first one using Google Drive, second one DropBox, and third one OneDrive. To collaborate in all three groups, the employee must effectively juggle all three tools and switch between them. The same goes for other kind of tools, like messengers, wikis, social networks and so forth. The effects of analysing trace data is the topic of the third paper, which is a proposal for a future research project. It looks at the performance impact of public monitors displaying employee statistics.

Besides the papers that I published in academic journals or presented at academic conferences, I write a research diary, regularly. This diary is a mix of reflecting on my own work and a status report to my supervisor. It provides interesting insights in my thought processes and how my research develops over time. Hence, this book illustrates some selected examples of the research diary.

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3 Personal

Sometimes, I also like to spend time writing after work. Contrary to my professional endeavours, I write about anything that comes to my mind, be it politics, prose, poems, or playing games. The motivation stems from the joy of constructing compelling sentences on the one hand and engaging in controversial debates on the other. Constructing compelling sentences is challenging. Finding the right words and putting them in the best position is like solving a puzzle. The result, the one I want to achieve and appreciate, the one that I am always looking for, is the result that makes the inner voice sing. A lively discussion on the other hand lives from a provocation and juxta positioned arguments. My goal is always to learn, by disputing common arguments and established beliefs, by putting forward, sometimes vastly, divergent views. For me critically engaging with other views makes a fruitful discussion, not trying to convince an audience, which would rather constitute a debate instead. The topics for discussions can vary, for I have wide range of interests in contemporary issues and trends. Other benefits of engaging in a textually articulated discussions are the longer time to think and craft an argument; the ability to precisely formulate and tackle particular points; and the potential public reach.

This book illustrates my pleasures of crafting sentences with an article I have authored for a pop-journal called Satura, in which I describe the craft of writing and how it is related to engaging with a journal community. Other impressions include various writing prompts that I have addressed by creating short stories, a writing prompt being a short- or medium-length sentence about a particular topic, serving as an impulse to stimulate an act of writing towards that topic.

As part of my reading, I reflect on books by writing reviews, which I publish online anonymously. Recently, I have reviewed Cal Newport, William Zinsser, and others—most reading is on edutainment by the way.

3.1 Writing Prompts

Writing Prompts are a few words or a short sentence that stimulate your writing and usually focus on a small scenario, or a particular topic. You can address these topics in creative ways, crafting a short story, a poem, whatever you feel like. In fact, you do not even have to address the topic at all, as long as it pushes you to write something. Writing communities have been built around the idea of writing prompts, where users publish their prompts, and upload their creative work as a response. For me, such a prompt is the nudge that I need to pursue my writing practice, in particular short stories or poems, which I otherwise would not find the motivation and time to write. In the following, a selection my responses to writing prompts from 2018 is attached. They are mostly crafted in the middle of the night, explaining their mixed quality.

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3.2 Reviews

I try to read as many books as possible, for work, for personal interests and entertainment. As part of engaging with the books, I write brief reviews to critically reflect on the contents of the book, and how well I liked it. Over time, different reviews accumulated and I have added a selection of those to this book.

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4 Afterword

A mistake. I made a mistake while compiling this book. I did not follow William Zinsser's advice that the most important phase of writing is revise and edit. For this book to be ready in time for Christmas, and with lots of to-dos at work, I did not spend close to enough time on revising the narrative that I added to all my previous manuscripts. Nevertheless, I believe that it will be interesting to read this book later in my life to reflect on my thoughts and writing ability. I hope that the selected pieces of writing illustrate my motivation to write as stated in the foreword adequately. With a smile and a tear at the same time, I acknowledge that there is still much to learn in terms of writing. A smile, because it is motivation and challenge alike to strive for better skills; a tear, because my writing still sucks so much. However, if you think of the bell curve, I am at least not at the top anymore, a claim I can make with much confidence. Still, there is room for practice, so I hope to continue on this road, and eventually create a lasting piece of writing that brings a smile to people's faces just like the first snow in winter makes children happy, for they have waited so long, or toys that live long and provide lasting emotional bonds and joy.

I actually do not quite remember how I got the idea to compile this book. Maybe I got inspired by Stefan Klein's book, or I was reading too many books and wanted to create something myself. Compiling this book, took a lot of effort, yes, but it was also fun. It was fun to relive what I have created in 365 days, to read it again and see if it still sounds decent, or after so much time, it does not sound that great anymore. Mostly crafted during train or car rides, or even in the waiting room in the hospital (post OP check), this compilation is a continuous effort of small and incremental contributions. For the upcoming year, I hope I can increase the number of small steps and maybe implement bigger steps, to craft more and better stuff in 2019.

That's it folks, the time in the waiting room is up and I gotta go. See you for my annual reflection next year.

5 Errata

LINGUA LATINA ELEGANS EST, UT IN MANU SCRIPTO IMPONO, SI POTEST. QUOEQUE CETERAS LINGUAS MI PLACENT, EXEMEPLI GRATIA LINGUA RUSSICA VEL HISPANICA. QUOD VALDE DOLENDUM, FUGIT INREPARBILE TEMPUS, SOL CELERITER CEDIT, QUI IN SOLITUDINEM PONE NIMBOS MONTESQUE SE ABDIT, UT DIES ET HEBDOMADAE TEMPORA BEVES SUNT, UT DISCIPULUS LINGVAE ESSE. FORTE AN SIT EGO DISCAM. NUNC PERMANEO CUM LINGUA GERMANICO ANGLICOQUE. SI ERRATA IN MANU SCRIPTO MEO INVIENI, TUM UNIONUM CERVISIAM TIBI PRAEBEBO.

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HUELLMANNUM EST
DISCILPINA MEI ET VIS
VOLUNTATIS*

Joschka Hüllmann
2018
(2020 public edition)