Trust, Complexity and Control

Confidence in a Convergent World

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Do not trust people. They are capable of greatness.
(Stanislaw Lem, ‘Holiday’, 1963)
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There are very few areas where technological innovation and social science are such uncomfortable yet dependent bedfellows.

The concept of trust has a warm, comfortable, deep-rooted familiarity that you would expect from something that has played a major part in defining human evolution. We all know something about what it is to trust... and be trusted.

Technology all too often casts a long cold shadow of reality across the familiar warmth associated with being human. Technology deals in hard facts. Lacking supporting context, technology-driven spaces like the Internet struggle to support human endeavours without resorting to the endless quest for control, to offset the unquantifiable risk. As the new saying goes, ‘On the Internet nobody knows that Alice is a dog!’

Given his background (university, Nokia, Medialab Europe) and the fact that Piotr is currently working as a Chief Researcher in the Mobility Research Lab of a global network operator, he is well placed to understand the generic limitations and needs of convergence. Even though from a user’s point of view convergence is likely to remain a moving target, it provides an interesting backdrop to explore the relationship between trust, complexity and control.

Humanity evolved in a world where a desire to communicate (real time, person-to-person) generated a profitable business where the connectivity and the service were implicitly linked – the telephone conversation! That world, its focus on network architecture and the related business model are becoming less important as customers increasingly look to personalised and converged lifestyle solutions – not just the connectivity. Today, we still want our customers to talk – but more importantly to sign up, log on and consume content 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The technical challenge associated with convergence is to hide the underlying complexity from the user... who simply wants to get on and do it! One starting point is to attempt to mirror in the virtual world something of the natural human approach to trust in the real world. Our current research suggests that an improved understanding of confidence in a converged world has the potential to unlock some radical business models based on identity and risk rather than control.

Piotr’s book, like the subject matter, is more than the sum of the individual parts. OK... it has all the presence of a well-researched, comprehensive, reference text that you would expect from an academic well established in his field. However, read from cover to cover, it is so much more. From the consistent reference to Alice’s relationship with Bob to asides...
like actually buying ‘Trust in a bottle’, the author’s obvious passion for exploring and
demystifying this cross-over subject takes on the enthusiasm of a Grand Wizard’s tutorial at
times.

Looking beyond the original intent and necessary iteration, the book has as much to say
about being human as it has to say about the technology of dealing with human interaction.

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