

THE FORCES OF COLLABORATIVE CREATIVITY

A practical guide to creative teamwork
in the healthcare business

Peter John Comber

Every pharma industry professional should read this book. It simply and clearly explains important business concepts.

*Roberto Lorè, Vice President Commercial
for Central Europe, BioMarin*

A very interesting book – a must-have for all professionals operating in life science and marketing with a clear and structured approach to solve real business problems. It is based on Collaborative Creativity: a flexible framework to increase ability to generate and execute meaningful ideas, through the empowerment of people – because the ability to understand and engage others is an awesome superpower.

*Nicoletta Luppi, Senior Vice President and
Managing Director MSD Italia*

The Forces of Collaborative Creativity is succinct without being spare. It is in-depth without being murky. It is practical without being uninspired. Truly a book to buy two of: one to keep fresh on the shelf to invite the conversation of others, and one to dogear the cover out of and rip out pages to tape to the walls.

*Bruce Rooke, Director Pufferfish, first-ever recipient of
the CLIO Healthcare Lifetime Achievement Award*

Collaborative Creativity provided us with insights that were unimaginable with traditional market research, to the point where, thanks to the depth of understanding of the experience of PKU patients, the company criteria and language of segmentation changed. Subsequently, we were able to share the results with specialist HCPs who welcomed the information on the opinions and needs of their patients and I am sure that they too regard their patients differently now.

*Maria Teresa Lerco, General Manager,
Orchard Therapeutics Italia.*

I was privileged to work with Peter Comber as a colleague when he was the Creative Director for Europe at GSW Worldwide. Many of the concepts Peter describes in his book were incubated in that period and made more robust through practised implementation. Now they are proven processes that I have also adopted to manage my medical device business.

*Philippe Deschamps, President and CEO Helius Medical Technologies
and former CEO, GSW Worldwide*

The Forces of Collaborative Creativity certainly provides us with an innovative and multidimensional approach to many aspects of our professional needs. This new comprehensive approach perfectly meets the current needs of healthcare professionals, who are increasingly asked to take care of patients in a multidisciplinary manner and as part of a multiprofessional team. To achieve this goal, the five forces reported in the book are of utmost importance. Moreover, as times and needs are changing, we have to learn to adopt new tools for monitoring and checking patients remotely; to do this creatively is mandatory. I found this book a very useful guide to change our way of thinking and working.

Professor Marcello Giovannini, MD,
Professor Emeritus of Pediatrics, University of Milan

The brilliance of *The Forces of Collaborative Creativity* is that it understands the essential catalysts of creativity and the true nature of organizations. Without collaboration, even the most creatively minded organizations wither on the vine. *The Forces of Collaborative Creativity* energizes and focuses organizations to surprise themselves and the world around them with elegant, powerful and engaging ideas.

Guy Mastrion, President and Chief Creative Officer of
Brandforming and the F. William Harder Chair Professor
of Business Administration at Skidmore College

Collaborative Creativity goes beyond design thinking and market research, on a journey that will bring the reader to discover themselves as creative directors – able to manage their internal and external workshops with professional exercises tailor-made to fit specific requirements.

Marco Mohoric', Digital Medicines Customer
Engagement Manager, Angelini Pharma

This book offers a lot more than its title suggests. Peter's unique methodology, developed over 30 years in healthcare communications, offers insights for every sector of business and society: how to design a framework for collaborative creativity to deliver effective outcomes through social and professional cohesion. Marketing, communications, project management and product innovation professionals have much to learn from his idiosyncratic but easy-to-follow approach.

Julian Boulding, President, the networkone

A practical guide that challenges the orderly way pharma marketing is used to doing things - either when it embarks on launching a new product or when it reinvents a promotional campaign, repeating and improving what has been already done seems almost inevitable. *The Forces of Collaborative Creativity* vividly shows how we can all leverage our most valuable human assets to seek change in a self-propelling and sustainable fashion.

Rodrigo Fernandez-Baca, General Manager, Seattle Genetics, Italy

'Creativity' is an over-used word, but in *The Forces of Collaborative Creativity*, Peter Comber shows you the power it can have in fresh ways. His thoughtful, practical and exciting approach supercharges traditional creative processes by enabling and building on creative contributions from all the 'owners' of the problem to be solved – be they citizens, patients, marketers, agency teams, doctors or scientists. Reading this book made me really want to be part of one of the workshops run by Peter and his team!

*Matthew Willcox, Founding Partner of The Business of Choice
and prizewinning business book author*

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A practical guide to creative teamwork
in the healthcare business

Peter John Comber



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To Alessandra and George

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About the author

Peter John Comber is an expert on creativity.

He began working in graphic design and advertising in 1983 and for more than 30 years he has created all manner of things for all manner of brands.

Early on, he became interested in computers and was online before the birth of the web. In 1994 he designed his first website which led to him founding his first company, a digital agency. His next venture was a healthcare advertising agency that he co-founded together with a leading US healthcare advertising network. Within this collaboration, he later took on the role of European Creative Director. In 2013, he created Atstrat, a healthcare consultancy dedicated to Collaborative Creativity and in 2016 it was expanded to include patient support and advocacy services.

Peter's career has always been in applied creativity. This has allowed him to develop the theory and practice of Collaborative Creativity with his:

- vast personal experience of creative work with groups of various sizes
- observations of what makes it easier or harder to have ideas
- expertise in directing the creative activities of large, international, heterogeneous groups of people

- understanding of the complexities and pratfalls of taking an idea from concept to realization within large, complex and multicultural corporations.

Peter believes that creativity is a force for change and a fundamental human characteristic. He also believes that applied creativity must embrace diversity and allow ideas to evolve to be relevant to different people and ultimately successful, and that collective creativity is an effective, efficient and enjoyable way of solving complex problems and creating the right environment for the solution to be embraced.

More information about Peter's career can be found at <https://peter-comber.net/pjc-career.html>.

Acknowledgements

Writing this book has been one of the most demanding things I have ever done and I am convinced I would have given up without the infinite support and encouragement of my wife and my business partner.

I am lucky to have worked with many people in many countries and everyone with whom I've created something has taught me something. There is a part of them all in the ideas expressed in this book.

I am still amazed by the generosity of the people who agreed to read the first draft of this book and provide constructive criticism. Without their precious comments, I would be embarrassed by rather than proud of the final result.

As the author, I am but a small cog in the large mechanism required to get this book into your hands. I am grateful for the professional skill and good old-fashioned pleasantness of the extended team at Practical Inspiration Publishing.

A huge thank you to all the clients who have trusted in me and the power of creativity. Long may they continue to profit from the forces of Collaborative Creativity.

A brief introduction to Collaborative Creativity

For more than 35 years, my job has required me to be creative every day and also to help others to be creative. In that time, I have learnt more than most people about ideas and the creative process. When I began my career, there was a clear distinction in most working environments between those whose job it was to be creative and everyone else. That has changed, with approaches such as design thinking and co-creation contributing to a shift in the ways businesses employ creativity. Today, far more people in diverse roles are expected to be creative because creativity produces ideas, ideas start innovation and innovation generates revenue and profits. Yet creativity is much more than a raw material that can be refined into practical inventions: it is a powerful force that can change the beliefs we hold, modify the physical reality we inhabit and influence culture and interpersonal relations.

Collaborative Creativity is applied creativity. It is a method that involves groups of people working together to solve business problems. I developed the concept of Collaborative Creativity while working as a consultant with pharmaceutical companies in numerous countries in Europe and North America and the methodology has since been refined through many diverse projects that have involved people from all over the world.

Collaborative Creativity is a flexible framework that has many applications. As the name suggests, it has two constants: collaboration and creativity. Consequently, in this book you will learn about ways to help groups of people work together to generate new ideas. Unlike other creative approaches, Collaborative Creativity will also help you appreciate and make use of the by-products of creative activity.

I use the term ‘by-products’ provocatively here, because creativity produces more than just ideas and the secondary products it generates can be equally useful and valuable. I argue that if you want to use creativity to its full effect in your business, you need to know how to take advantage of all the products of creativity – or, as I prefer to call them, the *forces of creativity*. I consider them forces because, when they are operating to their full effect, they directly result in various kinds of change. I have observed Collaborative Creativity consistently produce five forces, which we will examine in detail in this book. They are shown in Figure 1.

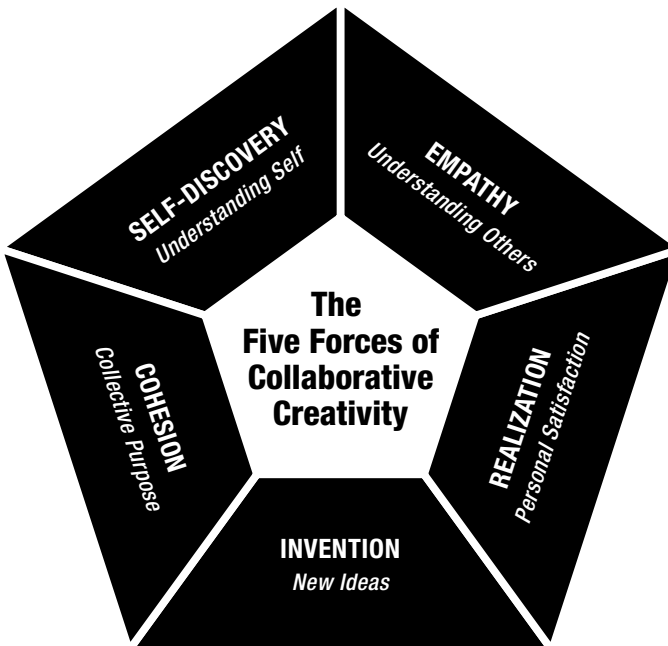


Figure 1: The five forces of Collaborative Creativity

Collaborative Creativity always produces ideas. Sometimes the ideas are the primary goal; at other times they are a means to an end – for example, a way to help people understand something about themselves or others. Often, the aim is to produce practical ideas while also achieving another objective, such as the cohesion and motivation of a group of people. In business today, I think there is a certain dogma around the use of creativity: it has to produce ‘useful’ ideas that can be monetized as quickly as possible. As a business owner, I understand the legitimate need to achieve a return on investment, but a focus on ideas as the only product of creativity ignores other valuable outcomes. Creativity produces ideas *and so much more*.

We humans are not rational beings. We are all guilty of deception – more often than not it is self-deception. If you are uncomfortable with that statement and are not familiar with the research and writing of Dan Ariely, I strongly recommend you read his work – I suggest you start with his book *Predictably Irrational* (see details in the Further Resources section at the end of the book).

Most adults are accomplished talkers and can discuss a topic in a convincing and apparently logical way. This skill gets elevated to an art form by those who practise competitive debating or by lawyers or advocates, for whom it is part of their professional competence.

It is fascinating – and useful to know – that while language seems to be controlled at a very conscious and rational level in our brains, creative thinking occurs in deeper and more ancient areas of the brain. The ideas you have reveal something about you. Creative thought accesses deeper areas of our minds than those concerned with logic and language, so its manifestations can show you unexpected, unconscious beliefs, emotions and internal contradictions. Once those ideas are out in the open, they can be discussed and understood. Creativity tends to be a (relatively) honest process.

The act of thinking creatively about a problem for a certain period of time changes your relationship with that problem. The change may be only slight or it may be quite significant, but whenever you are challenged in the right way to focus on a given subject or problem, it makes you elaborate new theories and explore new possibilities. When this happens, your own ideas can surprise you and the ideas

and experiences of others can inspire you and lead you in unexpected directions that can further modify your own beliefs and even shed light on beliefs and values that are on a preconscious level. Creativity changes the creator.

We tend to value and even over-value the things we create. Having an original thought or finding a solution to a problem is inherently rewarding. When we create something, we feel satisfaction. Ideas that form within a group have an advantage over ideas produced by an individual: there are more people who want ‘their’ idea to succeed. In this way, Collaborative Creativity cultivates a sense of co-authorship. This is significant because co-authorship means both sharing the ownership of an idea and also the satisfaction that comes from having contributed towards its creation. Furthermore, shared ownership of an idea can give a group a common purpose in its development, dramatically increasing the motivation of the group’s members and improving results. Creativity both rewards and motivates.

Creativity also affects human relationships. Something profound happens to people who share and develop ideas together: the creative process involves a transfer of energy and a kind of intellectual intimacy. Following the thoughts of another and contributing your own thoughts towards a shared goal is a powerful way of uniting people. In the right setting, human relationships can be strengthened and the sharing of personal beliefs and values can be accelerated. In the twenty-first century – a time already defined by its rapid change – the intelligence of an organization is not defined by the IQ or the experience of its individuals, but rather by the speed and effectiveness with which they are able to collaborate, test and adopt new ideas in the context of a shared purpose. Creativity unites.

For the most part, pharmaceutical companies are driven by science and organized with rigid processes in place. It’s fair to say that pharmaceutical companies aren’t particularly creative environments. So you may be wondering, ‘Who is going to do all this creativity?’

The answer is anybody and everybody, because everyone is creative. Often creativity is erroneously associated with being artistic, but creativity is not craft: it is a basic human ability and we all do it. Dreams are ample proof, if any were needed, that combining things in unusual ways and creating stories (imagining alternative versions of the past, present or future) are something that the human brain

is built to do. Our brain is creative – it literally does this while we sleep.

Anyone can be creative, given the right questions and stimuli, together with a safe environment and the right motivation to share their ideas. I have seen people who don't consider themselves creative and who identify as introverts being very productive and producing innovative work within a group. They were able to do this so well because the problem they were asked to consider was tailored to their own experience.

If you are a caregiver, you will have relevant practical and emotional experience about managing a certain disease or condition. If you are given a creative challenge that is pertinent to that experience, your creative approach and ideas will easily be inspired by that experience. If you are a medical liaison of a pharmaceutical company, you will have your own experience of the profession, your specific role and the pathology in which you specialize. Again, if you are given a creative challenge that is pertinent to that experience, your creative approach and ideas will be inspired by that experience.

If you put the caregiver and the medical liaison to work together on a creative challenge that is pertinent to their combined experience, their creative approach and ideas will be inspired by the confluence of their minds.

The creative approach and ideas of each individual are the product of their unique experience, so when you combine different creative approaches you get different ideas. This is why group creativity can be so powerful and produce valuable results that combine different perspectives. With the right questions as a spark, and the right setting as kindling, each individual's personal experience is the fuel that feeds the creative fire of the group.

For valid reasons, healthcare is obsessed with demonstrable facts. Human behaviour, on the other hand, is influenced more by emotion than by facts. In his book, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, neuroscientist Antonio Damasio brilliantly challenges traditional ideas about the connection between emotions and rationality. Damasio has studied people with brain damage that impairs their emotional functioning and found that they are unable to make decisions. Given two choices of similar foods, they can't decide which to eat, despite being able to describe in logical terms the decision they have been

asked to make. Emotions play a highly significant role in our choices and therefore our actions. When scientific evidence proves that facts and logic are trumped by emotion, even the most science-driven culture must accept that, as a means of understanding and using emotion, creativity is indispensable when it comes to achieving healthcare goals such as therapeutic adherence or the adoption of healthy lifestyle choices.

In summary, I believe Collaborative Creativity has transformational power that derives from the sum of its five forces (Figure 1), and each of these forces produces effects that have valuable applications in business in general and pharmaceutical companies in particular. I believe this because I have witnessed it, and in the next chapter I will share one of my practical experiences with you.

This is an extract from *The Forces of Collaborative Creativity* by Peter John Comber, published 27th October 2020 by Practical Inspiration Publishing.

<https://practicalinspiration.com/product/the-forces-of-collaborative-creativity>

Collaborative Creativity is a powerful methodology for groups that uses multiple bursts of creative challenges to solve complex problems.

Specifically developed for healthcare companies, Collaborative Creativity has been successfully utilized with internal and external stakeholders to reveal insights, nurture innovation and improve collaboration. Because the power of creativity lies as much in the creative process as in the output of ideas.

This book will introduce you to:

- The eight principles of Collaborative Creativity
- The practical applications and relative benefits of Collaborative Creativity
- Moderation guidelines for Collaborative Creativity sessions
- Examples of Collaborative Creativity exercises.



Peter Comber is the inventor of the Collaborative Creativity methodology and founding partner of Atstrat, a company providing Collaborative Creativity services to the healthcare industry.

An expert in applied creativity, with 35 years of professional experience that also includes a deep understanding of qualitative research, strategic planning and international marketing and management, Peter has unique practical knowledge of the power of group creativity.

