The rising need of technologists in the core creative team of advertising agencies
– An empirical study of Swedish advertising professionals –

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Abstract:
The Swedish advertising industry has been referred to as the “digital wonder” since the early 2000s, mostly owing to the numerous awards received at international competitions. However, such worldwide recognition certainly does not mean that Swedish advertising professionals are free from concern. This article pays attention to how they reflect on the ways in which they organize their projects and work styles in the digital age and the issues they are confronted with. Findings from qualitative interviews conducted with the professionals indicate that the development of the Internet and mobile communication technology is requiring skills and knowledge from the “technologists”, thus demanding the traditional creative team – an art director and a copywriter – to collaborate with such specialists and benefit from collective learning. In other words, it is no longer sufficient with an account manager incorporating the ‘business logic’, the planner the ‘scientific logic’ and the creatives the ‘artistic logic’ of advertising, defined by Gernot Grabher. The technologist embodying the fourth ‘technical logic’ is becoming a requirement in the core creative team within advertising agencies.
1 Introduction: Statement of purpose

The advertising industry has been in the midst of a restructuring process for the past fifteen years, notably due to the rising potentials of the web, social media and mobile technology. The ongoing impact of such new digital technologies has been occurring in almost every corner of the industry, disrupting the conventional production and distribution processes as well as the consumer’s media consumption habits. The speed at which these changes are happening is not slowing down, but rather it is increasing. Under such circumstances, the organizational structures of advertising agencies are required to adapt to the current needs of their clients and the consumers. The Swedish advertising industry is no exception. The present article pays specific attention to Swedish advertising professionals and how they reflect on the ways in which they organize their projects and work styles in the digital age. Findings from semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with the professionals indicate that the recent development of new communication technologies is requiring a new role within the advertising agencies – the “technologists”. This change is demanding the traditional creative team – an art director and a copywriter – to collaborate with such specialists and benefit from collective learning. In other words, it is no longer sufficient with an account manager incorporating the ‘business logic’, the planner the ‘scientific logic’ and the creatives the ‘artistic logic’ of advertising (Grabher, 2002:248). The fourth ‘technical logic’ cannot be neglected and the technologist needs to be considered as part of the core creative team within advertising agencies. Furthermore, the relationship between the advertising agencies and the digital production companies should not be understood in the form of orchestration, which follows a hierarchical relationship and modularization of tasks, but rather it should resemble jazz improvisation\(^1\) (Grabher, 2002:252), which implies that the key players perform in a collaborative manner, with “a deliberate interruption of habit patterns and resistance to the temptation to become locked in to routines of past success, thereby squelching experimentation” (2002: 252)

In the next section, a background to this article is given where three topics are discussed: the advertising industry’s restructuring process due to new communication technologies, redesigning of the advertising agency’s creative department, and a closer look into the Swedish advertising industry. The third section elaborates on the theoretical framework of the project ecology developed by Gernot Grabher and attempts to challenge the concept in order to match today’s media environment. The fourth section describes the research material and methods along with limitations that were found. This is then followed by a section of
interview analysis to reassess the project ecology and focus on the new role of technologists in the core creative team of advertising agencies. The article concludes with a final discussion and suggestions for future research in relation to this topic.

2 Background to the study

2.1 The restructuring advertising industry

Before the Internet became widely available to the public in the mid 1990s, advertising messages were mostly unidirectional, top-down and interruptive, using the limited media channels that were available, such as television, newspapers, magazines and radio. Information could be protected and controlled by the media industries in the form of what Jürgen Habermas (1985) terms “distorted communication” (cited in Holt, 2002: 72) where a certain authority creates an imbalance in the interaction between relevant parties. The advent of the Internet has drastically changed such media environment and is demanding advertising agencies to respond to the new reality more creatively through reorganizing and developing new skills and techniques (Hackley, 2010). As Fernando Rodés Vilà, the former CEO of the French communication group Havas, puts it:

The model that started with World War II [referring to the wartime metaphors of ‘campaign, target and launch’] was based on control in a few hands: very few media, two or three relevant brands in each sector and a few agencies … We are [now] facing a very different panorama, which is much more democratic, much more social, much more interesting but much more difficult for marketers. (Bradshaw & Edgecliffe-Johnson, 2009)

The Internet certainly does not create “an abrupt rupture with past history, because the new technologies cannot erase the core nature of the media within modern capitalist society” (Bustamante, 2004: 805). The conventional advertising in the form of 30-second television commercials or print displays is here to stay, and still plays an important role alongside the digital media. However, in today’s social context, the technological advancement in the digital field is allowing people to actively search for the information they need, check reviews of products and services before purchasing, and easily share information with friends. As for the advertisers, a communication space does not necessarily have to be bought from television or print media, but also “earned” through having the consumers spread the brands’ message within their social network.
According to Andy Sandoz, “Digital is now at the heart of all communication” (2010). The new communication technologies have changed the DNA of advertising, both in terms of how the brands and agencies can initiate and maintain communication, and also how the consumers have the ability to play a more active role in affecting the marketing and production process.

2.2 An unavoidable shift in the creative department
Traditionally, the organization of an advertising agency has been mainly composed of three departments: account management, planning and creative. In Grabher’s words, the account manager incorporates the ‘business logic’, the planner the ‘scientific logic’ and the creatives the ‘artistic logic’ of advertising (2002: 248). At the risk of oversimplification, the cultural production process for advertisements can be described as: first of all, an account manager brings a business assignment from the client, then the planner finds relevant consumer insights and creates a communication strategy, and finally a creative team consisting of an art director and a copywriter generates a creative idea to solve the client’s problem. This idea is then passed onto the relevant production companies and made into its final format. Projects in the advertising business have been more or less executed through this linear process within and across the firms. However, this traditional way of understanding the functional differentiation and career structure of advertising professionals is changing, as the media landscape becomes increasingly complex due to the development of digital and mobile technologies. The major transformation is occurring in the creative department along with its relationships with the digital production companies. However, that is not to say that account managers and planners are immune to the changes taking place in the media environment. All advertising professionals are increasingly required to think both strategically and creatively under the greater pressure for integrated media solutions (Hackley & Tiwsakul, 2011). Nevertheless, what were clearly brought out from the interviewees were organizational changes taking place in the creative department and hence, that is where the article pays the most attention to.

2.3 A closer look inside the Swedish advertising industry

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1 This paper uses a broad definition of the term “digital advertising”, meaning that it will not only include search or display advertisements, but also any type of marketing communication that advertising agencies may execute through the use of web, social media and/or mobile technology.
It goes without saying that the extent of this digital transformation brought into the advertising industry will depend on the technological, social and economic contexts of a specific location. For this article, Sweden has been chosen as the particular locale that is to be explored in depth. The choice of the Swedish advertising industry as the focus of this article is mainly due to its internationally acknowledged status as producing some of the most well-known and awarded digital advertisements in recent years, resulting in the nickname, the “Swedish digital wonder”.2

In the advertising industry, success is often measured by the number of awards won at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity – one of the most prestigious advertising competition in the industry – and the Gunn Report – an annual report that compiles data of awards won by agencies in various international competitions.3 According to the Gunn Report 2010, three Swedish advertising agencies, DDB Stockholm, Forsman & Bodenfors and Farfar, were given exceptionally high scores in the category of digital advertising. They had outnumbered the scores of agencies in some of the most influential countries in advertising, such as the UK and the US (gunnreport.com). When looking back at Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity 2011, Sweden collected 31 Lion trophies, ranking them in 8th place for the most awarded country.4 Considering Sweden’s population of only 9.4 million residents with a relatively small community of advertising professionals, the Swedish agencies have been winning a disproportionate amount of awards in the last few years compared to other countries. Lately, the Swedish government has been showing great interest in the creativity level of Swedish advertising agencies and has publicly announced plans to support its further growth as an export industry (Duner, 2011).

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2 There are numerous articles that highlight the Swedish digital wonder. For more details see:
- Broberg et al. (2012) “Both network and market”

The digital wonder does not only include advertising but also other industries such as gaming.

3 Broberg et al. (2012) also uses these two elements to measure the success of the Swedish advertising industry. They make note of the fact that there are alternative ways to measure success such as profit and customer satisfaction, and that this issue is an ongoing debate within the industry.

4 It was formerly known as Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival, but renamed in 2011.

When initially launched in 1954, the festival had only a single category for film that covered television and cinema advertisements. Today, with more categories including digital, it has grown into the world’s biggest annual awards festival for honoring creativity in communication, where advertising and communication professionals as well as advertisers gather.
(http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/jun/20/cannes-festival-rebrands-digital-age)
That the Swedish advertising industry is making news outside of its own country is nothing new. The beginning of what came to be known as the Swedish digital wonder took place in 2001 when digital advertising agency Farfar, within only a year after being founded, won its first Grand Prix (Broberg et al., 2011). Since then, Swedish advertising agencies, the majority of them being the emerging digital advertising agencies rather than the established advertising agencies, have been experiencing many successful moments on the international stage with their innovative and sophisticated advertising works.

Despite such remarkable achievements, there is a limit to how much we can understand a particular industry by only skimming through the results of advertising competitions and related news articles. What have been highlighted so far are only the positive and favorable aspects of the Swedish advertising industry, with its established international image as the “digital wonder”. However, interviews conducted with active professionals have shed light on the fact that Swedish advertising agencies are certainly not free from concern, and are facing challenges that are perhaps commonly shared among agencies in other countries as well.

3 Reassessing the theoretical framework of the project ecology

This article makes reference to Grabher’s theoretical framework of the project ecology for examining the organizational structure of the advertising agencies. His works (2001, 2002, 2004) based on the field of economic geography have often been referred to in research about advertising industries (for example see Bugge 2011; Pratt 2006; Röling 2010). Project ecology is a framework that can be used to understand how advertising tasks are organized, through examining the formation of projects that consists of members from not only within the agency but also from outside, including members such as clients, creative professionals and technical professionals. One of the main characteristics of the advertising industry today is that works are most often project-based where diverse skills and competencies are gathered in order to achieve the tasks requested by clients. The organization of projects is context-driven and the layers, such as the agencies, personal relations, localities and corporate networks, are often “stapled” for a limited period of time (Grabher, 2002: 259). In order to

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5 This paper uses the terms “digital advertising agency” and “digital production company” as different organizations. The former normally has direct contact with clients (brands) whereas the latter usually works with brands via advertising agencies. However, it is becoming more and more difficult to draw a clear boundary between the two.

6 One of the established advertising agencies, Forsman & Bodenfors, is an exception as a successful outlier within the community of digital advertising agencies (Broberg, et al. 2011).
describe the advertising agencies’ relationships with their external suppliers, Grabher uses the terms jazz improvisation and orchestration. Jazz improvisation concerns the agency creatives’ collaboration with external creative professionals, such as a film director. Similar to jazz, the key players ‘take turns’ and rotate ‘leadership’, where they shift between the roles of directing the project and being directed by project partners for the purpose of maximizing innovation and unpredictability (2002: 252). On the other hand, orchestration refers to the agencies’ connection to technical professionals, such as printing and sound or photo editing. From them, there is less expectation of genuine creative inputs compared to the creative professionals, therefore resembling “the hierarchical synchronization of an orchestra” (2002: 252). However, what Grabher has not fully explored yet is how the new communication technologies have altered the ways in which advertising agencies organize their projects, as well as how they conduct collective learning.

A similar limitation can be observed in James Faulconbridge’s (2007) empirical research into the role of professional associations within the advertising industries of London and New York. He delves into the value of spatial formations for collective learning and benefits that can be gained from being part of advertising communities. Despite his rich interview materials, its focus on examining the industry as a whole makes it insufficient to examine detailed interactions, frictions and conflicts that may exist between advertising professionals coming from different epistemic communities, such as between traditional creatives and the digital technologists. It is not difficult to imagine how the advent of Internet and its surrounding technological developments can trigger new discussions about the role of professional associations and conditions of collective learning, but such aspects were not touched upon.

In order to examine how two distinct epistemic communities may interact with each other, Etienne Wenger’s notions of communities of practice and boundary processes between the communities are convenient for the context of this article. He explains how humans have always formed some kind of communities that share common cultural practices that reflect their collective learning. On the one hand, “communities of practice” give people a sense of belonging, but on the other hand they imply the existence of boundaries. Wenger stresses that boundaries are both sources of new opportunities and potential difficulties. He further argues, “communities and boundaries can be learning assets (and liabilities) in complementary ways (2000: 233-234):
Communities of practice can steward a critical competence, but they can also become hostage to their history, insular, defensive, closed in, and oriented to their own focus. Boundaries can create divisions and be a source of separation, fragmentation, disconnection, and misunderstanding. Yet, they can also be areas of unusual learning, places where perspectives meet and new possibilities arise. Radically new insights often arise at the boundaries between communities.

This understanding of communities and boundaries is essential for assessing the challenges that advertising agencies, especially the creative department, are facing today in the digital age. The boundary is what seems to be causing anxiety and stress between traditional creatives and digital technologists, hindering them to move forward.

A recent study by Marcus Bugge, who examined the advertising industry in Oslo, Norway with specific interest to the impact of digitalization, provides an extensive look into the complicated realities of two distinct communities of practice – the advertising agencies and the web agencies – where its boundary only seems to serve as “a source of separation, fragmentation, disconnection, and misunderstanding” instead of a place “where perspectives meet and new possibilities arise” (Wenger, 2000: 233). He reports that the established advertising agencies are not able to fully embrace the new digital technology, resulting in a failure to benefit from collective learning with the web agencies. His argument is that this problem is caused by misunderstanding and lack of communication between the two parallel epistemic communities that do not necessarily share the same epistemic and cultural characteristics. According to Bugge, although being part of an “epistemic collective” (Grabher, 2004) may work positively and promote more learning and innovation, there may be cases in which, “the predominant knowledge base may hinder the integration with another knowledge base (Laestadius, 2000) or the collective learning may be stronger within an epistemic community rather than within an entire industry cluster (Lissoni, 2001)” (2011: 231). Grabher has emphasized that the diversity and flexibility of the advertising industry has facilitated creativity, learning and innovation, but Bugge does not see this as a valid statement when observing how digitalization has impacted the Norwegian advertising industry. For a collective learning to occur effectively, geographical proximity needs to be combined with epistemic and cultural proximity (Bugge, 2011: 246). This points to the possible need to reassess Grabher’s project ecology to match the realities faced by the advertising professionals in the digital age.
4 Research materials and methods

4.1 Interview structure

Since empirical research into the production process of Swedish advertising agencies is scarce and because it is difficult to capture the current industry status and structure by only referring to existing articles and literatures, a qualitative interview method has been applied in order to explore in depth and as up-to-date as possible. The conducted interviews have been semi-structured, meaning that it was neither an open free discussion nor a closed questionnaire. Due to the diverse background of the interviewees, the interview guide was adapted and customized to fit each individual. Such semi-structured nature of interviews poses a challenge since comparison of answers cannot always be made among the interviewees. On the other hand, this style was quite fruitful since at times the interviewees provided unanticipated answers and revealed new aspects of the inner workings of the industry. This follows Rubin and Rubin’s (1995) view that “qualitative interviewing design is flexible, iterative, and continuous, rather than prepared in advance and locked in stone” (original italics, 43). This interview structure has provided rich insights into how the advertising professionals perceive and experience the world they are living in today.

4.2 Data Collection

The present article draws upon a larger piece of work investigating the challenges faced by the Swedish advertising professionals in the digital age. For that study, 15 advertising professionals were interviewed within the period from January 31st to April 13th, 2012. The means of the interviews differed in two ways. Face to face interviews were conducted with 10 people: most interviews took place at their offices in Stockholm while two of them preferred a café. 5 people were interviewed via Skype/phone, which was due to location and time constraints. The range of time length for the interviews was from 40 minutes to 3 hours, with the average length being approximately 1 hour. Majority of the interviewees were chosen from advertising agencies that have ranked high in the Cannes International Festival of Creativity and the Gunn Report. For this particular article, the focus is on the organizational change within the creative department. Therefore, only interviews conducted with professionals relevant to this topic have been extracted for further analysis. All of the interviews were conducted in English, but since it was not the mother tongue for the interviewees, some of the personal accounts have been slightly edited for the purpose of

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7 These negative and positive aspects of semi-structured interviews were also mentioned by Bugge (2011).
providing a better flow. The identities of the professionals are not revealed since it is not important for this particular article.

4.3 Limitations of the research
There were two main limitations encountered during the interviews. First of all, because the interview was conducted only once for each interviewee, there was not enough time to build trust, which may have led some interviewees to produce normative or cautious responses. Secondly, there was a language issue where all of the Swedish interviewees were asked to respond in English, which was not their mother tongue. Sometimes the interviewee was lost in translation, which might have resulted in hesitation to speak further. It is not an easy task to discern whether the interviewees’ comments were in fact influenced by these limitations. Nevertheless, they should not be neglected and should be taken into consideration when discussing the interview materials.

5 Analysis of the interview materials
In the following sections, three discussions are made concerning the rising need of technologists in the Swedish advertising industry. The first section digs into the difficulties and struggles that Swedish advertising professionals are facing due to the current digital trend and how it is affecting their creative work process. In the second section, the main focus is on two digital producers in top Swedish advertising agencies as exemplary roles of “technologists”. The third and final section briefly comments on the upgraded status of digital production companies as they move up the value chain to connect directly with clients instead of via advertising agencies.

5.1 Challenges of collective learning
Bill Bernbach, who co-founded the advertising agency DDB (Doyle Dane Bernbach) in New York in 1949, is a well-known and admired figure in the advertising industry not only due to the successful campaigns that he has led but also for igniting the industry’s creative revolution. In the early days, the copywriters tended to look down on the art directors. Their works were clearly separated; therefore to whatever copy the copywriter came up with, the art director’s role was to attach a visual image of it. It was Bernbach who broke this tradition and brought in the idea that the two roles should work together, rather than independently (Advertising

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8 3 people were contacted again for a few follow-up questions. 2 were via e-mail and 1 was via Skype.
Age, 1999). For many decades, this team formation worked out fine, but only while the communication landscape was comparatively simple and predictable with the use of mass media (Bambach, 2010). Recently, it seems that the impact of the Internet is disrupting the structure of the creative team once again.

Having this industry trend in mind, this section explores the difficulties and struggles that Swedish advertising professionals are confronting today in the digital age, especially with regards to their creative work process. One of the interviewees is an instructor for an art director and copywriter course at an advertising/marketing school in Stockholm, but also working at a PR agency as a digital producer. He spoke about the challenges he faces at school, as well as the changing structure of a creative team. Alongside a team of an art director and a copywriter, he argues that the presence of a technologist is needed:

We have our struggle here because we have another course called interactive communication, and then we have my class, the art and copy. They're pretty similar, you know. So I mean all students here, they are truly digital in their souls. So we're really going to have a problem. [...] The traditional way of working as an art director and copywriter is definitely dead. But also you have to bring in the third creative, the technologist. And then you have the magic. [...] But everybody talks about it now so I think it's going to be a big difference. And that means we as a school has to follow that as well. (1. digital producer, PR agency)

This account highlights the pressing need for such vocational institutions to keep up with the industry needs, but the fact that an art director and copywriter course is being taught by a digital producer shows that a reconsideration of the creative roles is already taking place. It is also worth noting how this interviewee describes his young students. These students, likely in their early 20s, have grown up using the Internet, social media and mobile phones. He further commented that for them, “digital doesn’t exist. If you give them a task, 95% of the time it comes back with a digital solution for it.” Although these young students may be able to freely and digitally express their work at school, the interviewee was concerned that if they are hired at an advertising agency that hasn’t adapted to digital yet, “they are probably going to die”.

A creative director who recently left a global network advertising agency to start his own business, described his experiences of working with traditional creatives at his previous workplace by criticizing that they need to alter their way of forming creative teams. From a management perspective, it seems crucial to make the necessary organizational changes so as
to attract digitally equipped young talents, such as the students described in the previous quote.

The creative director argued:

My experience is that it's been very difficult for a traditional creative personnel to bring in digital talent earlier in the process. Let's say the brainstorm process. You have the traditional set up. Art director and copy writer, they come up with the idea and after they've been working for two weeks they come over to the digital guys and ask, 'What do you think we should do on the digital side, mobile and web?' Which is totally wrong because today even programmers or coders or other kinds of personnel should be there from the start, to feed things and say, 'You can do that, or no you can't do that, that could work’… So you need to look over your team from the start of the brainstorm process. (2. creative director/founder, independent advertising agency)

Bugge also emphasizes this point in his study of the Norwegian advertising industry. According to his interviewees from the web agencies, “[…] the art directors or copy writers constituting the creative teams in the advertising agencies have often ordered web solutions that are direct copies of print campaigns without letting the characteristics of the Internet influence the shaping of the idea” (2011: 239). Why a traditional creative personnel has difficulty bringing in digital talent earlier in the process is an interesting phenomenon. Considering how important digital media has become as a communication tool, it only seems so natural that the creatives would willingly join forces with digital talents to provide the most favorable solution to their clients and consumers. It is difficult to state the reasons for this phenomenon without understanding the actual thought process of such creatives. However, one possible reason may be that the traditional creatives are adhering to what Grabher calls “the hierarchical synchronization of an orchestra” (2002: 252), in which collaborative work with external suppliers of technical inputs are understood as not requiring much creative inputs, thereby such technologists having to follow “pre-scripted scores and a single conductor as leader” (2002: 252) to execute a given task. These technical specialists are placed subordinate to the advertising agencies and the main notion here is that the technical and creative fields are governed by different logics. Perhaps traditional creatives that this interviewee referred to are still considering digital talents as part of their orchestra members.

Below is a personal account of a digital producer, who also illuminated that point:

Some ad agencies are still like they were in the 50s. It's pretty conservative. As a digital guy you're still one of those digital guys that nobody really knows what they do. Maybe not here so much, but I know people in the business that are feeling a bit lonesome in an agency because they feel that no one really understands what they do. (3. digital producer, independent advertising agency)
From this comment, it can be assumed that there is still a knowledge gap between the professionals coming from the traditional and the digital side, and perhaps even a cultural gap that hinders a collaborative environment within the agency. A boundary clearly seems to exist, being “a source of separation, fragmentation, disconnection, and misunderstanding”. (Wenger, 2000: 233). This situation can also be described by what Bugge (2011) calls parallel epistemic communities, where a lack of intersection between the two distinct groups of professionals is causing an obstacle to collective learning.

Moreover, when a creative director was asked whether he has met any creatives that showed concerns about sharing part of their creative control to the consumers, he responded:

In my last agency [a global network agency], they didn't understand it. You have creatives that have been working with print and TV and linear communication for a long time and they did well. They are amazing storytellers, but they don't really get the interactive part. How can we connect with the consumers and make them part of the story? (2. creative director/founder, independent advertising agency)

In terms of the production process, advertisements for traditional media such as television and print are quite different from those that involve the Internet. Put simply, with traditional media, the creative team at an advertising agency draws a sketch of how a TV commercial or a print advertisement will look like. Then the production team, whether in-house or a job-shop outside the firm, transforms the sketch into its final format. However, this two-step linear process does not work well with digital advertising. Compared to one-way communication channels, the Internet is interactive and invites a dialogue. There are many different actions that can be taken by the users when an advertisement is on their computer screen instead of a television. Therefore, rather than applying the logic of traditional advertising to the new medium, the real opportunity lies in the attempt to benefit from the unique properties of digital (Burgoyne, 2010). “Digital is incremental, experimental, continually optimized – ‘perpetual beta’ – and never, ever finished” (Sacks, 2010). Taking this into account, it becomes clear that the conceptual stage and the complex production process cannot be understood as two separate steps (Bambach, 2010). They need to integrate and work in unison, which is why digital production has become such an important discussion topic within the advertising industry today.

In the Advertising Age, an industry magazine, Darryl Ohrt published an article titled “A Winning Creative Team Needs Developers Alongside the Dreamers”, in which the dreamers
refer to the art director and the copywriter. He argues the necessity of developers, who “are the people who determine what's possible, write the code to make it happen and have a keen understanding of the frameworks, platforms and technologies that can make, break or reinvent a solution” (2012). Rei Inamoto, a chief creative officer at AKQA, puts it like this: “The big part of this industry is still relegating technology just as an execution, a production task, and not as a strategic point of view” (2012). He believes that the creative combination of art and copy is from the last century and today it is about collaboration between art and code, meaning that, “a team of artists, designers, user-experience people, content creators, and, of course, writers should work together with a team of coders, programmers, developers and even scientists to create tools and experiences for people to use and be part of” (Rooney, 2012). Today, agencies are seeking hybrid talents who can write code and write copy; who are graphic designers as well as information architects (Griffith, 2012). Along with the interview comments, these industry articles also seem to point towards a pressing need for a more collaborative environment for professionals with all types of skills and knowledge to come together and work in a collective manner.

5.2 Exemplary roles of “technologists”

One interviewee, a digital producer at an independent advertising agency, is an example of a “technologist” or a “digital talent” that the interviewees above mentioned. He began his career as a self-taught HTML programmer in the mid 1990s and later started up his own production company, where they did subcontracting work for the agency he works at now. As a technologist in the agency, his task is to be involved in every digital discussion and to be a communication hub between the production company and the advertising agency:

For the creatives that I work with, my task is to form the idea to be as good as possible in a digital environment for the interaction of the end-user. Also, since we work with a lot of production houses that is outside the office, we need to combine our ideas with their ideas as well, to form a mixture. So 50% of the work is in-house with the work group, and 50% is with the production agency. We need to defend the original idea and to make sure that the output is becoming like what we wanted, but also see that there's space for the production agencies to do their creative magic, because most of the production agencies we work with have their own creative process when the production starts. That combines with the creatives that I have at the office, and everything needs to come together. […] I have legs in two companies: one in my own and the other in production agencies, so I need to feel and please both. (4. digital producer, independent advertising agency)

As opposed to the traditional creatives that the previous interviewee described, this digital producer expressed his satisfaction with the creatives that he works with, since they are well
equipped with digital know-how and have their standards and demands for the production based on what is actually possible to do on the Internet. He added that as a producer, it helps to have such creatives when discussing with the production agencies, “because then they are very near the reality in what output we’re going to see.” His constant use of the pronoun “we” may be indicative of the fact that he feels he has an equal status with the creatives, making it possible for a productive and collaborative relationship.

Another technologist, who works at a different independent advertising agency, also had his own production company since 2000. Landing his current position was a direct result of doing 8 years of subcontracting work for the agency he works at today. Similar to the previous interviewee, he described his task as having “one foot in the creative and one foot in the technology part”. After he “develops the creative idea in a digital way”, the production company takes over and realizes the idea. Regarding the role of today’s creatives (art director and copywriter), he seemed to have quite a generous view – that they don’t necessarily have to be experts in the digital field:

Sometimes it helps not to have the technical competence because you're very liberated in your way of thinking ideas. And the best digital producers take their creative ideas and make them work. So sometimes I actually enjoy working with ones who are not into digital at all because that's when you get very naive thoughts that in the beginning it seems impossible, but in the end just makes perfect sense, and you find a way to do it. That's when you're breaking ground. (3. digital producer, independent advertising agency)

Having a common background of starting up a production company and doing subcontracting work for the advertising agencies, both technologists identified quite well with the production team. Furthermore, their presence seemed to point towards a shift in the agency’s relationship with the digital production company from one of orchestration to jazz improvisation (Grabher, 2002: 252). In other words, it is a move away from relying on the production side merely for their technical inputs to extracting more creative inputs from them, leading to improvisation where there is a “deliberate interruption of habit patterns and resistance to the temptation to become locked in to routines of past success” (252) for the purpose of maximizing innovation and unpredictability in their works. According to these digital producers, not just simply having technical skills and knowledge, but to be able to think in the shoes of both the internal creative teams and the production companies seems to be a necessary ability of a technologist inside the advertising agency. For these two technologists, the boundaries between the distinct logics that govern the creative and technical realms seem blurred (Wenger, 2000).
As it can be observed from these accounts, the creative process can no longer be isolated from production. The technologists described above, who used to be subcontracting workers for the advertising agencies, are now playing an important role on the agency side as a hub between the creative and the production process. In relation to this, a CEO of a global network advertising agency commented: “If I could hire someone right now, it would be a digital producer (5)”. An executive creative director emphasized that in the future there will be more programmers or people with programming background in the advertising industry (6). Another creative director pointed out that even if an agency doesn’t have a production team in-house, “what you do need is to have a very good production management in-house who understands the process. So you need to be able to drive the projects and have full control from your agency (2)”’. As Hackley & Tiwsakul suggests, “the task of crafting a sense of professional identity in the field is being shaped by new technology and working practices” (2010: 210).

5.3 Digital production companies move up the value chain

Recently, there has been a trend where digital production companies that previously did subcontracting works have moved up the value chain and be contacted by the clients directly. Kokokaka, based in Gothenberg, is a good example. They were responsible for the production work of several award-winning campaigns for Forsman & Bodenfors, but at one point clients started to offer work directly to them. In 2010, they won their first Cannes award under their own name (Broberg et al., 2011: 19). One of the interviewees also went through a similar experience with his previous workplace at a renowned digital production company:

The client came directly to us and said, ‘We really want this’. And suddenly we got 2, 3 times more pay than we used to, doing the same stuff, because the agency wasn't in there. Mainly, if an agency does a campaign maybe 10% ends up at production, because it costs a lot to get the deal and to do the concept and thinking, and in a big agency, they have all this different hierarchy with roles and stuff that needs to get paid. They put more money in thinking than execution. But now it's a big trend in the world that you know, you have to put more into execution because a good idea can be lousy if you execute it bad. But an okay idea can be amazing if you execute it the right way. (1. digital producer, PR agency)

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9 On the other hand there are production companies like B-Reel who has strategically chosen to work via advertising agencies, so as to focus on the production and not on consulting. http://www.resume.se/nyheter/reklam/2012/02/21/bast-i-varlden-igen/ (Accessed 21 February 2012)
This quote shows that even the clients have begun to reassess the role of the technologists, recognizing them as business partners rather than as outsourced professionals who are only accessible via advertising agencies. Another way to look at this is that now the advertising agencies must face competition from digital production companies as well. It is also worth noting how this interviewee emphasized the increasing importance of execution over thinking. This also points to the fact that the conceptual process is required to blend more with the production process, which stresses the crucial role of technologists for balancing those two.

6 Concluding discussions
These various accounts indicate that Grabher’s (2002) explanation of the three logics – business, scientific and artistic – to describe the departmental tasks of advertising is no longer sufficient. The fourth technical logic needs to be in place, not below but alongside the three logics, which requires a reassessment of the organizational structure in the creative department of advertising agencies. In other words, the relationship between the creatives and the digital technologists should not be understood in the form of orchestration with a hierarchical relationship, but rather to be treated more on equal terms. The interview findings have demonstrated that there are some advertising agencies in Sweden that have proceeded with the organizational change by welcoming technologists, who were once external suppliers, into their core creative team. As we move further into the digital age, such talents who are able to think and act from both the advertising agency and the digital production company perspective will become increasingly valuable assets as they bridge the gap between the two parallel epistemic communities (Bugge, 2011). As Wenger argues, boundaries that exist between distinct communities of practice can also be “areas of unusual learning, places where perspectives meet and new possibilities arise” (2000: 233). With the technologists working as the hub, a more collaborative relationship between the advertising agencies and the digital production companies resembling jazz improvisation is likely to arise, leading to an increasing opportunity for a much more innovative and unanticipated creative works.

It is not difficult to imagine how advertising agencies that can quickly embrace this new organizational logic and instill digital competency across the firm will be better off compared to the slow adopters. This move is not only important for attracting clients, but also for the agency to provide an appealing work environment for the up and coming young digital talents. However, when it comes to the issue of talent wars, there is another pressing concern involving the entire advertising industry, which none of the interviewees commented on. That
is, the digital talent war that extends beyond the advertising realm. Borrowing the words of Maurice Lévy, current CEO of Publicis, “We need to fight with the startups, technology and platform companies for talent, not the banks anymore” (Griffith, 2012).¹⁰ It remains to be seen to what extent the Swedish advertising industry can succeed in luring the future talents with their “digital wonder”.

For future research in relation to this topic, there are three suggestions. The first suggestion is to conduct a comparative analysis with the industry situation in other countries to see whether any generalization can be made. As a second suggestion, an ethnographic research can be conducted alongside the interviews in order to study how collective learning actually occurs among the creatives and the technologists. Since the present article focused solely on qualitative interviews, such addition may reveal new aspects that the professionals may not have been aware of, and may even be of practical use for them to improve their work methods. The third and final suggestion for a future research is to conduct interviews specifically with the young creative talents working in the advertising industry to further understand how they perceive the current structure and functions of the creative department. To quote one of the interviewees, the young people are “truly digital in their souls”. Perhaps the term technologist will soon become outdated, as this generation merges both their creative and technical logics in their work process.

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¹⁰ This article from Adweek describes how desperate advertising agencies are when it comes to the issue of talent. At Ogilvy & Mather and OgilvyOne, 58 employees who lacked digital and mobile marketing skills left the agency in January 2012. AKQA is awarding any employee who brings in new talent to the agency with a cash bonus and a luxury trip. As a countermeasure, some agencies are investing in in-house startups to encourage innovation from the employees as well as to attract digital talents.
7 References

Published sources:


Unpublished sources:


Individual numberings:
1. digital producer, PR agency
2. creative director/founder, independent advertising agency
3. digital producer, independent advertising agency
4. digital producer, independent advertising agency
5. CEO, global network advertising agency
6. executive creative director, global network advertising agency