



Artful Making: What Managers Need to Know about How Artists Work

Robert Austin , Lee Devin

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Artful Making offers the first proven, research-based framework for engineering ingenuity and innovation. This book is the result of a multi-year collaboration between Harvard Business School professor Robert Austin and leading theatre director and playwright Lee Devin. Together, they demonstrate striking structural similarities between theatre artistry and production and today's business projects--and show how collaborative artists have mastered the art of delivering innovation "on cue," on immovable deadlines and budgets. These methods are neither mysterious nor flaky: they are rigorous, precise, and--with this book's help--absolutely learnable and reproducible. They rely on cheap and rapid iteration rather than on intensive up-front planning, and with the help of today's enabling technologies, they can be applied in virtually any environment with knowledge-based outputs. Moreover, they provide an overarching framework for leveraging the full benefits of today's leading techniques for promoting flexibility and innovation, from agile development to real options.

Artful Making: What Managers Need to Know about How Artists Work Details

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Torben Rasmussen says

This is an amazing book. The parallel drawn between knowledge work and collaborative arts is spot on at so many levels. This is excellent food for thought and should be part of any the curriculum of anyone managing organisations focused on development, innovation and knowledge work.

Zak Metz says

Artful Making is a book about agile, but the author didn't seem to know it already had a name and belabors the title phrase over and over. Regardless, the principles he elaborates are a sound guide to implementing the agile process as reflected in the daily work of a theater group preparing a play. In short, the author emphasizes that "artful work" requires low-cost and rapid iterations, an environment safe for experimentation and failure, and faith that the process will produce a better product than a team guided by coercion. Management must guide then release the team to find the best solutions, recognizing that collaboration, a step above being simply a team, leads to value greater than the sum of its parts. Although it gets weird when he diverges into a "real life" example of a middle-ages armor making who has no flexibility to innovate, he's on point when he gets to the fiscal issues of selling a project that has no well-defined end to it. Here he gets agile, and gets how to sell it, even if other books are more specific. In the end, the comparison of knowledge work to a theater group is an interesting angle and has value, and the author includes many examples that make for fun reading.

dv says

A good business book which explores art (and especially the theatre performance) as a metaphor for a way of working more functional for contemporary, knowledge-based organizations moving into a volatile and competitive context. Nothing especially new (but it has to be considered that the book is from 2003), but well told.

Snowlady says

I wish someone told me about this book last summer. The authors articulate clearly what managers need to do with knowledge workers and provide a framework for managers to follow. I will be using the principles learned in coaching my team. However, while this approach is more common in the US and some other countries, its going to be a challenge to implement in Japan. I recommend this book to managers in the IT industry

Todd Webb says

Sometimes when searching for the essence of what you do, in my case technical product management, it is useful to look at it from a different perspective. "Artful Making" serves that purpose well as it compares software development (and knowledge work in general) with the work of a theater company. The authors argue that collaborative, creative work requires an approach that is different than the industrial approach we are familiar with in business. And they make the case that the creation of a play by a theater group, under a deadline, is just as disciplined a process as any industrially oriented process. It just has a different aim, collaborative creation. It's worth a read.

Amir Hossein Fassihi says

Very inspiring book. Clearly defines what type of making can be called artful making and contrasts it with industrial making. The theater metaphors and details about the requirements and process for artful making is very interesting and very important for many people involved in the creation of innovative solutions, products or businesses.

I wished more authors wrote about similar topics.

Edward says

At first I was skeptical that theater could be a metaphor for other types of businesses. But if you buy into the notion that business is less about an end product and more about interactions with consumers, then yes, the act of creating anything, be it a work of art or a widget dropping off the end of a conveyor belt, is an ongoing, iterative process with no fully predetermined end. Makes absolute sense to me in the Software as a Service (SaaS) biz.

The quote that really resonated with me: "vocation is the work that's worth doing for its own sake."

How do we find the art in everything we do?
