

Artistic Thinking in Business

I received a few 'asks for an example of how an artistic mind plays out in the business context since my last article on 'Think Like An Artist', including this- 'I am inspired that many tech startups have backgrounds or interests in the arts but can you give me a practical example of artistic thinking at work?'

We surely can talk about the art of improv in jazz and drama being used in the ability to handle unusual questions during interviews or in a sales situation but I am quite certain that some people will say that these are soft skills and they'd like something more concrete.

Take a look at this assembled picture below. On the right is a sculpture my second girl did when she was 13, her very first art assignment in secondary school. Students like her who take Special Arts as a subject were asked to create an imaginary creature that consists of different animal parts. My daughter created one that had the head of a fox, an elephant's nose, a squirrel's tail and a tiny owl that sits on the creature's head.

A lot of logical, rational people write-off such an artistic process as a pure waste of time, or at best, an activity for social gatherings or just a hobby that calms our urban minds.

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On the left of this picture is a screenshot taken from Strategyzer.com depicting the disruption process that Amazon took using the Business Model Canvas (BMC). The BMC is a critical tool used by startup mentors like myself around the world in the Lean Launchpad methodology. The BMC has 9 building blocks that cover the entire spectrum of any business' activities based on Design Thinking. Using the BMC we can slice and

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dice, add and subtract activities within each of the 9 building blocks to create a new business model, even disruptive ones like Apple's iPod and Amazon Web Services.

In fact, using the BMC, I had great fun this week with a venture building team. I pulled them out of their previous entrepreneurial experiences, isolated one of their target segments, added new segments, strung up the customer segments' common needs with a common thread, and then put the team back into their enlarged tents. Doing the entire process in Mandarin simply added to the thrill for me.

Actually, we don't even need to go that creative; what we commonly know as business process outsourcing and offshoring are simply subtractions from a firm's internal core activities to relying on a key partner to perform these activities. You can also look at this as shifting the activities from one of the 9 BMC boxes into another.

Isn't the add and subtract process in the BMC similar to an art project of taking a part of various animals and putting them together, creating something new? Art and artistic thinking are more than hobbies, and we deprive ourselves greatly when we only use our logical and rational minds. Go try something artsy!

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