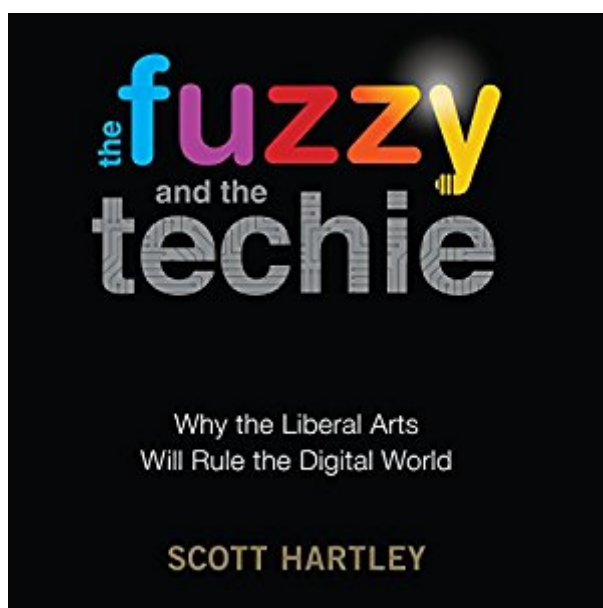


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The Fuzzy And The Techie: Why The Liberal Arts Will Rule The Digital World



Synopsis

A finalist for the 2016 Financial Times/McKinsey Bracken Bower Prize A leading venture capitalist offers surprising revelations on who is going to be driving innovation in the years to come. Scott Hartley first heard the terms fuzzy and techie while studying political science at Stanford University. If you majored in the humanities or social sciences, you were a fuzzy. If you majored in the computer sciences, you were a techie. This informal division has quietly found its way into a default assumption that has misled the business world for decades: that it's the techies who drive innovation. But in this brilliantly contrarian book, Hartley reveals the counterintuitive reality of business today: it's actually the fuzzies - not the techies - who are playing the key roles in developing the most creative and successful new business ideas. They are often the ones who understand the life issues that need solving and offer the best approaches for doing so. It is they who are bringing context to code, and ethics to algorithms. They also bring the management and communication skills, the soft skills that are so vital to spurring growth. Hartley looks inside some of today's most dynamic new companies, reveals breakthrough fuzzy-techie collaborations, and explores how such collaborations are at the center of innovation in business, education, and government, and why liberal arts are still relevant in our techie world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a techie who has obsessed, worried, and generally just been quite skeptical over the chance non-techies have in surviving the potential automation explosion that could soon come, I found myself relieved to FINALLY find such a convincing argument that the future may be bright after all

for both "fuzzies" and techies alike. Prior to reading this, I had come across the Oxford study (that is also discussed in the book) which estimated some 47% of jobs would be automated in the next one to two decades. This study initially rang true to my intuition, as I had been involved in programming several products which were responsible for automating away many manual, repetitive jobs. Having done these jobs, I really couldn't see any end in sight to the potential automation wave that could really create a dire future for any non-techies. But, Hartley presents many studies in the book which contradict these findings - the most prominent of which I found to be the McKinsey study - which states the number is probably closer to about 5%. More importantly, though, throughout the book he gives several explanatory models explaining WHY many jobs will survive automation, as well as why many "fuzzy" jobs will need to be created and even why these fuzzy jobs will be complex, high skilled and high value jobs. These models further *qualitatively* distinguish what jobs are ripe for automation, and what jobs (or potential jobs) are best served by "fuzzy" skills. The core concept that governs these models is complexity. By looking at a given job, these models highlight both the *magnitude* of complexity, as well as the *type* of complexity. For example, Hartley uses the Cynefin framework to distinguish between tasks that are simple, complicated, complex, chaotic, or disordered. Each of these categories are governed by the structure of the cause and effect relationships which dictate the required action of the person (or job/role) in effectively carrying out a required task. I found models like this to give me an incredibly simple and useful way for organizing and making sense of this topic, where previously I could feel myself floundering to pull together the essential governing laws of the debate. Besides this, the book is filled with a really nice blend of hard data and entertaining stories, that allows for a convincing argument in an entertaining way. I had one or two disagreements, where I thought the role of a "fuzzie" was slightly over-exaggerated - or at the very least was likely to be more valuable supplementally rather than critically. But, on the whole, I found myself mostly nodding in agreement with my own experience, where I have personally found many of the tech claims - especially those involving machine learning, AI, neural nets, etc - to be highly over-exaggerated, as well as the many times in my own work-life experience I have seen just how invaluable fuzzies can be in the right domains. The one benefit I did not expect to get from this book was just how much it could help me to not only appreciate more what "fuzzies" do in the current workplace, but also how to help and support their future in the workplace as we create more meaningful, cooperative, and fun environments where more people feel valued and important in these collective, creative engagements (that we so boringly call jobs) as we humans march forward into the totally unknown and exciting future that lays ahead of us

There is a principle coined by Raymond Loewy in the world of industrial design called most advanced, yet acceptable. This concept explains the tension between the exponential advancement in technological capabilities and the linear growth in human capabilities to comprehend these advances. The different between these two points is only increasing as technological capabilities built on one another. This widening gap means that fuzzies (aka liberal art majors and generally people who understand the social science) become even more critical in solving problems. Scott Hartley provides a unique perspective when many in media build the perception of the 'lone genius' technologist. His book includes many examples highlighting that the combination of art and science really do create better solutions to complex problems. This book is an important read for people just getting started in their career as well as others who are interested in the technology industry in general.

The central thesis of the book is that instead pushing every last student to major in a STEM field, we need to recognize that the liberal arts provide a crucial human perspective in a world increasingly governed by machine algorithms. As a venture capitalist who has served as a Presidential Innovation Fellow (we were part of the same round) and is a term member of the Council of Foreign Affairs, Hartley really covers the gamut in his book. From a founder who taught himself how to code and runs a law enforcement tech company to a charter school teacher using technology in novel ways to improve student outcomes to a military strategist applying human psychology to augment a threat warning system, we meet a cast of characters with degrees in philosophy, economics, political science, and other liberal arts majors, who are building or leveraging technology in important ways. Ultimately, I found *The Fuzzy and the Techie* to be a grand tour of thoughtful people trying to use technology to improve human life. Hartley has seemingly crossed the globe to get first-hand interviews with key players in his book and is just as comfortable explaining international ocean disputes in Asia as he is describing the approach that Google engineers took to program AlphaGo. It will encourage those who might feel that "the tech world" is out of their reach and compiles a wealth of meaningful people, ideas, stories, and statistics for those concerned that our world is being overrun by computers.

No one can predict the future. Any author with a proposal for how to understand the near-term or long-term world is fighting an uphill battle. However, driving nuance into the conversation of the current societal zeitgeist that simplistically groupthinks it's way into exulting one group or culture or education over another is increasingly important. The current simplistic and unquestioning

conversation does not predict the future. It creates it. That means we need to think more deeply about the world that we happen to be creating by claiming (or listening to and believing claims that) only one type of person will be employable in the the coming economy, especially when at the root of that claim is fear. Hartley thoughtfully fleshes out the counterargument that no one's considering. With enough real world examples to blow your hair back, his book will have you wondering not which cog you want to play in which wheel in which future economy, but what makes you unique, what lights your fire, and what you are doing and thinking about when you're in a flow state. All key wonderings if we're going to continue to question what it means to be human and figure out how to truly thrive in the future we are creating.

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