

BOOK REVIEW

## *Innovation in the Arts: Concepts, Theories, and Practices*

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**ABSTRACT:** An arts entrepreneurship professor reviews Jason White's *Innovation in the Arts: Concepts, Theories, and Practices*. **DOI:** [doi.org/10.34053/artivate.11.2.184](https://doi.org/10.34053/artivate.11.2.184)

With *Innovation in the Arts: Concepts, Theories, and Practices*, Jason White has thoughtfully distilled the critical concept of arts innovation into its fundamental parts. As a result, artists, arts students, educators, researchers, arts administrators, and entrepreneurs all stand to benefit from the book's precise explication of concepts, theories, and practices.

In the "Introduction," White takes the time to construct contextual frames around his theories, providing the audience with a primer on his approach. Briefly, he discusses the need for more representation of arts-specific innovation within general entrepreneurship and business management scholarship. I appreciated his awareness that "art" and "innovation" can potentially mean very different things to different readers. He ends his introduction by defining his key themes, preparing the reader for the book's primary content.

The "Introduction" and "Conclusions and Suggested Directions" sections also explore *why* innovation is an essential topic. Essentially, he argues, identifying and understanding patterns of innovation within the arts helps us to research, teach, and strategically utilize innovations in ways that are more sustainable, impactful, and rewarding. In my own experiences teaching arts entrepreneurship, I find that taking the time to discuss the benefits of innovation to arts entrepreneurs—and the various ways in which it may *not*

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be beneficial—typically results in lively, engaging conversation. Within entrepreneurship circles, “innovation” and “entrepreneurship” often appear so tightly interwoven as to be almost synonymous. However, entrepreneurship can be effective without innovation, and innovation often does not result in effective entrepreneurship. Additionally, both artists and entrepreneurs often feel pressured to innovate for the sake of innovating rather than because it makes for compelling art and/or entrepreneurship. White’s deeper dive into the usefulness of his topic encourages his audience to explore the relationships and differences between entrepreneurship and innovation.

White further defines his terms in the second chapter, “Key Terms for Mutual Understanding.” Although this chapter is necessary, I predict it may prove challenging for some readers, especially students, because it is heavy on definitions. Should this book be used in a classroom setting, it may need to be prefaced through some exploratory conversations. For researchers, however, this chapter is essential in guiding scholars from business-oriented disciplines and arts-oriented disciplines through the distinctions between our respective fields and the nature of the “products” (often utilitarian vs. aesthetic) with which we work.

White’s primary chapters outline three theories of innovation in the arts:

1. A Theory of Art Innovation: the creation, diffusion, and widespread endorsement of a new form of art in the art world.
2. A Theory of Art Movement Innovation: the introduction, diffusion, and widespread acceptance of a guiding ideology for a new art movement.
3. A Theory of Audience Experience Innovation: the development, diffusion, and widespread integration of a structured experience design for visual, literary, or performing arts audiences.

Beginning each chapter with a succinct definition, White then describes each theoretical framework in more detail, identifying and discussing the appropriate scholarly support for the theory. More in-depth discussion follows as he describes each theory’s unique characteristics, potential risks and challenges, strategies for gaining momentum and legitimacy within the desired art world, and desired outcomes. Each of these three chapters closes with concrete examples drawn from a wide variety of case studies in art history. The chapters are well organized with subheadings to help the reader navigate the underlying pattern in each type of innovation, which I found particularly helpful.

I also appreciated White’s attention to *how* each movement gains momentum, establishes legitimacy, and overcomes challenges; it is here that I see the most potential for classroom exercises in strategic arts innovation. For example, one might ask students to design a strategic plan for legitimizing a new art form (art innovation), generate ideas for diffusing a desired artistic reform/desired social reform via art (art movement innovation), or design a distinctively new aesthetic experience with strategic plans for gaining acceptance among arts administrators (an identified challenge inherent to this form of art innovation). Along the lines of business school pedagogy, instructors may

generate discussion questions and short exercises designed to put the student in the role of CEO/artist/arts administrator of the artists and organizations profiled, generating alternative strategies. As for arts administrators, practicing artists, and researchers, the descriptions of each theory help the reader understand the *typical* patterns of innovation within the arts. Of course, there are always exceptions to these patterns, which beg further research exploring why these exceptions exist. White concludes the book with suggestions for further research, providing inspiration for researchers seeking new projects.

Overall, *Innovation in the Arts* offers a thorough yet efficient exploration of how innovation is cultivated within arts contexts. White's ability to thoughtfully distill a vast and elusive topic into a concise text is impressive considering the amount of content and research he shares. Although White's primary audience would appear to be fellow researchers, this book is also beneficial to those working with artists in educational settings, as it can inform pedagogy. By bringing together concepts, theories, and practices in arts innovation, White has provided students, scholars, and practitioners with a timely and relevant text to inform their work and shape the future of innovation in the arts.