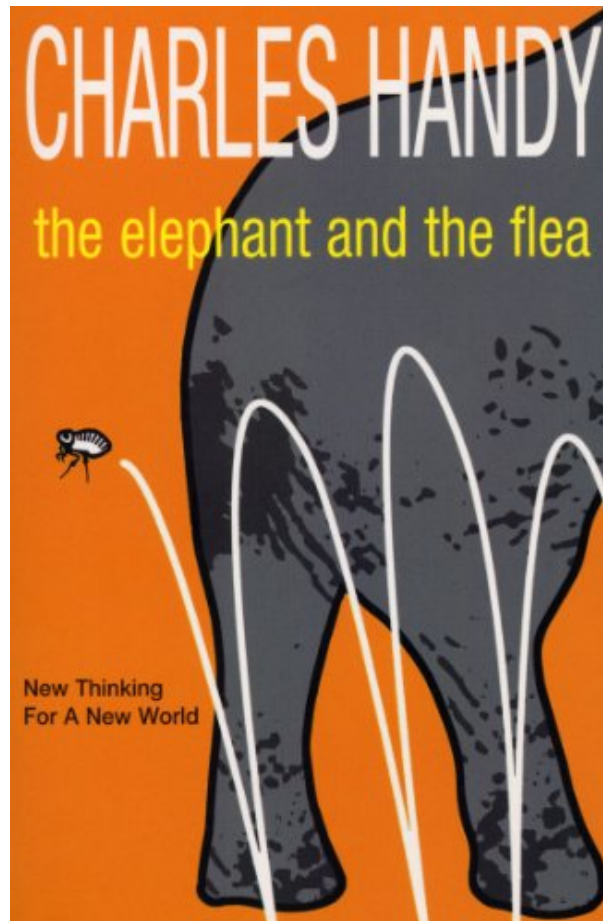
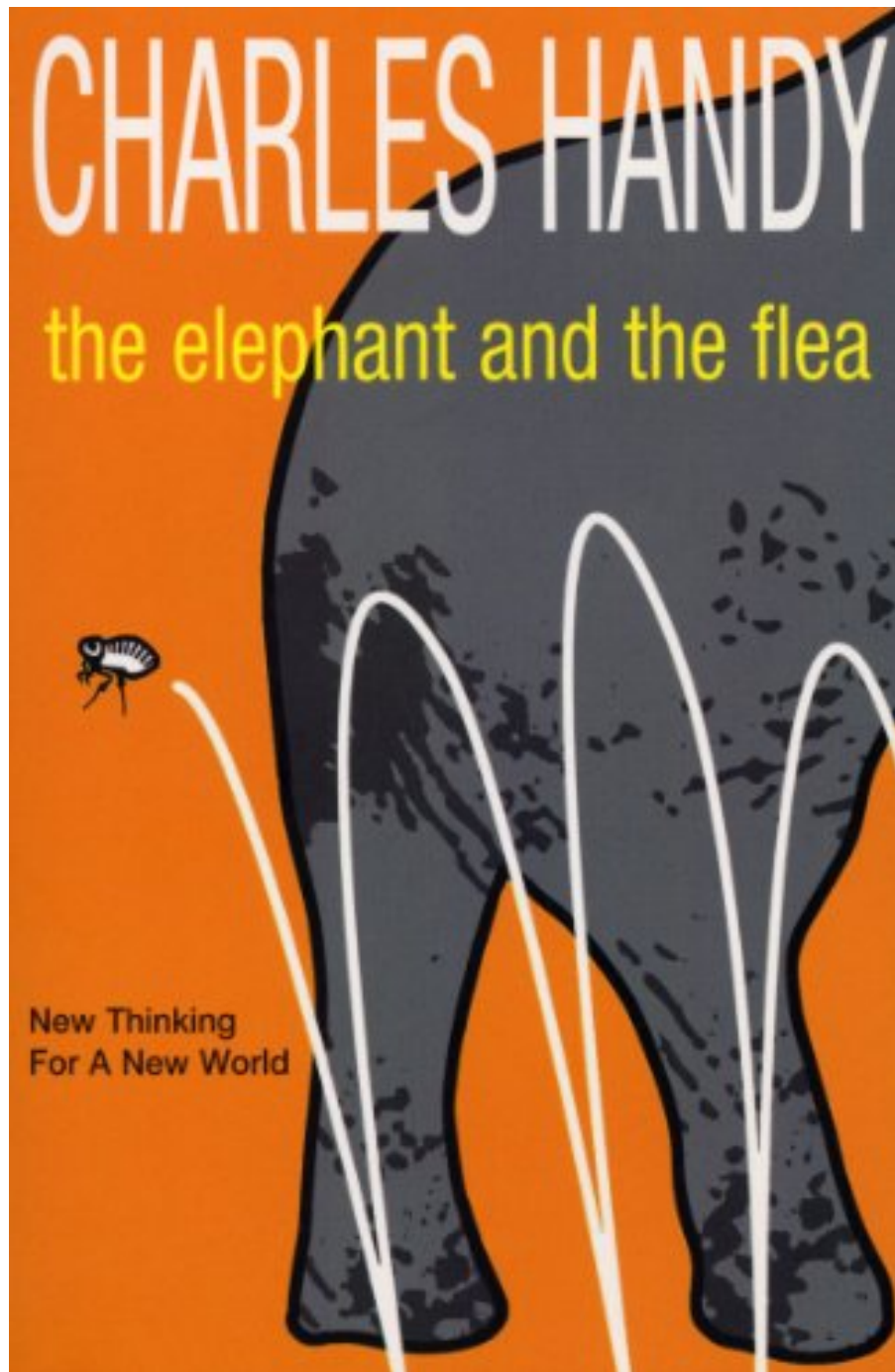


# THE ELEPHANT AND THE FLEA BY CHARLES HANDY



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## Amazon.com Review

Charles Handy is always a delight to read, and The Elephant and the Flea--his autobiography-laced analysis of business over the past two decades--is no exception. In his 13th book, the United Kingdom's preeminent sage on commercial and industrial matters looks within and at education, marriage, religion, and society in order to assess the changing nature of employment. His literate and knowledgeable tale begins in 1981, when Handy decided to exchange a safe but stifling life with a corporation (the "elephant" of his title) for the riskier but potentially more rewarding existence of an independent (or "flea"). Mixing diverse experiences with cogent observations on the evolving workplace, he sets the scene for plausible projections about where we might yet be headed. "Just as the signs were there 20 years ago for those who wished to see them, so I believe we can glimpse the shape of the new capitalist world even if it may take another 20 years to develop," he writes. "We may not like what is coming but we would be foolish to think that we can plan our lives, or our children's lives, without giving some thought to the shape of the stage on which we and they will be strutting." Intensely personal yet remarkably universal, the book is another provocative, illuminating, and enjoyable work from the oil executive turned bestselling author. --Howard Rothman

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A former oil executive and economist, as well as an early proponent of the "free agent" lifestyle, Handy (The Age of Unreason) uses his career as a telling example of how the nature of work has changed over the past 20 years and tries to predict how people will earn a living in the years ahead. Handy opens the book three-quarters autobiography, one-quarter social commentary with warm recollections of his Irish countryside childhood before elaborating his metaphor for the workplace, that of the elephant and flea. "Elephants" represent established corporations and large organizations of every kind, while "fleas" symbolize people who work independently as small-scale entrepreneurs. Handy, who used to work for Shell and has made his living as a lecturer and author since 1981, finds problems and opportunities in both kinds of establishments. Elephants, he contends, need to figure out ways to grow bigger while maintaining personal client relationships and rewarding creativity. The fleas need a better way to forge connections among themselves. Handy offers some general advice, but his main purpose is to try to make sense of the first 70 years of his life and the last two decades of the Western workplace. Some of his labor market analysis will seem familiar to readers, as it has already seeped into the cultural lexicon, but Handy's fans will appreciate this unusually personal look at the labor revolution. This is not the start-off book for those new to his work, however. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

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# THE ELEPHANT AND THE FLEA BY CHARLES HANDY PDF

Bookseller Charles Handy's best-selling new book looks at how individuals (the fleas in his analogy) relate to multi-national conglomerates (the elephants). In addition to addressing how and why we work today, he covers a wide range of preoccupations and issues including the increasing fear of big business: 'it is easy to see why many observers think that the big corporations are now both richer and more powerful than many nation states. They worry that these new corporate states are accountable to no-one - that their financial clout makes governments beholden to them ... The elephants, people feel, are out of control.'

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- Published on: 2008-09-04
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#### Most helpful customer reviews

20 of 21 people found the following review helpful.

Handy Wants it Both Ways

By Craig L. Howe

Charles Handy, a former oil company executive who recast himself as a freelance writer/thinker, desires success both ways.

While he celebrates the life of what he terms "the flea," --flexible, independent creative types -- he warns their life "is an invitation to selfishness and a recipe for a very privatized society."

Life, he says, requires a commitment to others. Something, he appears to believe can only be achieved by large organizations - the "elephants" of the world.

I found chapter entitled "The Problems of a Portfolio Life" particularly interesting. In it he describes three tensions which emerged from his decision to opt out of his organizational life for independence:

1. A lack of community.
2. The need for a driving passion.
3. The need to keep learning and developing.

He was particularly surprised by the first two points.

This is a book to be savored slowly; a book that explores three threads - the individual, the organization and society - and their interaction. When Handy publishes his treatise on how they should peacefully co-exist, I want to be first on line to purchase it.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

You may find inspiration in one man's search for meaning

By Bernie L. Malonson

You may think that here is yet another business book designed to sell the authors tapes, lectures, consulting services, etc. You may be right.

You may also find that reflection on a life lived for decades can provide insight and inspiration that you cannot find in your mile a minute world.

I first encountered Handy in a Fast Company article. He was discussing his fathers life and his fathers death.

I won't spoil the lesson he learned (it is worth reading for yourself) but at the end of the day it poses a question...., "How many lives can one person affect at a truly deep and meaningful level, while never straying more than a few miles from home?"

The answer may surprise you and cause you to reflect on your own life's purposes and meaning.

A worthwhile read.

Cheers!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

A must-read for independent contractors

By Susan

If you have made the leap from employee to independent contractor or entrepreneur, this is a must-read. Not only will you have a better sense of your decision in the context of a larger global trend toward "portfolio" careers, you will also get invaluable tips for managing your time, dealing with common prejudices about "working from home" and tips for a more fulfilling balance between your professional and personal lives.

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