Managers today are understandably skeptical of the promises of new technologies. During the 1990s, vendors of both enterprise applications and Internet platforms promised enormous benefits. Companies invested large sums, but the benefits either failed to materialize, or came at a high price. Managers sacrificed flexibility and struggled to collaborate with business partners—a crippling disadvantage in today’s marketplace. Now, leading business strategist John Hagel III has a refreshing message for managers burned by over-hyped technologies, yet pressured to find innovative ways to deliver more value with fewer resources. He focuses on a new generation of technology—known as Web services. This technology connects existing IT platforms in more automated and flexible ways, leading to much lower operating costs. The premise is practical and devoid of change the world promises. That very pragmatism, says Hagel, will drive enterprises to adopt it. In this book, he provides a clear view of the business implications of Web services: its distinct capabilities, its power to deliver near-term profits, and its potential to drive long-term growth. Drawing from the experiences of pioneering adopters, Hagel shows how Web services will enable companies of all sizes to: - Realize bottom-line savings quickly with modest investment - Leverage investments in existing applications and create more flexibility - Target specific areas for near-term cost reduction - Establish—or leave—business relationships fluidly and inexpensively - Create leveraged growth platforms for long-term competitiveness A landmark book for CEOs, strategists, and IT managers, Out of the Box addresses near-term cost concerns and requirements for future success. As it discusses Web services, it provides deep insights into business strategy. At its core, this book tackles the most fundamental business issue facing managers today:
how to continue to create value as competition intensifies. It also outlines innovative approaches to business process management and organization.

My Personal Review:
If you're like me and spend a lot of time with techies and read lots of tech journals, you're well familar with the "nuts and bolts" of how web services work. "Out Of The Box", however, takes a decidedly different approach, exploring not only what web services are, but also how they came to be, and where they're going. John Hagel's observations are generally high-level and strategic, exploring the ways that web services can change how businesses operate and interact with one another. Hegel's thesis is that web services have the power to transform the fundamental ways in which business is conducted, removing many of the barriers and problems in information management, and allowing business relationships to form and dissolve more rapidly than ever before. As a result, wholly new business models can emerge that allow businesses to respond to changes in customer preferences, compensate for new economic or political realities, and make continuous improvements in quality and value.

A highly readable work, just about the book's only weakness is that it is indeed based largely on conjecture, and the premise that today's web service protocols will form the foundation of long-term IT development. Anyone even remotely familiar with IT knows that change can be sudden and dramatic. However, Hagel presents a lot of sound and creative thinking that is especially helpful for an emerging technology such as web services. "Out Of The Box" should be essential reading for any manager or executive whose job involves implementation of web services at any level. By contrast, techies will find this book sorely lacking in specifics. But that's okay, as there are a host of other books by O'Reilly and other technical publishers that do an excellent job of "drilling down" into the details of the technology.

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