

January 2002

## Management thinkers

Suppose you were asked to list the 600 most influential people in shaping the management of business and the way we work. Whom would you include and whom would you leave out? How far back should you go and how broadly should you fix your parameters?

These were just a few of the considerations facing Morgen Witzel when he was asked to edit a two-volume Biographical Dictionary of Management for Thoemmes Press. Guru listings can be steady earners for the management book publishing industry but few books venture far beyond about 50 names including stalwarts such as Peter Drucker, Tom Peters, Henry Mintzberg and Charles Handy.

One that went further, *The Handbook of Management Thinking* published by International Thomson Business Press in 1998, featured 133 names, including exotics such as Sun Tzu, the fourth-century-BC Chinese general, and Luca Pacioli, the Italian Renaissance mathematician who published the first description of double-entry bookkeeping.

Mr Witzel's new dictionary, however, is far more ambitious, covering a broader population and trawling even more deeply into history. The result is an idiosyncratic mix of influences that provides a rich source of debate. The earliest entry, for example, is a woman, Ana-e (c. BC 2000-1800). According to the dictionary, she was one of history's first recorded female business executives. Her job was to manage the Assyrian-based weaving business of her husband, who spent most of his time engaged in cross-border trade missions.

Other early entries include Solon of Athens, an entrepreneur and business leader, Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, and Neferhotep, an Egyptian tomb builder and foreman. Egyptian tomb construction in Neferhotep's time involved two gangs of workers, one constructing the left side of the tomb and one working on the right, apparently in competition with each other. Neferhotep is chosen for the superior quality of the workmanship in his team of tradesmen.

Confucius is a worthy entry for his influence on east Asian society and work culture but why does a book that features Confucius not also include Jesus of Nazareth or Mohammed? Did neither of these figures have anything to say about leadership and management? Did they have less to say, for instance, than Laura Ashley, the clothes-maker and retailer, Mark McCormack, the sports agent, Billy Butlin, the holiday camp founder, and William Hill, the bookmaker, who are included among the 600? Is there a British bias here? What about Benjamin Franklin, the polymath and father of all self-help books? He does not feature on the list.

A list as ambitious as this one is always going to spark controversy by omission. While it finds space for the inclusion of Publius Sestius, a first-century-BC wine merchant, for his contribution to international trade, there is no word on Columella, the first-century-AD Roman farmer whose *De Re Rustica* features one of the earliest tracts on people management - in this case the management of slaves.

There are more recent omissions, too. The book does not find space for Don Tapscott, one of the most lucid analysts of the dotcom phenomenon, or for Clayton Christensen, one of the rising stars of the business-speaking circuit for his ideas on

disruptive technologies. Nor is there space for Richard Pascale, the man behind the Seven-S framework, a tool for shaping organisations, highlighted by Tom Peters and Richard Waterman in their best-seller *In Search of Excellence*.

One of the most surprising omissions is that of Jim Collins, the man of the moment in management writing, whose latest book, *Good to Great*, looks as if it may overtake his previous best-seller, *Built to Last*, written with Jerry Porras. Mr Collins does not belong to the arm-waving school of management. His skill has been to focus strong research projects identifying the leaders, strategies and processes that make great and sustainable companies. The leaders of these companies, he says, "let results do the talking", whereas those who cannot sustain success tend to "sell the future, to compensate for lack of results".

Where Mr Witzel's book has the edge over others, however, is in its recognition of the "doers" alongside the thinkers. So Frank Winfield Woolworth, the US store founder, Jehangir Tata, the Indian industrialist, and Ransom Olds, the US car manufacturer, all receive honourable mentions.

Richard Arkwright, the 18th-century spinning entrepreneur, whose water frame and Cromford mill in Derbyshire helped to define the industrial revolution, is included deservedly but it is arguable whether he can be described as the "founder of the factory system", a claim made in the book. There is an equally strong case to be made for Thomas and Joseph Lombe, the brothers who established a water-powered silk-spinning factory in Derby in 1724, more than a quarter of a century earlier than Arkwright's Cromford mill. Neither of them rates a mention.

The difference between the Lombes and Arkwright - and the difference between Henry Leland and Henry Ford, for that matter - is that the earliest pioneers in these industries were serving the luxury end of a market whereas the strongest success, by Arkwright and Ford, was enjoyed by those who created a mass market from cheap products. Cotton and wool yarns were much cheaper than silk and the Ford Model T was a lot cheaper to make than one of Leland's Cadillacs.

In spite of his omissions, Mr Witzel has made some inspired choices, recognising, for instance, the importance of Ronald Coase, the British economist who pointed out the significance of transaction costs in determining the size and structure of a company. Edward Brech, the management historian who Mr Witzel argues is "one of the most important British management writers of all time" is rightly included. Walter Dill Scott, a seminal influence in both advertising and occupational psychology, deservedly makes the grade and so does David McClelland for his pioneering methodology for identifying the traits and skills of superior performers.

The book is sparing in its coverage of military tacticians. Clausewitz and Moltke feature but Bill Slim, the inspirational British second world war general, and George Marshall, the US Army chief of staff whom Winston Churchill described as "the true organiser of victory", are overlooked.

That aside, this scholarly two-volume set has to be one of the management books of 2001.

*The Biographical Dictionary of Management*, ed. Morgen Witzel, Thoemmes Press, £350 (\$550).

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