

THE SUNTOP MEDIA THINKERS 50

Des Dearlove & Stuart Crainer introduce the [Thinkers 50](#) – the 2005 global ranking of business thinkers.

Who is the most influential living management thinker? That was the simple question that inspired the original [Thinkers 50](#) in 2001. A lot of hard work and number-crunching later, the answer became the first global ranking of business gurus.

The [Thinkers 50 2005](#) provides a completely new ranking. Produced by Suntop Media in association with the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), it is the definitive bi-annual guide to which thinkers and ideas are in – and which have been consigned to business history.

In the fickle world of business thought-leadership, of course, a lot can change in four years. When we created the [Thinkers 50](#), it was the first and only global ranking of business gurus. Since then, imitators have appeared.

But being first has its advantages: the [Thinkers 50](#) offers a unique snapshot over time of the practices and personalities shaping the world of work and the way we do our jobs.

HOW THE RANKINGS SHAKE DOWN

So what do the 2005 rankings show? Who are the most influential management thinkers in the post-dot-com, post-Enron business world? And who, among them, is the reigning champion?

Had we published the results just two weeks ago, the answer would have been different. Peter Drucker would almost certainly have topped the ranking for the third time in a row.

The influence of Peter Ferdinand Drucker on management thinking is immense. Born in Austria but long resident in the US, his work has a breadth and timelessness that makes some of his rivals look trivial by comparison. As far back as the 1960s, Drucker was

predicting the rise of the knowledge worker, for example. For intellectual curiosity and prescience, Drucker towers over his rivals. The 2001 and 2003 rankings confirmed it. But, the venerable father of modern management died in November at the age of 95.

The [Thinkers 50](#) is not a posthumous ranking. Nevertheless, it was with sadness and the greatest respect for his remarkable intellectual legacy that we decided to exclude the former journalist. In place of Drucker, the 2005 [Thinkers 50](#) anoints a new king.

THE KING IS DEAD...LONG LIVE THE KING

The most influential living management guru in the world is Michael E. Porter of Harvard Business School. Porter's progress is no flash in the pan. Third in the 2001 ranking behind Drucker and Charles Handy, Porter moved into second place in 2003 and now secures the number one spot.

In the intervening years, Porter has been more in demand than ever before. In the new economy meltdown, Porter on strategy is suddenly fashionable again. The greatest strategic mind of our times has consulted to several governments, investing his brain power on, among other things, addressing the UK's productivity gap.

PEARLY GATES

More of a surprise is a massive surge of support for Bill Gates. Once regarded as the business equivalent of a James Bond villain, Gates' elevation to the number 2 slot suggests that he has successfully reinvented himself through a judicious combination of vacating the Microsoft hot seat and philanthropic giving. (He gave \$3.35 billion to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation last year alone, to tackle malaria and education initiatives.)

Also benefiting from a generosity of spirit, is another strategy guru Professor C.K. Prahalad, of the University of Michigan. Professor Prahalad, whose book *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid* challenges conventional thinking about the world's poor, rises an impressive nine places to number 3.

Professor Prahalad is one of several Indian-born management gurus to make the 2005 ranking. These include CEO coach Ram Charan (24), Vijay Govindarajan of the Tuck Business School at Dartmouth College (30); Harvard rising star Rakesh Khurana (33); and would also have included London Business School's Sumantra Ghoshal, who tragically died in 2004. As yet, no Chinese guru has emerged.

SILVER FOXES SPARKLE

Many established gurus also remain influential. Tom Peters, the former McKinsey consultant and co-author of *In Search of Excellence* – the book that originally ignited the business guru industry-- drops one place to number 4. Henry Mintzberg, another strategy guru and arch critic of the MBA also drops a place to number 8; while, the softly spoken voice of management, Irish-born Charles Handy slips back from 5th to 10th place. Maltese lateral thinker, Edward de Bono is at 20; while the duke of leadership, Warren Bennis, is at 27; with Ed Schein, the father of corporate culture, at 36; and Geert Hofstede, the diversity expert, at 47.

WINNING BY THE BOOK

Jack Welch, former chairman of General Electric, is buoyed by a recent block buster book. Currently touring the world to promote his book *Winning*, written with wife Suzy, a former editor of the *Harvard Business Review*, Welch moves up three places from 8th to 5th.

Sailing up the ranking, too, are INSEAD based Korean, Chan W. Kim, and American Renée Mauborgne, whose best-selling book, *Blue Ocean Strategy*, helps float them up 16 places to number 15 – one place below strategy rival Gary Hamel. Hamel, a one time challenger to Michael Porter for the strategy crown, drops out of the top 10 -- a victim, perhaps, of the Enron Corporation whose achievements he trumpeted prior to its collapse.

UPWARDLY MOBILE

Continuing his ascent of the [Thinkers 50](#), too, is the all American Jim Collins, keen mountaineer and author of the best-selling *Good to Great*, who rises four places to 6th. And giving a whole new meaning to the phrase clean-cut, are the shaven headed Swedish academics Kjell Nordstrom and Jonas Ridderstrale. After slipping four places in 2003, the authors of the irreverent best-sellers *Funky Business* and *Karaoke Capitalism* croon their way into the top 10 at number 9.

Virgin king Richard Branson flies in at number 11 – a rise in altitude of 23 places. Other admired practitioners include: Michael Dell (29); CEO of the Brazilian company Semco, Ricardo Semler (37); Amazon's Jeff Bezos (40); and former Intel boss Andy Grove (41). Interestingly, the 2005 ranking sees no new CEO heroes emerge – a reaction perhaps to executive excess.

WOMEN ABSENT

Mirroring the corporate world, business gurudom remains a man's world. Women are conspicuous by their absence, with only four in the top 50. INSEAD's Renée Mauborgne is the highest placed at 15, a position she shares with male co-author and mentor W. Chan Kim; followed by Harvard's Rosabeth Moss-Kanter (19); Lynda Gratton of London Business School (34); and *No Logo* author Naomi Klein (46).

HACK ATTACK

Scribbling their way into contention, too, are a number of journalists. Thomas Stewart, current editor of *Harvard Business Review* and a former *Fortune* columnist, places 13th; while *New Yorker* columnist Malcolm Gladwell, author of *The Tipping Point* and more recently *Blink*, makes his debut at 31; while Daniel Goleman, the emotional intelligence guru and former *New York Times* writer, comes in 42nd.

Not to be ignored, either, is scribbler of a different kind – the subversive anti-management message of Dilbert rises from 27th to 12th in the guise of cartoonist Scott Adams. But despite a strong showing early on, there is no place in this year's ranking for the ultimate management fashion victim David Brent.

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

New to this year's ranking are Ram Charan, the itinerant Indian-born executive coach; Russ Ackoff, the veteran systems thinker; Vijay Govindarajan, co-author of *Ten Rules for Strategic Innovators*, likely to be one of the big business books of 2006; Malcolm Gladwell, populariser of the tipping point; Rakesh Khurana of Harvard Business School; intellectual capitalist, Leif Edvinsson; Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones, authors of *Why Should Anyone Be Led By You?*; Larry Bossidy, the American executive; and Costas Markides of London Business School.

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