

# So who is your Guru? - Part Two

by Malcolm Anderson

In Part One of this article I set out to explain who were the thinkers and writers that influenced my thinking in my work in change management. In that first part, I took you through the more well-known management gurus and explained why they were useful to me.

Now in this concluding piece, I have taken the opportunity to describe those less well-known players who have thought through some critical aspects of organisational change thinking.

## Stakeholders and Communications

Less well known in the guru stakes is Bill Quirke which is interesting because I have always found his subject matter - internal communications - to be an area, especially in the process of change, that many managers seem to think requires only passing attention to be effective. Money is thrown at intranet sites that no-one visits and glossies that no-one reads and then surprise is expressed at the level of rumour circulating!

Quirke has looked at what an organisation needs from its people to succeed, what gets in the way, and the role of communication in helping to bridge the gap. It is designed to help link the components of their internal communication together for a more effective result. I cannot claim it is thinking of real guru quality but in a field where few have written it is good practical stuff.

**Key Text:** Making the Connections: Using Internal Communication to Turn Strategy into Action by Bill Quirke.

## The Troubleshooter

Sir John Harvey-Jones knows a hell of a lot about running a business. His colourful career included chairman of ICI from 1982 to 1987, and chairman of the Economist group and Guinness Peat Aviation. He also served in the Royal Navy and has written several books on management, and appeared as the 'Troubleshooter' in a number of series (now available on DVD) acting as a company doctor in what must have been amongst the first reality TV series in the early 1990s.

Still very contemporary in their ideas, the case studies also figure in the books he wrote associated with the series and published by the BBC. What's in them for me? Well they clearly reinforce one of my basic tenets of change - a pragmatic adherence to the need for a holistic combination of the right systems, the right people coupled to sound business thinking.

**Key Text:** Troubleshooter by John Harvey-Jones.

## Emery on Socio-Technical Systems

Fred Emery published a paper in 1959 that outlined "sociotechnical systems". He described how organisations are composed of both a social and a technical system and how the interrelationship between these systems needed to be optimised for greatest effectiveness. Over the last forty years this thinking has evolved through much academic research and now the concept of joint-optimisation between the needs of the people who work within the system with the need for technical efficiency has become widely accepted in engineering but still has a surprisingly long way to go to gain as wide a level of acceptance in organisational change circles.

Perhaps this is because there are few books on the subject outside of the academic domain and those are hard going. I list a couple below for those really interested, the second being a collection of papers including some written by Australian academics.

The reason I like this thinking is because all of my experience points to the need for systems - be they electronic or management (such as OHS) - to be designed with the behavioural change needs of the target audience in mind. Why? Because if you don't then you produce another example of a technical system with poor compliance - and there are already too many of them. With all this good thinking from Fred Emery onwards why are we still paying good money for systems delivered with technical functionality but no attention paid to alignment with business processes or the propensities of users?

**Key Texts:** Socio-Technical and Human Cognition Elements of Information Systems edited by: Steve Clarke, Elayne Coakes, Gordon Hunter, Andrew Wenn, and Factors in Analysis, Design and Management by B Kenton De Greene.

## **Change Strategy: Sun Tzu and Niccolo Macchiavelli**

### **Sun Tzu**

The Art of War is one of those rare texts that transcends time. Though it was written more than 2,000 years ago, it is arguably still the most important work on the subject of strategy today. Written by Sun Wu, Chinese general to the state of Wu, The Art of War was intended only for the military elite of his time period. However, this treatise would later be absorbed by others of influence, from the fearless samurai in feudal Japan to the shrewd business leaders of the 21st century. The book is even more fascinating than its background. Only reading it will one see how much the principles are timeless and true, the words pragmatic and universally applicable to the strategic situations we face today.

Not only that but given the author has been dead a little while, you can now download the book free from the internet - or simple keep it in your favourites for reference:

<http://www.sonshi.com/learn.html>

### **Macchiavelli**

In 1498, Niccolò Machiavelli began his career as an active politician in the independent city-state of Florence, engaging in diplomatic missions through France and Germany as well as Italy. After more

than a decade of public service, he was driven from his post when the republic collapsed. Repeated efforts to win the confidence and approval of the new regime were unsuccessful, and Machiavelli was forced into retirement and a life of detached scholarship about the political process instead of direct participation in it. The books for which he is remembered were published only after his death.

Machiavelli originally wrote *Principe* (The Prince) (1513) in hopes of securing the favour of the ruling Medici family, and he deliberately made its claims provocative. The Prince is an intensely practical guide to the exercise of raw political power over a Renaissance principality. Allowing for the unpredictable influence of fortune, Machiavelli argued that it is primarily the character or vitality or skill of the individual leader that determines the success of any state. The book surveys various bold means of acquiring and maintaining the principality and evaluates each of them solely by reference to its likelihood of augmenting the glory of the prince while serving the public interest. It is this focus on practical success by any means, even at the expense of traditional moral values, that earned Machiavelli's scheme a reputation for ruthlessness, deception, and cruelty.

For me, though, like any guru text it carries many gems to pick up and blend into the rich picture that is successful change strategy, and like *The Art of War*, you can access this excellent source on the internet at <http://www.constitution.org/mac/prince00.htm>

Well that just about concludes our tour. I trust it has been enlightening. However, before I go, let me make a couple of a few further comments.

## The Health Warning

Beware the implementation hazards. Take care what you start and why. Define the problem before trying to apply your chosen guru solution. What you think is the problem might not be so when you drill down and therefore the applicability of the solution might dissolve before your eyes. Further, all good ideas need an underpinning process to provide the change traction through the concrete messiness of organisational change! Neither does change happen without resource in excess of that needed for 'Business as Usual'! So recognise the practicalities.

And do I have a guru? Do I have one above others who I follow? Well, no, I couldn't possibly go for just one as I think no-one looks sufficiently comprehensively at the complexity of change that I face every day in the projects I tackle. I suppose those who come closest are Kotter and Harvey-Jones. The former has analysed holistic change in terms of some key components, the latter has tackled change with a great deal of common sense - and at the end of it all - if you add together all this great thinking, how you take advantage of it in a given organisational situation is all down to the common sense you use in crafting a doable implementation.

And finally I'm sure there will be some out there who don't agree with my take on some of these thinkers and that's fine. My point of view, like yours, has been shaped by my experiences and these writers offer their gems to stimulate our thinking but like all great works, one will get into great strife if we try applying one set of thinking in isolation. Happy guru hunting!