

Book review

Management Gurus and Management Fashions: A Dramatistic Inquiry, Brad Jackson, Routledge, London and New York, 2001, £18.99, paperback, 208 pp, ISBN 0 415 24946 5

'Management gurus' arouse great passions amongst academics. Being a pundit, after all is said and done, is said to bestow high status and bring fame and fortune to the theorist and/or practitioner. Many see them, on the one hand, as inspiring and even instructive 'gurus' who may make the best-seller list and lecture to vast audiences; some others, with or without good reason, may even see them as 'charlatans' and 'vendors of managerial snake-oil'.

This new book by Brad Jackson makes a brave attempt to dissect the phenomenon of the 'management guru'. It originally started life as a PhD thesis at the University of Lancaster Management School. The author, Dr. Jackson, now teaches in the Antipodes, at the University of Wellington in New Zealand, in parallel with an associate appointment at the University of Calgary, in Canada, on the opposite side of the globe.

The first chapter of this book is exceptionally good, presenting an excellent literature-search. After this, the author sets out his approach, which he calls 'Dramatistic Rhetorical Criticism', here giving my spell-check software some minor turbulence. Then, looking at three famous, even worthy 'gurus', Hammer, Covey and Senge, Dr. Jackson attempts to seek out what they have in common and what makes them distinct. There

is a discussion chapter and last, conclusions where the author claims he 'demystifies the rhetoric' of the management gurus. 'Dramatism', he argues, is a useful framework by which to do this and make academics' work more 'plausible' to 'the audience of practising managers' [p. 179]. Really?

How good is this effort at making sense of the guru-phenomenon? Jackson has some complex and well-thought out diagrams and scheme for understanding these experts. But I do not think this attempt is as incisive as Huczynski's (1993) *Management Gurus*, which receives high praise from the author under review but the new book does bring the debate more up to date. Jackson will no doubt enlighten undergraduates in management studies and MBA candidates and please many of their teachers who look down on the 'so-called purveyors of managerial snake-oil' but practising managers will find much of the discussion rather jargon-ridden as well outside their immediate concerns. Even so, this is a tightly organized and well-edited short book on this important topic. All in all, it is a rather readable effort and well worth the price in its paper-back edition.

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