

50

The

top business gurus

The first authoritative ranking of business intellectuals offers managers and executives an objective way to evaluate who's who among purveyors of management advice and new ideas.

Lift here for Top 50 list ▶▶



Ranked No. 1 overall, Harvard's Michael Porter is a prolific writer on strategy.



Top-ranked independent consultant Tom Peters is best known for his book *In Search of Excellence*.



Among practicing managers, Microsoft's Bill Gates won by a wide margin (and ranked an impressive No. 19 overall).



Top-ranked journalist Malcolm Gladwell, a staff writer at *The New Yorker*, is also author of *The Tipping Point*.

A leading business guru must be highly visible on the Internet (as measured by hits on the Google search engine), publish work that is widely known in the academic world (citations in the ISI Social Sciences Citation Index) and be frequently mentioned in the media (mentions in LexisNexis). Rankings in each of these individual categories were given a corresponding numerical score. Overall guru rankings are based on the sum of these three scores. From a list of more than 300 names, here are the Top 50.

Guru rank	Name	Google rank	SSCI rank	Media rank	Profile
1	Michael E. Porter	13	2	8	Harvard Business School professor and prolific writer on strategy topics. Works include top-selling business handbooks <i>Competitive Strategy</i> and <i>Competitive Advantage</i> .
2	Tom Peters	6	25	7	Author of <i>In Search of Excellence</i> , a pioneering look at what sets top companies apart. More recent works include <i>Liberation Management</i> and <i>The Pursuit of WOW!</i>
3	Robert B. Reich	7	27	5	US Secretary of Labor in the Clinton administration known for advocacy of workers' rights and a higher minimum wage. Now a professor of social and economic policy at Brandeis University. Author of <i>The Work of Nations</i> .
4	Peter F. Drucker	2	15	33	Considered the godfather of business management thinking. Currently a professor of social sciences and management at Claremont Graduate University. Author of <i>Post-Capitalist Society</i> and <i>The Effective Executive</i> .
5	Gary S. Becker	32	1	26	Nobel laureate in economics for his work in behavioral economics. Professor at the University of Chicago and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. Author of <i>Human Capital</i> and <i>The Economics of Life</i> . <i>BusinessWeek</i> columnist.
6	Peter M. Senge	14	12	34	Organizational learning expert and author of <i>The Fifth Discipline</i> . Senior lecturer on behavioral policy science at the Sloan School of Management, MIT.
7	Gary Hamel	30	18	22	Considered a leading thinker on strategy and innovation, with more than 10 articles published in <i>Harvard Business Review</i> . Visiting professor at London Business School. Co-author (with C.K. Prahalad) of the influential <i>Competing for the Future</i> .
8	Alvin Toffler	3	63	6	Futurist and author of <i>Future Shock</i> and <i>The Third Wave</i> . Advisor to former US Congressman and Republican leader Newt Gingrich in the 1990s.
9	Hal R. Varian	19	23	43	Dean of the School of Information Management & Systems, University of California at Berkeley. <i>New York Times</i> columnist on technology issues. Author of <i>Information Rules</i> .
---	Daniel Goleman	28	36	21	Introduced concept of emotional intelligence with his best-selling book of that same name. More recently, focused on the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership with his book, <i>Primal Leadership</i> .
11	Rosabeth Moss Kanter	41	10	37	Authority on organization change. Harvard Business School professor and author of <i>World Class, Evolve!</i> and <i>The Change Masters</i> . Former editor of <i>Harvard Business Review</i> .
12	Ronald H. Coase	42	7	51	Nobel laureate in economics for work in transaction costs and property rights. Editor of the <i>Journal of Law and Economics</i> for almost 20 years.
---	Lester Thurow	36	40	24	Dean of the Sloan School of Management at MIT. International economy expert and author of <i>Building Wealth</i> and <i>Head to Head</i> .
14	Charles Handy	37	41	29	Social philosopher and radio commentator who predicted downsizing of corporations and rise of the self-employed. Author of <i>The Age of Unreason</i> and <i>The Age of Paradox</i> . Co-founder of London Business School in 1967.
15	Paul Romer	57	11	42	Evangelized the "new growth theory" and the "law of increasing returns." Professor of economics, Stanford University Graduate School of Business. Senior fellow, Hoover Institution.
16	Henry Mintzberg	52	6	57	Strategy and management expert and author of <i>The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning</i> . Professor of management studies, McGill University.
---	Stephen R. Covey	10	96	9	Author of the best-selling <i>Seven Habits of Highly Effective People</i> and other self-improvement guides.
18	Michael Hammer	47	29	40	With James Champy, ushered in the reengineering phenomenon with the best-selling book, <i>Reengineering the Corporation</i> .
19	Bill Gates	1	118	1	With the Windows operating system, reinvented the way people work. Founder, chairman and chief software architect, Microsoft. Author of <i>Business @ the Speed of Thought</i> .
20	Warren Bennis	29	56	36	Author of 18 books, including his seminal work, <i>On Becoming a Leader</i> . Founding chairman, The Leadership Institute at the University of Southern California. Co-author of <i>Geeks & Geezers</i> .
21	Jeffrey Pfeffer	60	4	60	Professor of organizational behavior at Stanford Graduate School of Business. Author of <i>Managing with Power</i> and <i>The Human Equation</i> .
22	Philip Kotler	34	26	66	Professor at Kellogg Graduate School of Management, whose textbook on marketing is the most widely used in business schools worldwide. Author of <i>Marketing Management, The New Competition, High Visibility</i> and <i>The Marketing of Nations</i> .
23	Robert C. Merton	84	19	31	Nobel laureate in economics for his work with Myron Scholes in valuing derivatives. Author of several finance textbooks and professor at Harvard Business School.
24	C.K. Prahalad	44	21	76	Renowned for his widely read 1990 <i>HBR</i> article on core competence; he and co-author Gary Hamel also wrote <i>Competing for the Future</i> . Founded Praja, a company that uses technology to improve knowledge sharing and data analysis.
---	Thomas H. Davenport	45	34	62	Director, Accenture Institute for Strategic Change. Distinguished scholar in residence, Babson College. Named one of 10 "Masters of the New Economy" by <i>CIO</i> magazine in 2000. Author of <i>Working Knowledge</i> and <i>Process Innovation</i> .
26	Don Tapscott	21	94	28	Expert in the application of technology in business. Author of <i>Digital Capital</i> and <i>Growing Up Digital</i> .
27	Malcolm Gladwell	22	104	20	Author of <i>The Tipping Point</i> , which describes how trends take hold and what you can do to create a phenomenon. Staff writer at <i>The New Yorker</i> covering a broad range of topics.
28	John Seely Brown	40	62	45	A leading thinker on distributed computing. Former chief scientist at Xerox and director of the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center.
29	George Gilder	18	119	14	Founder and writer, <i>The Gilder Technology Reports</i> , which describe various ways that technology will transform the world. Author of <i>Telecosm</i> and contributing editor to <i>Forbes</i> magazine.
30	Kevin Kelly	24	106	25	Founding editor and editor-at-large, <i>Wired</i> . Author of <i>Out of Control</i> and <i>New Rules for the New Economy</i> .
---	Chris Argyris	54	13	88	Organizational behavior professor at Harvard Business School who focuses on organizational effectiveness and organizational learning. Author of <i>Knowledge for Action</i> and <i>Flawed Advice and the Management Trap</i> .
32	Esther Dyson	11	137	11	Futurist with particular expertise in digital convergence. Active commentator on the Internet economy. Chairperson of EDventure Holdings and author of <i>Release 2.0</i> . Consultant to Russian and Central European entrepreneurs.
33	Robert S. Kaplan	61	44	56	Created the balanced scorecard system for managing difficult-to-measure corporate goals such as mission, vision and customer satisfaction. Professor at Harvard Business School. Author of <i>Relevance Lost</i> and <i>The Balanced Scorecard</i> .
34	Edward de Bono	26	114	23	Creativity and lateral-thinking consultant. Author of <i>Six Thinking Hats</i> and <i>Lateral Thinking</i> .
---	Jack Welch	4	156	3	Considered one of the model CEOs for the second half of the 20th century. Credited with creating billions of dollars in shareholder value at GE.
36	John P. Kotter	49	49	73	Organizational change and leadership expert. Former professor of leadership at Harvard Business School. Author of <i>Leading Change</i> and <i>Power and Influence</i> .
37	Ken Blanchard	15	141	18	Co-author of <i>The One-Minute Manager</i> , which explains the importance of immediate, positive feedback in motivating employees, and <i>Who Moved My Cheese?</i>
38	Edward Tufte	27	57	96	Wrote <i>Envisioning Information</i> and <i>The Visual Display of Quantitative Information</i> , which describe how to display information in easy-to-digest visuals.
39	Kenichi Ohmae	58	70	54	Former business consultant who writes on strategy topics. Published more than 100 books, including <i>Triad Power</i> and <i>The Mind of the Strategist</i> .
40	James MacGregor Burns	59	75	49	Pulitzer prize-winning presidential biographer who studies leadership in American political life. Senior scholar, University of Maryland. Author of <i>Leadership</i> .
41	Alfred D. Chandler, Jr.	95	20	69	Business history expert and author of <i>Strategy and Structure</i> and <i>The Visible Hand</i> .
---	Edgar H. Schein	53	7	124	Organizational psychology expert and author of <i>Organizational Culture and Leadership</i> and <i>The Corporate Culture Survival Guide</i> . Professor of management, emeritus, Sloan School of Management, MIT.
43	Sumantra Ghoshal	68	47	71	Globalization expert and author of <i>Managing Across Borders</i> . Professor of strategic and international management, London Business School.
44	Myron S. Scholes	81	91	16	Nobel laureate in economics for his work co-developing the Black-Scholes model, which is used to value options. Model has been used to assess risk and value in other situations as well. Professor of finance, emeritus, Stanford Graduate School of Business.
45	Richard Branson	8	180	2	Known for imaginative marketing to promote the various businesses (including an airline and a record store chain) in the Virgin Group, which he founded.
46	Anthony Robbins	16	162	15	Self- and professional-improvement expert. Emphasizes "psychology of peak performance," which focuses on helping students face and conquer fears. Wrote <i>Unlimited Power, Awaken the Giant Within</i> and <i>Giant Steps</i> .
---	Michael S. Dell	9	180	4	Invented new business model for computer design, manufacture and delivery with founding of Dell. Author of <i>Direct from Dell</i> .
48	James G. March	87	5	102	Organizational leadership expert and author of <i>Decisions and Organizations, Democratic Governance</i> and <i>A Primer on Decision Making</i> .
49	Clayton M. Christensen	65	87	44	Disruptive technology and innovation expert and author of <i>The Innovator's Dilemma</i> . Harvard Business School professor.
50	John Naisbitt	46	109	47	Futurist and global economy consultant. Author of <i>Megatrends</i> , which described America's shift in the 1980s from an industrial economy to a services one.

If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. And when it comes to measuring, one highly popular yardstick is the published ranking. Take the Fortune 500. Sure, it's simply a measure of revenues. But because it offers one gauge of corporate performance, investors and fund managers can do something with it. Other lists, measuring other aspects of performance, can also be useful. (And besides, rankings can be fun.)

These days, rankings seem to be everywhere—the biggest, the best, the richest. Yet despite the billions of dollars spent each year on management advice and on implementing new management ideas, there is no authoritative ranking of the business intellectuals—the “gurus”—whose stock in trade is new ideas and advice.

There is no shortage of guru lists out there, to be sure, but Accenture has never seen one that offers an objective, quantitative ranking. Business publications generally gather nominees, then editors or boards of experts rank them according to largely subjective criteria. But while these lists might provoke lively debate around the watercooler (and perhaps generate enough buzz to sell extra copies of the magazine), they offer managers and executives little in the way of practical, actionable information.

Measuring impact

But thanks to the World Wide Web and various online databases, it is now possible to objectively measure the impact of business gurus, and from there to create a credible ranking. As part of a broader project to identify the process by which business and management ideas enter organizations,¹ the Accenture Institute for Strategic Change has created such a ranking: The Top 50 Business Gurus.

Our Top 50 runs counter to several longstanding assumptions held by industry experts and the managers who use ideas popularized by gurus.

We began with a list of more than 300 names, ranked according to the three criteria used by American scholar and jurist Richard Posner in 2002 to create a similar list of “public intellectuals.”² The criteria are:

- *Hits by Google*, the Internet search engine, using the variations of a guru’s name (for example, Michael Porter, Michael E. Porter, Mike Porter) minus any of those hits that are not relevant to the guru. Google offers a measure of how much a guru is being talked about on the Web and his or her ability to capture the public’s attention across the globe (or at least the English-speaking parts of it; most management theory is written in that language).
- *Citations in the ISI Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)*—that is, the number of times that academics have cited the guru’s published work. Because this measure indicates a guru’s ability to garner the attention of serious scholars, it gives the guru credibility (or, at the very least, a certain notoriety). Leading universities use the SSCI to determine a scholar’s impact, reputation or worthiness for tenure.
- *Media mentions in LexisNexis*, the online database of English-language business and popular media. This measures the extent to which a guru is seen, heard and talked about through channels other than the Internet. It also offers a measure of whether a guru has the respect and attention of the gatekeepers to corporate America’s attention—the business press.

In short, a leading guru must be highly visible on the Internet, publish work that is widely known in the academic world and be frequently mentioned in the media. (Unlike Posner, we excluded people who are no

longer alive.) Rankings in each of these individual categories were given a corresponding numerical score. For example, if a guru ranked No. 1 in Internet hits, No. 6 in SSCI citations and No. 20 in media mentions, those scores would be 1, 6 and 20. Overall guru rankings are based on the sum of these three scores, which, in this example, would be 27 (the lower the total score, of course, the higher the overall ranking).

Although perhaps confirming some suspicions, our Top 50 runs counter to several longstanding assumptions held by industry experts—and, more important, held by the managers who use ideas popularized by gurus.

For example, nearly every opinion-based list—and just about everyone else’s knee-jerk supposition—puts Peter Drucker in the top spot. Our research suggests, however, that Drucker’s supposed “hegemony”—as *Business 2.0* described it a few years back—is now over. With comparatively few mentions in non-business categories (SSCI and media mentions), this perennial favorite comes in at No. 4 on our list.

So who is No. 1? Michael Porter, the well-respected strategist, Harvard Business School professor and author of two classic business texts, *Competitive Strategy* and *Competitive Advantage*. Much more a scholar and consultant than a media celebrity—though he also scored well in media mentions—Porter continues to conduct serious research. His critique of the dot-com era, “Strategy and the Internet,” was named best *Harvard Business Review* article for 2001 (a distinction he won for an unprecedented third time). Rounding out the first five are Tom Peters, co-author of *In Search of Excellence*, in second place; Robert Reich, US Secretary of Labor in the Clinton administration, in third; and University of

Chicago economist and Nobel laureate Gary Becker in fifth.

Another popular misconception is that gurus aren't "organization men" but are instead mavericks who make and market themselves without the benefit of institutional ties. But a scan of the Top 50 shows the central role that brand-name affiliations play in establishing and marketing a guru's reputation. For example, the associations Jack Welch (No. 34) and Richard Branson (No. 45) have with two of the best-known corporate names in the world, GE and Virgin, thrust them into the Top 50 by sheer volume of media mentions and Web hits.

In fact, without the significant hurdle of the SSCI, which shows scholarly impact and thus does little to boost a corporate chieftain's ranking, both Welch and Branson would have placed in the top five. They would have trailed Bill Gates, however, whose Microsoft brand gave him the No. 1 position in both Google hits and media mentions and the No. 19 ranking overall.

But nothing boosts a guru's ranking like the combination of brand and academic credentials. Seven of the top 10 have ties to leading universities, including Harvard (Porter), the University of Chicago (Becker), MIT (Peter Senge) and the University of California at Berkeley (Hal Varian).

The list also reveals striking biases in gender and nationality. Clearly the shifting demographics evident in much of the business world—precipitated by globalization and the rise of women to positions of power and influence—have yet to be felt in the halls of gurudom. There are only two women among the Top 50—Harvard's Rosabeth Moss Kanter (No. 11) and Esther Dyson, chairperson of EDventure Holdings, at No. 32. And 44 of

the 50 are Americans, at least by residence. The six exceptions: Charles Handy, Sumantra Ghoshal and Branson, all of the United Kingdom; Canadian Don Tapscott; Ken Ohmae of Japan; and Edward de Bono, who writes from the De Bono Institute in Australia.

No doubt the American business hype machine, which sets the world standard, clearly favors its own (especially its own men). On the other hand, given the historic US dominance of the world's economy, the global prevalence of American business methods and models, and the worldwide reputations of American business schools, this tilt toward US gurus is perhaps understandable.

Finally, while there is very little diversity of gender and home base, there is a surprising variety in the backgrounds of the Top 50. If Drucker is the prototypical guru, it is the interdisciplinary nature of this thinking that others emulate, not his résumé. Although nearly all of the Top 50 are boundary spanners in terms of profession—many circulate from consulting to academia to journalism and back—the institutional ties we described above reveal four basic types of gurus in the Top 50: business academics (27), consultants (16), practicing managers (4), and journalists (3).

But there is significant heterogeneity within each taxonomic type, suggesting that managers need a variety of intellectual talents to help them make their organizations more efficient, effective and innovative.

For example, journalist Malcolm Gladwell, of *New Yorker* fame, writes on the social aspects of organizations—including a recent scathing critique of "the war for talent"—and markets, while Kevin Kelly, founding editor of *Wired* magazine, writes and

speaks about the parallels between biology and information networks. Academic Varian of Cal Berkeley uses economics as a lens on information management for businesspeople, while the University of Chicago's Becker uses economics as a lens on the social aspects of organizational productivity.

Although they vary in the issues they address, our Top 50 gurus have one thing in common: a desire to influence the practice of business and management. In his autobiography posted on the Nobel Foundation website, Becker puts it this way: "[Agreeing to write a monthly column for *BusinessWeek*] was a wise decision, for I was forced . . . to write about economic and social issues without using technical jargon, and in about 800 words per column. Doing this has enormously improved my capacity to discuss important subjects briefly and in simple language . . . [and it] makes me stay abreast of many subjects that interest the business and professional readers of the magazine."

Successful companies are not, of course, built on Nobel prizes, best-selling business books or mountains of scholarly output. In the end, what is required is that critical alchemy that turns ideas from many sources into applied innovation and best business practices. And it is at this point that the gurus cede center stage to the executives and managers who must put the ideas to work. ■

¹ *What's the Big Idea?* is co-authored by Thomas H. Davenport, Laurence Prusak and James Wilson. It will be published by Harvard Business School Press in the spring of 2003.

² Richard A. Posner, *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* (Harvard University Press, 2002).