

Thinker's 50: Roger Martin

Des Dearlove and Stuart Crainer

Who is the world's most influential living management thinker?

We want to know who wins your vote in our biannual *Thinkers 50* survey. Since its introduction in 2001, the survey has become the definitive guide to the gurus and ideas that matter most in management today. Each week, until voting closes at midnight on August 18, we will question some of the contenders for this year's list. This week we talk to Roger Martin. Cast your vote at timesonline.co.uk/management. Roger Martin is Dean of the Joseph L. Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. Best known for his ideas on integrative thinking, he is the author of *The Opposable Mind: How Successful Leaders Win Through Integrative Thinking*.

How do you define integrative thinking?

If you are faced with opposed models, integrative thinking is where you have the capacity to create a better model, superior to both and incorporating aspects of each model, rather than choosing one model at the expense of the other.

What would be an example of that?

When Issy Sharp, founder of the Four Seasons hotel chain, was building his first property, everyone in the industry told him that there were only two business models that worked. The motel business model — small hotels with less than 200 rooms — with low amenities but a lot of comfort and warmth. Or, alternatively, you could go down the large city centre convention hotel business route. Bigger hotels with 750 rooms upwards, all the amenities, but tending to be more cold and impersonal than a smaller hotel.

So which did Mr Sharp choose?

He decided to create a new model — the Four Seasons hotel model. A medium-sized hotel between 200 and 350 rooms, with incredible service, that enables them to charge a price premium to fund the amenities.

That's what integrative thinkers do?

That is the classic integrative thinking response. It's a response when two available models oppose one another and are each unsatisfactory. More conventional thinkers are inclined to accept the situation and see their job as choosing between the two.

Do all successful business leaders think in this way?

Yes, the overwhelming majority. I would say about 80 per cent. Not all.

What does this finding mean for leaders and leadership?

Don't think that you're going to be a successful leader on the basis of analysing, evaluating or choosing between models. And, unfortunately, a lot of business education is orientated to doing just that. Instead, the message is that greatness will come from creating new models.