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Emeritus Professor Dennis Turner

by

Robert E. Wood †

The papers presented in this volume go some way toward documenting the contributions that Emeritus Professor Dennis Turner has made to management practice and thought within Australia. Through his teaching and his research, Dennis has influenced many students of management and the full impact of his legacy is, I believe, yet to be written. As you read the papers that follow, you will discover how Dennis' work with Mike Crawford is one of the few pieces of work on competencies and change management that provides a rigorous test of the ideas put forward.

My personal estimate is that ten years from now, when Change Management scholars have a more historical view of the development of knowledge in their area and are concerned about the validity of the inferences they draw rather than the popular appeal of the latest set of ideas, two books will provide the bedrock for their analyses. One will be the work on management competencies by Boyatzis (1982) and the other will be Turner and Crawford (1998). At this point in time, these are the only two studies that have provided comprehensive and rigorous tests of the ideas that underpin change management. There are not many other rigorous

† Australian Graduate School of Management, UNSW, Sydney, NSW 2052. Email: rwood@agsm.edu.au

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research studies of change management and those that have been done have tested much narrower sets of hypotheses.

In my allotted pages, I have outlined a brief history of Dennis' career before and after his joining the AGSM and presented a summary of the papers that follow. My observations on the papers and the contributions they make were my opportunity to have my say about Dennis' contributions. If you really want to know what each of the authors said, you will have to read the volume from cover to cover. It is worth the effort.

Putting this volume together and reflecting on Dennis' contributions has reminded me of two important lessons for researchers and scholars. First is that good research, even basic research, often begins with an attempt to solve a very practical problem and, if done well, finishes there also. This is one reason why the best ideas are understandable to practitioner and researcher alike. The second lesson was that good research and scholarship is often an extension of a personal philosophy. Simply put, people who believe in what they do, do it better than those for whom it is a chore. There is a risk here; personal philosophies can lead to over commitment to an idea. A good researcher is guided and sustained by their personal philosophy but is open to new ideas and new directions, based on what they learn from their studies.

Dennis' teaching and his research was a journey in search of answers to problems he encountered in his times as a manager. He was committed to his theories about change and competencies but never over committed to the point of not wanting to test and revise them. As you will see in the papers that follow, Dennis teamed up with Mike Crawford and learnt new research skills so that he could test his theories, and he was able to reinvent himself on several occasions to match the needs of the time. He has been and remains an exemplar of an open-minded teacher and researcher.

A Brief History

Academia was a second career for Dennis. After graduating from the London School of Economics, where he earned a B.Sc. Econ (Hons), he was called up for National Service. He graduated first in his officer training class and became the first national serviceman to be awarded the Royal Air Force Sword of Honour. Dennis then followed a career in business and spent more than 20 years in senior business roles before joining the AGSM. In the private sector he was managing director of retailing and manufacturing organisations in the UK and in Australia. In the public sector he served as Industrial Advisor to the UK Department of Economic Affairs, was Chief Counsellor to the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) and was a part-time Commissioner of the Trade Practices Commission for some eight years. So Dennis came to AGSM with a tremendous experience of top-level, challenging managerial positions as well as clear evidence of a sharp intellect.

Dennis joined the academic staff of the University of New South Wales in 1981, initially as an Industrial Fellow and Visiting Professor at the Australian Graduate School of Management and then as a Professor of Management.

As an academic, Dennis continued to do what he had done as a manager, to build the capabilities of the organization. He did this in a myriad ways and through

many different roles. He has been Associate Director and a source of support and advice for several AGSM Deans, particularly in times of stress. He has acted as a mentor to many staff. He was frequently called upon to run strategy workshops for the School. In 1990, he played a key role in the team led by Dexter Dunphy that won a \$5 million research grant to establish the Centre for Corporate Change.

The UNSW also took advantage of Dennis' managerial experience and craft. In July 1987, he was appointed by Professor L.M. Birt, then Vice Chancellor, to a Committee to consider the issues involved with developing a Code of Practice to assist the University in developing its funding links with commerce, industry and the community at large. During the 1990's, the UNSW drew on Dennis' expertise in helping senior colleagues to develop strategic options. He ran workshops for the Vice-Chancellor in 1992, for the Alumni Association in 1991, and for the Chancellor in 1999.

Within the AGSM, Dennis became Director of Executive Programs in 1983. At the time of his appointment, the School's major executive program had just been cancelled due to a lack of applicants, the market position looked unpromising, and profitability was low. By 1991, when he handed this responsibility to his successor, the AGSM dominated the Australian market in senior management education and the Executive Program Unit was making a significant contribution to the School's bottom line. Many programs developed during this period are still major contributors to the School's reputation and income today. During his time as Director of Executive Programs, Dennis mentored a number of faculty in developing their teaching skills. He also increased the number of scholarships for women, which resulted in a significant increase in female participation in executive programs.

Dennis' leadership of Executive Programs also included a large component of leadership by example and direct contributions through the development and teaching of his own programs. One of his programs, *Managing People for Performance*, has been presented more than 85 times over 16 years to more than 2600 executives! Quality lasts! Few management academics could lay claim to having helped to develop the skills of so many managers. And that was just one of the programs that Dennis developed and taught.

In his teaching, Dennis was always aware of how his teaching was experienced by the managers in the classroom, and developed each program as a learning experience for its participants. Through his use of surveys, he enabled managers to bring their leadership and management issues into the classroom, where Dennis would provide them with the knowledge and tools needed to work through the issues. Then he would guide his student managers through an action planning process that enabled them to work out how to apply the learning back on their job. These were true learning processes and Dennis supported them with relevant stories and illustrations to help the managers understand the key points.

All of Dennis' research and teaching has been focused principally on two major content areas, namely, managing people, with a strong emphasis on managing yourself, and managing corporate change. His experience in running a number of organisations before coming to the AGSM had made him aware of the importance of both personal and corporate capabilities and the distinctions between the two. He also had the insight that managing change and managing the ongoing business requires different competencies. These are now well-established ideas, but

back in the mid 1980's when Dennis first introduced them into his teaching they were true innovations in management thinking. It was these ideas that Dennis, in collaboration with Mike Crawford, developed and tested in the research that resulted in *Change Power* (1998).

An Overview of the Papers

When I asked the authors of the papers in this volume if they could prepare a brief statement on Dennis' contributions to management knowledge and practice, each of them thanked me for the honour. Guidelines were requested and so I produced some, which a few of the authors chose to follow. Thankfully, many chose to ignore the proffered guidelines and the resulting set of papers gives us many different perspectives on the scholar and his work, but with common themes that speak to Dennis' strengths and his contributions.

I considered several different orders for the papers. Each has something unique to say and could have been used as point of departure for the others. My final decision was to start with the papers that primarily present reflections on Dennis, followed by papers that provide a review of the *Change Power* research, and to conclude with those that discuss how the research findings relate to other research on change and strategy.

The opening paper by Roger Collins provides us with statement on Dennis as a colleague. Roger's summary comment on the many ways that Dennis has contributed to the School '...as manager and thought leader, innovator, mentor, bridge builder, advocate and networker, and career reinventor' is a recurring theme in the papers that follow. Phil Yetton provides a bridge from Dennis as a colleague who 'is always responding to a challenge' to a discussion of his research into change management competencies. In the process, Phil illustrates how Dennis' research is an extension of his personal philosophy. His observation that Dennis' work exemplifies the well-known dictum 'there is nothing so practical as a good theory' is another of the recurring themes in the papers that follow.

The next three papers, by Michael Crawford, Meredith Rogers and Geoff Eagleson provide an overview of the research program and major findings that are presented in *Change Power* (Turner & Crawford, 1998). Michael Crawford and Dennis Turner would appear an odd couple for people who do not know each of them well. When they formed their collaborative partnership, Dennis was a former manager in the process of reinventing himself as a researcher. Mike was a technically trained social scientist who had recently completed his PhD and was in the processing of becoming a practitioner. The story of their partnership, which unfortunately is not told here, I am sure would provide many lessons for applied research collaborations.

Mike limits himself to the story of their research project and gives us some insight into Dennis' contributions. He places Dennis' research and teaching as part of a broad tradition where '...practical experience leads to insight, which is followed by a process of articulation, testing and refinement to demonstrate the validity and improve the usefulness of the ideas'. Alfred Sloan, Douglas McGregor and Chester Barnard are some of the better-known researchers within this tradition. As Mike notes, the framework presented in their 1998 book has made the ideas

accessible and practical for managers and, in so doing, ‘...has completed a cycle to the source of many of Dennis’ ideas and the basis of the research.’

Meredith Rogers provides an overview and critical assessment of the contributions made by Turner and Crawford. Her succinct summary of the research findings provides a nice compliment to the more personal insights in Mike Crawford’s review. There is a personal story behind Meredith’s contribution. She is one of the thousands of managers who have attended Dennis’s programs and the experience led to some major changes in her career as a manager and her later entry into academia. Against this backdrop, Meredith’s concluding assessment of Dennis has, I believe a special integrity. In Meredith’s own words:

‘His contribution will live on in the understanding and practice of hundreds of managers, with beneficial effects for similar numbers of organizations. His example is one to inspire any management scholar.’

Geoff Eagleson provides a slightly different perspective on the insights to come out of the *Change Power* research program. First, he notes that the separation of ongoing operations and change programs raised awareness that change is a business to be managed in its own right. As he and others note, the recognition that change programs and ongoing operations each have distinctive requirements but have to be managed simultaneously was not explicitly recognized in popular writings on change management at the time. As the second insight, Geoff describes how the specification of the competencies in Turner and Crawford (1998) moved the literature to a level where managers could identify the actions needed to manage change effectively. Geoff fits these two insights into the broader literature on change management, thus providing a bridge to the concluding set of papers.

The next three papers by Dexter Dunphy, Robert Marks and Jeremy Davis place the research by Turner and Crawford into broader but different contexts. Dexter, who is a leading change management scholar, places the work within the development of the change management field. He provides an analysis of how the research advanced existing knowledge on change management. His assessments of the work as an ‘..outstanding and innovative research study of formidable scope... [and that] no other study in the field of organisational change, before or since, ...has covered so many cases of organisational change in such depth’ carry special weight.

Robert Marks, who is an economist and not a change management scholar, picks up on the theme of rigor in the research project, which is also noted by Dexter Dunphy and in other papers in this volume. He explains how the Turner and Crawford study is not subject to the front-runner bias that limits the validity of the many popular writings on management that only report success stories. Robert also notes that the pressures for change in many organizations that rely on the guidance provided by Turner and Crawford, can be traced to political and social changes, such as the taxpayers’ revolt in California in the 1970’s and the privatisation initiatives of the Thatcher government in the 1980’s.

The final paper is by Jeremy Davis and it was selected to provide the ending comment because it is forward looking. Jeremy places the research by Turner and Crawford into the context of the emerging paradigms now dominating strategy research. He provides a succinct analysis of those strategy research paradigms and then explores how the research reported in *Change Power* differs from and can

contribute to strategy research. As Jeremy's analysis shows, the Turner and Crawford approach to performance and its determinants is one that strategy researchers could use in their attempts to understand the determinants of performance.

The papers in this volume pay tribute to Dennis for what he has done to this point, but the story continues. Through his desire to learn, his natural inquisitiveness, and the value that he places on applied research and its application, Dennis has always been close to the core of AGSM's identity. His contributions through his leadership, teaching and research form a significant part of the foundations on which the future success of the AGSM will be built.

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