Relations industrielles
Industrial Relations

Human Resource Management in Context: Strategy, Insights and Solutions, 3rd edition, By David Farnham, London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2010, 506 pp., ISBN: 978-18439-8259-3.

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See table of contents

Explore this journal

Cite this review

L'article d'Amyot et Bérubé présente le Cadre de développement et de reconnaissance des compétences qui a été inséré dans la Loi sur les compétences à compter de 2007. À travers une présentation bien ficelée du dialogue social entre les partenaires en matière de formation en entreprise, on apprend comment les partenaires sociaux sont arrivés à placer la reconnaissance de compétences au cœur de toute démarche visant le développement des compétences de la main-d'œuvre et le transfert des apprentissages, peu importent les stratégies, les méthodes et les lieux de formation. Ce dialogue entre les partenaires sociaux est porteur d'une meilleure qualité dans les relations au sein des différents milieux de travail. Dans le chapitre sur l'approche par compétences, Monchatre présente les raisons qui ont motivé le ministère de l'Éducation du Québec à retenir cette approche et pose son articulation entre les sphères productive, scolaire et professionnelle. Cet article est intéressant dans un contexte où ni les entreprises, ni les milieux scolaires ne parviennent à combler adéquatement leurs besoins de main-d'œuvre. Cette troisième section de l'ouvrage se termine par un article de Bernier qui traite de la politique de formation tout au long de la vie. L'auteure tente de montrer que la décentralisation des rôles de l'État en matière de formation de la main-d'œuvre et la tendance croissante à l'activation des politiques font en sorte que les individus sont devenus les maîtres d'œuvre de leur employabilité. L'auteure réfléchit aussi au partage des droits et des responsabilités entre les partenaires sociaux en matière de formation en lien avec la sécurisation des parcours de vie professionnelle.

Les qualités de l'ouvrage sont nombreuses. Il mérite le détour pour l'éclairage particulier qu'il donne aux multiples vues du développement des compétences et à la recherche partenariale en matière de formation des mains-d'œuvre. L'analyse du dialogue social présentée à travers le changement de paradigme de la société industrielle à la société du savoir est particulièrement éloquente : les résultats issus des études de cas et des enquêtes que l'on retrouve dans cet ouvrage en témoignent. Ce livre pourra aussi être une référence utile pour les différents partenaires sociaux afin de mieux saisir les défis à relever au cours des prochaines années quant aux pratiques à adopter et aux stratégies à mettre en œuvre pour outiller les individus à transférer leurs savoirs, ou encore retenir les compétences au sein des milieux de travail. On peut noter que le compagnonnage est encouragé par les partenaires sociaux et se trouve à formaliser certaines pratiques déjà inscrites dans l'organisation du travail.

Seule ombre au tableau, la présentation du cadre de développement et de reconnaissance des compétences gagnerait à être plus schématisée pour faciliter la mise en contexte et la compréhension des aspects plus théoriques, notamment pour les non-initiés.

Pour conclure, cet ouvrage collectif mériterait une large diffusion et revêt de l'intérêt pour quiconque s'intéresse à la recherche partenariale en matière de formation de la main-d'œuvre.

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TÉLUQ

Human Resource Management in Context: Strategy, Insights and Solutions, 3rd edition

This book is linked to the UK Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's *HRM in Context* postgraduate module, and the strategy, insights and solutions area of the CIPD's Profession Map. It seeks to be "intellectually demanding, academically robust and professionally relevant". It is designed for a Masters level audience and to help HR practitioners being educated to this level understand the key drivers of HR strategies

and practices. In addition to reviewing the most important contextual factors, the author seeks to analyze the theories relevant to the study of external context. One would assume, given this remit, that the book is intended to equip professionals for the more senior strategic business partner roles that they might end up in. The match between topic and level of seniority of people on a course using the book of course is not always easy to control. So, in this review I explain what the book is designed to do, ask if it is successful in this by reviewing the broad content, and finally ask if there are any obvious gaps, despite the required breadth of the syllabus.

What is the book designed to do? Its stated goal is to provide practitioners with the knowledge and underpinning behaviours that will help them understand the underlying drivers, and barriers to, sustainable organizational performance and the needs of customers. To help organize the wide-ranging material that must be covered, three separate contexts are delineated: external, internal, and business and managerial. Each of these three contexts in turn is broken down into component, so for example the middle layer of internal contexts requires coverage of culture, layout, innovation, power-conflict-control and social components; 18 such subcomponents are identified, and are gathered together into 10 chapters. Each chapter is typically structured through a series of learning outcomes, opening theory, review questions, case studies and an explore further section. In between comes the key content. The author notes that the 18 subcomponents can rarely be separated out into the different layers of external, internal and business-management contexts, and that the knowledge, concepts and theories used to make sense of each component are often contradictory. In order to keep up to date with the changing discourse around key issues, the reader is advised to examine major newspapers,

websites and professional journals, but of course as a CIPD textbook it is supported by their online resources.

Is it successful? In part, yes. It signals the huge territory of knowledge that is relevant. However, to weave a narrative through what inevitably comes over as a checklist of 'must mentions' is a very difficult challenge to be set. In part this narrative works, in other parts there can not by default be enough depth of analysis. So on occasion you feel "shouldn't HR professionals know about this institution or issue without being told about it?". But this of course is a judgement that depends on the level of student on the relevant courses.

Part 1 covers the external and internal contexts as they impact HRM. It moves from the traditional personnel management versus HRM debate to coverage of contemporary HR structures and delivery models, and quickly touches on outsourcing, ethics and international HRM. Herein lies a challenge – the territory is so broad that each topic can at best just be signalled as being important. Having a case on age discrimination in Europe might not be the most powerful exemplar of the external drivers that HRM faces. The internal contexts and managerial contexts chapters serve as a quick primer on organizational behaviour and analysis – scientific management, human relations tradition, culture, power and politics, organizational forms, meanings of management and so forth. All good stuff, but difficult to bring to life, and I found that these chapters tended to jump from one topic to another and back again. Two pages on finance for example might be seen as a little too brief for a book on strategy, insights and solutions. But I sympathize with the authors – in their completeness they must by default be brief. This is a syllabus issue.

Part 2 focuses on strategy formulation and implementation. Of course, one way of dealing with the territory would be

to look at how HR practitioners actually strategize themselves, or contribute to the front-end (i.e. not implementation) strategic management processes of the organization as a whole. It does cover the basics of strategic management – and some of the better-known contrasting views as to how strategy operates – comparing and contrasting the deterministic view versus the emergent view. Quick mention is made of the main techniques such as forecasting, Delphi, scenarios and so forth, and the different levels at which it operates. A strategy textbook in a chapter! This is followed by a chapter on HR strategy. This has to be a lynchpin chapter – I am not sure if it really serves as this. It covers academic ways of thinking about HR strategy – person-job fit, systemic fit, and value creation. There is then a slightly strange jump in my mind to sections on talent management and workforce planning and vertical and horizontal integration, and then of course the familiar ground of HR academic discussion of universalistic, contingency, configurational, resource-based view and behavioural perspectives; best practice approaches, high-performance work systems, best-fit models. Finally, there is some discussion of strategic leadership.

Part 3 then moves us back to the external context, beginning with a chapter on markets and the competitive context, full of discussion of different economic schools of thought, the financial crisis, the role of institutions and labour markets, public sector reform. A little surprising to see Porter's five forces model here and not in the chapter on strategy, but it is a useful organizing device. The international chapter catches high-level debates about globalization, the role of MNCs and bodies such as the EU, with a bit of national culture thrown in. Demographic and social trends are easier to both write about and tease out HR consequences from, and it was interesting to see a table on interpretations of Luddism in the

chapter on technology. Governments and legislation form the closing debates.

What is missing? Given the comment that the book already has to be over-inclusive and broad-ranging, it seems trite to have to say something about this this question, but that said, I think there is a gap that could be addressed. Given the chapter on strategy and HR is very academic, it is of course removed from the reality of how organizations actually involve HR practitioners in strategy, or indeed how HR Directors ensure that strategic thinking takes place in their function. For me, there needed to be a further chapter at this point, which would provide the reader with a reality check if they ever work as a strategic business partner or HR Director. Perhaps it could say more about the strategy as practice perspective which has gained more prominence recently, and I think the book could say more about the rhetorical skills that HR practitioners need in order to have a voice in the strategic discussion, along with more pragmatic insight into the sorts of issues-based contexts that often drive HR strategy in practice. So discussion is needed about the sorts of strategic drives that create complex HR issues – such as globalization, innovation, the design of customer centric organizations, lean management and cost effectiveness.

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