

REFERENCES

Mabey, C., G. Salaman and J. Storey, 1998, *Human Resource Management: A Strategic Introduction*, Second Edition, London: Blackwell Business.

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Strategic Human Resource Management: A Reader, edited by Christopher Mabey, Graeme Salaman and John Storey. London: Sage Publications in association with the Open University, 1998. Pp. vii + 334. £16.99 (pb). ISBN 0 7619 6033.

This Reader of chapters and articles by respected authorities is designed for both students and practising managers. It is a component of an Open University course of study booklets, development exercises and assessments. As a stand-alone text it introduces the literature, giving managers a feel for the conflicting frameworks of strategic human resource management (pp. 1–13).

Some practitioners may be irritated by Part 1 as it seeks 'to demystify management and SHRM ideas and principles which are too often taken at face value'. Thus, the editors suggest that 'if the strategic management of human resources can be undertaken differently, who is to say which approach is correct?' (p. 17). The extracts from the works of Legge, Miller (Paul), Miller (Peter) and Rose, de Gay and Salaman, Sparrow and Hiltrop, and Noble (pp. 15–100) explore moral, ethical, cultural, governance and comparative contexts of SHRM. The message is of 'a battle between national mindsets and forces of business transition' (p. 68).

Part 2, *Human Resource Management and Business Performance*, provides a practical focus and its summaries guide readers to making the best of this material (pp. 101–3). Huselid's investigation of the impact of HRM on labour turnover, productivity and financial performance is a model for future research. Pieces on appraisal by Newton and Finlay follow; performance related pay by Storey and Sisson; *resource* based theory by Mueller and excellence. HRM and TQM in retailing are covered by Rosenthal and Peccei (pp. 104–81).

Part 3 has a useful summary (pp. 182–4), chapters on high-technology Silicon Valley firms, (Bahrami, pp. 185–99); the NHS and managing through networks (Ferlie and Pettigrew, pp. 200–22), and employment relations in smaller organisations (Bacon, Ackers, Storey and Coates, pp. 251–68). A study of leading American companies by Kochan and Osterman (pp. 223–50) focuses on a 'new kind of enterprise whose foundations are built upon the principles of what they term mutual gains' (p. 183). Guest (pp. 236–50) outlines the options that managers have when designing employment strategies and relationship patterns. Jacques (pp. 269–79), by asking are we 'managing for the next century – or the last', provides an historical dimension to 'the emergence of new organisational forms and relationships'.

Part 4 explores the issue of building organisational capability (pp. 281–324) and the dangers of SHRM accepting the unitary agendas of senior managers, and losing its developmental and humanistic roots (Kamoche, p. 283). Two sets of international authors (Brunsson and Olsen; Nonaka and Takeuchi) provide contrasting views of ways that organisations build competitive capacity and manage the processes of knowledge creation. Finally, Mabey, Salaman and Storey (pp. 281–2) finish with what

could be considered a benchmark of the essence of SHRM. Thus '[w]hile Western managers are characterised as relying upon quantifiable data, codified procedures and explicit information processing, Japanese managers are said to derive knowledge from highly personal intuitions, to work at internalising their knowledge from highly personal intuitions, to work at internalising their discoveries and then find ways of migrating this tacit knowledge into the wider organisation such that personal and corporate renewal can take place. This contrasting divide between East and West perhaps spills into caricature on occasions. However, the value of their chapter is the recognition that everyday mundanities reveal a mindset, and this mindset is one which either revels in, or eschews inexactitude, ambiguity and creativity, and is from this tolerance that organisational capability is born'. Exactly.

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The Focus Group Research Handbook, by Holly Edmunds. Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Business Books, in conjunction with the American Marketing Association, 1999. Pp. x + 276. US\$49.95. ISBN 0-8442-0288-6.

The focus group is one of the most widely used marketing research techniques. Over the years it has proved to be an invaluable method for managers to understand consumers, to test consumer reactions to marketing materials, and to try out new ideas. So flexible is the focus group that it has evolved beyond its origins into new forms and new fields of application.

With *The Focus Group Research Handbook*, Holly Edmunds presents a clearly and logically organised guide to conducting and using focus groups updated for the next century. Her expertise and experience with focus groups are used to good advantage. She presents the steps required to organise, conduct and report the findings from focus groups of many types. This handbook is comprehensive and designed for practical use. Each element of the focus group is described and explained. While intended for project managers, marketers, and even professional moderators, it can be read with profit by anyone wishing to learn how focus groups are conducted.

The handbook is divided into two parts, with the first half comprised of eight chapters describing all aspects of the focus group project. This includes a useful glossary explaining technical terms. The chapters are clearly organised to present the maximum information. Chapter One describes the advantages and disadvantages of focus groups, explains when to use them and not use them, and describes the general design of focus groups. Several variations on the basic focus group paradigm are presented and described. Chapter Two shows how to design a focus group. The material is presented in sufficient detail to enable one to develop a focus group for almost every problem. Examples of screening questionnaires are given that clearly illustrate this important part of the focus group project. Chapter Three discusses facility issues, such as room size and video capability. Many practical aspects of arranging a focus group are explained. Chapter Four deals with the moderator and his/her role in the focus group project. Practical tips are given that make clear the important role of the moderator, but this is not a training program for potential moderators, and those interested in working as moderators are wisely advised to seek specific moderator training. Chapter Five describes the work that goes into evaluating