

of principles and values. He respects his parents who have reared him, and also keeps his allegiance to Duryodhana un-franchised even when he has learnt that he is the eldest of the Pandavas. At the same juncture Karna also promises that he won't slay any of the Pandava brothers to save Arjuna. Perhaps Karna wanted to prove his mettle against Arjuna because he had been snubbed by a very beautiful but equally haughty Draupadi. Gurcharan Das explains that exactly the same scenes are still being enacted today, only the characters are different.

There was a hullabaloo when two officers had made noting on the official files in green and red inks. A query in this regard was raised on 13 April 1999. Some relief was provided in an answer to the "ink" query by 27 August 1999. One has to read the book to understand the intricacies involved in the answer finding process and get a glimpse into some of the government organisational structures and practices.

The USP (unique selling proposition) of this book is the factual data and true cases with the original solution. Readers wouldn't be left groping for the answers and will be able to learn the basic principles of human interaction.

The book provides refreshing reading and is helpful to the management practitioners and those who have completed their MBA and or aspiring to get enrolled in similar courses. This book performs a root-causes analysis of failures at the professional front, failures at the political front, and at places, it explains the significance of interpersonal skills and why people might go the wrong way. All the while the author refrains from preaching.

#### **Wallace Jacob**

Lecturer – Human Resource Management Area  
Tolani Maritime Institute, Induri,  
Talegaon-Chakan Road,  
Talegaon Dabhade,  
Pune,  
Maharashtra- 410507

#### **HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT / ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR / ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY**

**John Storey, Patrick M. Wright and Dave Ulrich (Eds.),  
*The Routledge Companion to Strategic Human Resource  
Management, Oxford: Routledge, 2009, xxii+530, Price  
not mentioned, Hard.***

Strategic human resource management (SHRM), as a discipline, almost did not exist in the nineteen eighties. It can be seen to be rooted in the discoveries of the seminal, and so far the largest selling, management book, *In Search of Excellence*, by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman, published in 1982. This book revealed to the management world the saliency of people management as a critical factor

for competitive success. The book established that hoping for competitive success through exclusive focus on certain established methods—especially heavily systemised philosophies and practices—were not appropriate. Rather it proved how crucial people concerns are to competitive success, thus signifying the saliency of style, staff, skills and shared values over strategy, systems, and structure in McKenzie's 7-S framework. The excessive focus on the latter three, it was argued, reflected what Tom Peters later on referred to as "tyranny of the bean counters" (or business by the numbers). Today, a large body of literature has developed in SHRM. It is concerned with devising people interventions that help an organisation develop customer-centric behaviour so as to promote competitive advantage. It is believed that SHRM is the single largest area of consulting in management globally—all functional and strategic management disciplines included.

In the last two decades or so voluminous SHRM literature got developed in the West, more so from the scholars in the UK and the USA. Writings from these scholars reflect several innovative HRM themes. Some of the emergent themes in the contemporary strategic HRM discourse include: Speed, HR support to innovation, war for talent, idiosyncrasies management, psychological contract, employer branding and employer of choice policies, strategic recruitment, strategic leadership and change, employee engagement, global leadership development, human capital management, HR outsourcing, linking HRM with customer outcomes, and alignment of HR with business strategy. Empowerment and autonomy have been seen at the centre of many of these themes focusing on the softer model of HRM. Carrying this thinking further, empowerment was labeled as "the elixir of the 1990s" by the Western business world as it led to exponential enhancement of performance by attending to the growth needs and other requirements of the workforce.

Researches have however revealed that the negative side of HRM is as much or more in vogue as pursuit of all the above themes; for organisational survival in the complex business environments is not all positives and the empowerment claims of employers are merely symbolic of seeking legitimacy to their covertly unitarist policies. Harder strategic HR themes like cost-cutting, rate of return, productivity measurement, performance measurement, de-unionisation policies, voluntary retrenchment schemes, flexibility, etc. have largely been seen negatively by the employees. So there is a clear dualism in HR interventions that organisations have been adopting for their survival. This tension between empowerment and instrumentalism—both working on reverse value hypotheses—has often been the focus of critics of HRM. HR practitioners are more concerned with benchmarking the best HR practices and aligning their HR with business strategy. They are less

concerned with the developments in HR theory.

Not many quality books have been so far produced in the sphere of SHRM that could be exclusively relied on for teaching a full course in this area. The book, *Aligning Human Resources and Business Strategy* (Butterworth Heinemann, 2009) by Linda Holbeche was perhaps an exception. For supplementing those basic fundamentals in that book, the readership was looking for a new reference point reflecting some innovative material for teaching, research and training in this extremely important area of people management. The book under review is a fine response to these needs, and is likely to be seen favourably by the teachers and scholars as a leading reference in their material-selection exercises in teaching and discovering research questions.

One of the main aims of this book, as claimed by the editors, is to bridge the gap between research and practice. Several renowned scholars and practitioners from around the globe, who are contributors to this companion, have examined the contemporary state of research and practices in different domains of SHRM. It consists of 30 chapters, which have been grouped into ten parts including the introductory one. These parts are titled: analytical frameworks, the external environment of SHRM, the strategic role of HR, the HR function, areas of practice, the capability-building perspective, changing contexts, regions, and performance outcomes. Through the contents, mainly, the book focuses on four broad themes, which are: need to intertwine theory, research and practice; linkage between firm's inside HR issues with outsiders like suppliers and customers; HR needs to manage issues at micro and macro levels; and needs to manage HR transactions as well as transformation. It is difficult for a reviewer to adequately focus on the entire contents of thirty chapters in a book like this dealing with a vast set of issues and themes. However, some of the chapters as also the conceptualisation of this book need special mention:

SHRM prescriptions are never comfortable when juxtaposed with pluralist employment relations frameworks. Paul Edward's chapter probes this issue when he discusses the influence of traditional industrial relations (IR) on HR. Thus, he shows, that the managerialist orientation of SHRM can be difficult to operationalise in pluralist settings such as those prevailing in Europe. He concludes by observing that "HR managers have merely tried to change the world; the point, however, is to understand it."

Beechler and Baltzley have discussed how the exigencies of globalisation warrant a new breed of global leaders. They have argued that though global leadership starts with selection, but six things are necessary for practitioners for developing global leader's skills, which include, among others, identifying mentors and developing

two or three assignments ahead.

In their two chapters as part of section five of the book, Ulrich *et al.*, have discussed the evolution of the HR function and the competencies that HR must demonstrate so as to deliver the enhanced expectation from it. They have referred to their twenty-year HR competency study comprising large-scale data set where they find five domains of HR competence all HR professionals must master i.e. making a strategic contribution; knowing the business; personal credibility; delivering HR practices; and knowing and using HR technology. In the other chapter they have argued that HR function should operate like a business within a business; and that it can be effective only if it has a strategy and structure

Story *et al.*, in chapter 18, have dealt with perhaps the hottest issue of employee engagement. They caution that HR must ensure that this serious issue is not seen just another HR thing. Its fuller understanding should be based on the negative consequences that may result from ignoring it. It is necessary; they emphasise, to clearly understand "what people are supposed to be engaged in." In another chapter, Gratton and Erickson deal with HR and innovative teams. They talk how risks associated with working of complex teams can be minimised by creating what they refer to as "signature processes."

Cooke's insightful analysis of HRM in China reveals how competitive realities are gradually changing the traditional focus of paternalism as a unique feature of Chinese firms' approach to HRM. She has argued that Chinese employees are becoming more receptive to Western performance orientation, though most organisations are still quite traditional and yet to adopt a strategic approach to HRM. The situation, as convincingly argued by Budhwar in the chapter on India, is similar but HR practices in MNCs there are being benchmarked at a faster pace by some of the leading Indian employers. The message from South Africa is encouraging for HRM development except that there is a simultaneous rise of IR institutions, as has been revealed by Horwiz's chapter in the same part.

In perhaps the most interesting section of the book in the part consisting of the last three chapters authors have dealt with linkages between capabilities of individuals and organisations and how they lead to positive outcomes through mutual dependency. Beaty and Huselid's chapter focuses on financial outcomes that result from such collaboration; Warrall and Cooper are concerned with employee outcomes; and Bowen and Pugh with customer outcomes. The last one is, in fact, a very intriguing issue that is being debated in contemporary SHRM discourse i.e. the HR value proposition or linking HRM and customer outcomes. This chapter by Bowen and Pugh refers to some

fine anecdotes reflecting a mix of theory and practice. The authors have developed a strategic leadership model linking HRM practices and customer outcomes in services; and rightly conclude that HR's role in customer satisfaction can be most useful only when HR managers partner with colleagues from other functions in implementing business strategy.

As the editors of this timely book have claimed in the introduction, the book chapters are certainly replete with several difficult issues which can be seen as paradoxical. Three such paradoxes have been identified, i.e. managing the needs of the individual and the organisation at the same time; connecting the inside and the outside; and delivering both the transactions and transformation. Indeed, HR has to learn to attend to the dynamic realities of these paradoxes, which are challenges to the practitioner as well as the researcher. The book identifies issues pertaining to both areas of business success and succeeds in its claim of bridging the gap between the theory and practice. The contents of the book, no doubt, are refreshing and even innovative from both these view points. It has succeeded in exploring new perspectives so as to project a credible overview of the discipline of SHRM. The editors have planned the contents well and have not tried to fit them into some forced categories. That reflects a good quality of editing based on careful planning.

No book on HRM strategy can be expected to deal with all possible issues. Since SHRM is a very wide subject, there can always be a debate on what needs to be included and what could have been omitted. But since the editors claim the book to be a companion, the reader's expectations naturally go up. My preference would have been to include some fuller chapters on issues such as: the flexibility paradigm; learning and knowledge-creation role of HR; HR's support to organisational innovation; and HR's role in relationships management. Also, I would have liked to have in part nine a chapter on HRM in Brazil or a composite one in South American economies.

Overall, it needs to be acknowledged that the editors have definitely added fresh and challenging insights into SHRM themes through involving some of the well-known experts in the subject and related areas. This volume will certainly be seen as enriching the emerging field of SHRM. Reflecting a good blend of the theory and practice of SHRM, it will be a useful resource to researchers and students studying this subject. Most contents of the book are largely jargon-free which is likely to make it of some interest to the practitioner reader as well. The book is a result of a partnership between a British and two North American scholars, who all are leading global names in HRM. It certainly is close to the British rigour in theory and the American concern for practical implications, and should be seen as a useful contribution to the literature

on this emerging subject. The editors have helped this discipline grow further in its attempt to seek a requisite identity. The rigour and practical orientation reflected in most of the contents will be a compeller for the book to be read perhaps from cover to cover; and the scholar as well the practitioner will find it a pleasant experience.

#### **Debi S. Saini**

Professor – HRM Area  
Management Development Institute  
Mehrauli Road, Sukhrali  
Gurgaon-122007

#### **OPERATIONS RESEARCH**

**Kevin Aguanno (Ed.), *Managing Agile Projects*, Macmillan Publishers India Limited, New Delhi, 2009, 417pp, Rs.340, Soft.**

The edited volume, first published in 2004, has been reprinted in India only for sale in the Indian subcontinent. The book organised in four parts has 16 contributors in addition to the editor Kevin Aguanno, who has also contributed five chapters out of a total of twenty chapters. Contributors to the book are experts and practitioners who have distinguished themselves in the agile projects management. Many of the chapters are modified/adapted and enriched versions of the work published or presented by the chapter authors earlier elsewhere.

The main aim of the edited book is to facilitate project managers in learning the secrets of successfully managing agile projects – the projects which have unclear requirements and high level of dynamics due to frequent changes. The book is a practical guide that should help executives, managers and developers to understand the features and characteristics of agile projects. Although the methods and techniques described can be applicable over a wide spectrum of contexts; the major thrust in the book is in the context of software development projects. The book is written in an easy to read style and practical orientation approach. The original edition of the book had already been well received and widely appreciated. Out of the four parts of the book, part one comprises two chapters that give introduction and identify the roots of quality. Chapter One authored by the editor himself gives a very useful overview of the agile projects, linking various approaches such as Extreme Programming, Scrum, Feature-Driven Development, Lean Development, Crystal Methods to Agile Project Management. The term “agile” refers to the ability of these methods to respond to the changing requirements in a controlled but flexible manner. It justifies the need to use new methods as compared to the traditional methods of project management. What is different about agile methods and its benefits leading to reducing risk, improving control, and delivering more value are given.

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