



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Managing People in Organisations: The Challenges of Change* by B. R. Virmani

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MANAGING PEOPLE IN ORGANISATIONS: THE CHALLENGES OF CHANGE by *B.R. Virmani*, Response Books, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 237, Price Rs. 395 (Cloth).

In this age of rapidly changing technology and emerging opportunities organisations are faced with new challenges. Survival is the key word of organisations. Organisations today feel the need for new management strategies that can yield results. The focus is on human resource planning, development and management. In the new changed scenario, there is increased emphasis on human resource management (HRM). Lately, professionals in the area of management have started talking of human resource development (HRD). The popular management concepts of UK or USA are gaining importance in India too. They are governing the employer-employee relations of many organisations. With the passage of time these traditional HRM practices demand certain changes.

In the present context the author discusses various HRM issues such as alignment of corporate strategic goals with HRD and training, technical training and workers education, technological change and transfer of technology, collective bargaining and the changing industrial relations scenario. The book is divided into 12 chapters mostly based on first hand research, case studies and data collection done over the last decade.

Chapter 1 focuses on HRM practices in India which are heavily borrowed from the West. The management theories developed in the West are evolved around their particular socio-cultural milieu, political and economic systems. But in India "grafting process" is not well planned which created confusion in management thinking. The Indian environment is characterised by a strong sense of tradition or a "*parampara*". People are strongly bonded by their 'family traditions' which can be seen or practiced even in the work setting. In this chapter, by studying 44 Indian

organisations, the author tries to probe the gaps in Indian management. The organisational practices followed by other countries would not fit *in toto* in an Indian organisational setting. "Indian-ness" is required in the grafting process. Further, he points out that in Indian organisations, little attention is paid to career planning: where as emphasis to systematic career planning is refused from the day the person joins the organisation.

Chapter 2, addresses the status of training imparted to various employees by formal training institutes which are often under-financed and impart the skills of an outdated technology. The planning process of HRD should start with a framework for evaluation and the evaluation process should then guide the next stage of the planning process. HRD planning process must take into account the level of development of each country. There are no uniform HRD strategies applicable to all situations. Also, within the country, there can be wide variations in terms of the development of technology in different sectors of the economy. Therefore, different types of training strategies should be required for HRD depending on the status of the industry. The author further points out the importance of non-conventional methods of training (e.g. Computer Assisted Instruction) and industry-academy collaboration by setting up 'research parks'.

'Corporate Planning and Training Strategy' is the subject matter of Chapter 3. In the present scenario, training is considered as one of the important corporate activities. Training and the organisational philosophies must be in agreement with each other. Training plans must flow from the corporate plans. Training should not be just the numbers game, it should be based on issues and problems that are of concern to the organisation. On the basis of these, the organisation should identify its training needs.

Chapter 4 emphasizes the qualitative approach to the evaluation of learning in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes and its subsequent transfer to the job. The evaluation model of training incorporates the three stages of training—pre-training evaluation, content and input evaluation and lastly post-training evaluation. The author further identifies certain benefits and drawbacks of the action-oriented research approach to evaluation.

In order to find ways and means to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of management training and its evaluation, a longitudinal study was undertaken in an Indian organisation and reported in Chapter 5. The author points out that in most of the organisations under study, training activities are never planned in advance, which result in sheer wastage of money, time and energy, without any impact. Towards the end of the chapter he concludes that the basic requirements to facilitate the transfer of learning to the job are—a supportive organisational climate, top level administrative/ managerial commitment, high level of motivation among trainees, the right attitude on the part of the trainer and consistency of views on fundamental objectives among the trainees.

In Chapter 6 the author has listed different types of institutions which are offering management education. He questions the relevance of this education as the manager's world is more complex, especially in the fast changing global scenario, and less theoretical than any academic model. Thus, the roles of management teachers, practitioners and institutions have become more challenging in term of fully understanding the Indian environment, the organisational problems and the global scenario.

'Developing Technical Training Schemes' is the title of Chapter 7 wherein the various issues connected with the development of the technical trainee schemes are dealt with. The chapter is based on the findings of a study conducted in association with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) comprising 90 organisations in India. It was found that there was a lack of coordination between engineering institutions and industries. He points out certain hurdles in the way of effective technical training and presents recommendations to improve upon it.

Chapter 8 highlights workers education. In India, less attention has been given to workers education, though the Government of India had set up a Central Board of Workers Education in 1948 with regional centres all over the country. The study done by the author points out a number of basic problems that need to be resolved before workers education can have any meaningful impact. The institutes which are dealing with worker's education

should come together and focus on quality worker's education. The author suggests that a fully autonomous board comprising the government, employees and trade unions along with academicians should manage the proposed institute.

Chapter 9 focuses on globalisation, technological change, HRM, and HRD. The author compares four countries—Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and India. The comparative analysis of the investment climate revealed favourable climates in Singapore and Malaysia but in India the climate was obstructive. While technology will make certain sections of the workforce redundant, the author suggests, the problem can be reduced by investing in skill upgradation training. Also, the countries should develop their own R & D base. Chapter 10 deals with different types of alliances, technology transfer and assimilation and their role in the development of any industry. With the help of the two cases (Process Industry Limited (PIL) and ABC company), the author emphasizes heavily on upgradation of human resources. The organisations should prepare well in advance for technological changes and intimate and gear their human resources towards such advancement.

'Redefining Industrial Relations' is the title of Chapter 11. The author begins this chapter by discussing historical evolution of the IR systems and collective bargaining and then compares collective bargaining with participative management. The impact of collective bargaining has been discussed with the help of case studies of eight organisations. On the basis of this he suggests alternative approaches to the theory of HRM and industrial relations. He also points out the need for some fundamental changes in the company law.

The author has rightly pointed out that the ultimate focus of any HRM or HRD in the organisational context involves preparing people and organisations for change, which requires deliberate action steps to bring about such change. In the last chapter he mentions the Indian initiatives in managing transformation. Oil companies took initiative in preparing themselves for global competition. They prepared their human resources well-in-advance and provided opportunities to increase their capabilities. Thus "it

is a unique experience where a set of competing organisations have come together through a networking system—the National Petroleum Management Programme (NPMP) by which they are able to work out certain common strategies” (p. 233). This model can act as ‘trend’ setter’ for other organisations.

This book has highlighted some of the traditional and current HRM practices with international perspective very effectively. The presentation style is simple and highly readable. The book also suggests how internationally accepted HRM concepts can be grafted/adjusted in the Indian settings.

With the help of several case illustrations the book presents the current pathetic status of training and development in the Indian organisations. Hence in upgrading the knowledge, skill and technology lot of inputs are required from training divisions of these organisations. Towards the end of each section the author suggests ways to improve training. The book successfully provokes and guides the enterprises into action to enhance the performance of people by providing need based training and further giving them opportunity to transfer their learning to the job. It will provide insights to the CEOs, human resource practitioners, consultants and policy makers for successfully managing the transformation. The book is also recommended for students and researchers in the area of HRM.

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