



## Book Review

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*Human Resource Management in Education: Contexts, Themes, and Impact (2010)*

Authors: Justine Mercer, Bernard Barker, & Richard Bird

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Limited are the books written about human resource management as applied in the school context. Commonly human resource management is tackled in general; however, without specificity, it may lack the necessary nuances to better understand a certain context. Even though organizations have similarities, they also vary from one another. The way how human resource management operates in a health care organization is entirely different in the school setting. Comprising of 11 chapters, *Human Resource Management in Education: Contexts, Themes, and Impact* explores the associations among human resources, educational management, and school philosophies. Written powerfully by Justine Mercer, Bernard Barker, and Richard Bird, this book critically analyzes the human resource management policies in schools in consonance with the global reform agenda.

Part I introduces the book's content and details. It also discusses its central aim which is to provide a holistic overview of the salient ideas of human resource management under the education arena. It argues that the previous models of each human resource management (HRM) are not sufficient to face the different issues in the school setting. The authors discuss four key concepts which can help readers better understand these succeeding chapters: (1) human capital theory, which assumes that individuals are eager to increase their knowledge and skills, otherwise known as human capital, by obtaining relevant qualifications and experiences; (2) neoliberalism, which pinpoints that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual freedoms and skills; (3) managerialism, which uses organizational processes, technologies, and management practices are applied in the school setting to make it efficient; and, lastly, (4) performativity, which takes about

minimizing costs and maximizing benefits to put more value. All these concepts reorient education systems in different locations and histories. Though neoliberalism and human capital theory have safeguarded the school personnel against discrimination, it also still cannot deter some forms of exploitation.

Meanwhile, the advancement of professionalism of teaching and other school personnel has put forward strengthening of credibility, but this contributes also to a decline in professional autonomy. A different form of professionalism is encouraged. That is, implementing democratic professionalism which seeks to reclaim the moral dimensions of teaching. The authors put forward that there is an overemphasis on individual skills and capacity to produce, which sometimes can become self-defeating. Forming relationships, helping to see the bigger picture of education, and the promotion of conscious and cosmic awareness are not much attended to which indeed are of crucial importance.

Furthermore, the authors contend, at certain times and places, that “educational visions have strengthened democracy and social justice”. Teachers are also encouraged to collectively discuss important matters, instead of being alienated in the classroom. Having meaningful discussions can lead to fruitful results. Through unions, teachers can have a more confident and united voice. The notion of democratic professionalism is pragmatic because it is rooted, not on the tangible license or diploma, but more on the actions of teachers. This seeks to make teachers work in consonance with stakeholders, most especially with the marginalized groups to promote social justice, reinforce authentic education, and eliminate oppression.

Part II delineates that, though there is a growing trend to advocate transformational and distributed leadership, to various organizations, including schools, the authors have found out that it creates a very minimal improvement in terms of students’ achievement; in fact, it is not very easy to detect. Moreover, they pinpoint that teaching quality is the single most determinant over which the school has the capacity to manage. Focusing only on transformation narrowly on distributed leadership can do a disservice to teaching quality and student achievement. The authors also cite a case study that talks about the value of relaying power and trust to middle leaders. They pinpoint that the case study’s facility operates under hyper accountability, which means expectations are so high or impractical. Since goals are set by the top management; and teams were self-directed only

in terms of means, the authors conclude that this can be limiting. Teams are constrained by the progress indications and external judgment of the top management. And this, in turn, cannot make them realize their potential and creativity.

There are two case studies that the authors have further analyzed. One is a learning organization, while the other is a greedy organization. The learning organization, according to the authors, is very useful for school leaders. A learning organization has a vision of continuous school improvement and is committed to lifelong learning. This helps, not only the faculty and administrative members, but also the students. A caveat is pinpointed due to the prevalence of performativity. School leaders must be mindful of limitations it might give. Meanwhile, a greedy organization makes people become stressed and is operating under a survival mindset; this exploits the teaching profession, and the moral purpose of teaching is discounted.

Part III puts forward observation and analysis on how the school leaders and teachers in different countries are developed. They pinpoint when leaders are appointed because of their political connection, even though they do not have any experience in the classroom setting, they may not be able to empathize with the happenings in the school premises. They lack the tacit knowledge, which is pivotal in leading organizations. This type of knowledge is the intuitive know-how that can be gained through the experience garnered in the organization itself.

Likewise, it is not fitting if school leaders expect teachers to be engaged in professional development activities, when in fact the latter could not have met their needs. This is related to the educational term, “Maslow over Bloom,” which means before any instruction or training objectives, the satisfaction of psychological and physical needs must be met. This is to produce better outcomes. The authors also recommend for teachers pursue their interests so that they can put forward creativity and passion. This is what schools advocate for students. It seems that schools do not have integrity if they do that for students solely, but not for their teachers. Hence, learning must be reflected, not only for students but also for the rest of the organizational members in the school context. The authors have also dealt with the topic of appraisal, both developmental and evaluative. They want schools, not to confuse or mix the two, for it will lead to negative repercussions or ineffective judgment. They argue also that power dynamics come into play in the context

of appraisal, which must be understood and addressed. This is because abuse may potentially manifest.

By and large, this book is very insightful and a great addition to the comprehension of the role of human resource management in the field of education; the authors have written its content bearing in mind the readers since the concepts and jargon are well defined. Hence, the consequent result is the clear elucidation of topics. Critical analyses are made cogent with case studies, making the topics concrete and clear. Caveats are not also neglected since the findings from case studies are not supposed to be hastily generalized. Indeed, this book is recommended to postgraduate students undertaking education courses, academic leaders, and other individuals who are interested to venture into the realm of academic leadership. It is anticipated that this book can spark meaningful conversations, leading to educational innovations.