

Book Review:
Human Resource Management Ethics
Authors: Deckop, J. R.

Deckop, J. R., (2006). *Human Resource Management Ethics*, Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing

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The increasing influence of the global economy with concomitant pressures, promises and threats to business competitiveness is at the root of countless challenges, successes and failures in modern corporations. At the same time, the role of human resource management has been maturing over the past few years with international governance issues such as publicity, liability and worker behaviours making it imperative for practising managers to have knowledge of what is meant by business ethics as it is applied to human resource management. Consequently, Deckop and a number of highly regarded authors have presented a collection of information on how to attune HRM practices that cultivate the identification and application of ethical principles, values and practices in organisations.

In order to define, analyse and propose solutions to ethical problems related to executive levels of the organisation and the organisation as a whole, macro and micro perspectives are presented, from psychology, social psychology, organisational behaviour, strategy, law, spirituality, critical studies, public/non profit management and a variety of functional areas within the field of HRM. Fourteen stand alone chapters are integrated into two sections, labelled 'broad based' and 'focused' perspectives; the former reflects on the nature and place of ethics in business and the role of HRM in improving individual, group and organisational ethics, and the latter on a number of functional HRM areas that demonstrate the intersection of organisational culture, values and HRM ethics. Throughout, there is the pervading theme of the practice of ethics in HRM encompassed by a fascinating range of scholarship.

The contents in Part I of the book are built on the work of Orlitsky and Swanson who refer to the concept of a lack of corporate responsibility as 'value neglect' and suggest 'value attunement' for executives to use formal and informal mechanisms to signal that employees should attend to values to promote the social contract, co-operation and symbiotic linkages to enact corporate social responsibility. By integrating the four HRM practices of recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, compensation and training and development organisations can capitalise on processes that reinforce and perpetuate 'attunement'. By emphasising the research, educational and practical implications of their model, the authors are able to develop a robust perspective on socially responsible, ethical HRM.

In Chapter 2, Lepak and Colakoglu focus on ways to connect ethics to strategic HRM. (i.e., on the impact of different stakeholder groups on HRM, how HRM systems are related to multiple outcomes and how HRM systems may be designed to achieve multiple stakeholder satisfaction). Wisdom, ethics and HRM are viewed in Chapter 3, by Kolodinsky. HRM is presented as having a servant-leadership role in establishing ethical behaviours. (i.e., HRM will position itself to promote the hierarchy of wise practice among employees to bridge tensions between 'bottom line, financial performance' and 'right' behaviour that "is not only doable, but imperative").

Cardy and Selvarajan, in Chapter 4, highlight the importance of ethical conduct and provide directions for measuring and improving such behaviours. By its very nature, ethical conduct has to do with the process of performance and most organisations have the tools and expertise to measure

and improve ethics, as well as the peers and customers who are knowledgeable sources for assessing ethical conduct.

In Chapter 5, Hatcher examines the potential of human resource development (HRD) to improve organisational ethics. By arguing that HRD and HRM are moving further apart, he emphasises the pluralistic nature of HRD which can have positive and/or negative effects on employee behaviours. Appropriate HRM practices can influence modern workplace realities such a change, speed of change, different paradigms, diverse values, outsourcing, downsizing and developing technologies.

Schumann, in Chapter 6, notes that individuals are motivated to behave ethically for different reasons depending on their stage of moral development. Kohlberg's model of moral development is reviewed. The conclusion is that through appropriate HRM policies, procedures and practices all employees can be motivated to act ethically, regardless of their stage of moral development.

From an HRM perspective of building a framework for everyday ethics built on shared moral beliefs, norms and practices, an analysis of care staff in assisted living settings is used by Circa and Messikomer, in Chapter 7, to demonstrate that failure to establish an ethical culture will lead to unintended, unwanted consequences. Building a sustainable ethical culture is essential in providing the highest quality of residential care.

Part II of the book has seven chapters. These sections present 'focussed perspectives' and a plethora of practical details about HRM involvement in ethical issues such as drug testing, sexual harassment, fairness and reciprocity in compensation, religion and pay, justice in the public and non-profit sectors, union decline and employee well being and performance. Readers will identify with the provocative ideas and issues presented. Similarly, while there is a modicum of theory to enable readers to understand the significant issues, the emphasis on providing detailed practical suggestions makes Part II especially worthwhile.

In summary, although multiple author, edited compilations of papers are good eye candy, they often fail to deliver. This cannot be said in the case of Deckop's book! The coverage of topics may be a little disjointed because chapter authors have been given carte blanche autonomy in developing their topic. However, in addition to each chapter being independent, there are a number of themes that recur during the book. (e.g., the link between organisational culture and HRM ethics, the potential conflict between the goals of profit and ethical treatment of employees, the issue of economic justice and compensation). The various themes add to the value of the specific topics which are timely, essential and relevant to the public, private and non-profit sectors.

No single book can completely satisfy all readers, and in this case, there are times when the authors present more questions than answers. Similarly, the reader may ask for more. (e.g., a chapter on HRM's role in providing ethical support for 'whistleblowers' or an index of key words used to locate themes and ideas used through the book). Nevertheless, Deckop has used authors who have excelled at being informative; they have readily met their pre set goal of stimulating thought, discussion and debate. Not only is Human Resource Management Ethics written in a clear, user friendly way, it offers sound, persuasive advice on the current state of HRM ethics with a range of positive alternatives to practitioners. Not only will the book be a well-thumbed favourite of corporate executives and HRM specialists, it should be compulsory reading for all those who face critical ethical challenges and look to HRM for solutions.

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