

Book Review:
Organisational Behaviour on the Pacific Rim
Author: **McShane, S. & Travaglione, T.**

McShane, S. & Travaglione, T. (2003). *Organisational Behaviour on the Pacific Rim*, Sydney: McGraw Hill.

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Organisational behaviour is an enjoyable subject to teach. Students, especially the many who have had some work experience, can readily relate to topics such as motivation, individual differences in the workplace, group dynamics and leadership. There are also news stories that can be used to illustrate aspects of organisational behaviour. For example: Does the decision to invade Iraq exhibit any of the characteristics of groupthink? Finally, the teacher of OB is well catered for in the area of textbooks. There are many colourful and well-designed texts on the market with features that facilitate teaching and learning. Increasingly, they are being supported by web-sites with extra resources for instructors and students.

Organisational Behaviour on the Pacific Rim by Steven McShane and Tony Travaglione, two Australian academics, exhibits many of the features you would expect to find in the best organisational behaviour textbooks. The content is arranged in four parts – a stand-alone introductory chapter, a cluster of chapters focused on the individual (covering topics such as learning, perception, personality, motivation, values, ethics and emotions), a section on team processes (including decision making, communication, power, politics, conflict, negotiation and leadership) and a section on broader organisational issues (structure, design, culture and change).

Each chapter opens with a list of learning objectives that set the scene, and a short vignette illustrating concepts that are about to be discussed in a 'real life' organisation or situation. Theories and concepts are clearly explained, with key words highlighted and definitions in the margins. Although the textbook is not overtly critical, McShane and Travaglione avoid an over-reliance on simplistic categorisations and optimistic prescriptions. For example, they eschew the familiar two-by-two grids for categorising organisational culture, explaining that such devices 'oversimplify the diversity of cultural values in organisations' (p. 535). In their discussion of organisational development, they raise a number of ethical issues associated with the practice, thereby alerting students to the idea that attempts to build 'strong' cultures by intervening in employees' private thoughts and emotions have their problematic aspects (p. 582). Ethics are not treated as a separate topic, but are woven into the text in a number of chapters. The authors are also not as gender-blind as some of those who have written popular OB textbooks, with gender making an appearance in discussions of communication, conflict management, leadership, organisational politics and motivation.

There is abundant case study material in the book. As well as the chapter-opening vignettes, there are short 'reality checks' dotted throughout the book which again relate theoretical concepts to real-life situations. There are photographs with short descriptions and questions relating to the content. The book comes with a CD containing short video clips illustrating OB phenomena in companies such as BHP, Billiton and Virgin airlines. There are the customary end-of-chapter case studies with discussion questions. And if all this is not enough, there is more material on the accompanying web-site at www.mhhe.com/au/mcshane. In keeping with the Pacific rim focus of the text, the cases feature organisations from Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Korea, Japan and the United States, among others. As well as end-of-chapter case studies, there are team exercises

suitable for tutorial work, and self-assessment exercises to enhance participation and interest.

The text is suitable for undergraduate classes, and the wealth of material allows for considerable choice and customisation. I have only one criticism, which does not so much relate to this text in particular, but to introductory organisational behaviour textbooks in general. Human behaviour and the nature of social organisation are fascinating topics that have been probed by many great thinkers for centuries. The fields of philosophy, psychology and anthropology are rich with insightful attempts to answer profound questions relating to human nature, social structures and interaction. It is a pity that so many OB texts gloss over or ignore this material, favouring instead an approach that concentrates on naming and listing phenomena (four styles of leadership, five sources of power, six methods of decision-making) rather than probing the fundamental nature of the human interactions that give rise to these phenomena. While in-depth exploration of these matters is rightfully the preserve of sociology and psychology courses, more consideration of them in organisational behaviour texts, perhaps through the ideas of thinkers such as Weber, Marx, Freud, G. H. Mead and Mary Douglas, would deepen students' understanding of the topics that they study.

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