Book reviews

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Keywords *Employee relations, Industrial relations, Human resource management*

Abstract *Reviews three books in the field of employment relations, industrial relations and human resource management:* Employment Relations: Continuity and Change: Policies and Practices *by E. Rose;* Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice *by M. Salamon; and* Human Resource Management A Critical Text*, edited by J. Storey. The review highlights the tension between the academic requirement for rigour in research and the publisher's requirement for a text that will have commercial value. It raises the point that textbooks often define of a research discipline for those outside academic circles. The review provides a detailed account of each book and compares their strengths and weaknesses. Concludes with a call to debate further what is required in a good textbook.*

Employment Relations: Continuity and Change: Policies and Practices
E. Rose
Pearson Education
Harlow
2001
702 pp.
ISBN 0201-34299-5
£28.99 (paperback)

Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice
M. Salamon
Pearson Education
Prentice Hall
2000
4th edition
617 pp.
ISBN 0-273-64646-X
£29.99 (paperback)

Human Resource Management A Critical Text
Edited by J. Storey
Thomson Learning
2001
2nd edition
371 pp.
ISBN 1-86152-605-9
£24.99 (paperback)

In recent years the trend in the social sciences, especially the business social sciences, has been toward ever more comprehensive texts. Eventually it seems each field of study may need only one, albeit hefty, text (book). At least two of the books under

Personnel Review
Vol. 33 No. 6, 2004
pp. 711-719

0048-3486
DOI 10.1108/00483480410562951

review reflect this shift toward comprehensiveness – in content and in what it aims to do.

Regardless of its comprehensiveness, a textbook has an unheralded, and unappreciated role. This is especially so in fields around employment relations with their ill-defined boundaries and uncertain future. Yet, even in the self-confident disciplines like economics, the text will be, for the student, a most enduring aspect of the study. In EMPREL 101 or 701, the student may well have their first and last view of a discipline. In those weeks or months of study, the student will learn not only what is the basic content but also some of the hidden language of the invisible college, the secret signs and priorities, and what is excluded as unimportant in terms of content, method or epistemology (see Platt, 1996; Johnston, 2000; Kelly, 1999).

Consideration of the attributes of texts has become even more important in recent years with the commodification of academic knowledge itself. The content and choice of textbooks depend as much on publishers' choices and priorities as on the decision of academics to begin the arduous, lonely and often unfulfilling task of presenting their disciplines for students in a way that allows for comprehensiveness, rigour, accuracy and accessibility.

Moreover, and in part because their worth is based on sales potential, textbooks, both reflect and affect a discipline. Contemporary texts frequently tend to reflect the mainstream of a discipline precisely because they sell better than iconoclastic texts. Publishers have no place for the marginal or innovative, or the so-called heterodox. Thus textbooks also affect the future of a discipline because what is presented in the text tends to become the basis for the next generation of scholars, and in the case of business disciplines, they can also determine the epistemological foundation for the next generation of practitioners. Thus, a text will overtly and implicitly legitimate particular kinds of knowledge and knowledge-getting, and by selective critique or elision, de-legitimate other forms of knowledge. Very often the decisions of what to publish and what is acceptable within a publication are as much decisions of the publishers as of the academics. For publishers though, the decisions are based simply on what will sell in an era when competition and pressures for increasing profits are supreme considerations. For publishers, decisions about what will sell are not simply based on academic merit, but also on the popularity, of a discipline, as measured by student numbers. Yet if only the orthodox and the popular are taught and sold, then dynamism and self-critical scholarship may fade and "heterodoxy", of itself a value laden term, becomes increasingly marginalized. This is not to diminish the academic rigour and pedagogical value of "orthodox" texts, but rather to emphasise that what is ultimately sold as a text or textbook is the product of multiple decisions, which are not underpinned wholly by intellectual, pedagogical and other academic criteria.

It is appropriate then to review textbooks within such considerations:

- against what the author or editor claims are the aims and objectives of the text;
- against what were laid out as the generic attributes of texts (comprehensive, rigorous, accurate and lively, accessible, sufficient foundation); and
- against what the text demonstrates about the core of a discipline.

The substance of this review therefore will first evaluate the two employment relations/industrial relations text, then examine Storey's edited HRM text. The reasons for such separation are manifold. Most obviously, the publications of Salamon and

Rose are introductory texts in what is a clearly different discipline from that of Storey's edited anthology. Indeed the former are authored rather than edited.

Despite the avowed difference in the two fields by Rose, the employment relations/industrial relations texts share a number of attributes. Both texts have evident pedagogical intent, insofar as both provide explanation, discussion, exercises case studies to enliven and illustrate. As well both of these texts seek to cover all foundation aspects of the discipline, and in consequence are huge – Salamon has 600 pages while Rose has 700 pages. They both seek to cover all elements of the discipline, in glossy layout with case study boxes, summaries and exercises. In Salamon's text there are open-ended activities and suggestions for further reading, while in Rose there are self-evaluation exercises throughout with specific answers at the end of each chapter – possibly too many? Perhaps it reflects the greater capacity of the modern student to read, digest and analyse than previously, but it must surely take students every waking moment, if they really do complete the exercises, read critically and analytically all of the topics, concepts and further reading in a 12 or 14 week semester, and then read research journals and other sources besides. However, in this respect Salamon and Rose are simply maintaining market standard, and, mostly, they do it well. I would quibble with the specificity of Rose's SE exercises – the notion that there is one best answer or one simple framework seems counter to scholarly approaches of critical analysis, but it is a quibble.

Indeed, Ed Rose aims for a reader-friendly text that is "written in a way which is easily understandable to the reader but without making the content appear simplistic". (Rose, p. xv). Rose's introductory chapter on "The nature and context of employment relations" is comprehensive insofar as it attempts to deal with terminology, "industrial relations vs employment relations", the historical context of UK industrial relations, and a fairly traditional categorisation of approaches to analysing industrial relations. The topics are interesting and useful, especially the inclusion of some brief economic discussion, but in some respects the chapter is too short for what it intends to do, and perhaps conveys to students a simplicity and surety that is not in keeping with his goal of avoiding simplism.

Salamon's *Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice* seeks to provide a framework of concepts and knowledge for understanding IR, and to present knowledge in a way that facilitates a student's learning, taking account of contextual issues, both locally in the UK and "within international variations in styles, institutions and conduct of industrial relations" (Salamon, p. xii). In so doing Salamon provides in each chapter, boxes of learning objectives, definitions, key issues, diagrams, tables and case studies all set out with boxes in contrasting colours and bullet points all aimed at effectively facilitating student learning. There is a research project for a technological determinist awaiting, in which the hypothesis might deal with the great and unquestioned contribution of the capacity of modern presentation technology to ensure the bullet point as central to the transmission of scholarly ideas. It seems no powerpoint lecture or textbook is complete without bullet points to simplify and clarify.

The first three chapters provide a solid and thoughtful foundation, dealing as they do with approaches, context, concepts and values. This awareness of the significance of values is a notable feature of industrial relations. Indeed, what differentiates IR from HRM is that as a discipline its scholars have always been self-conscious about the centrality of values and ideology. By contrast while HRM scholars have tended to be

more positivist, yet more ideologically bound, in promoting explicitly and implicitly the essential causes of enterprise values. The role of values is evident in Salamon which begins with a better than usual survey of the multiple ideologies at play in IR analysis. In particular chapter 3 of Salamon's text is unusual and potentially excellent in providing a series of explanations of the concepts and values that Salamon sees as informing industrial relations scholarship and practice. These concepts and values include fairness, equity, power and authority, individualism, collectivism, integrity and trust. It is not that these are new to industrial relations – as noted above values have generally been integrated into IR frameworks. Rather the early chapters of Salamon are more comprehensive and better structured than introductory sections of most texts. The difficulty is that like the IR "theories" canvassed in chapter 1, these values, theories and concepts seem quite separate from the rest of the book. What a wonderful employment relations/industrial relations text it would be, if those themes were sustained – if the "theories", language and "hidden" meanings of the discipline shone through the sections on practices and processes, instead of the familiar deadly descent into description, implicit opinion and serial citations. Having said that it is worth noting that Rose attempts to continue some "theoretical" themes through some of the chapters, but they tends toward the simplistic, such as the 1970s conceptualisations of Fordism and Taylorism.

Perhaps not surprisingly both texts cover much of the same material and in a similar order. The largest section by far in Salamon's text is trade unions. Salamon has three chapters on trade unions covering development and function, organisation and structure, and much of the chapter on representation, that is over 120 pages on trade unions. By contrast, chapter 7, "Management", is about 60 pages and the government as a party within the IR system is accorded fewer than 40 pages. This imbalance is one of classic attributes of industrial relations study, and is arguably a weakness in most IR textbooks. Rose aims for less coverage of trade unions, perhaps reflecting his view that where industrial relations takes an "exclusively collective orientation to the employment relations", employment relations examines "not just institutions but how the employment relationship operates in practice" (Rose, p. 2). Curiously though, it is Salamon who has a comprehensive section on pay and working arrangements, including performance related pay where Rose focuses on what he might call industrial relations.

Both texts have good and comprehensive chapters on government policies and legislation, with one major omission. Neither author gives sufficient weight, in the view of this reviewer, to social and economic policies such as welfare, trade and economic reform that have a major effect on the employment relationship. Too close a focus on trade union and employment legislation can ignore the ways in which governments can determine the working lives of employees. Salamon and Rose are not the first to omit these important aspects of government activity – indeed this omission is almost a standard in industrial relations texts, and needs to be remedied.

Having described and discussed the parties, both texts also cover collective bargaining, industrial action, employee participation, disciplinary and grievance procedures, redundancy and negotiation. These are all covered thoroughly if somewhat discursively. In this respect I have to confess one of my gripes about IR texts is the watertight separateness of topics. It would have been helpful to students for example to link union roles (chapter 4), collective bargaining (chapter 9) and pay

(chapter 14) rather than leave each as separate and unrelated topics. Arguably one of the great potential strengths of industrial relations as an academic discipline is the holistic approach that scholars and analysts take in their investigations of work and the employment relationship.

The sections on industrial action in both texts focus almost exclusively on strikes. Disappointingly Rose's discussion of the "causes" of strikes takes a rather simplistic perspective, assuring his readers for example that "The biggest single cause of strikes has … been disputes over wages … [but] disputes concerning redundancy have become more important … ". Anyone who has explored the anatomy of a strike will know that this kind of naïve causality misrepresent the nature of work and employment.

In Salamon's text oversimplified discussion relates not so much to particular areas but rather in the attempt to internationalise the text with case studies from a variety of countries. I have sympathy with the notion of broadening students' understanding of industrial relations but too often the international references are a-contextual or oversimplified. Good comparative industrial relations avoid assumptions that, for example, all trade union movements are the same. Despite such quibbles, these are good textbooks. Both of these texts are thorough accessible and comprehensive.

Assessing the nature of Storey's edited text, *Human Resource Management: A Critical Text*, is rather more difficult. This text has 18 chapters, covering several major elements of a traditional HRM text, such as strategy, training, pay, change management, aspects of HRD and the curious field of international HRM. It differs from the standard introductory texts in omitting elements such as motivation and leadership, but then covers additional areas dealing with the nature of HRM as a field of study and the place of ethics. In these respects then it is not a core textbook, but rather an edited anthology which seeks to provide a "critical" approach (more about that later) to aspects of HRM. This is not a bad thing for the advanced management students who are the target readership.

The text is a second edition of the successful text edited by Storey in 1995, and while its claims that each of the chapters from the previous edition "has been fully rewritten" (p. ix) does not bear too close scrutiny in a few cases, the text in the main deals with some recent debates. On the other hand the continuing debate about just what is HRM remains pretty much in the old discourse of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In this text HRM continues to be seen as both as a newish and specific field, or set of practice, or a universal. The definition depends on the writer and the problem they seek to investigate. This is a pity because the advances in areas such as discourse analysis offer valuable insights in the scholarly analysis of management. Ignoring methodological developments in nearby areas of study which can illuminate vexed issues and debates can have perilous consequences, as the field of IR found in the 1990s when it was first swamped by HRM. However, as noted above the texts tend to deal with what scholars perceive to be the mainstream.

Storey's introductory chapter was slightly disappointing. As a prolific author and highly experienced academic researcher Storey could have provided an in-depth and illuminating analysis drawing on his considerable experience. Storey's chapter 1, "HRM today: an assessment", while ambitious and earnest in its defence of HRM as practice and a coherent scholarly endeavour, is more defensive than defending. For example, Storey dismisses the critics of HRM as unhelpful. He asserts that Keenoy's conclusion "that

HRM could be regarded as 'a collective noun for the multitude of concepts and methods devised … to manage and control the employment relationship …'" reflects how the term is "already widely, indiscriminately and unhelpfully deployed". This kind of dismissal deserved rather more critical explanation, especially when Storey follows up two paragraphs later with a claim that HRM is a recipe – which I take to mean in part a "multitude of concepts and methods", and then in the following pages with discussion of HRM in practice which again highlights the diversity of perception.

What are the standout chapters in this text? Legge's chapter "Silver bullet or spent round" is written in Legge's usual lively style. Her objective is to explore the notions arising from "the search for the Holy Grail of establishing a causal relationship between HRM and performance" (Legge, p. 23). In the process, Legge offers many small gems of analysis, such as her lucid and well founded criticism of uncritical reliance on surveys, and a salient discussion of the ways in which HRM is problematic precisely because positivist analysts need a conceptualisation of HRM as a solid and measurable entity despite the compelling arguments showing HRM to be at best a "hologram", or simply evanescent. Similarly, her final argument and major conclusion focus on the continuing interest in academic HRM. As she has done before, Legge develops the case that academic HRM derives not so much from practical or intellectual concerns, but rather from increasing credentialism in the academy, and the dominance of American business schools. Yet, this is not classic incisive analysis that we have come to expect from Legge. There are too many asides, and the "gems" of analysis are poorly linked. The over-ambitious nature of the chapter is evident in Legge's final sentence which is a masterpiece of mixed metaphors, where silver bullets, Holy grails and gravy trains jostle for attention. Nevertheless, Legge's capacity to provoke critical thinking has much flair.

In a testament to Legge's breadth of scholarship, Woodall and Winstanley begin their chapter with reference *inter alia* to Legge's work on ethics in HRM. Like Legge, their chapter aims to explore several issues, "adopting a multi-faceted approach using a variety of frameworks." So this too is an interesting and wide-ranging skim over some of the basics of ethics, and how they might assist the HRM professional. Yet, their definition of HRM as the "totality of behaviours of personnel managers" is rather vague, so that they tend toward a simplistic treatment of HRM practices. Job design, motivation and participation all roll out as if in a singularly uncritical undergraduate text. Similarly, although their table of everyday ethical frameworks (Woodall and Winstanley, p. 45) is a very clear and useful summary, they then diminish their obvious expertise in the area by segueing into a standard business ethics enumeration of what each ethical framework means for the HR professional. As such it is a useful introduction to ethics for a novice to the discipline, but it too suffers from too many issues over too few pages.

Part 2 of *Human Resource Management: A Critical Text* comprises four chapters under the heading of "Strategic issues". Of itself this curious term highlights the haziness about what is HRM and how it might differ from earlier perceptions forms of personnel management. This is because many argue that that the primary difference between HRM and PM is that HRM is integrated into company strategy (Purcell, pp. 62-63). This assumption suggests there is tautology in the term "strategic HRM". While each of the chapters covers aspects of strategy, an introduction to the section

examining the different perceptions, emphases and assumptions would have been useful.

Of the strategy chapters, Purcell's is likely to be the most interesting for students. It is a thoughtful discussion of terms such as HRM and strategy. This is old ground to be sure, but Purcell describes and discusses issues thoroughly, although some might query his paradoxical assertion that "Strategy is … often only 'visible' after the event…". Both Guest's and Sisson's chapters in the HRM as strategy section are only somewhat changed from the previous edition. Sisson's chapter "HRM and the personnel function – a case of partial impact" is a hopeful piece on how "human resources" might expand. For Sisson, HRM is an obvious and specific concept, key ingredients of which include "single status and guarantees of employment security", (Sisson, p. 78). Sisson is hopeful yet asserts that managers are unwilling to develop firms' capability for high commitment management which is seen as a proxy for HRM. The curious and yet tantalising conclusion to this chapter claims the need for "a serious review of … UK's corporate governance arrangements that are so inimical to investment in human capital" (Sisson, p. 95). This deserved much more discussion. The following chapter, Guest's "Industrial relations and HRM", *inter alia*, provides lucid argument and evidence for low levels of adoption of "high commitment or progressive human resource practices" (Guest, p. 111). Although the haziness about what is HRM weakens these chapters, and such haziness is problematic, these chapters have a foundation of good research and critical and questioning core of good traditional scholarship.

The chapter by Schuler, Jackson and Storey, "HRM and its link with strategic management" is perhaps the one that will be most used by students. Yet it is the chapter which is among the least "critical", in any sense of the word. It begins with a determination to link strategic management and HRM and concludes that "all human resource activities can be regarded as strategic" It is replete with lists, bullet points, diagrams, statements of certainty and clear definitions of terms such as vision and mission. Unlike the rest of the book it is not "text-heavy" and will be seen as providing all the answers, the silver bullet perhaps.

Iles' chapter "Employee resourcing" is rather more measured and cautious. Iles is fascinated with employee resourcing and how perceptions of employee resourcing vary depending on analytic frameworks. He conveys his enthusiasm and his wide research, mostly with clarity, the occasional sixty word sentence notwithstanding.

Ashton and Felstead's "From training to lifelong learning: the birth of the knowledge society" suggest some inducement is needed to expand and improve levels and availability and quality of training. While the front end of the chapter has changed only somewhat from the earlier edition, the latter section seeks to trace the extent and nature of training in UK organisations and the resultant effectiveness. The authors begin with assumptions that the rhetoric of HRM has given way to a new discourse in the field of training and development namely HRD, and in the process throw doubts on the old HRM methods of integrating training with the business plan, doubts which may surprise some academic HRM analysts. This chapter is interesting thoughtful and mostly cautiously and critical.

The reader is caught unawares then to read the first sentence of the next chapter. Salaman's chapter "The management of corporate culture change" which is "Chandler was wrong". Such a bold assertion (which he quickly softens) is bound to grab the

reader. In this chapter Salaman focuses on the role of management in notions of enterprise and the ways in which employees are reinvented as "enterprising" subjects of the corporate culture. Salaman not only develops a solid rational argument for his claims but then provides two case studies (oldish but illustrative) from which to demonstrate the facets of his claims, making a thought-provoking case for the seemingly ominous changes to the employment relationship.

Kessler's chapter on reward systems explores the causal factors and the ways in which causality might be understood. He draws on a variety of analytical approaches under the general rubrics of the "universalistic" and "contingency" frameworks. This provides a useful discussion that highlights the ambiguities inherent in two frameworks, and the need for continuing investigation into reward systems. Marchington's chapter, "Employee involvement" also draws to a fair extent on his entry in the previous edition of this book. The breadth of coverage of employee involvement in this chapter would provide a good introduction to the notions and underpinning questions of employee participation.

The chapters by Iles, Ashton and Felstead, Salaman, Kessler and Marchington comprise the section called "Key practice areas of HRM". Some discussion drawing the arguments and ideas inherent in these chapters would have been helpful to the student reader, together perhaps with some discussion about how and why the topics covered in this section are indeed "key" practice areas. This absence of linking sections is also notable in the next section on international HRM that also seems to have a different meanings for different writers. Brewster's chapter draws heavily on the earlier edition of this book, while Kochan and Dyer's chapter seems almost unchanged. It seems unfortunate there was not more up-to-date comparative analysis, given the research work of these well-respected US scholars.

Scullion in his chapter on "International HRM" makes some efforts to come to terms with the notion of international HRM but despite differentiating between expatriate management and broader forms of "international" HRM, much of his attention is focussed on expatriate managers. Nevertheless, Scullion draws on some useful material in promoting his argument on the linkages and importance of strategy and senior management. Schuler also emphasises the competences and roles of HR managers, but he takes a different direction, in his focus on "HR issues in international joint ventures and alliances". The chapter is clearly set out with diagrams, bullet points and tables to clarify assertions and prescriptions. In prescribing Pucik's (1988) set of ten activities for HR managers, Schuler highlights the value of clarity. However, the absence of any critical analysis weakens the argument somewhat.

The final section of the Storey text focuses on future directions, and comprises two chapters with the editor as an author in both. The survey of knowledge management co-written by Storey and Quintas is a short useful survey of the field of knowledge management, although one might query the claim that knowledge management has possibly been "the most significant development – in management and organization theory". There is also some useful discussion on the linkages and ambiguities inherent in the terms "learning organisation" and "knowledge management". The last chapter, also by John Storey, is a brief three-and-a-half page overview of some aspects of human resource practice in the UK. Storey ponders over what these HRM phenomena suggest for the future of British human resource management practices. Arguably there could have been a more analytical conclusion. This is especially so given the multiple

conceptualisations of HRM evident in this text, and indeed hazy terminology in allied aspects, such as "strategic HRM"

Storey's edited text contains some gems, and there is no doubt that it is a worthy ambition to try and achieve a critical and analytical approach to aspects of human resource management. However the text lacks integration and indeed perhaps needed a tougher editorial hand so the text as a whole could have met with Storey's objectives of a critical assessment in several sense of the word critical.

Conclusion

All three of these texts highlight the difficulties inherent in providing student readers (and their teachers) with rigorous, sufficient, and apt source material that also develops in the would-be scholar or practitioner critical and analytical skills. Moreover a text is the foundation of a discipline, and thus must encompass all the salient elements of that discipline, however defined. Storey's edited text demonstrates that a lack of comprehensiveness can be problematic, while also re-emphasising the inherent difficulties of the edited book – the unevenness in various authors' skills and commitment to the publication and the need for integrating material to offset the unevenness.

On the other hand a text too large may drown in its own weightiness. The texts by Rose and Salaman are massive and daunting. Yet these two authors were perhaps more successful than Storey in achieving their objectives, and meeting the criteria of liveliness, accessibility and substantiveness. These sorts of considerations highlight the importance of texts as the most widely known and most fundamental re-presentations of a discipline. Textbooks represent the discipline to those outside the discipline, and what is contained in them remains the abiding recollection of students long after qualifications have been completed. Further debate over what constitutes a good text(book) is needed.

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