

Book Reviews / Comptes Rendus

Manuel London. (1995). *Achieving Performance Excellence in University Administration: A Team Approach to Organizational Change and Employee Development*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group. Pp 272; Price \$59.95.

Reviewed by John G. Dimond, University of Toronto.

This volume is written in the context of ongoing resource constraint and the pressure to do better with less. The “excellence” that it seeks to elucidate involves the non-academic administrative activities of a moderately large state university (S.U.N.Y. – Stony Brook) over the first half of this decade. Examples are drawn from elsewhere, but basically the book is a compendium of change-inducing activities as seen from the perspective of a professor of management who served as Deputy to the President during this period. Its themes are “that organizational development is evolutionary, that employee development is critical to meeting changing environmental conditions and expectations, that work is a process, and that cooperative teamwork is essential to effective work processes” (p. 248). In such an environment, management emphasizes, not “control, monitoring, organizing, and evaluation”, but rather “coaching, facilitating, educating, giving feedback, and managing change” (p. 9). All managers must concern themselves with human resource issues, in addition to whatever formal role they have on the organization chart.

With this perspective in mind, the author begins by setting out examples of how a President and a President’s Deputy exercise leadership in directing change (chapter 2). The next chapter sets out a number of ways

in which human resource professionals are proactive in developing programs and policies to facilitate organizational change. Here the author draws on the experiences of his previous life in human resources management and research at AT&T. New human resource programs will be central to organizational renewal in universities, just as they have been in the private sector:

IBM and AT&T are examples of how the profile of the human resource department was raised in times of change. The human resource departments in these firms increasingly worked with line units to identify and manage labor force imbalances, communicate organization restructuring, identify requirements for new managerial and technical skills in light of the changing business environment, lead quality improvement efforts . . . assess employee attitudes, and design new career planning and development programs in downsized organizations. (p. 48)

Chapters 4 and 5 contain basic descriptions of several processes — overall strategic planning and the activities involved in financial, enrollment and facilities planning. Their connection with the main themes of the volume is not drawn out; many of these chapters are contributed by other authors. Professor London makes the point in his introductory chapter that these activities “build a sense of teamwork, belonging and unity of purpose,” and “rely on user input, expert judgment and shared decision-making” (p. 11). As such, they presumably require some of the skills that human resource professionals are concerned to identify and inculcate. However, the planning processes are simply described without further analysis. The connection with the author’s main themes is a bit more clearly made in chapter 6, which describes activities aimed at increasing the effectiveness of units — internal audit, administrative reviews, management development and the negotiation of agreements between departments based on analyses of the costs of services provided by one unit to another. Such activities are presented and promoted as being “less control mechanisms than they are sources of support for organizational analysis, self-reflection, and interdepartmental cooperation and smoother, more effective operations” (p. 123). Again, however, the reader is left largely to draw the connection on one’s own, as the chapter has a number of authors, with Professor London contributing only introductory and concluding paragraphs. Alternatively, the reader can flip

back to the introductory chapter, to be told that these functions provide opportunities for continuous learning. The same pattern is repeated in chapter 7, which is described as a “compendium of service quality measurement techniques and applications” (p. 125).

The final five chapters deal more explicitly with the human resource dimensions of change. Chapter 8 sets out several examples of team building efforts among executives and senior managers. In chapter 9 the University’s master plan for employee training and development is presented as a necessary component in an organization concerned to increase the quality of its operations and therefore its competitiveness. Chapters 10 and 11 deal with techniques of individual performance appraisal and the problems of dealing with low performers and difficult managers. The book concludes with an argument for the recognition of a systematic approach to human resources as a key strategic tool in the management of change. University administration should model a “learning organization,” characterized by flexible and innovative management of teams and processes.

The volume contains descriptions of several successful processes that might be models to emulate, for example in the conduct of regular reviews of administrative units and in the integration of academic and non-academic interests in facilities renewal, the latter drawn from Berkeley. There is also an interesting discussion of abusive managerial behaviour. On the whole, however, there is too much description and too little evaluation. Moreover, much of the description reads as if it had been assembled for other purposes and simply imported into this volume without further editing. In terms of substance, there is little that is not being tried also at other institutions and one is left with the sense that the volume was assembled speedily with too little attention to what lessons could be drawn. Ultimately, the emphasis placed on the importance of human resource issues suffers from the approach chosen and a number of the most important questions in this area are not explored. For example, there is no description or analysis of how to obtain the allegiance of a university’s academic leadership to a strategic use of human resource policies and programs. There must be some interesting tales to tell — and lessons to be learned — about this dimension of the problem in the moderately large research university being presented, but they are not set out here.

