

S. Borkowska (Editor) [2007]

**Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi w Polsce.
Przeszłość, teraźniejszość, przyszłość
[Human resource management in Poland:
The past, present and future]**

HR Series, Wolters Kluwer Business Publishing
House

“Where are we coming from and where are we going?” That is the shortest possible description of the substantive contents of the book being reviewed. It is a reference to the words of Prof. S. Borkowska, the volume’s editor and one of the most distinguished people in the Polish community of experts in the field of human resource management.

The discussed publication provides the reader with a plethora of reflections and diagnoses intended to attempt to answers the following questions:

- How is human resource management currently being presented as a scientific specialty? Does it and to what extent does it meet standards required of all sciences (including claims to being a clearly defined field of theoretical and exploratory interest with its own methods for verifying scientific hypotheses and conducting research)?
- How is the identity of human resource management expressed, especially in comparative references to other sciences in the realm of economics and management?
- Where are the substantive sources of the scientific specialty known as human resource management and what is their character?
- How does the map of Poland’s leading scientific centers involved in the conceptual–research and educational spheres of human resource management present itself, and how are major achievements in these fields expressed?
- On what level are the real human resource management standards in organizations functioning in Poland, especially in companies that are owned by Polish capital? Which practical aspects of this management should be considered critical and which note relatively favorable states?
- What mechanisms serve as the basis for the dynamic growth of human resource management as a scientific specialty and to what extent can directions of its future development be predicted?

Just the above listing of questions touched upon by the reviewed book demonstrates that it is an unusual and unique item on the Polish publishing market. Both reflections of a more general nature relating to the condition of human resource management as a scientific discipline and the changes of a paradigmatic nature taking place within its sphere as well as the synthesizing of diagnoses of organizational pragmatism in this field as undertaken by diverse authors from multiple points of view and on the basis of various sets of empirical data are what make this book so unique. Publications of a similar substantive profile that simultaneously present original and often controversial views of various authors (even mutually exclusive views, which is by no means a weakness of the book, but rather a trump card generating creative reflection in the reader) are impossible to find among the publishing offers in the area of human resource management.

The reviewed book is made up of four sections that are basically aligned with the above presented matters.

Part I, "Ideas, Schools, and People: Roads to Human Resource Management," provides a rather detailed characterization of the conceptual and research achievements of Poland's major scientific and educational centers grouping leading specialists in the field of human resource management (Gdańsk, Katowice, Cracow, Lublin, Łódź, Poznań, Toruń, Warsaw, and Wrocław). A look is provided at not only human resource management achievements at colleges and universities, but also the Polish Academy of Sciences (Labor and Social Policy Scientific Committee and Organization and Management Scientific Committee).

This part of the discussed publication also includes two essays in which the respective authors discuss certain processes in the development of various scientific disciplines and specialties that, in hindsight, served as the basis for human resource management in Poland.

In "The Development of Economics and Labor Economics," W. Golnau states that human resource management emerged as a result of the transformation of labor economics (in Poland after 1989) and makes reference to the level of organization, thus clearly differentiating itself from labor economics that is a scientific discipline describing labor market phenomena occurring on a macro-scale.

A. Sajkiewicz, the author of "The Pedigree of HRM in Poland," conducts a synthesizing diagnosis of the most important sources of contemporary human resource management as a scientific specialty, taking into account Polish reality. She looks into these sources as revolve around the following triad of sciences: (1) work organization and management, (2) philosophy and sociology, and (3) economics and labor economics. These sciences provide the roots for human resource management to the extent to which they are concerned with man as a participant in teamwork.

Part II of the reviewed publication, "The Practice of Human Resource Management," contains four chapters whose authors use their own data sets to develop independent diagnoses of real human resource management standards at work in organizations operating in Poland.

Thus, A. Pocztowski and B. Urbaniak, the authors of "HRM Practice in Polish Companies," utilized information culled from application forms submitted by organizations taking part in successive editions of the nationwide Human Resource Management Leader Competition in order to formulate a synthesized evaluation in this area. It should be stressed that these are usually organizations implementing improved and high level human resource management standards. The authors maintain that human resources in these organizations are treated as significant capital of a strategic nature, where the importance of the personnel function is decidedly growing in their case as it drives a multiplying of value for stakeholders. Also noticeable is the clear shortening of distance between Polish and foreign companies operating in Poland.

In the chapter "HRM Diagnosis: 2006 Studies," M. Juchnowicz and T. Rostkowski state that many Polish companies appreciate the role of human resource management as a factor for business success on the basis of the results of questionnaires completed by personnel managers and specialists. However, Polish companies endow the personnel function with strategic importance to too little an extent. The perspective of running operations is clearly dominant. It is this state of affairs that is, to a great extent, responsible for the lack of proper integration among the individual human resource management functions. Many companies have difficulties in employing independent, competent specialists as well as qualified executive personnel, which leads the authors to the discovery that these organizations are presently loosing the "war for talent" and will soon be unable to effectively compete on the market with foreign companies.

In his turn, C. Szmidt presents human resource management practices on the basis of the results of questionnaires used on approximately 160 companies employing no more than 250 workers in "HRM and the Competitiveness of Small and Medium Enterprises." The diagnostic picture of the personnel function in small and medium enterprises in Poland as seen on the basis of this analysis is not favorable. To a great extent it comes down to administrative actions, regulations based on current conditions, and is characterized by minimal orientation towards the development of worker competencies. An optimistic accent stemming from research described by Szmidt is the relatively high level of education of the managerial staffs of small and medium enterprises as well as their good substantive background for filling their functions. What is more, many personnel managers are correct in their awareness of cause-and-effect relations found between low human resource management standards in companies and their lower levels of competitiveness on the market.

For their part, D. Lewicka and A. Orlińska–Gondor provide a diagnosis of the competencies of personnel managers on the basis of their own research on twelve Polish companies from the *Rzeczpospolita* 500 list. Especially such personnel manager competencies as specialized substantive know-how, professional experience in human resource management, and loyalty to the organization met with a relatively high assessment on the part of company staff. Low ratings were particularly assigned to the knowledge of personnel managers in other areas of company operations (production processes, marketing and sales, and IT systems) as well as the ability to measure the real efficiency of actions in the realm of human resource management. The authors stress that such competency deficits among personnel managers may be a significant barrier to the cohesive integration of company management.

Part III of the reviewed book, “HRM Identity,” is devoted to the problem of detailing the range of reality that is the area of interest of human resource management as well as reflections on the scientific status of this specialty. The need to formulate substantial and status definitions is important not only in the phase of scientific discipline emergence, but also under conditions of changes in paradigm. In the case of human resource management, it is probably a question of the second situation: Various sectors of the post-industrial economy, based on knowledge as a prime development factor, have been subject to dynamic shaping as of the last turn of the centuries, which is forcing a change in the paradigm of organizational management.

S. Borkowska stresses the fact that the subject of interest of human resource management is the management of human work on an organizational level in “The Question of HRM Identify.” At the same time she notes that a certain inadequacy is coalescing in the traditional name of this specialty with respect to its substantive content. However, at the same time she maintains that human resource management has a well based status as a scientific specialty.

J. Szambelańczyk presents a different view on this matter in “Controversies Around the Scientific Identity of HRM.” There, the scientific status of this specialty is brought into question. The view of the author is that the cause for the controversy in this area stems from the multiplicity of terms relating to the subject of interest of human resource management as well as the fact that it mainly applies alien borrowings from other fields through research methods.

The fourth and final section of this book, “A Look into the Future,” revolves around projected directions of human resource management development in terms of both new questions to examine and changes in paradigm.

In their article, “Development Tendencies of the Personnel Function in Organizations in Poland,” Z. Antczak and T. Listwan conduct an overview of changes taking place in the area of human resource management pragmatism in organizations operating in Po-

land, starting with the transformation breakthrough of 1989. The primary vectors of these transitions are oriented at a decentralization of the personnel function, its broader incorporation into processes implementing company objectives, and the computerization of the sub-functions forming it. Significant differences in the manner of implementing personnel functions are clearly marked between small and medium, and large organizations as well as between Polish businesses and those belonging to foreign capital. The substantive level of the performance of the personnel function in organizations is systematically improving and these processes will probably be continued in the future.

In his "Around the Strategic Problems and Development Directions of HRM," A. Pocztowski identifies several challenges facing human resource management in the context of the emerging structure of the new knowledge-based economy as well as challenges appearing in connection with Poland's entry into the European Union. In the view of the author, the integration of the personnel function and company strategy, company orientation towards entrepreneurial development and employee innovativeness, the building of knowledge capital in the organization, the molding of task-project employment, personnel risk management, the computerization and virtualization of the personnel function, the building of company social responsibility, and finally concern over the building of a state of life-work balance among workers will be among the most important factors shaping the development of human resource management over the upcoming years.

A different and unique look at the mechanisms of human resource management development as a scientific specialty may be found in J. Strużyna's article "Tendencies in the HRM Niche." This author identifies two possible ways of presenting the changes taking place in the area of human resource management. First, there is the historical perspective, which comes down to a description of successive phases in the development of this specialty ("a linear historical layout"). Then there is the population environment perspective, which makes reference to mechanisms known from the theory of evolution. In this light, human resource management entity populations can consist of human resource management concepts in competition with each other. These are obviously created and maintained by various centers and groups. By relating the principles and mechanisms of population environmental theory to questions of human resource management development, it is possible to assume that competition, co-evolution, and adaptation to new conditions in the niche are the relations that may occur among already existing and newly emerging concepts. As a result of these processes, some are replaced by and "absorbed" by others or adaptive changes occur within them. New "genetic" concepts make their appearance with human resource management as an answer to new external factors, including answers to organizational needs (e.g. the concept of knowledge management). In bringing his reasoning to a close, the author formulates the conclusion that "in its niche, at least in Poland, human resource management is alive and kicking."

In concluding this presentation of the book *Human Resource Management in Poland: The Past, Present and Future* it is necessary to ask who is the addressee. There can be no doubt that the primary addressee of the reviewed book is the scientific community and specialists involved in questions of theory, research, or education in the area of human resource management. The views and reflection presented in the book provoke the reader to think on the matter of the identify of human resource management as a paradigmatic assumption as well as with respect to current changes taking place that may therefore become an important factor in molding the self-awareness of people specializing in this problem sphere.

For similar reasons the reviewed book may also be recommended to consultants collaborating with organizations in the area of human resource management. The closing off of circles of tool-oriented actions may lead to something akin to mental routine, lowering the quality of the advisory process. Reflections provoked by the contents presented in the reviewed publication may, for their part, mold a more creative look at several practical questions in the area of human resource management that require solutions.

Students of the management sciences, especially of human resource management and related specialties revolving around questions of human work will benefit greatly by reaching for the reviewed book. These readers will find a broad perspective and generalizations allowing better understanding of the changes currently taking place in the economic sphere in the discussed publication.

To what extent can the reviewed publication be recommended for practitioners involved in the day-to-day performance of the personnel function in their organizations? They will certainly not find recommendations of the “tool” type ready for implementation in the set of organizational management practices on these pages. However, by investing their time and effort in reading many fragments of this publication, they can garner benefits of a different type: reflection on the internal logic and real standards of human resource management in their organizations as well as a perspective on desirable changes in this area.

Piotr Bobdziewicz