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Human Resource Management in the Public Sector: Examining  
International Cases

[Condrey, Stephen E](#); [Ledvinka, Christine B](#). [Public Administration Review 70.3](#) (May/Jun 2010): 500-501.

### **Abstract (summary)**

Human Resource Management in the Public Sector, edited by Rona S. Beattie and Stephen P. Osborne, is reviewed.

### **Full Text**

Human Resource Management in the Public Sector: Examining International Cases Rona S. Beattie and Stephen P. Osborne, eds., Human Resource Management in the Public Sector (New York: Routledge, 2008). 150pp. \$140.00 (cloth), ISBN: 9780415372923.

Since the advent of New Public Management (NPM) in the 1990s, public organizations worldwide have sought to make their organizations more flexible, accountable, and "business-like." Ingraham notes that "[t]he advent of new Public Management reforms - contracting for services, performance contracts, clearer political direction - returned both efficiency and individual performance to the spotlight but also focused on organizational performance" (2006, 491). Hajnal states that New Public Management was, in some quarters, treated as the scientific management of the 1990s: a type of "one best way of modern public administration" (2005, 496). He argues that in order to understand NPM's prospect, it should be examined cross-nationally.

An outgrowth of the New Public Management movement in the United States has been the "reinvention" or outright dismantling of traditional models of civil service and public personnel administrative systems (Bowman and West 2006; Condrey and Battaglio 2007; Hays and Sowa 2006). Shedding the mantle of "rule enforcers" in public organizations, personnelists have sought to reassert their strategic importance. No longer so confined by rules, regulations, policies, and procedures, they have sought to become "strategic partners" in the management of public organizations. Some examples of the personnelist's strategic decision-making role include implementing transition planning to avoid the loss of organizational knowledge when employees retire, engaging in targeted recruiting to develop a more diverse and talented workforce, and ensuring human capital development through organization-wide training policies. Human Resource Management in the Public Sector traces this nascent role in different international organizational settings.

Human Resource Management in the Public Sector is a collection of articles that appeared in *Public Management Review*, a leading British journal, after the authors originally delivered the contents as papers at the Seventh International Research Symposium on Public Management, held in Hong Kong in October 2003.

The articles concern the important topic of how government agencies are making the transition from a traditional model of public personnel administration to a broader, more

inclusive and strategic model of human resource management. This transition points to a clear shift away from the traditional, rule-bound role, in which personnelists' main responsibility involved ensuring that line managers did not violate strict civil service roles. In contrast, the strategic role requires collaboration with line managers to achieve organizational goals by meeting human capital needs. The chapters present empirical studies from the United Kingdom, France, and Australia, bringing interesting findings and concepts to light as the field shifts to become more viable in a postreinvention, New Public Management environment.

Utilizing case studies, the authors focus on the relationship between human resource management practice and organizational performance (Australian Health Service), training and development (France), organizational communication in a climate of change (Australian Department of Main Roads), work-life balance (United Kingdom), and performance management in a public safety setting (United Kingdom). An evaluation of all health service companies in Australia with 50 or more employees suggests that firms that implement strategic human resource management exhibit greater perceived organizational performance. In France, when the public sector implemented a private sector-developed policy of mandatory funding for employee training, the immediate value to public organizational performance was limited because there was little connection between the training program, strategic human resource management, and French public service goals. At the Australian Department of Main Roads, an unsuccessful effort to change organizational culture demonstrated that strategic human resource management might require structural as well as procedural amendments in order to yield improved organizational responsiveness. Additionally, managers in the United Kingdom reported improved attendance, performance, and employee relations following the implementation of work-life balance initiatives. However, unsuccessful efforts to integrate a new performance appraisal system in the United Kingdom Police Service suggests that greater accountability for employee performance may have the unintended consequence of constraining entrepreneurial behavior.

Overall, this collection is an important contribution to the field of public management and public human resource management, as each article attempts to assess the application of New Public Management concepts and techniques to actual governmental settings. It is the first such attempt to assess the actual impact of NPM on human resource management practice in a variety of settings. Given its international perspective, the book is particularly important as public human resource management scholars continue to probe and define the nature of the field. The book would have been strengthened by a concluding chapter drawing together the themes of the book and outlining a future research agenda.

In summary, *Human Resource Management in the Public Sector* provides a broad, international perspective on human resource management innovative practices. It should prove of interest to both practitioners and academics who are interested in public management and public human resource management. The book also would prove a useful supplemental text to graduate human resource management classes.

## References

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