Relations industrielles
Industrial Relations

David Jamieson and Julie O'Mara. *Managing Workforce 2000. Gaining the Diversity Advantage*

Kenneth W. Thornicroft

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Découvrir la revue

Citer ce compte rendu

Managing Workforce 2000 – Gaining the Diversity Advantage, by David Jamieson and Julie O'Mara, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991, 241 p., ISBN 1-55542-264-0

Undoubtedly, one of the most dynamic forces shaping the contemporary workforce, and organizations' concomitant human resource management (HRM) policies, is its increasing diversity as evidenced by the overall mix of gender, ages, races, and ethnic origins. Traditionally, North American organizations' human resource policies have been driven by a somewhat stereotypical view of the "typical" worker – male, married, white (usually), and if his spouse was employed at all, it was in the secondary labor market. Leaving aside the question of whether or not this model made sense at one time, clearly, today it does not. In *Managing Workforce 2000* (subtitled "Gaining the Diversity Advantage") authors David Jamieson and Julie O'Mara argue that "By valuing diversity, we can gain greater potential and creativity from the synergy of the workforce, recapturing commitment and unleashing pent-up talent" (p. 7). The authors argue that firms that are not sensitive to the needs of the changing workforce will lag behind their more forward-thinking competitors.

Jamieson and O'Mara argue that there are six principal socio-demographic trends shaping the contemporary and medium-future workforce. First, the "Baby Boom" and the ensuing "Baby Bust" pose several problems ranging from the impending shortage of entry-level workers, to the issue of motivating "Baby Boomers" when there are simply not enough promotions for all at higher levels of most hierarchically structured organizations.

Second, by the year 2000, women will constitute about one-half the workforce (versus about one-third in the mid-1970s). Three-quarters of all working women are of child-bearing age; more than half of all mothers do not withdraw from the labor market in order to "stay home and raise the kids"; and while female "wage gaps" and "glass ceilings" are still a fact of life for many women, both law and economics are forcing change.

Third, the workforce is increasingly multicultural; the focus here is to integrate, not assimilate – the American "melting pot" model may well give way to the Canadian "mosaic" model. In a multicultural workforce managers will have to rethink many HRM polices. "Attempts by managers to work together with employees of different backgrounds are likely to be hampered by communication issues, insensitivity, and ignorance of each others' motivation" (p. 22).

Fourth, in terms of education, the workforce is increasingly bimodal – the percentage of high school and college graduates has steadily increased since the early 1960s; on the other hand, so has the illiteracy rate especially within certain minority groups. Higher educated workers will demand a more stimulating and creative work environment; poorly educated workers will need extensive classroom and on-the-job training.

Fifth, persons with physical disabilities of one sort or another are refusing to accept a life without meaningful employment, and sixth, the range of personal values held by employees is arguably much wider today than it once was.

Having identified these six key trends, the authors then propose a "new management mindset", what they term Flex-management. "Flex-management is a deep appreciation of individual differences and the understanding that equality does not mean sameness... diverse needs and wants are equally respected [but] not met by treating everyone the same... Flex-management recommends creation of more individualized policies, systems, and management practices" (p. 35).

The first three chapters of the book outline these six socio-demographic trends; the balance of the book (chapters 4 to 17) advances policies and strategies that will best accommodate "Workforce 2000". These strategies fall under five general headings: "Matching People and Jobs", "Managing and Rewarding Performance", "Informing and Involving People", "Supporting Lifestyle and Life Needs" and "Taking Action". Unfortunately, in what should be the heart of this book, all we are treated to is a rather superficial treatment of several contemporary HRM initiatives ranging from flexitime and flexible benefits to daycare and employee assistance programs.

To be fair, many of the chapter topics deserve (and have received from other authors) book-length treatment. For example, chapter 14 concerns "flexible benefits", that is, a benefits program this is not based on the premise that "one size fits all". However, this very complex issue is dispatched in less than five pages (about the average length of each chapter in the book as a whole). The format of chapter 14 is typical; a few snippets of information (invariably extolling the virtues of whatever practice or policy that is under review), followed by some sort of imperative direction to "Go out and do it!" The book is depressingly thin when it comes to a substantial (and balanced) analysis of the various topics of interest. This failing could be excused if the reader was directed to further detailed sources, but the authors generally fail to cite appropriate references (the reference list totals 50 references, or an average of about 3 per chapter). Presumably, the authors' had this failing in mind when they included a separate "Resources" list – comprising 65 (mainly) independent consulting organizations – to which their readers could turn for further assistance.

In summary, the authors of *Managing Workforce 2000* have identified some important socio-demographic trends (although certainly they are not the first to do so) that will drive organizational HRM polices through the 1990s and beyond. A number of HRM policies are identified that may respond, in greater or lesser measure, to the changing needs of "Workforce 2000". However, the authors have largely failed to give the reader much more than a "passing glance" at these policies. While reading this book I had the uneasy feeling that I was reading a catalogue – the product descriptions were enticing, but I generally prefer to have a great deal more information at hand before I buy a product for the first time.

Kenneth Wm. THORNICROFT

University of Newfoundland