BOOK REVIEW
(KİTAP DEĞERLENDİRMESİ)

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES: LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

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The book titled Human Resources Management Challenges: Learning & Development focus on a variety of issues related to diversity of workforce and diversity management. As many researchers claim, the diversity relates to the factors that differentiate employees, such as age, gender, marital status, social status, level of disability, sexual orientation, religion, personality, physical and mental capabilities, moral values, culture, religion, even outlook. Nevertheless, the concept of diversity is not based only on differentiation related to workers' attributes, but also on other issues, such as relationships between the organisation and workers, interests of organisations' stakeholders etc. Diversity management is, on the other hand, perceived as an opportunity to increase the competitiveness of enterprises. Organizations might gain competitive advantage through the use of diverse workforce potential and by implementing proper structures and processes with the goal of maximising the ability of the employees to contribute to organizational objectives and to achieve the full potential unhindered by the group identities such as gender, race, nationality, age and departmental affiliation.

In the book there are eight chapters covering some of the important issues related to the diversity of workforce and diversity management – talent management, development of diversity-oriented and cross-cultural competencies, self-employment as an opportunity for introduction of flexible working time and contractual flexibility, green jobs creation, age management, and issues related to the age and gender stereotypes. As described in the book, diversity-oriented and cross-cultural competencies represent the foundation for diversity management in an organisation. The authors also explain in detail that knowledge, skills and attitudes might be important for managing the diversity, and describe the ways these knowledge, skills and attitudes might be developed. Talent management and age management, on the other hand, represent the approaches to managing diversity of workforce in the sense of handling the differences in abilities and age. Concept of intergenerational programming upgrades the idea of age management representing the ways of cooperation and knowledge transfer between older and younger workers, which might become an issue in the following years. For sure, gender is seen as a key factor that differentiates workers and represents an important dimension of organisational diversity, but when added to the issue of age, it represents the factor that has been poorly studied in the literature. In some specific way, the concepts of flexible work practices together with self-employment opportunities and introduction of green jobs also promote the idea of managing diversity. Encouraging self-employment from unemployment, which is systematically done in many countries, might encourage organisations to consider the use of flexible work practices more than they would do it without governmental measures. Nevertheless, the introduction of this work practice leading to combination of regularly employed and self-employed workers might increase diversity in an organisation in the sense of social status, social security issues, autonomy at work, motivation, etc., and therefore also the need for diversity management. Another issue that is becoming relevant in recent year is also division between so called brown jobs on one hand and green jobs on the other. In the case of larger and diversified organisations, these two kinds of jobs might also co-exists and cause unnecessary conflicts among workers. Therefore, there might be the need for the introduction of diversity management practices as well.

As already mentioned, the book consists of 8 chapters. They can be logically organised into four segments – (i) development of competencies to manage diversity, (ii) green jobs and flexible work practices as opportunities for encouraging the diversity, (iii) talent management, and (iii) age management and handling of gender issue. In the following sections, these four segments of the book are briefly explained and linked to diversity and diversity management in an organization.

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Development of competencies to manage diversity

To successfully manage diversity, the authors of the chapter Diversity-Oriented Competencies put special importance on the group of transferable competencies that comprise communicative, negotiation, intercultural, social, affective and cognitive competences. Apart from the aspects related to the effectiveness within social situations, they also include the aspects such as openness, acceptance and tolerance, emotional commitment and cooperation. As the authors note, the development of those competencies should be treated as one of the priority challenges for human resources development (HRD) in an organization. In the chapter The Importance of Cross-Cultural Competencies, the author continues the discussion about the competencies affecting the effectiveness of diversity management and emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural competencies. The latter refer to the ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures and comprise components of awareness of one's own cultural worldview, attitudes towards cultural differences, knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, and cross-cultural skills. Knowledge about other cultures and other people's behaviour; understanding the feelings and needs of other people, self-confidence related to the knowledge of one's own desires, strengths, weaknesses, and emotional stability and cultural identity linked with the knowledge of one's own culture are most important parts of cross-cultural competencies.

Green jobs and flexible work practices as opportunities for encouraging the diversity

In today's business context self-employment represents an important approach for introducing flexible work practices. This might be especially important for individuals coming from unemployment, with low-level social status and specific physical or mental capabilities. Such approach might be beneficial also for countries trying to solve the problem of high unemployment levels and to enhance economic growth. Often, these measures are based on the use of grants that are received by the unemployed for becoming self-employed and to persist as self-employed for at least a certain period of time. The chapter Self-Employment from Unemployment: Is It worth the Effort? Concludes the discussion with three important findings: (i) the unemployed who become self-employed possibly overestimate their entrepreneurial knowledge, (ii) overestimate the potential success of their business idea, and (iii) one of the more important factors which separates effective self-employed individual from those, who are less effective, is the extent of their working experience abroad.

In the chapter New Approach to Human Resources Management: Green Jobs the author stresses that due to social and economic challenges two major - climate change with deterioration of natural resources, hot and cold extremes, floods, severe storms and rising sea levels, and need for social development and decent work context for everyone. As the author states, such situation calls for changes and introduction of green concept also in the area of human resources. Green jobs provide occupational health and safety, adequate wages, job security, gender equality and workers' rights. Despite the green jobs might be more expensive for organizations than the brown ones, the number of green jobs is growing fast all around the world. For example, in 2006 in the renewable energy sector over 2.3 million "green jobs" were created. According to UNEP's prediction for 2030 number of green jobs will be more than 20.4 million which is 10 times more than in the year of 2006.

Talent management

Despite a lot has been written on talent management, little effort has been done to identify how to introduce talent management in an organization to affect its performance. The main question that arises here is how an organization can effectively manage their talent pool. There is namely an interesting paradox, as the author in the chapter Internal and External Contingencies of Organizational Talent Management states, that HRM emphasizes equality of employees (related to selection compensation, training, performance, etc.), but on the other hand, talents should be treated differently than the rest of the employees. The chapter discusses which contingencies affect the relationship between talent management and its effects in the organization tackling the issue of knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to handle diversified work teams.

Age management and handling of gender issue

In the chapter Age Management in an Era of an Aging Labour Force the author stresses out the importance of age management practices due to ageing population in most of the developed countries. She notes that raising the retirement age on one side alters an individual's attitude to work, motivation to improve

skills and the degree of health care and working conditions, and on the other forces the employers to consider optimal use of the potential of their existing employees and keeping their professional activity on high level at least until the retirement age. Age management should therefore include activities such as health promotion, disease prevention, education, training, lifelong learning and proper equipment of the workstation. In spite of the importance age management the author notes that there are not many organisations which introduce age management practices in everyday life. She notes that employers should primarily focus on developing competency models and conditions for the realisation age management, and employees should be responsible for maintaining their ability to work at a level that guarantees employment.

The chapter Intergenerational Programming: An Imperative for Today's Workplace complements the chapter on age management. It presents theoretical and empirical evidence for the development and implementation of intergenerational programmes in organisations. The authors identify four groups of such practices: mentoring practices, reverse mentoring practices, aged-mixed teams, and cooperation between older and younger employees in the process of on-the-job training and formal education. As they note, there are many positive consequences of such practices in organizations - for example younger employees involved in intergenerational cooperation such as mentoring gain knowledge, technical and social skills, older workers gain self-respect, technical skills related to new technologies, and motivation for learning. Intergenerational cooperation can also lead to the empowerment of older workers to take control of their own ageing process. In the long term, positive effects of intergenerational programmes in work environment lead to better intergenerational cooperation and more tolerant society.

In the last chapter Adding Gender to the Age Factor the authors join together two aspects relevant for diversity management – age and gender. As the authors note, the combined effect of these two aspects is still an under-researched area, despite its increasing relevance to HR managers. In the chapter the authors come to two main conclusions: (i) age and gender remain crucial factors in organisations; and (ii) stereotypes and discrimination are still in place, although discrimination is less prevalent or it is replaced by more subtle forms. They emphasize that appropriate HR practices should be introduced to prevent negative outcomes, costly to organisations such as higher turnover, absenteeism, lower performance and productivity, low well-being and higher health care costs.

The book is worth reading because it is actually a useful literature review in the content area of the chapters, and it might be also a good source for collecting research ideas on one hand, on the other it can be used as a study material for students attending HRM or HRD courses or courses related to more specific topics such as intergenerational learning, age management and also social responsibility. One of the main advantages of the book is also its international character – the authors come from culturally quite different countries such as Turkey, Poland, Romania, Portugal and Slovenia. The book was published in 2015 as a kind of continuation of a book Strategic Approaches to Human Resources Management Practice. Both of the books were published by international publisher ToKnowPress.