

Book Review:
Human Resource Management in Service Work
Author: **Marek Korczynski**

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With its focus on the service economy, this book meets a long overdue need for a text on human resource management dilemmas and issues facing the services sector. It highlights the three-way relationship between management, workers and customers, which acts as a counter culture to employment, traditionally dominated, by the dyadic management-worker relationship.

Marek Korczynski notes " the wisest books offering the most insights were often detailed ethnographies which married a sensitivity to the experience of service workers with a wider theoretical awareness" . In portraying with passion the human resource management role as essential in viewing much of the contemporary service work through the lens of the customer-oriented bureaucracy, the author has woven these two facets into the fabric of his thesis on the unique factors involving service work.

The book establishes a contemporary relevance for the nature of employment in services by demonstrating social, charitable and moral aspects of service work as being different from employment in the manufacturing and agriculture sectors. The customer oriented bureaucracy, supported by the new " service management school" of American academics and challenged by a range of critical perspectives, is clearly shown as having dual and potentially contradictory fundamental logics.

Nevertheless, Korczynski identifies and explains five attributes of service work – intangibility, perishability, variability, simultaneous production and consumption, and inseparability. The several classifications of types of service work provide an excellent summary of different labels used for similar types of service work and are used to clarify the focus and usefulness of the book as being about the experience of service work and its management. A great deal of skill and empathy endures in Korczynski' s understanding of HRM in service work and the systematic contradictions within it between ' hard' and ' soft' policies and between the rhetoric and reality.

A persuasive examination of the new service management school has a strong critical approach, a positive review of relevant research and a challenge to the unitarist perspective of harmonious and self-correcting relationships between customers and management. The chapter on the critical perspectives of service work comprises reviews of Ritzer' s McDonaldisation thesis on the dehumanising processes of work, Du Gay' s focus on the discourse against bureaucratic policies and towards the enterprising self, and feminist analyses of gendered HRM policies in a workplace increasingly subject to gender-based servility. Korczynski' s view is that the front line work must be based on an ability to see the importance both of bureaucratic logic and the logic of the customer orientation of service quality.

Service work is interpreted as functioning within a customer oriented bureaucracy with key dimensions of management, HRM policies, labour processes, the basis for division of labour, the basis of authority, forms of control, emotional effects and flexibility indicating ways of capturing the dual imperatives of the need to create the myth of customer oriented sovereignty and to be

efficient at the same time. Korczynski proceeds to devote chapters to analysing distinctive types of front line work, sales work, front line empowerment, managing emotions and gendered segregation and disadvantage. The analysis is theoretical throughout, but it is a substantially grounded theory with empirical research drawn from a wide range of service settings. In considering ways in which to challenge segregation and disadvantage, Korczynski recognises that trade unions are important bodies that use existing laws and workplace practices to constrain the decisions of service managers. Because trade union membership has fallen significantly in recent years, a chapter is devoted to examining whether and how trade unions can significantly contribute to the minimisation of negative aspects of front line work provided they are able to effect an accommodation with employers.

In the concluding chapter of the book the point is restated that for too long the front line worker has been the forgotten figure of modern organisations. Korczynski then summarises the main arguments and concepts of the book. The implications of this analysis are established for the study of HRM in general, and in relation to the overall characteristics of the service economy. In effect, one could read the last chapter as the introduction to the topic and the book as a whole.

The book is an excellent and thorough introduction to the somewhat young, yet growing discipline of service work. It is eminently readable and packed with information which will provide front line practitioners, under-graduate and post-graduate students and academics with knowledge that will enable HRM and service work skills to be integrated. With well over five hundred pertinent references as well as an extensive name index and subject index, Korczynski's book is a robust addition to Palgrave's Management, Work and Organisations series; one which will provide ongoing enrichment for leading-edge understanding and workplace performance.

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