Book Review:
Intercultural Empathy and Human Resource Development: An Ageless Aspiration

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The Routledge Companion to Human Resource Development, edited by Rob F. Poell, Tonette S. Rocco, and Gene L. Roth, Abingdon, Routledge, 2015, xxxv + 694 pages, 978-0415820424, $265.

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The Routledge Companion to Human Resource Development is one in an expanding series of "companions" in business, management and accounting offered by this UK-based publisher. The series combines expected themes such as "human resource management" (HRM) with some surprising titles: for example, edited books on "creativity," "identity and consumption," and "visual organization." The title reviewed here focuses on human resource development (HRD) and mirrors its HRM companion in that the insights it presents along with the questions it poses are likely to resonate among researchers of international management for years to come, during which time we hope that a more affordable paperback version of this book will become available.

What does the book offer? First of all, it offers an example of crisp editing and layout. The editors – Rob Poell of Tilburg University in The Netherlands, Tonette Rocco of Florida International University, and Gene Roth of Northern Illinois University – have combined to assemble contributions by ninety-eight authors of fifty-four chapters organized into nine major sections of themed discussion. These are: Origins of the field; Adjacent and related fields; Theoretical approaches; Policy perspectives; Interventions; Core issues and concerns; HRD as a profession; HRD around the world; Emerging topics and future trends. With over 700 pages and over fifty main chapters, there is limited space here to detail the book's wide-ranging contents in depth. Consequently, the following review is designed to give context to selected extracts from this book's contents and thereby gives readers pointers to themes that appear of direct relevance to research and discussion about people and our human capacity to express and record empathy. Specifically, the focus for this review is on the concept of "intercultural empathy" - for which, some brief context is provided.

It has become common in contexts for the research and practice of "working with" or "managing" people to distinguish between business and organizational management interventions that emphasize either an HRM or an HRD paradigm or approach: HRM generally assumes that hiring and managing people generates costs – costs that, ideally, should be controlled and or reduced where possible; costs, like employees, are transferable, replaceable. In contrast, HRD practitioners are assumed to look beyond cost and seek to identify the potential in people (employees) to perform productively and thereby add competitive and perhaps non-substitutable value. In increasingly globalized contexts for business and management, where uncertainty and complexities of risk abound, there is an argument that

organizations wishing to remain competitive should seek out people with potential for development as opposed to relying on people with tried and tested skill sets which can be readily trained up and, when necessary, substituted. One emerging and often cost-reducing trend in international HRM is towards substituting human skill sets with artificial intelligence (AI) along with other "non-human' solutions." Can AI replicate intercultural empathy?

In HRD terms, increasing numbers of global employers are looking for people with competencies: that is, people whose demonstration of skills is underpinned by attitudes that not only generate required levels of performance in the here-and-now; they offer promise of value-adding performance in situations that have not yet arisen or perhaps even been imagined. Indeed, in chapter fifty-two of the Routledge Companion to Human Resource Development Katherine Rosenbusch makes the point succinctly and forcefully in her appeal (p. 602) for greater researcher and practitioner attention to be given to conceptualizations of "intercultural competence": "As interactions between individuals from different cultures increase, the complexity of workforces will intensify. Organizations need to examine and act on how they develop and grow their people to work in dynamic and culturally diverse societies."

From a global HRD perspective, "intercultural empathy" can be regarded as one such competence. The term "intercultural empathy" appears in the influential "global mindset" model proposed by researchers and practitioners at Arizona University's Thunderbird School of Global Management, whose conceptualization of the term encompasses an individual's ability to: "work well with people from other parts of the world; understand nonverbal expressions of people from other cultures; emotionally connect to people from other cultures; engage people from other parts of the world to work together" (www.thunderbird.asu.edu, accessed 10th January 2020). In HRM terms, skills that underpin or facilitate these "abilities" can be trained and then managed or supervised – albeit, at a cost. Emphasizing an HRD perspective, these 'abilities' can be assumed to reside latently in individuals until they can be identified, encouraged, and even led such that their individual and collective demonstration and application of combined "abilities" renders a given organization more globally competitive.

So, how might this "Companion to HRD" guide us towards developing a finer conceptual and practical appreciation of 'intercultural empathy'? The first of the abilities highlighted in the aforementioned 'global mindset' model invokes an individual's ability to "work well with people from other parts of the world." In chapter fifty-two under the section heading "merging topics and future trends," Kyoung-Ah Nam, Yonjoo Cho and Mimi Miyoung Lee discuss "cross-cultural training and its implications for HRD." They make the case that, as Asian multi-national corporations (MNCs) continue to expand their share of global markets, there is reason to address established and commonly "Western" biases that appear still to bias contexts for cross-cultural training (CCT): for example, with regard to how MNCs invest in preparing expatriate managers (expats) for international assignments. The authors do well to combine and summarize concisely from current research and practices in CCT. Of special note is the attention they give to the problem of how to measure or ascertain the relative 'effectiveness' of CCT. A further dimension to this problem is developed as the authors recognize the "explosion of social networking technologies" before concluding that intercultural competence "is no longer a recommendation but a means of survival for responding to the complexities of globalization" (p. 587). This conclusion suggests several relevant pathways for future research: for example, into how the aforementioned social networking technologies might be impacting how people might communicate or share

intercultural empathy across virtual spaces – spaces that, as the authors suggest here, might appear a priori biased in their conceptualization.

A second ability identified explicitly with intercultural competence in the global mindset model is how to demonstrate an appreciation or understanding of nonverbal expressions used by people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The emphasis given to "nonverbal expressions" connects with many contributions to this book that discuss the complexities of communication. To illustrate, Seung Won Yoon, Doo Hun Lim and Pedro A. Willging compare and discuss (in chapter ten) approaches to "performance improvement" (PI). From an employer perspective, any investments in HRD should offer some promise or prospect of improved productivity – an issue the authors address during their critique of existing PI methodologies and practical approaches. They offer a concise and current diagnosis of the impact of – and prospects for – increased used of advanced communication technologies in the form of "smart devices" such as mobile phones, sensory recognition and web-enabled projects, each of which promise ever greater efficiencies of global business and management communications. The authors offer thought-provoking insights into possibilities for applying augmented reality (AR) and similar emergent technologies in contexts for PI before concluding that PI and HRD must be discussed and combined in their status as both process and outcome. This insight might be applied towards HRD interpretations of intercultural empathy: i.e. empathy as both process and outcome.

A third ability associated with people with competencies relevant towards developing and expressing intercultural empathy concerns how individuals might emotionally connect to people from other cultures. In chapter forty-nine, Paul Nesbit discusses "emotions and self-development." His focus is on processes of self-development, and specifically in contexts for leadership development. After offering a definition of the self-development process, Nesbit draws our attention to the influence of an individual's emotions within the self-development process, explaining how these can lead to development outcomes that might appear more or less effective: for example, more or less open with regard to recognizing the relative strengths and weaknesses of an individual's performance potential. A salient and ever-present factor in processes of self-development and self-assessment of development is "culture." As Nesbit explains: "culture influences emotions because it shapes understanding and interpretation of social experiences and these cognitions in turn impact on the emotions felt" (p. 567). Viewed in this manner, intercultural empathy might be conceptualized as an on going process of sense-making and interpretation: unlike a skill, it might not be feasible repeatedly to 'do' empathy; claims that "it" can be "done" (easily) appear to lack credibility.

One further ability associated with intercultural empathy relates to how individuals appear to engage people from other parts of the world and collaborate effectively with them. In a novel "Epilogue" to this book, the three editors combine to offer "a synopsis of the present, future and intrigue of HRD." Here, individual contributors provide updated comments on their own chapters into a "conceptual matrix" that the editors formed for each section of the book. The flow of ideas brings a freshness of perspective to the earlier submitted chapters, for in this Epilogue, the authors' contributions appear in an unedited form. To illustrate, sharing further thoughts about their chapter on the theme of "employee engagement and HRD" (chapter forty-six), authors Brad Shuck and Sally Sambrook call for more research towards a establishing a "unifying theory of engagement that explores the psychological phenomenon as it relates to the whole person" (p. 648). They furthermore call for more research into processes of

"disengagement," investigating its sources and impact on employee and organizational performance.

Given the scope and complexity of the many themes presented in this book, it is difficult to give a full picture of the insights that the authors and editors offer readers. In line with other "Companion" titles in the Routledge series, this is very much a book that reader-practitioners and HRD researchers are invited to "dip-into": most likely, each readership will find examples and insights that prompt further thought. Overall, the book is a success, and the editors are to be congratulated for their efforts.

As suggested in the title for this review, the aspiration to develop and express empathy between people of differing social and cultural backgrounds - the aspiration to think and behave humanely and expect similar treatment in return – has existed for as long as civilized societies have existed: the aspiration to empathize is ageless. To paraphrase from the great Master Kong (Confucius): "None of us is born humane: we must each learn to become so."

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