A Review of Managing People and Organizations in Changing Contexts written by Graeme Martin reviewed by Brian Bridgeforth published by Butterworth-Heinemann ISBN 9780750680004 (2006)

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Abstract

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Introduction

Drucker (1974) offered a normative perspective to the profession of management that has sufficiently served successive generations of managers since its publication. Drucker conceived the practice of management to be a role, a set of tasks, and ultimately, responsibility. Moreover, time has proved it proficiently fertile in stimulating research into managerial practice. Martin's (2006) offering raises questions regarding classic management theory suggesting it is obsolete. Was Drucker's conception of the role of management idealistic rather than practical? Are Drucker's ideas passé? Are those practitioners, educators, and researchers amongst us influenced or guided by Drucker's ideas too much traditionalist? Have things changed with enough significance that we need yet another management principles text? Let us seek to answer these questions in the context of Martin's offering.

Reading Martin's first chapter leaves answering the questions regarding Drucker's relevance and influence in the early 21st Century to the reader. The first two chapters read as a split decision regarding Drucker. While there is no mention of Drucker throughout the text, Martin advocates, as Drucker did, the necessity and role of institutions and professional managers to the maintenance and advancement of a free and capitalistic society. Martin expresses this agreement with his statement that the goal of the text is helping students and practitioners to become effective managers, the latter of which is a key goal of advanced industrial society. It is here, however, that Martin changes his answer to the final question.

Upon Mintzberg's (1973) observation based positive orientation, Martin (2006) offers an unequivocal "yes" to the question of change, and the need proposing that the experience of today's managers is qualitatively variant from the experience of management decades ago. Martin argues that context determines role and responsibility, and thus offers a practitioner's text from a contingency perspective. Specifically, Martin offers seven (7) contexts, each a chapter and comprising the bulk of the book, in which managers practice their craft. The first three provide a Micro to Macro scope. The latter four permeate the first three. The seven are the individual, organizational, international, corporate, knowledge, technological, and change. Labels can be misleading because they are open to interpretation. Therefore, let us briefly expound Martin's conception of each context.

The individual is the manager-employee relationship examining the manager designing, influencing, and controlling the psychological contracts of subordinates. Within this chapter, leadership is conveyed as, a management function; and as a socially influenced set of behaviors. Exploration of these ideas, although begging and potentially beneficial, are outside the scope of the work, so it is not surprising that instead Martin defaults to a short lesson on the history of academic research into leadership. The bulk of the material offered is on *the new leadership* theories of the last 20+ years, which coincides with the context dependent theme of the text. The primary criticism that stands out here is the emphasis on Goleman, *et al.*'s (2001) work on emotional intelligence (EI) as supporting new leadership as context dependent theory. While Martin acknowledges the continuing preoccupation with trait theory and argues for the necessity to abandon it in favor of shifting focus to context, there is a failure to acknowledge that EI is old wine in new bottles — trait theory revisited.

The organizational context is about the design and analysis of how structure influences managerial authority and power. For an introductory lesson on organizational theory this chapter offers a good balance of breadth and depth. The three dominate models (Galbraith, Mintzberg, and Miles & Snow) are presented in conjunction with an instructional case study. The conclusion of each model offers application questions relating to the case. The chapter concludes with nine tests of effective design developed by Goold and Campbell (2000). The nine tests ask questions covering design principles and of fit drivers. The proposition of the nine tests is that the modern competitive context necessitates a contingent approach to organizational design and structure.

The international context examines questions regarding going global. For example, how does the organization adapt to the local style of foreign considerations be they national or communal? To answer this and similar questions, the chapter is a mixed lesson of sociology and societal development concentrating on those matters of particular business interest. Flowing from breadth to depth to application, the topics of interest are convergence-divergence, culture as values, systems-past and present, international management competencies, and development of managerial competence at the international level.

The corporate context examines how external and internal constituencies relate and respond according to respective perceptions of identity — both corporate and organizational — image, strategy, vision, and communications in affording trustworthiness and confidence. These perceptions are foundational to building, maintaining, and defending organizational reputation and brand. Each concept is reviewed in turn highlighting current ideas culminating in a complex model of interdependence. Then upon this model, Martin presents an equally challenging prescription meant to aid in interpretation and application, in the form of core lessons. While the issues of brand and identity and their relationship are complex, the question *can this be simplified* arises. Isn't brand and identity correlated to the ambitions and values of the organization? Isn't reputation correlated to behavior? That is, we ask is there consistency between word and deed? At the fundamental level, doesn't the question of 'corporateness' ask, are profession and action of ambitions, values, and norms aligned and congruent? In summation, if this reader is following Martin's intent with this text being an in-depth validation of the contingency approach to organizational management, he went awry with the core lessons in this chapter as this section presents as a one size fits all solution.

Although not explicitly stated the underlying assumptions of the knowledge context described in Chapter 7 is that knowledge is socially constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1966).

According to Martin, the knowledge context is characterized by intellectual considerations (i.e., the ability to acquire and transfer knowledge and learning more efficiently than effectively) rather than the classic assumptions of economic considerations (market relations, pricing, and physical or financial capital) driving market forces. Upon this paradigm shift from classic to contingent the chapter examines six questions adapted from Choo and Bontis's (2002) model of strategic knowledge management. Why is knowledge a strategic asset? What does a knowledge based enterprise (KBE) look like? What are the processes of creating, utilizing, and transferring knowledge? How does a KBE facilitate feed-forward and feed-back across organizational levels? What is the nature of intellectual capital? What are the strategic levers to improving the aforementioned processes?

Like Chapter 7, the technological context expounded in Chapter 8 is a restatement of past theory under a new label. Specifically, socio-technical systems theory as delineated by Applebaum (1997). Similar to Appelbaum's conjecture of socio-technical systems theory (STS) as the preferred choice for successfully integrating technology and organizational development into an effective organizational transformation strategy, this chapter examines the nature of technology and its affective position in the social nature of an enterprise. Reminiscent of Appelbaum, Martin's premise is the role of management in this context is blending the continuous evolution of technology with the social aspects of work to achieve competitive advantage.

Chapter 9 continues the *Lewinian tradition* of the 3-Step model of change. I use the term 'Lewinian tradition' loosely. By it, I mean that one may generalize organizational change models as having a common root in Kurt Lewin's ideas and consequently, replicate the pattern of three steps to effect change. Martin's work here extends that tradition by offering two relatively new models, the latter building on the former, that each comprises three steps. This relationship of convenience is no sin. The error rather is the introduction of culture as part of change. Placement of information on organizational culture as a consideration of organizational change results in misleading learners to conceive of culture as something possessed by the organization and therefore, malleable by management. Culture is a social construction in which a group identifies with and agrees on ambitions, values, and norms (Bridgeforth, 2005). Consequently, unlike brand and identity, which are possessions, culture is the organization. The organization is its culture. Consequently, while it is subject to change, for all change is culture change; it is at

best subject to influence, but not managerial control.

In conclusion, Martin's text advocates a contingency approach to management under the umbrella concept of context. The exposition strikes this reader as imbalanced. While it relies heavily on currency — the most recent literature and ideas — it offers little of classic ideas that have governed and guided the development of management theory and practice. This emphasis on relativism and disconnection from the past commits the practitioner who utilizes this tool to a game of trial and error. Perhaps that is the point — that managerial practice is just that — practice.

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