TITLE: ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR: A contemporary South African perspective

Authors: Helen Schultz (Ed.), Jeffrey Bagraim, Tracy Potgieter, Conrad Viedge, Amanda Werner

Publisher: Van Schaik Publishers

Reviewer: Andrew Thatcher

According to the authors the aim of this book is to present an interdisciplinary approach to the understanding of organisational behaviour within the contemporary South African environment. Within this framework, the book targets (senior) undergraduate and postgraduate students in Industrial/Organisational Psychology and Human Resources Management. The text is written in a simple, conversational style (as was the intention of the authors) that should be suitable for most undergraduate students at English-speaking tertiary institutions. The book is organised into three sections based on a model of four components of organisational behaviour: the individual, the group and the organisation. The fourth component of the model, the environment, refers specifically in the context of this book, to a contemporary South African approach to understanding behaviour in organisations. In the 'individual' section, the authors cover topics such as individual differences (e.g. personality, attitudes, perceptions, emotional intelligence, etc.), ethics, work motivation, and performance management. In the 'group' section, the authors look at issues of group and team dynamics, power and empowerment, communication, decision-making and leadership. Finally, in the 'organisation' section, the authors address issues of contemporary organisational design, organisational change and employee well-being (e.g. stress management, job satisfaction, etc.).

In order to address the fourth component of the model, the 'environmental' aspect, the authors have included a number of inserts that they refer to as "encounters" that look at contemporary issues or aspects from a South African perspective. Each chapter typically attempts to include four types of encounters: ethics encounters, technology encounters, diversity encounters, and global environment encounters. While these "encounters" provide interesting interludes from the main text they do tend to break up the thought patterns of a reader interested in understanding the theory.

It is quite evident that the book is primarily aimed at a student population. Each chapter begins with a set of outcome statements (as required by SAQA's outcome-based education system), the key terms and concepts for the chapter and a practical example from the world of business (called a "descriptive viewpoint"). In a similar fashion, each chapter concludes with a chapter summary, review questions and a case study. These aspects provide very useful tools for a student to test their newly acquired knowledge and to relate this knowledge to real-world settings and practical examples. The "descriptive viewpoint", case studies and some of the "encounters" give the book the distinctive feel, reminiscent of the approach used at the leading business schools. In support of the text, the authors use more than 90 figures and tables in the 263 pages of text in order to illustrate the primary concepts. The authors have chosen to use a bibliography rather than a reference list, as they did not want to clutter the text with cited references (except for the highly recognised theorists and researchers). This is useful for the average undergraduate student but perhaps less useful for more dedicated postgraduate students. Each chapter also comes with a list of associated websites. Given the emphasis on information technology, these are particularly useful for the student interested in a particular topic. However, many of the listed websites are of a practical rather than an academic nature.

As with any textbook of this kind, the authors acknowledge that they have not attempted to provide a comprehensive account of all the theories and research in the field of organisational behaviour. Some concepts are not covered at all (e.g. theories of conflict and conflict management), while others are only given a cursory glance (e.g. organisational commitment and organisational development). Nevertheless, the book covers most topics in Organisational Behaviour in sufficient depth for most undergraduate students and as a primer for postgraduate students. The book certainly goes further than many of the international publications by introducing contemporary South African examples and case studies and by emphasising the contemporary challenges posed by technology. However, it is evident that the examples, case studies and even the technology will shortly become outdated.