

## Book Review

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**The Oxford Handbook of Management Theorists**, Edited by *Morgen Witzel and Malcolm Warner*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013 (paperback 2014), £105 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-19-958576-2 and £30 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-19-870882, 592pp + xix pp

The handbook is a timely (re-)evaluation of contributors to the development of management theory. The editors posit the works of *Frederick Winslow Taylor* as the starting point of management theory *per se* and see in its evolution a cycle of acceptance and rejection as additions to theory superseded and/or subsumed earlier approaches. Moreover, the editors seek to locate the work of individual theorists in the contemporary societal and institutional context.

The editors are specific about the criteria they have used in selecting individual theorists to be included in the handbook and these criteria encompass length, breadth and depth. The notion of length is used to indicate the period of time which has elapsed since Taylor's research and publications from the latter part of the nineteenth century to the present. This time period is sub-divided into three segments, comprising first, the early pioneers (1890s – 1930s), second, the post-World War Two theorists predominantly operating in research institutes and foundations, and third, theorists based in business schools. The time periods reflect a shift in the balance between practice and theory, with the emphasis on practice among the early pioneers giving way to increased theoretical underpinning and development.

Breadth is defined by the editors as the scope and generalisability of a particular theorist's work, particularly in terms of general management, thus excluding work located in a specific discipline such as marketing and finance. The notion of depth is used to assess the extent of individual contributions to the field of theory, in particular '...the degree to which each author helped to alter the *paradigm* in the field' (p.5), the editors using the word *paradigm* in the *Kuhnian* sense. Using these criteria the editors have included 24 theorists in the handbook, seven in each of the first two time periods and ten in the third. The selection of theorists includes what may be considered mainstream individuals as well as so-called mavericks.

Witzel and Warner have brought together an international team of contributors to write the individual chapters on major authors in the field, albeit with a few omissions. Nevertheless, the individual contributions provide a panoramic view of the evolution of management theory. Each chapter seeks to capture the thought of the theorist in the round. The authors, moreover, provide not only a summary of the individual theorists' contribution to the field but also adopt a critical stance to the validity and impact of their ideas. For example, Kyle Bruce, in his chapter on *George Elton Mayo*, links Mayo's ideas to the development of a more authoritarian approach to the management of individuals within organisations and of a human resource management function regarded as informing both the management of individuals and the practice of managers themselves. In her chapter on *Geert Hofstede*, Monir Tayeb presents Hofstede's major contribution to the study of national culture and its relevance to management but goes on to provide an extensive critique of Hofstede's work, based on her own and others' evaluations.

The handbook also provides an overview of the development of the language of management theory. This involves more than a specialist vocabulary and includes concepts, values and reasoning. Over time observation of practice has given rise to increased conceptualisation and theory development. This has gone hand in hand with the development of and drawing on areas of the social sciences such as psychology and sociology. This process has supported the evolution of management as a discipline in its own right and underpinned the position of managers in the organisational hierarchy. A related feature has been the move from dealing with more 'simple' issues, for example, from Taylor's development of techniques to improve individual worker efficiency and as a consequence individual and firm performance to *CK Prahalad's* rejection of the traditional wisdom of accepting trade-offs, reconceptualising management issues at a more complex level.

The editors, Witzel and Warner, have done good work in devising the framework and underlying logic of the handbook and in recruiting a distinguished group of contributors. The individual authors have written informative chapters combining the substance of each theorist's contribution and a critical evaluation of its impact and rigour. The handbook is timely in that it

enables the reader to locate current discussions of the role, legitimacy and practice of management in the context of its historical evolution, to reflect on how management theory has evolved and on its interrelationship with individuals, societal institutions and society as a whole. By tracing the development of management as a whole, the reader – both practitioner and student – can follow the twists and turns of the development of

management theory as well as the emergence of management as a body of thought, academic discipline and social institution in its own right.

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