

The Employment Relationship: Examining Psychological and Contextual Perspectives.

Jacqueline A-M. Coyle-Shapiro, Lynn M. Shore, M. Susan Taylor, and Lois E. Tetrick.
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The temptation to take a broad view of our work is great, but it is a temptation with both promise and peril. Academic work is inherently narrowing. In order to do that meaningful work we all must focus on a question that lends itself to empirical research, say the question of why employees become committed to (or alienated from) their organizations. Is it because of their pay, their supervisor? Or do boredom, anger, wanderlust or jealousy play a part? The answer is inevitably that the answers are complicated, allowing us to spend a happy two decades parsing who, what, and when employees will feel attached to their organization. But it is difficult for smart people to spend twenty years of their intellectual life on such small questions. Some do, and seem the happier for it. However, for most of us the temptation to frame our small questions as part of something bigger and more meaningful is more than we can resist. So, we reframe our work as a larger and more important question, say the relationship between employers and employees.

The promise of taking the broad view is that the addition of different questions and perspectives can enrich the work. Linkages between your small question and a host of other questions now surface. Your wider perspective takes you into fields and perspectives that can expand your understanding. You discover questions and answers that you never would have considered if your focus had stayed small.

This edited book has stepped back from the small question why employees may or may not become alienated from (or committed to) their employers, and collects a wide range of papers on the employment relationship. *The Employment Relationship* reflects many of the promises of this broader perspective. The editors' purpose is to integrate different perspectives on the employment relationship and suggest future directions for research. It provides a comprehensive, up to the date-of-publication review and summary of the organizational behavior research on the employment relationship, with a particular emphasis on reviews of the literature and new and promising avenues. It is intended as a reference source for such scholars, as well as for those interested in the organizational-behavior perspective on the employment relationship from the related fields of employment relations, and other allied social science disciplines.

The Employment Relationship is better integrated and focused than most edited volumes. It is organized into three parts: Part I provides a review of the employment relationship from different fields: social exchange, justice, industrial relations, law and economics. Part II reviews some of the recent and most prominent organizational-behavior work on the employment relationship, and Part III, consists of those topics they believe have the strongest implications for future research, concluding with the editors' own chapter laying out directions for future research.

Part I reflects the great promise of taking a broader perspective. Here different subject-matter experts briefly review the employment-relations topics, and the section concludes with a chapter highlighting the points of difference and potential commonality among these perspectives. These individual chapters provide a welcome broadening of

perspective, and I am sure will provide scholars in organizational behavior with handy summaries and reference lists. However, the concluding Chapter 6 reflects one of the perils of taking a broader perspective: a loss of focus. There is the risk that the broader category becomes so heterogeneous that coherence is impossible and the work becomes no more than an annotated bibliography. So, for example, rather than trying to integrate these ideas from psychology, sociology, industrial relations, law and economics, superficial similarities and differences are noted, and then dropped. Do these chapter authors' ideas matter in any significant way for the various questions addressed within the category of employment relations? While readers interested in employment relationships will find great value in these broadly differing perspectives, the book would have been stronger if the editors had pushed themselves to really think hard about what these disciplines have to tell us about the organizational behavior work that has been done.

In Parts II and III, all of the chapters stick to their purposes, explicitly focusing their discussions on the employment relationship; they are concise and clear. This undoubtedly entailed a lot of work from the editors, and they are to be commended for this model of an edited book that draws on the differing knowledge and voices of the chapter authors but keeps them focused on the employment relationship. All of the chapters provide excellent reviews and summaries of their subjects. I particularly liked Chapter 3 by Kelly on legal theory and Chapter 7 by Shore, Porter and Zahra on integrating current theories of corporate strategy into the employee-organization relationship discussion. Kelly's discussion of relational legal contracting was new to me, and I found that it has fascinating implications for organizational-behavior work on

psychological contracts. Shore et al.'s chapter developed an innovative application of those corporate strategy theories that recognize employees, developing propositions that were genuinely creative extensions of those ideas to the employment relationship.

Finally, in Part III these authors, all accomplished researchers with the highest standards, address the significant methodological problems in the organizational-behavior employment relationship research. These are done primarily in Taylor and Tekleab's Chapter 12 and Tetrick's Chapter 14. These scholars know how to evaluate empirical research and they note the key methodological problems with this field. However, the peril of the sweeping view appears again: conceptual and methodological problems are noted, and then dropped, as the authors go on to make research recommendations on other subjects. If these methodological problems are real, what are the implications of this large body of research? If there are serious conceptual overlaps between experienced breach and felt betrayal doesn't that mean we should look closely at this entire causal argument. It is not enough to simply "note" design or conceptual flaws, we need to take them seriously and think about their implications for our claims. Noting problems as swiftly and unobtrusively as possible is reasonable for journal articles, whose editors must make complex trade-offs, but a book, especially one of nearly 400 pages, should be able to take the time to rise to the intellectual challenge of thinking through the implications of problems in order to make a statement about the research.

In summary, this book reflects the promise and perils of taking a broad approach. The editors take advantage of the edited form to collect a rich variety of perspectives, while making sure the chapter authors remained on point. This makes it an invaluable resource for all of those addressing problems under the broad perspective of the

employment relationship. However, it also displays the peril of such a broad perspective: the different views and flaws are duly noted, added to the list of possible-future-research, but not pushed for their meaning and implications. We have here a rich and comprehensive assemblage, one that can be sampled for insights, but is not an intellectually coherent statement on its field.

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