

Mathews, John, *Catching the Wave: Workplace Reform in Australia*

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an international human resource management perspective. The chapters involve Chris Brewster (Europe), Thomas Kochan and Lee Dyer (America) and Hugh Scullion (international human resource management); coupled with a final future prospects chapter by John Storey. In this respect, the work by Chris Brewster in developing a European model of human resource management and in his role in the Price Waterhouse/Cranfield researches is worth a special mention. After all, at both theoretical and empirical levels this has added a rich new dimension to earlier analyses and debates.

In sum, this is an important text. It comprises contributions from many leading U.K. scholars in the field. It has an added international dimension and the chapters are informative and well written. If the empirical work on human resource management ultimately matches the quality of current critical contributions we will achieve the desirable goal of critically informed empirical analyses of the area and the transcendence of earlier prescriptive approaches linked with personnel management itself.

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Catching the Wave: Workplace Reform in Australia

by John MATHEWS, Ithaca, N.Y., ILR Press, 1994, 359 p., ISBN 0-87546-707-5 (cloth), and ISBN 0-87546-706-7 (pbk).

In his field John Mathews is a well known, prolific Australian writer. His works have taken a broad sweep from left political pamphleteering through occupational health and safety, technological change and industrial restructuring. Since the mid 1980s Mathews has turned his attention to workplace change and along with much of the Australian 'left' has increasingly reflected managerial concerns in this pursuit. Mathews was an influential advocate of the strategic document known as the Accord, an agreement between Australia's peak union body, the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Australian Labor Party, by which Australian unions were to gain influence over public policy in exchange for wage restraint and cooperation with industrial rationalization. Although later to lead the union movement into a direction of industrial relations decentralization and labour market flexibility informed essentially by business interests this strategy was for Mathews in the vernacular of the day, a 'powerful engine of socialist advance'. From the mid 1980s the unions' original objectives altered. The recasting of Australian public policy was forgotten, and (along with Australia's business interests) the unions co-operated

with the Hawke/Keating Labor Government in workplace change and labour market 'flexibility' to improve international competitiveness. Mathews was an intellectual leader of this shift through his advocacy of 'post-Fordism' according to which the moving forces of history embodied in the grand shift from 'Fordism' to 'post-Fordism' made work reorganization and 'industrial democracy' necessary for economic survival.

These ideas were subjected to considerable criticism and Mathews has in *Catching the Wave* apparently jettisoned the Fordist/post-Fordist divide which he finds no longer 'helpful' (p. 309). While he has deemphasized his former theoretical predilection many of the key ideas remain, in particular the image of a wave of change washing over the world of work as a result of the 'end of mass production'. Other ideas have been recast to reflect trends in the current debate. At times this imposes stresses on the book's logical consistency. Formerly an advocate of 'post-Fordist' work organisation, above all exemplified in 'lean production', Mathews now identifies 'two competing paradigms of industrial efficiency' of which one is lean production and the other is what he calls the 'sociotechnical

production system'. Yet, in chapter three (p. 51) Mathews identifies this system as world best practice.

Catching the Wave is divided into three parts plus an introduction with comprehensive notes and index. Part one outlines the two competing models of productive efficiency and discussions of teamwork and part three is a theoretical discussion of about fifty pages. Part two (approximately 150 pages) contains a collection of case studies on organizational change in Australia which have been previously published through the University of New South Wales Industrial Relations Research Centre of which Mathews was at the time of writing the director. Although some of the other material has also been published elsewhere there is some value in having these ideas together between the same covers. It should be noted that much of this material is by now somewhat dated and is flawed by the fact that the effects of workplace change have not been critically assessed subsequently. In fact labour market indicators show that the costs of 'flexibility' fall inequitably on youths, women, non-whites and workers from a non-English speaking background.

Major fiscal, monetary, industry and wages policy directions under Labor such as the deregulation of the previously tightly protected financial sector, the floating of the Australian dollar and the erosion of protective tariffs have led to a weakened industry sector, a burgeoning service sector and a highly casualised workforce increasingly represented by women and youth workers which after two major unemployment troughs is vulnerable to workplace reform which is not based on the advanced levels of commitment and trust claimed by Mathews: Under the Accord process, of which *Catching the Wave* is an enthusiastic supporter, the vitiation of Federal and State industrial relations jurisdictions too detailed to recount here changed the traditional 'needs' (cost of living) principle of wage deter-

mination to a capacity to pay principle increasingly premised on 'flexible' work practices and efficiency. In particular the re-enactment of the 1904 Conciliation and Arbitration Act in 1988 and a transformed Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) metamorphosed the Commonwealth jurisdiction from a highly centralized and controlled entity to a decentralized, weakened organization susceptible to economic rationalist positions. As a consequence workers have considerably more work to do under the guise of job enlargement or enrichment, multiskilling, broadbanding or any of a number of other euphemisms for what used to be known as the intensification of work. This is an aspect of workplace change not assessed in *Catching the Wave*.

In 1992 decentralization was brought to its zenith when the IRC fully accepted the principles of enterprise bargaining. Under the auspices of enterprise bargaining, productivity based agreements geared to the needs of individual enterprises at the expense of their workforce became the dominant guideline of wage fixation. More recently, nonunion enterprise bargaining was permitted under yet another employer oriented change to industrial legislation sponsored by the Labor Government. This reversal from the customary union preference principle together with an already weakened trade union movement which has experienced a rapidly deteriorating fall in membership represented another major capitulation to the economic rationalism that has underpinned much of the more recent Accord strategies. As a consequence private and public sector employers, including those Mathews has written up for the case studies in *Catching the Wave*, have workforces unable to resist wages and conditions which previous to the Accord would have been vigorously rejected. This critical perspective is nearly totally absent from this book which seems to be fascinated by workplace change. This is not to deny that change was necessary in many Australian workplaces, but

change often resulted in reduced conditions for workers when it need not have.

For all that, there is merit in this publication. One of Mathews' strengths has always been his ability to pinpoint relevant secondary literature and this book abounds in useful references for those interested in its subject matter. The discussions of the various forms of workplace change, lean production, the sociotechnical production system and

teamwork provide useful introductions to further reading. The book is well written, readable and informative and the case studies interesting (if uncritical). Despite the concerns raised in this review, *Catching the Wave* makes interesting reading and puts a popular position worthy of reflection.

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Les apprentissages du changement dans l'entreprise

par Nicole Fazzini-Feneyrol, Paris, Éditions l'Harmattan, 1995, 303 p., ISBN 2-7384-3418-5.

À première vue, cette étude ethnologique semble présenter une approche innovatrice à un sujet important d'actualité, celui de l'analyse de la transformation technologique des entreprises. L'ouvrage est organisé en quatre parties: I. Des tentatives de changement, II. La construction du changement en actes dans des situations de travail, III. L'apprentissage de l'entreprise, et IV. Les capacités d'adaptation des entreprises. En annexe le lecteur trouve le compte-rendu de quelques « morceaux de vie au travail » (p. 239) vécus par l'ethnologue avec le personnel de l'une des entreprises étudiées.

Dès l'introduction, les objectifs de la recherche ainsi qu'une brève description de la méthodologie ethnologique appropriée à l'étude sont exposés. Les trois axes de la réflexion sont (1) la compréhension de l'entreprise vue comme ensemble social et culturel, (2) l'analyse des capacités de changement organisationnel à travers la construction des usages collectifs et individuels, et (3) la comparaison des modèles de développement des entreprises de cultures régionales ou nationales différentes. Ainsi la démarche réalisée par l'auteure s'oriente à éclairer la compréhension de l'entreprise comme ensemble social et lieu de construction d'usages à la base du développement d'actions collectives. Quatre entreprises

servent d'objet d'analyse de cas de changement technique ou technologique dans des secteurs d'activités variées: la production de conserves, le bâtiment et les travaux publics, le service informatique et le service de restauration. Nicole Fazzini-Feneyrol s'est impliquée au sein de ces entreprises dans le rôle d'observatrice participante à travers des emplois généralement à caractère administratif ou technique.

La première partie du volume fait état de l'analyse comparative de trois cas dont les observations ont débuté il y a près de quinze ans, ce qui rend leur problématique peu pertinente à la vie des entreprises contemporaines. Des hypothèses qui s'inspirent de ces observations doivent guider une analyse plus approfondie de la quatrième entreprise, une société de service en restauration. Malgré l'énoncé des objectifs à l'introduction de l'ouvrage, les questions évoquées au fil de chacune des analyses de cas semblent mal articulées à la perspective d'ensemble. Par exemple, dans le cas de la société de production de conserves, l'auteure précise qu'elle réalise une enquête sur la circulation de l'information dans l'entreprise, les modes de communication, les relations entre les groupes sociaux et, d'une manière plus générale, la maîtrise de l'information. Il n'est pas clair de quelle façon la compréhens-