Championing better work and working lives

7LMP – Leading, Managing and Developing People

EXAMINER'S REPORT

September 2018

Advanced Level Qualification

Leading, Managing and Developing People

September 2018

Date: 27 September 2018 **Time: 09:50 – 13:00 hrs**

Time allowed – Three hours and ten minutes
(Including ten minutes' reading time)

Instructions

- Answer **all** of Section A.
- Answer **five** questions in Section B (**one** per subsection).
- Read each question carefully before answering.
- Write clearly and legibly.

Information

- Questions may be answered in any order.
- Equal marks are allocated to each section of the paper.
- Within Section B equal marks are allocated to each question.
- If a question includes reference to 'your organisation', this may be interpreted as covering any organisation with which you are familiar.
- The case study is not based on an actual organisation. Any similarities to known organisations are coincidental.

You will fail the examination if:

- You fail to answer five questions in Section B (one per subsection) **and/or**
- You achieve less than 40% in either Section A or Section B **and/or**
- You achieve less than 50% overall.

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SECTION A - Case Study

Note: In your responses, you are allowed to improvise or add to the case study details provided below. However, the case study should not be changed or compromised in any way.

Scrub & Sponge Ltd (S&S) is a well-established cleaning contractor with a strong reputation in a large, prosperous town and its surrounding county. A family-owned business that was started over 30 years ago, the company currently employs 175 people on full-time or part-time contracts. Most work as providers of cleaning services, but there is also a small administrative team who work from premises in the town centre. S&S operates in both the domestic and industrial markets, supplying high quality and reliable cleaning services to private households and workplaces.

S&S has fostered a good, local reputation over many years. Operating in a highly competitive industry in which annual client retention rates are less than 50%, the company has managed to retain over 70% of its customers in each of the last three years.

This comparatively strong business performance has been presided over by S&S's owner-manager Janet Orwell. Her strong, energetic, no-nonsense personality make her an excellent salesperson and under her leadership the company has grown steadily. The company even managed to continue its expansion after 2008 when recessionary conditions caused the contract cleaning industry to retract for a few years.

Most of S&S's commercial clients run small businesses from premises like shops, pubs, offices and restaurants which require regular cleaning, and this is where 80% of operating income originates. But at any one time Janet's team also provide domestic weekly or fortnightly cleaning services to around 400 private households.

After a long period of relative stability, S&S now finds that its future commercial viability is under serious threat.

The company is facing fierce new competition from two international app-based cleaning providers that have begun to market their services in the town. These organisations operate in the so-called 'sharing' or 'gig' economy. They do not employ any cleaning staff directly. Instead people who have spare time available and are looking for cleaning work register with them as self-employed associates, and are provided with work when a client books cleaning services using one of the apps. The companies expect their associates to adhere to high standards and will cease to offer them work if clients give them poor reviews. However, they also pay enhanced rates to those who garner excellent ratings from customers. Training and uniforms are provided, but associates have to pay for these themselves as well as covering all their equipment, transport and insurance costs.

The new competitors' business model allows them to provide high quality cleaning services at around half of Janet's costs because they only hire people for the hours they are fully occupied, while avoiding employer's national insurance contributions and statutory sick pay (SSP). They make no pension contributions and have no office premises in the town to pay for. They are thus able to charge customers considerably less for services than S&S while also paying their cleaners a higher hourly rate than Janet is able to afford. As a result it is getting harder to secure new clients, while a good number of existing customers have ceased to do business with S&S.

Moreover, several of Janet's strongest employees have decided to work on a self-employed basis rather than continue to be employed directly by S&S. They can earn a lot more, pay less tax and work at times which suit them.

Janet now has to pay her best people more than she used to in order to persuade them to work for her clients when they are not undertaking independent assignments provided by the new app-based competitors.

Indeed, more generally Janet is finding it harder to keep her staff. Unemployment levels in the locality are low, so there is no shortage of alternative job opportunities for people. S&S's employee turnover rate has increased substantially over the past few months and Janet is beginning to wonder if the rather autocratic, paternalist style of management that she practices may be part of the problem. Recruitment and training costs are increasing rapidly as S&S is having to hire more new people each month.

For all these reasons S&S's profit margins are getting tighter all the time, and while the company is still operating at a profit, Janet has serious concerns about its future viability.

In order to help her figure out an appropriate 'turnaround strategy', Janet has been reading articles and has attended some business seminars. There seems to be no alternative but to find ways of cutting operating costs by staffing her company more efficiently, but she is unsure about what precise steps she needs to take.

She also understands that she needs to expand her operation geographically so that S&S operates beyond the locality in which it currently sells its services. Moreover, Janet has concluded that she needs to diversify S&S's activities so as to open up new business opportunities. She plans to start providing more specialist cleaning services and to develop a more original 'customer value proposition' which her competitors will find it harder to replicate. One idea would involve despatching small teams of cleaners to 'blitz clean' a property in an hour rather than sending a single person for half a day. Others would involve investing in new high-tech equipment that would allow her company to provide 'deep cleaning' and expanding her range of activities to include car valeting, gardening and property maintenance services. She is also considering trying to re-brand S&S as a 'green cleaning company' which uses locally-sourced, environmentally sustainable products and provides its services at premium rate.

PLEASE TURN OVER

Janet Orwell asks you, as an HR Consultant, for advice in the following areas:

1. **How she can reduce employee turnover.**

2. **How she can increase staffing efficiency while maintaining quality standards.**

3. **What would be the major HR challenges associated with diversifying and re-branding S&S along the lines suggested?**

Your brief requires you to put forward and justify practical proposals that will have a speedy impact and will not cost a great deal of money to implement. Draw on research and organisational examples.

It is recommended that you spend roughly a third of your time on each of Questions 1, 2 and 3.

SECTION B

Answer FIVE questions in this section, ONE per subsection A to E. You may include diagrams, flowcharts or bullet points to clarify and support your answers, so long as you provide an explanation of each.

A

1. In December 2016 the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) published a position paper entitled 'In Search of the Best Possible Evidence'. Here it was argued that HR managers have a strong tendency to follow current fashions or 'fads' and to apply them in their organisations even though there is often no good evidence to justify such a course of action.

i) Illustrating your answer with examples, explain why so many managers are attracted to the latest management fads.

AND

ii) What advice would you give to a senior colleague who was interested in pursuing 'evidence-based human resource management' but was unsure about how to go about doing so?

OR

2. Every year the CIPD carries out a survey which focuses on trends in absence management. Last year the survey reported a continuation of three long term trends:

- A decline in the average number of days that employees are absent each year (i.e. reduced absence rates);
- An increase in the proportion of absence which is accounted for by stress, anxiety and depression;
- The delegation of responsibility for managing absence from the HR function to line managers.

The survey indicated that while line managers were being expected to carry out absence management activities such as return-to-work interviews, they were often given insufficient training and support to carry the role out effectively.

i) To what extent are these trends true of absence and absence management in your organisation? How can they be explained?

AND

ii) You are asked to prepare a half day training course for line managers entitled 'effective absence management'. What key points would you want to make? Justify your answer.

PLEASE TURN OVER

B

3. You receive the following e-mail from a friend who has recently been promoted to a management role for the first time:

'Hello. My Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is keen to improve levels of motivation in our business and has asked me to brief him on what steps we might take. I have searched online and have found an article which says that motivating people at work is simple. You just find out what your people need from their jobs and look to provide it for them. Is it really that straight forward?'

Answer this e-mail using examples and published research findings to justify your key points.

OR

4. It can be argued that contemporary thinking about psychological contracts and employee engagement have a lot in common. A workforce will only be engaged if a positive psychological contract with the employing organisation is maintained. Moreover, when managers breach psychological contracts the result is often disengagement on the part of employees.

i) Explain what is meant by the term 'a positive psychological contract'. What steps can HR managers take to help foster them in organisations?

AND

ii) Drawing on your own experience and observations at work to justify your answer, say how far you agree with the proposition that disengagement on the part of employees is often rooted in perceived breaches of the psychological contract.

C

5. Brazilian entrepreneur Ricardo Semler summed up his leadership style when he said that 'authoritarians cannot impose commitment, only commands.' His view was that organisational success is most likely to occur when its leaders stop exercising 'command and control' and start focusing on 'making the workers feel good about their lives' as this delivers a genuinely committed workforce.

i) Drawing on published research, explain how far you agree with Semler's approach to leading organisations.

AND

ii) Explain why so many senior managers appear to prefer to lead their organisations or departments using 'command and control' rather than alternative approaches.

OR

6. You work for a commercially successful, growing company operating in an industry and based in a country, with which you are familiar. The company is looking to expand internationally by setting up subsidiaries overseas and acquiring smaller companies in other countries. You are asked to brief the senior management team on the impact this internationalisation strategy should have on leadership development activity in the organisation.

i) What competencies and attributes do global business leaders ideally need to have which are less significant for those based in one country? Illustrate your answer with examples.

AND

ii) Drawing on research and examples, what recommendations would you want to make about how the company might go about developing effective, future leadership talent? Justify your answer.

PLEASE TURN OVER

D

7. In a recent article Andre Lavoie (2015) wrote about what he saw as 'the common HR mistakes' that are often made by managers in small businesses. His key point was that these typically get made when things are running smoothly, creating avoidable future risks. Three of the common mistakes he identified were as follows:

- over-hasty recruitment decisions;
- inadequate record keeping in areas such as performance and absence;
- insufficient investment in training and development.

i) Why do you think that these 'HR mistakes' are commonly made in small businesses? Justify your answer.

AND

ii) What business case would you put forward to support actions aimed at avoiding these 'HR mistakes'? Justify your answer.

OR

8. According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) there are around 500,000 cases of 'stress, depression or anxiety at work' reported each year in the UK. The figure has remained at this level for most of the past 20 years, while absence related to these factors is estimated to be around 12 million working days each year. HSE statistics also show that the prevalence of stress and of stress-related absence is almost twice as high in the public sector than it is in the private sector.

i) Why do you think public sector workers are apparently so much more likely to suffer from work-related stress, anxiety and depression than people who work in the private sector?

AND

ii) You have been asked to suggest **ONE** measure that could practically be taken by HR managers in public sector organisations to help reduce stress among employees. What suggestion would you make and why?

E

9. You receive the following e-mail from a friend who works as an HR manager in a private company which has operations in several countries:

'Hi. I need your advice. The HR Director has been asked to draw up a code of professional ethics for my company. He has asked all of us in his team to say what we think should be the three most important points in the code. It has to be appropriate for all global sites'.

Draft a reply to this e-mail setting out what **THREE** distinct points you think would be the most important to include in a code of ethics for an international company. Justify your suggestions.

OR

10. Porter and Kramer (2011) reported their research looking into attitudes towards business across the world. They showed that people overwhelmingly see business activities as the cause of most of the world's social and environmental problems.

To what extent do you agree with this assertion? Justify your answer using examples.

END OF EXAMINATION

LEADING, MANAGING AND DEVELOPING PEOPLE

Examiner's Report – September 2018

Introduction

A total of 153 candidates sat the 7LMP examination in September. Due to an administrative error the wrong seen case study was sent out a month prior to the examination. As the error was only spotted less than a week before the date of the exam, candidates had very limited time available to prepare the 'right' case study. As a result it was decided that we would mark and moderate Section A on this occasion as if the case study was unseen rather than seen. We also appreciated the potential knock-on impact on the time candidates had to revise for Section B resulting from the case study error and therefore we applied marking compensation across the whole paper. Despite the error, there were some very impressive answers in both Sections A and B and many that were very solid indeed. This was by any standards a strong cohort.

Section A

These questions were intended to test knowledge and understanding of:

- LO2: Contribute to the promotion of flexible working and effective change management in organisations.

- LO5: Critically discuss the aims and objectives of the HRM and HRD functions in organisations and how these are met in practice.

Candidates were not required to give completely equal attention to all three of the areas, but did need to cover each reasonably fully in order to achieve a pass mark. There was plenty of room for originality and we were not therefore too prescriptive about the content of answers provided they directly addressed the issues raised in each question. As always, however, we did focus on how achievable recommendations and proposals were. This organisation is clearly relatively small and is operating under resource constraints. Answers which simply recommended expensive interventions were thus not marked highly. It was also important that a sound business case was put forward by way of justification.

The first question on employee turnover / retention was generally answered pretty effectively. Aside from pay, most candidates correctly picked up on the lack of flexibility on offer at S&S and on the references made to Janet Orwell's "strong", "no-nonsense", "autocratic" and "paternalist" approach to management. She is respected by those who work for her, but not held in much affection, which is a problem in a tight labour market situation where people have a choice about where to work. Strong answers thus focused on a number of areas including: improving inter-personal relations (praising and thanking people more, social activities etc), increasing employee involvement, offering more flexibility about when and where people work, giving people a choice about their employment status (ie: employed or self-employed), providing better career development opportunities and interventions aimed at improving well-being. There was also some scope here for reward management initiatives such as bonuses for referring friends and family members and additional pay for longer-serving staff, provided overall wage costs do not increase unsustainably.

The more impressive answers also demonstrated an awareness of the tools that can be used to investigate the causes of voluntary employee turnover (exit interviews, satisfaction surveys etc) and put forward a number of distinct ideas about how staff retention could be improved.

As always when marking Section A questions we were here very much looking for candidates to engage with the case itself. On some occasions this was not so evident, candidates offering rather generic prescriptions that might apply in all workplaces.

Part 2 proved more of a struggle for some. A good number of answers focused much more on quality than on efficiency, so some marks were lost here. Question 2 answers were also sometimes too brief, containing very limited justifications.

On operating efficiency there is a need to reduce slack time so that people are only paid for hours that they are working. Modest investment in appropriate IT systems may thus be advisable for roistering. Back office costs also need to be reduced. Encouraging or even requiring administrative staff to work from home would be a way of reducing office expenses considerably. There is also scope for developing new contractual relationships such as annual hours arrangements, flexitime, compressed hours and term-time working which can help improve efficiency in ways which also increase employee satisfaction and hence potentially contribute to improved employee retention. Thoughtful absence management initiatives may also have a role to play here including those aimed at improving health and wellbeing.

The final section was very straight forward because all candidates were required to do was to identify and briefly discuss some key HR challenges. The HR implications associated geographical expansion mainly concern recruiting and selecting a workforce. This is true also of diversification, but here there will be significant HRD implications in addition. Strong candidates also discussed change management here. The big challenge will involve achieving these things while maintaining existing standards of service.

For the reasons discussed in the introduction above, we marked this case study as if it was unseen on this occasion. For example, where key issues were discussed (eg: management style, flexible working etc) as part of an answer to a question that was not so focused on them we took that into account. It was, however, still necessary for candidates to develop thoughtful and well-informed answers which demonstrated core knowledge and understanding. We could not pass answers which either did little more than repeat the facts of the case or which, conversely, avoided those facts in preference to passages describing theory. A lack of justification for perfectly solid basic proposals remains a problem too. At Level 7 it is not sufficient, for example, simply to write out a few bullet points and not to go on and justify their inclusion in an answer.

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Section B

Question A1

This question was intended to test knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1: Review and critically evaluate major contemporary research and debates in the fields of HRM and HRD.

A sizeable minority of candidates attempted this question and produced some varied and effective answers. We were not looking for knowledge of the CIPD position paper cited in the question as much as an appreciation of the broad ideas its authors discuss.

The paper argues that there is a strong tendency across the HRM community to read about and take note of journalistic pieces which report the activities of the world's most high profile and successful companies. The assumption is then made that if a course of action is being taken by Google, Apple or Virgin it must have some intrinsic merit and will offer something to all organisations. As a result 'best practice case studies' become influential and a new fad is created. The paper gives the example of organisations abandoning traditional approaches to performance appraisal – a current fad which is being widely copied because it has been done by some well-known organisations. In fact, the paper argues, there is only very limited evidence of any substance which supports such a course of action.

There was some tendency for candidates simply to lament the lack of an HR presence in organisations with the influence required to avoid fads, but these were not always hugely convincing as it is often HR professionals who seem to be attracted to them. We awarded high marks to candidates who put forward somewhat more sophisticated answers.

Advice in part 2 varied a lot, so much depended marks-wise on how compelling and well justified the answer was. The key point is that decision-makers should refrain from jumping on band-wagons without first considering what evidence exists to show that a change in approach or the adoption of a new intervention will have any positive impact. Hunches should be avoided. There is plenty of robust evidence to look at and weigh up. Expert opinion can also be taken account of, provided the experts in question are knowledgeable and that their advice is itself evidence-based.

Question A2

This question was also intended to test knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1: Review and critically evaluate major contemporary research and debates in the fields of HRM and HRD.

This question was chosen by most candidates and on the whole it was answered pretty effectively.

Answers to the first question varied a lot depending on the situation in the candidates' own organisation, some mirroring the national trend more than others. What mattered here was that the candidate demonstrated some understanding of how absence is being managed in their organisation and what the major trends are. There were some weaker answers that took too much of a descriptive approach here, telling us what was happening in their organisations but making too few, well-justified points about the reasons. But on the whole the answers were nuanced, thoughtful and well-informed. Explanations often focused on increasing pressure on private sector organisations to generate greater profit and increase productivity and on public sector organisations to meet targets with reduced budgets. This leads to the intensification of work (hence more stress), a tendency to de-centralise routine HR activities (i.e. delegating absence management) and less tolerance of absence / fewer paid absence days (less absence overall). There were, however, numerous other points made such as improved health & safety records, better medicine and the tendency for a small proportion of people to account for a large proportion of total absence. It was interesting to read discussions in the stronger answers about stress and well-being issues, although it was disappointing that so few candidates went on to focus their answers to part 2 on these kinds of issues.

Instead, too many part 2 answers were basic and / or unpersuasive. Some candidates simply set out an agenda without much explanation for their choice of topics, while others focused exclusively on administrative and process issues which will only ever take an organisation so far. Another weakness was a tendency to pack far too much into a half-day training programme. We also read a lot of answers – as is often the case when questions like this appear on the paper – which discussed training methods (discussions, videos etc) rather than the substantial issues of policy and practice.

That said, we also read plenty of interesting and well-informed answers here covering the range of absence management activities that are typically delegated to line managers. The essential need is for line managers to know how to deal with a range of relevant situations effectively and sensitively when conducting return-to-work interviews and reviews when people are absent. Record keeping and monitoring activities, target setting and ways of maintaining contact with absent staff were all discussed effectively too.

Question B3

This question was intended to test knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 2: Evaluate major theories relating to motivation, commitment and engagement at work and how these are put into practice by organisations.

This was answered by a good proportion of candidates and most wrote fairly strong answers in response. The major weakness was a tendency simply to provide an account of key motivation theories without fully or directly addressing the question. A lack of justification for arguments was also an issue here.

Most candidates demonstrated familiarity with needs-based theories of motivation at work. Maslow and McClelland are the most commonly-cited theorists and stronger candidates demonstrated their understanding of these perspectives. Needs-based theorists argue that motivation is linked to employee needs and that organisations which meet needs well (money, job security, comfortable working environment, good work-life balance, career development opportunities, interesting work etc) will have a more highly motivated workforce than those who do not meet such needs. Things are, of course, made more complex by the fact that people vary a lot in what their needs are and that these change during the course of our careers. So it is not "simple" as the email suggests. Meeting diverse needs is very challenging in practice.

Stronger answers went on to introduce points relating to other families of motivation theories and of the ways in which these further complicate the question of how best to motivate people at work. Goals-based approaches, cognitive theories such as equity and expectancy theories, and job design-based approaches were all be cited and explained effectively in the best answers to this question. They key point is that meeting employee needs is a necessary but often insufficient approach to take when looking to maximise levels of motivation.

Question B4

This question was also intended to test knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 2: Evaluate major theories relating to motivation, commitment and engagement at work and how these are put into practice by organisations.

This was tackled by a minority of candidates, but those who did write answers tended to have good knowledge and understanding of the relevant issues. The performance was therefore often good.

There are a number of ways in which the idea of a 'positive psychological contract' can be defined and explained. Markers took a broad approach here allowing for considerable variation in the definitions developed. Stronger candidates tended to stress the notion of reciprocity, clearly showing understanding of the idea that workers have psychological contracts with their employers which are made up of very real, if unwritten, expectations on both sides which amount to a deal. It follows that a positive psychological contract is one that works well for both parties and is sustained over time. Employers gain reliable, possibly-flexible, high-performing staff, well-engaged staff, while employees gain job satisfaction, security, money and appropriate developmental opportunities.

There were many different examples given in answer to part 2. What mattered as far as marks were concerned was that the candidate provided a full answer that drew on experience or observations of others' experience in the workplace. These clearly had to be examples of breaches of psychological contracts (ie: situations in which expectations have not been met or where an employer has failed to honour its side of the deal) in order to attract good marks. It was not enough simply to give examples of poor treatment or unfairness without further explanation of their relevance to the question.

Question C5

This question was intended to test knowledge and understanding of Learning outcome 3: Debate and critically evaluate the characteristics of effective leadership and the methods used to develop leaders in organisations.

This proved to be a very popular choice of question. Most answered in pretty well, although the requirement to draw on published research when answering part 1 proved rather challenging for some candidates.

Several leadership models have been developed and tested over recent decades which could form the basis of strong answers to part 1. Examples are those associated with Goleman, McGregor, Blake & Moulton and Hersey & Blanchard, all of which have plenty to offer in justifying answers to the first question. While views differ, most contemporary commentaries on effective leadership argue in favour of a distributed approach, authentic leadership and selecting a style that best meets the needs of organisations and followers at particular times. In all of these cases, a degree of control has to be exercised alongside more positive approaches and the best answers here reached a thoughtful, nuanced conclusion rather than one which is more simplistic, for example just saying that Semler is right. However, what mattered most when awarding higher marks was that some published research was cited accurately and that a credible argument was both developed and justified.

Views also differed in part 2 and here there was plenty of scope for original answers to be developed. Some argued that 'command and control' is simply an easier and less taxing approach, others that it has plenty to offer in practice, and often that senior managers are simply unaware of the possible alternative approaches that are open to them. Really strong answers took an international perspective and considered cultural diversity / expectations in different countries.

Question C6

This question was also intended to test knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 3: Debate and critically evaluate the characteristics of effective leadership and the methods used to develop leaders in organisations.

There were not many takers for this question, but those who opted to write answers tended to have good knowledge of IHRM issues and developed some strong and well-informed arguments.

There is a great deal of evidence that shows how global leaders tend to be more effective for a variety of reasons if they have a good level of familiarity with a broad range of cultures. Workplace cultures as well as the tastes and expectations of consumers vary very significantly from country to country and it is therefore necessary to lead organisations in such a way as to respect and take advantage of these differences. A key competence is therefore inter-cultural sensitivity a well as good, in-depth understanding of particular cultures of direct relevance to an organisations' operations. Speaking a second language reasonably well also helps to improve trust, communication effectiveness and understanding. The other key point that stronger candidates made in this context concerned the particular challenges associated with leading an international organisation. Events are less predictable, structures more complex, face-to-face communication less frequent and policy more varied. A one size fits all mentality is not feasible.

Developing future global leadership talent typically involves a mixture of formal training interventions and exposure to international operations during the earlier part of a career. Overseas assignments, including periods of expatriation are the best way of achieving the latter. There is a big literature piece on expatriation which strong candidates drew on effectively when answering this question.

Question D7

This question was intended to test knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 6: Assess the contribution made by HRM and HRD specialists in different types of organisation.

This was answered by most candidates, some doing so a great deal more convincingly than others. The major difficulties came when answering part 2 where there was a tendency simply to argue that the establishment of an HR function is the answer to all problems. First, of course, this is a simplistic and somewhat weak argument to deploy without a great deal more justification. Secondly, it is not a realistic prospect for many SMEs which are simply too small to be in a position to employ a team of qualified HR professionals in the manner that some candidates were arguing they should.

There are many potential factors that could be included in an answer to part 1. What mattered as far as marks were concerned was that candidates clearly differentiated the prevailing circumstances that apply in small businesses from those of other types of organisation and that they provided a good justification. Stronger answers focused on inexperience in HRM on the part of managers who are not specialists and are obliged to carry out a wide range of management tasks, the absence of a specialist HR function, a preference for informality, pressure of time, limited spare cash for investment and relatively small numbers of employees making extensive expenditure on sophisticated HRM practices impractical.

The business case in part 2 had to focus on commercial outcomes and not purely on questions of ethics for high marks to be awarded. Too often candidates write much more confidently about good practice, while ignoring the practicalities or downplaying cost issues. The wider the range of compelling arguments that were made and justified, the higher the mark. Stronger answers made reference to organisation performance over both the long and short term, employee engagement, improved customer service, innovation, recruitment and retention of strong performers, reputation-building, high trust and potentially the avoidance of employment tribunal claims. The very strongest answers made reference to relevant academic research findings (Purcell, Huselid, Pfeffer etc) which link HR practices to superior organisational outcomes.

Question D8

This question was also intended to test knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 6: Assess the contribution made by HRM and HRD specialists in different types of organisation.

As is always the case when we ask questions that focus on the public sector we read some answers which are very poorly-informed, often making assumptions about public sector working which owe somewhat more to caricature than reality. By contrast of course, answers written by candidates who have worked in public sector organisations are often very strong.

HSE reports on stress at work make reference to a wide variety of factors which they believe help account for why there is so much more reported stress in the public sector than is the case in the private sector. It is partly related to the size of organisations. Reported stress is generally much more prevalent in larger organisations than smaller ones, and most public sector organisations are by definition big. Specific causes that they discuss are workload pressures, deadlines, the level of responsibility that many frontline public sector workers carry, too much disruptive change, bureaucracy and perceived 'lack of control', poor interpersonal relationships, too little management support and even threats of violence from service users. There were plenty of issues here for candidates to explore and discuss in their answers. It was important, however, that they did not put too much emphasis on current developments in the public sector environment (pay, cutbacks etc) because the HSE figures show that there has been no discernible increase in stress in recent years. This is a long-term, endemic problem. There was also room here for candidates to develop arguments about the validity of the statistics. It may, for example, be the case that stress is equally common in many private sector organisations but that it is less effectively recorded and reported.

Answers to Part 2 inevitably varied very considerably. What mattered was that the suggestion made was set out clearly and justified effectively. It also had to be practically achievable for an HR manager and thus not be a major organisation-level or government-level policy initiative. A lot of answers discussed wellbeing initiatives of various kinds, flexible working and improvements to management style. All were the basis of some strong and interesting arguments here.

Question E9

This question was intended to test knowledge and understanding learning outcome 7: Promote professionalism and an ethical approach to HRM and HRD practice in organisations.

This was a popular choice and the answers were of very variable quality. The main problem was a strong tendency to do one of two things. First, not to focus on ethics, instead writing about a wider range of HR matters. Secondly, candidates had a tendency to cite the same essential point twice or even three times, by for example discussing equality and diversity under two separate headings. Given that the question specifically required distinct points to be made, this inevitably meant that some marks were lost.

That said, there was plenty of scope here for candidates to develop original ideas and arguments, and stronger candidates were very much able to do this. The highest marks were awarded to those whose suggested points were justified with reference to this being an international, commercial organisation and were tailored to that scenario.

Published analyses of corporate codes of ethics tend to identify content relating to integrity & honesty, legality and respecting human rights, professional proficiency & CPD, loyalty to the organisation, confidentiality and fairness & equality. These are generally expressed both in general terms and with specific reference to the various stakeholder groups (ie: clients, suppliers, colleagues, employees etc).

Question E10

This question was also intended to test knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 7: Promote professionalism and an ethical approach to HRM and HRD practice in organisations.

This was a very broad, general question on ethics and sustainability which gave candidates plenty of scope to develop thoughtful and original answers. Some agreed with the statement in the stem, while others disagreed. Most argued that businesses are (and can be) both a force for good and ill when it comes to social and environmental issues. What mattered is that a full, well-argued answer was provided which used good examples and provides, effective and compelling justification for the points that were made. As this was often the last question to be answered, answers were sometimes rather limited length-wise, but most who attempted the question managed to develop some interesting and well-justified arguments.

Conclusions

Overall this was a pretty strong set of papers with strong performance from many candidates notwithstanding the case study error. I continue to be most impressed by the standards that candidates achieve, with the amount of background reading they carry out and, presumably, the high standards of tuition they are receiving.

Stephen Taylor