Introduction

This book was inspired by the success of professional development workshops (PDWs) on experiential learning in human resource management (HRM), held at the Academy of Management. Each year for the past five years, presenters at these events bring their “tried and tested” experiential learning activities to the PDWs to share with HRM academics and practitioners who are looking to expand their repertoire of experiential activities. Now, through this text, you too can take advantage of a wide range of “ready-to-go” HRM-related activities, confident that they will work. We are pleased to offer Teaching Human Resource Management: An Experiential Approach, especially as it fills an important gap; few practical examples of experiential learning in human resource management are currently available (Matsuo, 2015).

All learning arises from human experience and in this sense we may assume that ultimately, all “learning is experiential” (Bird, 2015, p.30). An experiential approach enables a number of powerful learning benefits for students or workshop participants that are serviceable for life-long learning as Smith (2016, p.2) also observed: “Experiential learning activities require learners to go beyond the confines of the online classroom and connect their learning to the real world, often making contributions to their future professional field and society.”

Most notably, an experiential approach, as it applies to this text, encourages the application of HRM theories to analyze practical situations. Such linkages help to scaffold conceptualization (Kolb, 1984), structuring the connection between the “here and now” of concrete experience with abstract concepts. This process helps to develop self-knowledge by encouraging questions like, “Do I overlook personal bias that may have implications for my HR practice?” The development of self-knowledge through experiential learning is fostered by an emphasis upon reflection (Crossman, 2011; Freire, 1973). Indeed, reflection is at the heart of Beard and Wilson’s (2006, p.2) definition of experiential learning as, “the sense-making process of active engagement between the inner world of the person and the outer world of the environments.” As a skill, it has direct applications to professional life since workplace activities often require a level of team reflection on work progress to function effectively (Matsuo,
2015). For this reason, we have selected experiential activities for the text that foster both group and personal reflection.

Historically championed by Dewey in the early part of the last century as a tool for learning, reflection, as Neck, Greene, and Brush (2014), noted, enables other learning processes including the synthesis of thinking and acting, theory and practice, learning and doing. Experiential learning and the activities in this text therefore stimulate higher order and deep learning skills that are, at the same time, personally revealing, engaging, and fun.

All of the activities in the chapters that follow characterize important elements of experiential learning in their capacity to encourage theory to practice applications, the cultivation of self-knowledge, reflection, and sense-making in ways that scaffold understandings from concrete to abstract and vice versa. For the less experienced HRM facilitator, the activities in the book serve as models for good practice and can also foster an understanding of how to create new and original experiential activities. For other “time poor” facilitators, more familiar with experiential teaching, the text can be a reliable, “go to” resource.

Teaching in HRM, in common with other disciplines, has been influenced by western ideas of not only how knowledge is best acquired but also by assumptions about what practitioners need to know and how they should respond to certain HR issues. Internationalization, however, has led to an awareness and acknowledgment that western perspectives of learning and professional practice are not necessarily embraced in all national cultures and organizational contexts. Japanese HRM managers, for example, reportedly respond to learning strategies that promote reflecting and feeling while Malaysians may tend to prefer to learn through thinking and acting (Yamazaki & Kayes, 2010). For this reason, the editors of this text set out from its conception to invite submissions from educators all over the world. The intention was not only to try to capture and celebrate international perspectives and locally relevant activities but also to foster the sharing of ideas among international facilitators of HRM. Borrowing ideas internationally has a rich tradition in education and experiential learning relies upon a certain spirit of invention that arises from this process.

Most of the contributors in the text have suggested variations to the activities they have submitted, conscious that our teaching contexts vary in innumerable ways: how many students are involved, demographic implications, the time available, and the level of academic or professional expertise. Thus, the activities are inherently flexible, and sensitive to the considerations that all educators have, in responding to their own teaching situations.

You will also notice that some experiential activities are suitable for
online learning, a feature that scholars such as Smith (2016, p.5) are only just beginning to explore. For example, in Chapter 15, Whiting and de Janasz offer their innovative online mentor assignment, whereby students use their networks to identify, initiate, and carry out a relationship with an HR mentor exclusively online. While students can be encouraged to share what they’ve learned from their mentors in small or large discussion groups, this experiential learning occurs outside class and using non-face-to-face communication. The efficacy and value of this learning is demonstrated in empirical research by de Janasz and her colleagues and provides ample evidence that the benefits are substantial and similar to traditional – i.e., face-to-face – mentoring (e.g., de Janasz & Godshalk, 2013; de Janasz, Ensher & Heun, 2008).

For the convenience of our readers, we have grouped activities within chapters that reflect common course topics and HRM practitioner functions, such as diversity, recruitment, safety, selection, job design, performance management, feedback, and coaching. In practice, topics and functions invariably overlap. For example, in addressing performance management, activities designed to develop effective skills in providing feedback are also relevant. We therefore encourage facilitators to spend some time sampling as many activities and chapters as possible, rather than focusing on a specific topic. In doing so, we also hope to stimulate the imaginations of facilitators who are often adept bricoleurs, so that they may recognize some features in one activity that can be applied to another subject matter entirely. Also, note that Chapter 15 features four activities that are intended to extend over multiple course meetings or a semester, and which integrate or feature multiple HR topics.

We do hope you will use this text often in facilitating HRM learning and that you and your participants enjoy and value the “gifts” our experienced and talented contributors have shared.

REFERENCES


