

Reviews

L.M. Spencer Jr. and S.M. Spencer, *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance*, New York & Chichester: Wiley, £34.95 hardback, 372 pp.

How to place the 'right' people in the 'right' jobs? The state-of-the-art in HRM applications of the McClelland/McBer Job Competence Assessment technique is the focal point of this book by Lyle and Signe Spencer. It covers nearly 300 empirical testings of the JCA methodology, dealing with recruitment, assessment, selection and so on. The authors describe quite early on (p. 7) that the method is being used by over 100 researchers in 24 countries, leading to a world-wide database, although the book has a very limited mention of cross-cultural applications. It deals first with the history of the field, then goes on to look at predictors, and examines competency-models. It later tries to see how predictions 'predict' performance and their subsequent management applications. In 25 chapters, the authors cover the occupational-psychologicistic background of the concept and how it has proved to be a useful tool in mostly U.S. business organizations for their current corporate HRM needs. The authors are well-placed to tell the tale as both have practical experience as consultants in such contexts with the McBer/Hay database, and the book should appeal to practising managers, as well as MBA candidates.

The material is well-referenced and constitutes a database in itself of sources in the literature. This reviewer was particularly interested in the authors' definition of 'competency' (Chapter 2), how they developed a 'competence model' (Chapter 12) as well as its societal applications (Chapter 24) with the U.S. Department of Labor. Insights from the practical experience enrich the interpretations in the text as a whole. There is also an insightful short section on how schools must change to develop

'competencies' (pp. 332–341), but the book is short on policy-implications and prescriptions.

Looking to the future, the authors predict a 'tight' labour-market for information-workers (who else?) and see the key-skills top executives, managers and workers require as flexibility, ability to deal with a changing environment and so on, ground covered extensively already in much labor-market research. The general tone of the book is in the end, I regret, rather too scientific and *meliorist*, and far too U.S.-oriented, while claiming to be universalist in its relevance. It fails to sufficiently take into account the *structural* problems advanced economies across the world are facing, in the opinion of this reviewer. Neither HRM nor JCA, alas, will provide satisfactory answers vis-à-vis the global economic changes we are facing!

Malcolm WARNER
Judge Institute of Management Studies
University of Cambridge
 Mill Lane
 Cambridge, CB2 1RX
 UK

Carl L. Cooper and Roy Payne (Eds.), *Causes, Coping & Consequences of Stress at Work*. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, 1990, Paperback, 418 pp.

This collection of papers updates the authors' 1978 volume 'Stress at Work', and examines the major contemporary issues in occupational stress research. It begins with an exploration of the epidemiology of stress in the workplace, by Ben Fletcher. Fletcher captures the growing trend towards examination of the psychology of the individual as well as detailing the vast literature on environmental factors. One aim of the article is the identification of those employment sectors in which the workforce is most subjected to stress.

Part II, 'Factors in the person's environment',

details how organisational structure and type of work affect group stress levels. Meredith Wallace, Mary Levens and George Singer challenge the traditional division of worktypes into blue and white collar, which is used as a categorisation criterion for the purposes of research on stress. Ronald Burke examines causes of stress in managerial occupations employed in large organisations. The topical issue of computer and terminal related stress is discussed by Rob Briner and Robert Hockey, whose paper is a welcome contribution to an ongoing debate. Barbara Gutek, Rena Repetti and Deborah Silver discuss the links between stress at the workplace and social and family life. Concluding this section, Stephen Bluen and Julian Barling examine the particular burdens placed upon those involved in industrial relations negotiating. The authors argue that involvement in industrial relations is a source of stress due to the almost inevitable presence of conflict and change.

Part III, 'Factors in the person', attempts to control for the environmental issues described in Part II, to determine how individuals differ in their susceptibility to, and ability to cope with, stress. Papers by Roy Payne and Jeffrey Edwards discuss the mechanisms which affect coping ability. Part IV, 'The person in the work environment', describes the extent to which organisations are now attempting to provide stress-reducing conditions for their employees. John Ivanevich and Michael Matteson examine the ways in which individuals can change behaviour patterns to influence their well-being. Organisational attempts to reduce stress in the workplace are described by Lawrence Murphy, who provides both a historical review and empirical evaluation of workplace interventions. Finally, Part V, 'Issues in research on stress at work', examines some of the problems of research design, and describes their theoretical implications. Yitzhak Fried questions the rigour of previous studies' measurement of physiological variables, and suggests a framework for future research. Self-selection and the problems of subjective stress measurement from the topic for Michael Frese and Dieter Zapf. They discuss the question of objectivity in research on stress at work as well as issues which users of traditional longitudinal studies need to address.

In summary, this book provides an excellent overview of the subject's domain, and suggests a multitude of directions for further research. It de-

serves a place in the library of anyone involved in the theory or practice of occupational stress management.

Nicola-Maria RILEY
Trinity College
Cambridge University
Cambridge, CB2 1IQ
UK