This book on sustainable human resource management is a timely and relevant contribution for students of international business and human resources because it addresses important geographies and challenges that have been largely overlooked by mainstream management scholars.

Sustainable human resource management is a fundamental activity for any business leader because, without effective and efficient human resources, the boundaries that define organizations in relation to their contexts cannot be maintained or renewed. Edith Penrose (1959) argued that the limits to firm growth stemmed from a shortage of human resources within the firm who are ready to pursue new growth opportunities for the business. The Penrose Effect, as this phenomenon is known, is apparent throughout the book.

The examples also demonstrate how an organization’s institutional compatibility with indigenous institutions represents another of the administrative restraints on a firm’s growth. The authors make it evident that local context and especially the norms and institutions of the informal sector have a profound impact on processes that define corporate bureaucracies. For example, the case of Egypt during and after the Revolution (Case 10) illustrates how delicate the institutional environment can become and how easily it can undermine the fabric of firms. It is because the countries featured in this book are so different from developed countries that the cases, as extreme examples of compromise and creativity, are so valuable and interesting. This study of sustainable human resource management reflects the ‘coal face’ of globalization where the solutions are devised to solve the specific challenges of modernization.

The challenges they describe illustrate how difficult it is to create a strong corporate culture which both accommodates local context and develops professional commitments to the organization. Theories of the firm tell us that this professionalism is essential for the organization’s survival. Although local governments play an important role in establishing conditions that permit professional commitments to develop, it is up to business leaders to develop an accommodating and effective company culture. Faced with institutional adversity the managers and entrepreneurs
featured in this book demonstrate how organizational solutions evolve in response to the needs of their organizations and stakeholders. The cases illustrate how important knowledge sharing is to maintaining the contracts that keep the organization functioning.

This book describes examples of sustainable leadership where managers and entrepreneurs have experimented and struggled to find solutions that engage, motivate and retain human resources for the organization’s cause. The editors have made a convincing case that understanding the needs, attitudes and behaviors of employees is fundamental for sustainable human resource management. In the case of the multinational corporation so too is the capacity to effectively transfer knowledge and other intangible resources from abroad. With their judicious choice of cases the editors have illustrated the importance of expatriate managers as emphatic brokers in making this possible.

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