

## HERIOT-WATT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

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### HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT / ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR - STAGE 3

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#### EXAMINERS REPORT – DIET: DECEMBER 2009

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##### Overall Comments

Candidates answered the OB questions they would like to have been asked, despite it being made quite clear what they were required to answer. In future they should answer the question set. An attempt to answer the question will allow candidates to gain some marks.

The language proficiency of some students is a matter for concern and when placed under exam conditions it is clear that many struggled in the areas of comprehension and understanding. Students have been given support in being clear about what the question is asking e.g. 'discuss', 'critically evaluate', 'compare and contrast' and should be reading this guidance. However, it seems that many students are not well prepared for these examinations.

##### Question A1: Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Most answers indicated what leaders/managers did, and/or gave details of various theories of leadership, neither of which answered the question. The question wanted to know what changes were happening in the environment (economic, education, changes in the attitudes of leaders and followers, the 'green' agenda, etc.) and only a few noted what was occurring. This would lead on to a discussion of the changes necessary for leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Many students confused leadership and management.

##### Question A2: Organisational culture.

Answers which gained more marks showed a diagram of the levels of culture to be found in an organisation, and many answers used Schein's model of culture as a basis for their answer. However, many scripts did not answer the second part of the question – where does the culture of an organisation come from, how is it sustained, etc. Many answers described various models of culture, especially that of the authors noted in the question, but that is not what was asked.

##### Question A3: Conflict between groups.

It was very disheartening to find that the vast majority of students wrote about conflict within groups despite the fact that the question asked about conflict between groups. The word between in the question was even underlined to indicate what was wanted. Students who answered about conflict within groups received some marks. Similarly, those who answered about conflicts within groups also discussed how a manager might go about reducing that type of conflict. A few answers discussed how conflict between groups might be solved.

### **Question B1: Performance appraisal and performance management**

The answers focused almost entirely on performance appraisal and only a small number of candidates made the connection between appraisal and performance management. The answers were very much 'from a script' and there were striking similarities between them, with little in the way of original or critical thinking. The focus was almost entirely on processes and there was almost nothing on organisational outcomes.

There was also a misunderstanding about the role and function of appraisal with many candidates stating that it was the job that was being appraised, not the job holder.

The question was designed to test understanding as much as knowledge but only a small number of students were able to place appraisal within the context of performance management.

Many students cited personal experiences from their own workplace highlighting how appraisal is carried out in practice but very, very few took a critical stance here and instead gave the 'company line'.

### **Question B2: Evaluating training**

A small number of candidates provided a reasonable assessment of how training might be evaluated. Too many candidates adopted a broad brush approach and wrote everything they had read about the topic without taking the time to read the question carefully and answer it; it wasn't a trick question and it should have been straightforward for them. Very few candidates identified evaluation as the final stage in the training cycle although a number pointed out, correctly, that the training need might be the outcome of a performance appraisal.

### **Question B3: Human resource planning**

Most candidates set out the planning process and stages but relatively were able to develop an argument across the essay and highlight the strengths and weaknesses of HR planning. The answers at the upper end of the scale started from the planning process and developed their answer around that and pointed out how theory of HR planning might be translated into practice. Again, the better answers looked at the issue from a critical perspective and questioned the assumptions upon which HR planning rests.

In overall terms, however, the answers were weak as far as language, structure and content are concerned.