This book focuses on human resource management perspectives and practices in 14 countries in the Middle Eastern region. It provides a broad overview of the key issues that organizations and individuals face today in this region of the world. The overarching message of Managing Human Resources in the Middle East, edited by Pawan Budhwar and his colleague Kamel Mellahi, is that HRM systems in the Middle East are neither comprehensive nor prevalent enough to meet the needs of an ever-increasing diverse workforce, or, in particular, mid- and low-wage workers.

The book should appeal to a wide audience. It is an excellent foundation for readers interested in HRM in Middle Eastern countries, particularly since all chapters on national countries are structured around a set of common features: an analysis of the socioeconomic and political background of each country, a description of historical initiatives and developments of the HRM function and its role and importance in most corporations in the country, a review of the future and key challenges facing the HRM function in the countries covered.

Most contributors to these 14 chapters either are native to the countries of their study or have worked for long periods in that country, and hence provide a valuable review of the local scenario of HRM in the Middle Eastern region and related key local issues. The term Middle Eastern is used to define a cultural area with no precise borders, and thus includes all countries with a connection to Arab culture, Arab value systems, and Islam. The editors include in their comprehensive list the following countries: Iran, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

The objective of Chapter 1 is to provide the reader with an understanding of the role of HRM in the Middle East region. Budhwar and Mellahi also provide a useful discussion on the diverse configurations of national factors (cultural dimensions, institutional, and business environments) that dictate HRM in cross-national settings. The authors offer a comprehensive framework based on these national factors, which have been adopted throughout the chapters to develop all the country-specific sections of this book.

In Chapter 2, Namazie and Tayeb focus on factors that have influenced the business environment of Iran over the past two decades or so and highlight the changes that have taken place in HRM. The authors discuss the impact that professionalization of HRM and the creation of professional bodies has had on the shift from personnel management toward HRM.
Chapters 3 through 8 focus on HRM systems in six countries of the Arab Peninsula. Chapter 3 of the book (Al-Hamadi and Budhwar) discusses the dynamics of HRM in the Sultanate of Oman. This country has developed a notable track record in the progress of human resource development (HRD) through the development plan called Vision 2020. This is a long-term initiative pursued by the state that attempts to develop HRM and the capabilities of Omani people to generate and manage technological change. Given the lack of research on the country, the authors use data from two large studies to provide empirical support to their analysis. The authors conclude that HRM is very much a new phenomenon in Oman, and that the triangle of Islam, tribe, and family plays a significant role in the development of HRM in Oman.

In Chapter 4, Suliman examines the past, present, and future of HRM in the United Arab Emirates. The author explains the key challenges and prospects that confront organizations in the area of HRM as well as HRD, with special emphasis on the role of women in the workforce and the increasing presence of foreign national workers. In Chapter 5, Ali and Al-Kazemi highlight the strategic importance of Kuwait in world affairs. A former British colony, Kuwait embraces an economic policy aimed at “maintaining prosperity and traditional political authority, modernity and tribal and social cohesiveness, market openness, and centralized planning” (p. 79). Employment laws, regulation, and HRM function in Kuwait are closely tied to the welfare system of the state. Ali and Al-Kazemi illustrate their findings with a case study of the Kuwaiti National Petroleum Company.

In Chapter 6, Mellahi argues that the HRM system in Saudi Arabia is a product of a mixture of social, cultural, religious, and political factors. Saudi Arabia has a two-tier labor market structure. Wages and work conditions in the public exceed the private sector's wages and conditions by many times. Thus, nationals are reluctant to accept jobs in the private sector, while the private sector has benefited from the influx of cheap foreign workers. The author notes that as a result of an economic downturn, a reduction in oil revenues, and the appearance of mass unemployment, the labor market has entered into a new phase. Increasingly, Saudi Arabian firms face political pressures to employ more Saudis, and yet they need to hire foreigners as a way to open up and diversify the Saudi economy. These contradictory forces lead to a situation where the government regulates the establishment of HRM policies and practices, while simultaneously pushing for more flexibility in the quest for economic competitiveness.

Chapter 7 (Abdalla) focuses on HRM in Qatar. It describes the business environment, industrial relations, the labor market, and the labor force. Qatar is becoming an open and investment-oriented economy. Within this context, HRM is seen as an instrument for both economic and social change. Business and policymakers have invested in the modernization of HRM policies and programs with the expectation that Qatar's HRM evolves into an efficiency-oriented system. The author concludes that improving the quality of HRM in Qatar is a challenging task that requires not only a political will and financial effort, but also social change that guarantees the quality of HRM and the development of a skilled workforce.

In Chapter 8, Branine and Analoui present the evolution of HRM functions in Jordan. The authors discuss at some length the extent to which HRM in Jordan has evolved over the last decades in light of an emphasis on the development of a knowledge-based economy. They contend that the influence of national culture values of tribalism, nepotism, and governmental bureaucratic procedures are unresolved obstacles to progress in economic and HRM reforms.

Chapter 9 provides an analysis of HRM systems and practices in Turkey. Aycan provides an insightful discussion of different historical changes, such as the changing cultural context or the characteristics of the Turkish workforce, and the important economic and political transformation process Turkey is undergoing in line with the EU perspective and integration. Drawing on a large-
scale survey, Aycan concludes HRM is expected to have a bright future in Turkey, but that know-how and expertise to guide practice still is insufficient.

In Chapter 10, Baruch, Meshoulam, and Tzafrir discuss the unique political, social, religious, and cultural characteristics of Israel that distinguish it from its neighboring countries. The authors note that the current state of HRM is related to factors such as immigration of workers and changes in workforce, the impact of globalization and the role of high technology on the nature of work, legislation, and industrial relations. Baruch, Meshoulam, and Tzafrir argue that greater interest on a professional HRM scene, along with political stability, should be achieved and sustained if Israel wants to recognize the role of human capital in order to maximize the full potential of the economy.

Chapters 11 through 15 focus on HRM systems in five African nations. In Chapter 11, Hatem discusses Egypt's political, economic, and social profile influencing the historical developments and the country’s efforts to restructure the economy, to enforce the new Unified Labor Law, and to give prominence to an undervalued HRM in both public and private corporations. In Chapter 12, Ahmed examines the HRM scenario in Sudan by focusing on the state of HRM in two organizations. The author concludes that HRM is largely underdeveloped and has not yet taken root in Sudan. In contrast, Chapter 13 addresses the development of a hybrid model of HRM in Tunisia. The liberalization policy that the government has pursued has allowed the establishment of local and foreign HRM systems, as well as the emergence of a hybrid of HRM practices. These policies have resulted in a model specific to the Tunisian environment.

In Chapter 14, Branine discusses the management of HR in Algeria. Besides the political and economic instability, Branine observes that a mix of socialist and Arab principles, such as respect for work, piston or waseda (contacts), and discipline still dominate working relationships in Algerian firms. In Chapter 15, Benson and Al Arkoubi present HRM in Morocco. Despite its strategic location, little attention has been given to management, organizational practices, and HR systems in Morocco. According to Benson and Al Arkoubi, the future of HRM in Morocco is promising but uncertain, as business ethics still face several hurdles in addition to managerial culture development.

In the last chapter, Mellahi and Budhwar summarize the emerging scenario of HRM in the Middle East and discuss emerging issues that will be the focus of future research in the area. The editors note that “only when organizations in the Middle East appreciate the strategic importance of the HRM function will the HRM function develop and gain strength” (p. 298).

Given that the book expands traditional geographic boundaries to include all countries with connections to Arab culture, its value system, and Islam, along with the information provided in the chapters on national HRM systems, the book could have been strengthened by placing greater emphasis on corporations that might be managed on the principles of Arab culture. For example, a detailed analysis of Al-Jazeera, a Qatar-based TV network with 500 employees from all 14 Arab countries, would be an interesting case of how Arab culture crystallizes around an Arab HR system. Overall, this book makes a useful contribution and provides managers, executives, and international assignees with useful and relevant information about HRM in the Middle East. It also will be a helpful reference for students and academicians interested in the Middle East.

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