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Employment with a Human Face

Balancing Efficiency, Equity, and Voice

John W. Budd

John W. Budd contends that the turbulence of the current workplace and the importance of work for individuals and society make it vitally important that employment be given “a human face.” Contradicting the traditional view of the employment relationship as a purely economic transaction, with business wanting efficiency and workers wanting income, Budd argues that equity and voice are equally important objectives. The traditional narrow focus on efficiency must be balanced with employees’ entitlement to fair treatment (equity) and the opportunity to have meaningful input into decisions (voice), he says. Only through a greater respect for these human concerns can broadly shared prosperity, respect for human dignity, and equal appreciation for the competing human rights of property and labor be achieved.

Budd proposes a fresh set of objectives for modern democracies—efficiency, equity, and voice—and supports this new triad with an intellectual framework for analyzing employment institutions and practices. In the process, he draws on scholarship from industrial relations, law, political science, moral philosophy, theology, psychology, sociology, and economics, and advances debates over free markets, globalization, human rights, and ethics. He applies his framework to important employment-related topics, such as workplace governance, the New Deal industrial relations system, comparative industrial relations, labor union strategies, and globalization. These analyses create a foundation for reforming employment practices, social norms, and public policies. In the book’s final chapter, Budd advocates the creation of the field of human resources and industrial relations and explores the wider implications of this renewed conceptualization of industrial relations.

John W. Budd is Industrial Relations Landgrant Term Professor at the Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota.

“Employment with a Human Face will quickly be viewed as a classic statement of the first principles underlying the study and practice of modern human resources and industrial relations. John W. Budd’s clear articulation of efficiency, equity, and voice as the objectives that underlie the field, accompanied by a strong ethical and real-world empirical analysis of the challenges we face in transforming our policies and practices, makes his book a required and refreshing reading for any serious student, scholar, or practitioner in the profession.”—Thomas A. Kochan, MIT Sloan School of Management



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