

People and the Competitive Advantage of Place: Building a Workforce for the 21st Century, by Shari Garmise. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2006.
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Shari Garmise's *People and the Competitive Advantage of Place* fits squarely in the discussion about the new wave of economic development policy that started in the late 1990s and emphasizes the importance of people as human capital assets over business location strategies (such as tax incentives, infrastructure development, and business financing). As I was reading the book, I received a call from a staff member of the economic development department of a medium-sized city nearby. He was looking for advice about how to approach his new job of attracting, maintaining, and creating talent. This new emphasis on people surprised me. In the past, the city primarily has focused more traditional economic development policies on downtown redevelopment, industrial development, and various location incentive programs such as enterprise and technology zones, and now they have a staff member dedicated to human capital development. I sent him the reference to this book (and hoped that he would buy it), confident that he would appreciate and benefit from its content. In fact, the book will not only inform planning practitioners like him but also educators and students in economic development about strategies to create people-centered places. In particular, the author highlights the ways in which communities can pay attention to the labor market by creating programs to develop talent, connecting workers with employers, and providing opportunities for career advancement.

The book starts with the premise that in the "knowledge economy, the economic vitality of places depends on the skills of the workforce, making workforce development our economic priority" (p. 3). Building on this premise, the author reviews the evolution of human capital strategies and the key players and actors in a community on which these strategies must rely. The book contrasts with other works in the workforce development field because it attempts to make the case for a systems approach to human capital development in which the key players focus on workforce development in an integrated and holistic way.

In particular, chapter 2 introduces the reader to key actors in the workforce system. This descriptive chapter highlights the work of institutions such as workforce investment boards, education providers, public-private partnerships, and neighborhood and community-based organizations. Those unfamiliar with workforce development will find brief introductions to major players and become acquainted with the field.

Chapter 3 makes the case for workforce development intermediaries as community-based institutions that serve as a bridge between workers and employers. The chapter benefits from the case studies of the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership and the Gulf Coast Workforce Development Board. The author argues that these institutions are system entrepreneurs because they are able to shape the labor market in new and innovative ways. Throughout the book, the author uses case studies to illustrate communities that successfully implemented workforce development strategies.

I found chapters 4 and 7 the most informative because they deal with questions about how to enhance the mobility of workers from one job to another and how cities and regions can institute a culture of lifelong learning. Both topics are critical in the knowledge economy because of the bifurcation of the labor market into high- and low-skill jobs and the erosion of traditional career ladders. Workforce intermediaries, employers, community organizations, and economic developers will find these chapters useful because they highlight the importance of skill standards and certification and credential programs in labor market mobility and upgrading. The example of East Harlem-based workforce intermediary STRIVE (Support and Training Result in Valuable Employees) illustrates the importance of strong occupational skills and the ways in which the organization is using skill certification to advance its clients in their careers in fields such as artisan baking, brownfields environmental technology, and computer networking.

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Chapter 7 discusses lifelong learning and the need to provide access to a wide range of educational and training services as well as the ability to address varied needs of workers. The chapter also emphasizes the need to focus on career-path development and the horizontal and vertical integration of training and education programs. Economic development practitioners will find this chapter interesting because it highlights the importance of career path development and illustrates this concept using the example of a program that integrates the training of technicians and engineers for the semiconductor manufacturing industry. The program not only ensures a mutual understanding between the occupations, but it also introduces technician students to the next possible step in their careers. The chapter, however, would have benefited from a more hands-on discussion of how communities can map career paths and develop strategies for upward mobility.

The practitioner who called me will find chapter 5 most relevant because it presents a case study of the Greater Cleveland region and its efforts to attract, retain, and develop talent. The efforts discussed range from student-run internship programs to programs aimed at increasing college access to local people. The author suggests that not only the qualities of a place matter, but also the economic opportunities such as the availability of jobs and opportunities to make a living are important in considering talent expansion strategies.

Two major weaknesses of the work stand out: The first is the question of how a successful workforce development system can link with city and regional economic development planning. At various points throughout the text, it becomes clear that workforce development does not exist in a vacuum and that planning strategies need to incorporate a more people-centered approach. However, the author does not provide a roadmap for how to do this. This seems to be an important omission, as the book aims to contribute to a paradigm shift in the practice of economic development.

Second, even though the book's purpose is to develop a blueprint of how to create a people-centered place, the author does not provide answers regarding the geographic scale of the efforts. Workforce intermediaries have become much proliferated, and there is a danger of organizational and geographic fragmentation. The challenge is to make the proposed workforce development system regional in scope but yet responsive to community and neighborhood issues.

Despite these weaknesses, the book will be useful to economic development practitioners who are interested in people-based economic development. It will also serve educators and students of economic development because it presents a comprehensive overview of issues and challenges associated with human capital investment strategies.