

# HRD - much more than just training!

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## Abstract

*Despite the enormous impact of change on human resource development, it is still largely considered as being 'that part of human resource management that deals with training and development'. This presentation will propose that not only is HRD much more than training and development, but that change is the main reason a need for HRD exists. It will then argue that by using a conventional paradigm framework for static change environments and a contemporary paradigm framework for dynamic change environments, we can categorise specific characteristics that influence how HRD is approached within organisations.*

## WHAT IS HRD?

There is general agreement that Human Resource Development (HRD) is a relatively new field. For example, DeSimone & Harris (1998:3) make the comment that 'Human Resource Development is a relatively new term, *but not a new concept*' [emphasis added]. McGoldrick and Stewart (1996:1) tell us that '...HRD is a relatively new concept that has yet to become fully established and accepted, either within professional practice or as a focus of academic enquiry.'

Since the adoption in the early 1980's of the term HRD, it has evolved from being considered as 'the training function' to 'the training and development function' and then to 'the training, development and education function'. Even the person who lays claim to originating the term HRD, Leonard Nadler (cited in Smith 1998:2), regards HRD as 'an overarching concept that embraces all three activities of training, development and education. The core of HRD is...learning'. However, the more recent attribution has been to consider HRD as being the process of developing the capacities of the workforce to adapt to change.

Much confusion about the process of developing the capacities of the workforce still arises because of the interchangeable usage of terms such as 'Training', 'Education', 'Employee Development', and 'Personnel development'. Smith (1998:2) suggests that often the confusion arises because the terms are associated with other activities, eg. training is often associated with the development of physical skills; education suggests a much broader activity in line with the 'holistic' development of individuals associated with the school system; development implies growth in a non-organisational context as well as in the workplace.

McGoldrick and Stewart (1996) take the discussion of training, development and education further because they suggest that HRD is constituted by interventions that are intended to *change* organisational behaviour. Their argument is that although education, training and development are three interventions in the HRD process, these do not in themselves constitute HRD. This is because the level at which the intervention is applied, that is, the extent to which it is intended to have an impact on organisational as well as individual learning, will be a key element.

Human Resource Development is an evolving and dynamic field of study that is usually associated with the overall discipline of human resource management. Much of the evolution results from the incredible rate of change that is taking place within our respective work places, industries, countries and the world in general.

This means that the stage that HRD has reached, in a particular environment, might be quite different. For example, in some areas will be confronted with the traditional (or conventional) attitudes towards HRD, ie. it is largely about training. Others will be confronted with more contemporary attitudes, ie. HRD is largely about developing individuals and organisations as part of the organisation's strategic functioning.

Regardless, the central theme is 'change' and this paper proposes a somewhat contentious proposition that change is the reason a need for HRD exists. Change requires that 'things' become different (Stewart 1996:20). The conventional paradigm views organisations as operating in a relatively stable environment, so that as change occurs any problems can be rectified by appropriate HRD strategies, e. training. In this scenario, HRD is seen as reactive in nature. In contrast, the contemporary paradigm views organisations as existing in a dynamic environment, where they exist in a constant state of change, as a result of globalisation and economic rationalism. Thus, HRD interventions should be pro-active, rather than reactive; to ensure that change is effectively managed.

We are part of a world that is functioning at a rapid pace and which is being increasingly more and more driven by technology. A business world that is increasingly more global, businesses that are increasingly more transnational, a workforce that is becoming more and more casualised (or part-time) and where many people will be working as contractors rather than as employees (in the traditional sense). A business world where there are incredible competitive pressures to perform at optimum levels all the time and where product life-cycles are becoming both very short and multi-layered. A world where people will be expected to be able to provide very specific skills and where the emphasis will be largely on the individuals, not the employers, to both acquire and to update those skills. A world where the required competencies are changing constantly and where the provision of 'training' may be substantially web-based - where you will log on to computers, key in your credit card details, and then access particular modules of training.

## **CONVENTIONAL vs. CONTEMPORARY PARADIGMS**

It is suggested a pragmatic approach to HRD is that we should try to think about HRD not in terms of what has been done in the past but rather from the perspective of what we will need to do in the future – in a world of rapid and constant change.

This section will present a framework – conventional paradigms and contemporary paradigms – that is a 'tool' to use to differentiate between what McGoldrick and Stewart

(1996) refer to as functional and procedural aspects (ie. static) and those that are strategic and based on change (ie. dynamic). It must be emphasised that a lot of the material does not fit neatly into either the traditional or the contemporary paradigms and it is this material which should receive particular attention.

### **Conventional Paradigms**

The traditional employment relationship has been heavily based on principles of commitment and loyalty - by both sides. There has been an expectation, by many, that the arrangement were be for the longer term (a career or a job) - a level of security. Therefore the remuneration tend to be more conservative because there has been a reasonable expectation that the employment would usually continue, through good and tough times. If training or development was needed, the employer is expected to provide it and almost always this is done on the job and over an extended period of time. Where careers are concerned, the employer takes the initiative and bears the responsibility for career development and career management aspects. Performance management is a much more subdued activity and the main process tends to be an annual performance appraisal that is typically linked to an annual increment (pay increase), promotion, or transfer.

The conventional scope of HRD has largely been that organisations provide training to orient new staff to the organisations or teach them how to perform in their initial assignment, to improve the current performance of employees who may not be working as effectively as desired, or to prepare employees for future promotions or for upcoming changes in design, processes, or technology in their present jobs (Fisher et al., 1996).

Many organisations have offered training programs only to their managers, technicians and professionals, not to the 'rank-and-file' workers. These workers are being increasingly challenged because their basic job skills are insufficient to maintain jobs that require continually changing skills. It has made many of the lower-level workers extremely vulnerable to either redundancy or abrupt changes in situations of downsizing, outsourcing and re-engineering.

Within the areas where a conventional 'career' might have been typical (eg. managers, technicians and professions), you might have gone into an organisation and worked your way up. Your career was developed and managed, predominantly by the employer. Such programs traditionally involved attempts to develop an employee's career in a way that would benefit both the organisation and the individual. Banking and the Public Service are good examples. Historically, young men joined up and they worked their way through the system until eventually they became a Manager. The pay was not substantial, the working conditions reasonable, the security almost assured.

### **Contemporary Paradigms**

There has been a trend in recent years for some organisations (and governments) to take a mercenary view toward human resources under the guise of efficiency, competitive pressures and economic rationalism. As a result, organisations are becoming less hierarchal. As work processes are re-engineered to make better use of technical and human resources, the organisational chart is flattening. This means there are fewer mid-level managers within a more fluid organisation.

While there are many negative connotations that can be associated with much of the change that is taking place, recent changes in the business environment have made the HRD function even more important in helping organisations to maintain their competitiveness and to prepare for the future. Fischer et. al. (1996:352) tell us that 'technological innovations require training for affected employees. Competitive pressures are also changing the way organisations operate and the skills that their employees need. For instance, more and more organisations have been providing management and customer service training in an attempt to keep up with rising consumer expectations. Restructuring and downsizing mean that many employees need to be trained to take on expanded responsibilities'.

Contemporary HRD is also undergoing change, from being a reactive response to organisational needs to being a proactive player in organisational change. Contemporary HRD must be tailored to fit the organisation's strategy and structure. For instance, an organisation whose strategy involves providing exceptional service through committed and extremely well qualified employees will need more complex training system than an organisation that competes on the basis of simple, low-cost services provided by transient, unskilled employees, team-based high involvement organisations find that extensive training in team skills as well as individual job skills is necessary to make innovative organisational structures function as intended. When strategy changes, training is often needed to equip employees with the skills to meet new demands (Fisher et al., 1996:354-5)

The diversity between traditional and contemporary HRD can be illustrated by the comment from Fisher et. al. (1996:355) that 'in an age of network organisations, alliances, and long-term relationships with just-in-time suppliers, leading companies are finding that they need to train people other than their own employees. Some organisations even offer quality training to their suppliers, to assure the quality of critical inputs.'

### **THE CONVENTIONAL RELATIONSHIP OF HRD TO HRM**

DeSimone and Harris outline the conventional paradigm. They tell us that 'in most organisations, human resource development is a part of a larger human resource management department' (1998, p. 6). They also advocate that HRM is '...the effective utilisation of employees in order to achieve the goals and strategies of the organisation.'

They (DeSimone and Harris) divide the HRM functions into primary functions and secondary functions. (You need to recognise that they do this in the context of HRM activities being carried out by a dedicated HRM department – rather than throughout the organisation by line management etc.) These activities are well presented as a 'Human Resource Wheel' and are followed by a detailed discussion of each activity. DeSimone and Harris also provide a detailed discussion of the competencies which are believed to be required for the HRD functional roles

### **THE CONTEMPORARY RELATIONSHIP OF HRD TO HRM**

The contemporary paradigm is advocated and outlined by McGoldrick & Stewart in their attempt to develop a framework for theorising the nature of HRM and HRD. They (McGoldrick and Stewart) contend that neither HRD nor HRM '...is a sub-set of the other but rather that each has its distinctive, albeit problematical, space in the analysis of the human aspects of contemporary organisations' and that '...viewing HRM and HRD as separate yet complementary processes is vital' (1996:9). They then go on to develop an

argument that the conceptual differences between 'strategy' and 'practice' and between 'function' and 'process' are vital to clarifying the distinction between HRD and HRM.

McGoldrick and Stewart (1996) also introduce a contention that HRD has derived from the literature and practice of organisational development (OD) as well as training and development education and practices. This has led HRD to being concerned with organisational as well as individual learning that in turn implies that, as well as change, HRD is also concerned with notions such as leadership, culture and commitment.

The literature relating to HRD has been, and arguably still is, 'fragmented, multifaceted, and reflects a diverse range of perspectives and models' (Garavan, Heraty & Barnicle 1999, p.169). However, they suggest that there are a number of common issues, priorities and dilemmas that emerge from the literature. Specifically, these are:

- *HRD is intrinsically related to overall business strategy and competitive advantage.*
- *HRD is conceptualized as an investment in human resources capability rather than an employment cost.*
- *HRD is concerned with change at all levels both organizational and personal.*
- *HRD views the employee in a 'holistic' sense.*
- *HRD is concerned with identifying and enhancing the core competencies required at each level to meet its present and future objectives.*
- *HRD focuses on the management and delivery of training activities within the organization.*
- *HRD concerns itself with selecting the best delivery systems designed to enhance human resource competencies.*
- *HRD is concerned with organizational and individual learning.*
- *HRD consists of a set of generic activities associated with learning.*
- *HRD is a social and discursive construct.*
- *HRD is concerned with how well human resource development strategies are reinforced by and reinforce other HR strategies.*

## **CONCLUSION**

Throughout this paper we have looked at how HRD has become increasingly more important to the success of modern organisations. Rapid changes require that employees possess the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to cope with new processes and techniques. The complexity of continually changing organisations make it necessary for all participants (whether employees, contractors or suppliers) to be prepared for new and more demanding assignments. As organisational strategies are changed, human resources will also need to change and to be developed.

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