MAJOR ISSUES IN HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

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Contents

Summary

The seven philosophical foundations of HRD affect each other. As a result, they have a profound impact on other important elements of HRD. This includes HRD philosophy, the principles that one considers critical, the components one embraces, as well as the domains, roles, and practices one chooses to engage in.

1. Introduction

Seven critical pillars comprise the philosophical foundation of HRD. They include the historical, cultural, sociological, global, political, economic, and financial components of HRD. Separately they represent important issues relevant to contemporary HRD practice; collectively they exert an overwhelming force on the field of HRD and its practitioners. The historical foundation of HRD is the structure upon which all of the other components are built.

Each component directly or indirectly influences all others, and to varying degrees. The model in Figure 1 reveals this relationship. For example, the cultural component most

directly affects the sociological component, while the sociological component most influences the global and cultural components. The global component has a strong impact on the political and sociological while the political equally influences the global and economic. Simultaneously, the economic component strongly impacts the financial and political components, as the financial component affects the cultural and economic equally. Finally, all seven components directly influence HRD practice and its practitioners .

2. The Seven Philosophical Foundations of HRD

2.1 Historical Aspect of HRD

Torraco (2002) contends "a study of the history of learning reveals that training and education of all types, academic and work-related, are largely the products of social and economic conditions." Thus, he argues HRD is a field with historical roots in both education and the world of work…and is first and foremost, a field of education that is for and about work. Although the field of HRD has grown significantly since WWII, its historical origins cannot be separated from the histories of education and training.

2.2 Cultural Aspects of HRD

Hansen and Fancher (2002) stress that culture helps us "make sense of organizational behavior in that its makeup consists of various levels of inter-related values and beliefs, each driving or reacting to the other in a variety of circumstances resulting in norms for acceptable and unacceptable behavior." They contend that "societal or national culture may have the most powerful effect on how employees perceive training, career, and organizational development interventions and may often serve as a barrier to change efforts." Further, "occupational and organizational cultures often pursue counter-productive goals resulting in conflict and ineffectiveness…Thus, the challenge for HRD practitioners lies in the adaptation of these cultures and their subsequent sub-cultures to new ways of how to perceive the work we do while overcoming our own ethnocentricity."

HRD scholars have only recently begun to study the impact of culture on HRD. The primary focus has been on the following:

- The role of culture on HRD's strategic influence within organizations (Hansen &
- Kahnweiler, 1995),
- The profession's belief systems as an occupational culture (Hansen, Kahnweiler, & Wilensky, 1994), and
- Variance in how HRD is perceived and implemented cross-culturally (Hansen & Brooks, 1994; Peterson, 1997) and in specific national cases (Hansen, 1995; Hansen & Headley, 1998)

Today, cultural research in HRD proves particularly interesting because of the role it plays in an organization's agility, flexibility, and ability to renew itself. Over the past few decades, organizational structures have changed significantly. One notable change is the downsizing of organizations, which yields less opportunity for advancement. Management, therefore, will need to find new ways to motivate employees. Fewer levels of management will increase the scope of responsibility of managers, as well as the number of skills required to perform work assignments. Changes such as these significantly affect organizational cultures and the role of HRD within firms.

Flattened organizations have more people in each layer. The net effect is a reduction of as much as 50 percent in the total number of managers (Hale, 1987). In many organizations, a parallel increase in the number of staff positions occurs. This, too, causes problems, since traditionally only line officers can aspire to positions of power.

HRD is challenged to develop programs that reflect corporate strategies. If, for example, the organization is short-term oriented, so will be the HRD program. Not surprisingly, much of the recent criticism of U.S. corporations concerns their lack of productivity, which results from a quarterly emphasis on profits and investor returns, rather than a long-term orientation. As more and more organizations address their need for long-term planning, HRD programs will become more long-term focused. If, for example, the organization's goal is productivity, HRD programs focus on performance improvement initiatives that support such engagement. If the organizational goal is to be competitive, HRD programs should focus on interventions appropriate to enhance competitive readiness and renewal capacity, and so on.

Changing organizational cultures force HRD professionals to develop interventions, initiatives, and services that support the organization's strategy. These engagements must help the organization become more efficient, productive, and quality oriented.

HRD professionals must also develop skills and abilities that foster cultural change. Among these is the ability to act as facilitators and problem-solving specialists. In many organizations, HRD professionals act as internal consultants responsible for helping facilitate organizational cultural change. HRD professionals serve a broader range of clientele as organizations downsize or become more decentralized. Finally, HRD professionals must be able to support participative management approaches and help develop environments that exemplify cooperation and mutual respect. This includes developing teams as well as individuals (Gilley & Eggland 1989, p. 358).

2.3 Sociological Aspect of HRD

Kayes (2002) outlines five sociological issues facing organizations in the global HRD context. These include breakdown of traditional institutions, emergence of multiple perspectives, shift to an information based economy, increased rate of change, and inadequacy of traditional models. He contends that HRD professionals who respond to these changes rely on their ability to adapt to these changing institutional structures. Such changes include "responses to the changing demographics and values of the workforce, increased professional specialization, better equipping the workforce to learn

independent of formal learning programs, learning in a team environment, greater sensitivity to diversity, and engagement of the workforce in developmental or long term learning programs."

The continuing evolution of the workforce is perhaps the most significant factor in the future of HRD. The work force is not only the receiver of HRD interventions and initiatives, it is also the developer and deliverer of such engagements. The work force will continue to become more diverse, as more minorities and females enter the labor pool in record numbers. Many of the changes taking place in the work force include the following:

- More women and minorities in the workplace
- Slower rate of expansion due to a labor shortage in specialized sectors
- Increased educational attainment
- Illiteracy (?)
- Aging population
- Changing and evolving value orientation
- Decline of public schools (Hale, 1998).

United States demographics have changed significantly over the past century. According to 2000 U.S. Census data and the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2001), women constituted approximately 50% of the population and 50% of the workforce in 2000, while minorities comprised approximately 25% of the population and 29% of the workforce. These numbers will continue to rise in the new millennium as the immigrant population (primarily Asian and Hispanic) swells and women increasingly seek work outside the home.

Schwendiman (1987, 3) stated that organizations that create the most nourishing environments for personal growth will attract the most talented people. This takes on special significance given the fact that shortages of qualified employees are expected during the first two decades of this century.

Changes in education levels can be seen as the number of college graduates is expected to exceed the number of positions requiring college degrees for the first time is nearly a decade. Although the bachelor's degree is almost a prerequisite for some organizations, advanced degrees are often not wanted because employees with advanced degrees demand more in salary and perks for doing the same work performed by those with bachelor's degrees or none at all (Hale, 1998).

Today, more than 35 million adult Americans are "functionally illiterate," with another 55 million marginally literate--functioning at about fifth-grade level. Experts predict the number to grow at about 2.5 million people per year (Hale, 1998). Some managers falsely believe that employed individuals are literate and unemployed ones are not. According to Bennett and Olson (1987), organizations are finding retraining of non-management employees only minimally effective because of the low literacy level. They contend that if an employee cannot read or write, it is very difficult to train and retrain for new jobs requiring new competencies and skills.

It is obvious that the work force is aging. By 1995, three quarters of the labor force was within the prime working ages (25-54), compared to two thirds in 1984. The age of the labor force affects how HRD learning programs are designed and delivered. Although e-learning and computer based learning are exploding throughout the world, an older work force has poorer visual and learning acuity, thus, HRD professionals will have to develop different instructional methods to meet this demand. During the same period, the share of the work force aged 16-24 will drastically decline, while the number of older workers eligible for pensions and/or who elect early retirement increases. Many organizations have elected to actively recruit workers in upper age brackets to take jobs traditionally handled by high school and college students (Hale, 1998).

The value orientation, that is, the interests, priorities, and values of the work force, is also changing. One concern of organizations is that an aging work force creates a trend toward more leisure time, less company loyalty, and less inclination of (older) employees to seek leadership roles at the expense of family responsibilities. Some workers are not interested in relocating to less desirable locales, despite significant increases in salary and responsibility (Gilley & Eggland 1989, 353). In some ways this trend is a paradox for HRD professionals. Fewer workers seek leadership roles, yet management needs good leaders. Although many workers are unwilling to move, a new type of migrant worker is emerging. They are "mostly well educated professionals and highly paid blue-collar types who move around the country following the economic sun" (Hale, 1987, p. 10).

Many believe that public schools are getting worse. The message is becoming clear to the private sector: If people are to be trained adequately, reliance on public schools could be a mistake. Sredl and Rothwell (1992) identified several implications for HRD professionals regarding improved linkage with the public school system. They suggest that HRD professionals work to improve links between business and secondary schools, and between business and the post-secondary education system. HRD professionals should support school programs in career development and encourage work/service learning opportunities for all secondary and post-secondary students. They argue that it is important to revamp secondary school curricula to include skills in interaction and employability as well as provide support for bilingual and multicultural programs at the secondary and post-secondary levels.

A movement to change corporate culture is well under way. Employees are demanding more participation, sharing, openness, flexibility, risk taking, and improved quality. HRD programs play a key role in implementing sweeping change (Lusterman, 1985). In HRD, the trend is to move away from "activity-driven programs" toward results-driven interventions that support business goals (Brinkerhoff and Apking, 2001).

Sredl and Rothwell (1992) identified several implications for HRD professionals as a result of the sociological changes that will occur in the next few decades. HRD professionals need to understand the learning challenges of older workers and the elderly, and develop alternatives for older workers regarding retirement, internal job transfers, and declining career opportunities. HRD professionals should create new ways to use older workers in entry-level positions and help develop support services for dual-career couples. Moreover, HRD professionals must develop an understanding of

career development and its importance in human resource planning and forecasting. They should increase efforts to improve cultural understanding and sensitivity, and support improved educational programs for minorities. HRD professionals should encourage bilingual and multicultural training programs for workers and managers, develop creative, realistic workplace child care options, and develop wellness programs for all types of employees. HRD professionals improve ties between HRD, local economic development efforts, and the strategic business efforts within ones organization. Finally, HRD professionals should provide more learning initiatives in work attitudes and ethics, and educate management about the importance of employee attitudes and their relationship to productivity.

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