

Challenges in Human Resource Development Practitioner Preparation

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ABSTRACT *This article describes some of the challenges that confront designers of programs which prepare or upskill Human Resource Development (HRD) practitioners. It surfaces varying perspectives of human resource development and some of the issues that confront organisations in the post-industrial economy which have implications for HRD practice. It also surfaces some tensions and areas of convergence that can be seen in recent studies which have investigated the role of HRD practitioners. The final section recommends some substantive areas that should be addressed within HRD preparation programs which are designed to equip learners for practice in the current organisational context.*

Introduction

Organisational learning and skill formation initiatives are increasingly being seen as contributing to the achievement of organisational competitiveness in the contemporary economy. As a result, the development of employees has become a more prominent organisational practice. Since Human Resource Development (HRD) practitioners are primarily responsible for employee development there is a need for them to become more highly skilled to ensure that their practice meets the changing needs of organisations. Formal educational programs in the practice of HRD provide a way of assisting practitioners to acquire the skills they now need for effective practice. The design of such programs, however, is problematic given the emergent and cross-disciplinary nature of the field. This paper surfaces some of the challenges associated with program design for the development of HRD practitioners, drawing from discussions in, and profiling research from, the HRD literature. The final section of the paper proposes several key areas that need to be addressed in preparatory programs for HRD practitioners.

Some Definitions

In focusing on the development challenges for such an occupational group, this paper is using "Human Resource Developer" as an umbrella term to encompass those practitioners whose work within organisations is concerned primarily with improving performance through fostering learning in individuals, groups or the organisation more collectively. Whilst the diversity of practice in the field is acknowl-

edged, for the purposes of this paper those working in organisations with positional labels including enterprise trainer, training officer, trainer and developer, learning strategist or consultant, performance developer, organisational developer and staff development officer are being collapsed into one occupational category. All of these labels have been or are being used in organisations and in the literature to designate those whose primary work is to improve performance in organisational settings through fostering learning (Mulder, 1992). The paper also uses the term Human Resource Development as an umbrella term to describe the work of such practitioners. It therefore considers HRD practice as encompassing orthodox forms of training as well as other forms of employee or organisational development.

Challenge 1: what is driving HRD practice?

A major challenge confronting designers of programs for HRD practitioners is determining what is driving HRD in organisational settings. Certainly those writing about the field in both journals and HRD methodology texts provide a number of competing perspectives about this question (Kuchinke, 1998; Barrie & Pace, 1997; Garavan *et al.*, 1995; Chalofsky, 1992; Watkins, 1989). A brief summary of some of the differing perspectives follows.

HRD is Primarily About Meeting Business Needs Through Learning

There is a body of literature that argues that HRD is first and foremost about improving performance through learning-based strategies for the purpose of achieving business goals. This perspective, underpinned by human capital and strategic human resource theories, claims that the real value of HRD practice should be measured in terms of its contribution to organisations as opposed to the value of learning for the individual (Kuchinke, 1998; Stace & Dunphy, 1996; Torroco & Swanson, 1995). It emphasises that HRD activity should provide measurable value-added outcomes that are aligned to the mission, strategic goals and business planning processes of organisations. It also argues that HRD practice is proactive and therefore about anticipating imminent business needs and shaping the organisation's future through contingency plans that firms can deploy when situations warrant (Kuchinke, 1998; Martocchio & Baldwin, 1997; Garavan *et al.*, 1995). Such a future orientation means that HRD practice should be about improving the flexibility and adaptability of workforces and business units and therefore should work in close association with other organisational or business systems, and sometimes customers or suppliers, to help achieve business goals.

A business-oriented perspective of HRD would suggest that HRD preparation programs should foreground learning activities that increase learners' understandings of the functioning and direction of their organisations and the pressures these organisations face. Such programs should build learners' capacities to diagnose immediate and future organisational skill level needs. They should also provide learners with an understanding of a range of strategies for achieving and communi-

cating measurable and transparent outcomes in terms of performance improvements that are valued by organisations.

HRD is About Fostering Individual Employee Growth and Development Through Learning

A competing perspective of HRD is that it is primarily about helping individuals working in organisations learn and grow. Although there is debate between those arguing that development practice should be driven by an instrumental competence-based approach and those arguing for a more holistic humanistic approach to employee development, advocates from both camps posit that the major concern of HRD is that of helping individuals and groups learn through formal training or some other planned strategy (Barrie & Pace, 1997; Watkins, 1989). As a consequence, the organisation will benefit, but this is secondary, as the main concern is always for the people engaged in the learning. This perspective of HRD argues that learning is the mechanism for empowering individuals by equipping them with skills and knowledge required for technological and occupational change. If practice is driven by a humanistic orientation, it often involves learners planning their own development. It also attempts to enhance the capacity of individuals for critical reflectivity by recognising that individual identity and growth are integral to learning. On the other hand, when skill formation and learning is driven by a more instrumental approach and based on industry- or enterprise-based competency standards, orthodox training classes and on-the-job coaching and assessment of competencies are common.

This emphasis on the need for individual employee growth through learning is sustained by recent organisational literature, which argues that individuals should take greater responsibility for their own ongoing development and career management. Such literature suggests that individuals can no longer expect their employers to take sole responsibility for ensuring employee career development given that contemporary employment is often project based and therefore less permanent. In this scenario, individuals need to make opportunities for their own growth and development and hence should seek individual learning and growth opportunities from HRD activities (Arnold, 1997; Wilson & Barnacoat, 1995; Handy, 1995).

This perspective of HRD would suggest preparation programs for HRD practitioners should provide learners with sound understandings of the principles of adult development and learning and with capacities to design development approaches which enhance individual learning and development.

HRD is About Fostering the Development of a Learning Organisation

This third perspective is found in both management and HRD literature, and is frequently associated with high-performance organisations that are utilising new working practices including the application of more sophisticated production technology, more participative approaches to decision making, team-working structures and more flexible use of labour. It is also a perspective of HRD practice often found in organisations undergoing significant structural or cultural change (Marquard &

Sofa, 1999; Barrie & Pace, 1997; Field & Ford, 1996; Watkins & Marsick, 1992; Jones & Hendry, 1992). Such organisations frequently identify themselves as learning organisations or at least indicate that they are aspiring to become learning organisations. Definitions and descriptions of learning organisations vary. Most definitions, however, suggest that such organisations have characteristics which include the capacities to collect, store and transfer knowledge which enable them to continuously transform themselves and so attain high levels of performance and competitive positioning. These definitions and descriptions also suggest that learning organisations empower employees to learn as they work both individually and collectively, to utilise technology for more productive outcomes, to strive for continuous improvement, and to critically question processes and work practices and their underpinning assumptions (Denton, 1998; Garavan, 1997; Coopey, 1996; Field & Ford, 1996).

Thus, this perspective of HRD advocates that a prime dimension of HRD practice should be the promotion of a form of collective learning that allows organisations to transform themselves. The focus of the learning organisation approach therefore is on the work team, the business unit and the wider organisation rather than the individual, although individual skill development is still recognised as important. In organisations adopting this perspective the HRD practitioner often works as an internal consultant. This role requires the HRD practitioner to advise teams and business units on problems, assist with the management of change and foster continuous improvement processes and attitudes. There is less emphasis in such organisations on formal training in technical and procedural skills and more on development of behavioural skills and learning through collaborative experiences which occur in the workplace and through work roles. Team building and facilitating change through action learning are common practices for such HRD practitioners (Argyris, 1994).

This perspective of HRD also acknowledges that the learning that determines organisational achievement is often tacit or attained informally. Hence, HRD practice involves stimulating questioning about current work processes and creating opportunities for critical reflection on both explicit and tacit knowledge used as part of work. It may also involve working with managers or supervisors to establish more open workplace climates which can provide for participative decision-making opportunities for employees and which recognise the contribution that difference and diversity can make to workplace outcomes.

Programs seeking to develop practitioners with this perspective of HRD should provide learners with enhanced capacities to understand the directions and the dynamics of their organisations, including the work of the various subsystems within their organisations. Such programs should develop in learners an understanding of how to network with and influence those working in organisational functions other than HRD in order to collaboratively achieve the sought-after collective learning. Such learners need to acquire skills in promoting individual and organisational change. This may require developing skills in using traditional upskilling approaches but may also involve HRD practitioners acquiring skills in the design and implementation of less orthodox development strategies to assist individuals and groups

collectively to develop new frameworks for understanding their roles, responsibilities and relationships in organisations.

HRD—a questionable area of work specialisation

A more radical perspective, occasionally found in both popular management journals and some more academic critiques of training and human resources, questions the contribution and position of HRD as a separate organisational function or as a specialist role. Arguments used to advance this position are that, in the downsized, team-based learning organisations of today, separate HR/HRD specialists are unnecessary for organisations; that all managers and supervisors should be the trainers and developers and stewards of their staff; that all employees have a responsibility for their own career development; and that developments in technology such as “just in time” on-line services, computer-based training packages, flexible and self-paced learning packages, and computerised HR management systems allow learning to occur anywhere, any time without a trainer or HRD specialist needing to be present (Ulrich *et al.*, 1997; Goldrick, 1996). Stewart (1996) further illustrates this line of argument, positing that since human resource (HR) practice does not increase competitive business advantage, all HR services, including training, can either be abolished, outsourced or absorbed into the normal roles of supervisors, team leaders and managers. The future for HRD specialist practitioners according to this approach would be as specialist consultants or contract trainers working for a number of client organisations.

The emerging body of literature about learning in small enterprises could also be seen as challenging the need for specialist HRD positions in organisations. Several recent studies examining learning in small business have shown that there is considerable learning through development-related experiences occurring in small enterprises, despite the fact that most lack an HRD function or HRD specialists (Harris & Simons, 1999; Field, 1997; Rowden, 1995; Hendry *et al.*, 1995). In many small enterprises development occurs because an employee needs to know or be able to do something in order to be useful in the organisation. This pervasive form of human resource development is usually provided by a more experienced co-worker or manager or supervisor and informed by a pragmatic common-sense logic. The reported success of such an approach to HRD for small enterprises could be seen as raising questions about the value of specialist HRD skills preparation.

Some post-modernist writers also critically question the value and the traditional contribution of the specialist HRD practitioner in the development of individuals or organisations. Such critics seek to interrogate many of the cherished truths trainers hold. For example, they question the idea that competence can be clearly defined and that the values of the workers match those of the organisation. Furthermore, they deny that there is a single best practice and are highly critical of training and development activities which inculcate compliance to organisational rather than individual needs (Garrick & Solomon, 1997; Garrick, 1994).

While there is some overlap between the competing perspectives presented above,

each perspective could be seen as suggesting a need for a different emphasis or focus for attention in designing programs which prepare HRD practitioners. Alternatively, the existence of these perspectives could be seen as suggesting the need for inclusion of each perspective within such programs.

Challenge 2: the changing nature of workplaces

Further challenges also exist for designers of any programs preparing individuals for new vocational roles when the sites of such vocational practice are subject to significant change. Such change can render what has previously been seen as essential working knowledge less valuable, and can create an imperative for new knowledge and practice. As a result, it could be argued that any practitioner preparation only achieves relevance if it addresses at least elements of the changing context of work and occupations. The literature addressing the changing nature of organisations contains a number of interrelated themes that have significant implications for the role of HRD practitioners and their practice. The following section briefly considers three frequently occurring themes.

Organisational Change Responses for Achieving More Competitive Positioning

Recent organisational literature has examined the structural and cultural changes made by organisations in response to the more competitive global economy. Some common responses to this environment have included: the move to leaner, more flexible, less hierarchical, more team-based organisational structures which allow more rapid response to the changing economic environment; the establishment of more dynamic, competitive and participative organisational cultures requiring individuals to be more accountable for their own performance, and the use of more powerful information, management and production technologies (Handy, 1995; Senge, 1990; Kanter, 1989).

These responses have contributed to the use of more flexible employment practices within industries and enterprises that are reducing the opportunities for some individuals to secure permanent employment. Flexibility in employment practice has also produced new conceptualisations of both careers and work itself and has required new understandings of the processes of career planning and development (Arnold, 1997; Handy, 1995; Hilltrop, 1995; Bridges *et al.*, 1994; Lawler, 1994; Ostermann, 1988). While there is vigorous debate about the nature and effects of such change there is little questioning that these changes have occurred (Casey, 1999; Tessaring, 1998; Rifkin, 1995; Handy, 1995).

In such a changing environment the HRD practitioner faces a number of new challenges. Firstly, they may find themselves responsible for upskilling employees for new roles which require new mindsets about the way work is to be carried out on the part of employees. The HRD practitioner may therefore be involved in motivating learners to accept new organisational roles and structures and imposed organisational cultures at a time when long-established reward and recognition systems are eroding. Secondly, as time frames for achieving desired organisational outcomes are

reduced, HRD practitioners can no longer rely on using HRD strategies that are reliant on well-established calendars of development events which can be implemented over a long time period. Thirdly, HRD practitioners themselves in this context of change and accountability are increasingly being required to demonstrate their own contribution to the achievement of measurable and valued outcomes for the organisation.

These are only three changes that place new demands on the HRD practitioners and require them to have new forms of working knowledge. Formal HRD practitioner preparation must therefore be designed to equip these practitioners with capacity to both anticipate change in the global economic environment and assist with the shaping of their organisations' response. In so doing, HRD practitioners will no longer be able to rely on traditional models for answers and time frames for action. This presents the challenge of how HRD learners can be prepared so that they are more responsive to the changing context of the environment of their organisation and in Rhinesmith's (1995, p. 37) words, help them to "reframe boundaries" and "develop new mindsets" about practice.

Core Organisational Competencies for the Information Age

Discussions about the core competencies which organisations need for survival in the post-industrial economy are also prominent in contemporary organisational literature. These discussions frequently emphasise the need for organisations to develop knowledge generation and knowledge management competencies. They also advocate that employees from all levels and from most occupational fields need to see themselves as knowledge workers who require enhanced formal and abstract skill sets (Casey, 1999; Ulrich, 1998; Denton, 1988; Rifkin, 1995).

Additionally, managerial and learning competencies are seen as essential core organisational competencies for achieving competitive positioning in the contemporary business environment (Stuller, 1998; Ulrich *et al.*, 1997; Dunphy *et al.*, 1997; Boxall, 1996; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Leonard-Barton, 1992). Dunphy *et al.* (1997), argue that an organisation's capacity to create and embed learning around the strategic tasks is critical for its long-term performance. To achieve this, they claim organisations (and their employees) require engagement competencies (communication, motivating and enthusing, commitment formation, integration, path finding and enactment), business technology competencies (the business-specific technology through which the organisation creates and delivers value) and performance management competencies (1997, p. 232). Dunphy *et al.* see the task of embedding such competence as resting with managers. It could also be argued that this task is also a responsibility of the HRD practitioner. This therefore requires the HRD practitioner to have an understanding of these core competencies, the skills to develop the needed competencies in others as well as the skills to ensure that the competencies are practised by employees.

The requirement for new skill sets or competencies once again places pressures on HRD practitioners. One pressure is that they must learn to redefine their own roles

as part of the knowledge generation/knowledge management process of an organisation. Some evidence of the value of such reframing of the HRD practitioner role to include knowledge management is already emerging in the US literature (Stuller, 1998). Secondly, HRD practitioners need to assist their trainees to see the value of acquiring and using more abstract skills and knowledge. Thirdly, the call for new forms of managerial competence suggests the need for HRD practitioners to increasingly understand the broad range of attributes and skills comprising successful organisational management and once again to design strategies which both develop such skills amongst managers and facilitate their use.

Workplaces and Work Roles as Sites and Sources of Significant Learning

A further theme in the organisational change literature of immediate relevance to designers of preparatory HRD practitioner programs is that which advocates the importance of learning for competitive workplaces. No longer is organisationally useful learning being seen as solely that which is delivered in workplace training rooms. It is increasingly being seen as occurring when employees share knowledge gained through collaborative work experiences, or from discussions with competitors, or gained from "on line" sources or other electronic data repositories (Marquard & Sofo, 1999; Davernport, De Long & Beers, 1998; Denton, 1998; Rowden, 1995). In some organisations the introduction of performance management systems has further reinforced the notion that the development process takes place within the workplace and the work role. As a result, in many organisations the HRD practitioner is a consultant or coach working directly with individual employees and managers to develop the performance necessary to achieve the strategic goals of the organisation (Marquard & Sofo, 1999).

An increased recognition of a need for more effective communication, problem solving, team building and conflict resolution skills on the part of employees has also been part of the discussion associated with the importance of workplace learning. Newer work behaviours being sought are often based on making more explicit employees' tacit knowledge about how the organisation operates and a range of interpersonal attributes. Smith and Hayton (1999) suggest that development activities to build these forms of work behaviour are particularly evident within organisations that have introduced quality improvement processes and new forms of work organisation.

Each of the above themes has implications for the work of the HRD practitioner and in turn for the design of preparation programs for such practitioners. These themes suggest the scaling back of traditional bureaucratic organisational structures and the emergence of new forms of employment in which employees play differing roles and complete different work. The themes imply the need to equip employees with a broader range of skills and changed mindsets about the nature of work. Similarly, HRD practitioners require understanding of the newer skills required in organisations and the differing delivery formats which may be more appropriate for the new forms of work.

Challenge 3: diverse findings in profiling studies

The previous sections have drawn on those ideas from the HRD, organisation and management literature that have implications for the design of preparation programs for HRD practitioners. This section considers the challenges that arise from the somewhat diverse findings from recent studies examining the role of HRD practitioners.

One of the largest profiling studies of this field of practice was completed by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) in 1996. From a survey of the membership of this society this study identified the range of professional competencies that practitioners saw as necessary to meet the demands of a changing society and their changing workplaces. The critical roles that respondents in this study nominated included: providing performance support services (which required competencies in all interventions not just training); using technology for delivery support interventions (which required competencies in technology planning and implementation); managing human performance systems (requiring an ability to apply business system skills); promoting continuous learning at individual, team and organisational levels, and managing change processes (requiring capacities with technologies that facilitate change and change management consulting). The report argued that the critical competencies for practice were: an awareness of industry or corporations including an understanding of vision, strategy, organisational culture and how to link HRD practice with organisational goals more than ever before; management skills including leadership skills; understanding the customer focus and project management skills; interpersonal skills and technological literacy (American Society for Training and Development, 1996).

While this American study would suggest a broadening role for HRD practitioners, some other studies are less definite. For example, Nijhoff and de Rijk (1997) report findings from a comparative study of HRD practitioners from four European countries. From this study the researchers tentatively reported that training and development and organisational change activities remained the most important parts of the HRD practitioner role.

Similarly some Australian studies of the early 1990s also suggested a narrower role than that found in the United States. For example, Moy (1991) analysed position vacant advertisements for HRD practitioners (using a similarly broad definition of this term as used in this paper). Her data revealed that the traditional responsibilities associated with an orthodox training role such as instructing, facilitating, program design and administration continued to rate highly as key responsibilities in advertised positions. She did report, however, a trend towards advisory and diagnostic service and showed that organisational change and development, analysing needs and conducting skills audits, advising on individual career development and strategic HRD planning were amongst the most frequently identified responsibilities in newly created positions.

Another Australian study of the early 1990s, using professional association members from this field, also found a dominant training orientation for those in this role. This study suggested that there was no indication of a shift towards a broadened

HRD role or to role specialisation (e.g. needs analyst, learning evaluator) or to any role transformation as had been predicted in some of the literature of the late 1980s (Dunstan, 1993).

Later studies, however, have provided some evidence of change in line with the ASTD findings. In 1997 Anderson and Johnston examined HRD roles and practices, the challenges practitioners faced and the skills and understanding these practitioners perceived they would need for future practice. The sample for this study was very small and may have been atypical in that all participants were completing formal studies in HRD. Nonetheless, the study comprised practitioners with a spread of experience (6 months and 20+ years of professional experience with a median of 5.5 years of experience) and from a wide range of industry sectors.

Common HRD Practices

Findings from this study revealed that the HRD activities were carried out in organisations by both HRD staff from a centralised HRD function and by line staff. HRD activities undertaken centrally included program development, staff induction, career development and management and change management. HRD work carried out by line staff and supervisors comprised mainly individual training and development and performance assessment. Respondents also reported that many others in the more general HR (Human Resources) function had development responsibilities. Other positions with titles such as Capabilities Manager, Performance Manager, Quality Assurance Manager, and Learning Services Manager were further identified as having HRD responsibilities.

The most common HRD activities conducted in respondents' organisations included: classroom-based group training, assessment of performance or competence, assisting with the implementation of organisational change, program design, HRD budgeting, program evaluation, one-to-one training or coaching. Other HRD activities undertaken in at least 40% of respondents' organisations included: monitoring organisational change, career planning, facilitating team development, process improvement/quality initiatives, and internal performance improvement consultancy.

Survey respondents themselves were most frequently responsible for group training, program evaluation, one-to-one training, and assisting with the implementation of change. Payroll administration, award interpretation, recruitment, counselling, HRD management, training resource development, and training record systems maintenance were other work tasks nominated by respondents. These findings could be seen as reflecting both the broadening in scope of HRD activities and a blurring of occupation role boundaries (especially with generalist HR staff and managers) within organisations. These findings also reflect findings reported by Moy and, to some extent, those of Dunstan of an ongoing reliance on orthodox developmental strategies for many practitioners.

Perceptions of Recent and Anticipated Changes

This study also gathered data on practitioners' perceptions of recent role change and anticipated challenges. Several themes emerged. The most common perception of role change was the increased demand for a closer linkage between HRD initiatives and the core business of the organisation. Several respondents indicated that they were now required to devote more energy to developing the performance of business units, to place a greater focus on workplace issues, and to be more accountable for achieving outcomes that related to organisational goals. These practitioners stated that they needed to be more aware of business goals, more strategic in their practice, and to take on broader roles in the new "flexible" workplace.

A second theme to emerge from respondents' perceptions of change was concerned with the HRD strategies being used within organisations. Several respondents reported that there was more outsourcing of HRD provision by their organisations, that learning centres, individualised learning plans, open learning strategies were being increasingly used and that there was more involvement by managers and line supervisors in HRD activities than there had been in the past. Other responses indicated changes related to the focus on industry or enterprise competency standards and assessment of such competency, to meeting mandatory statutory requirements (e.g. EEO, Occupational Health and Safety requirements), to multi-skilling and to the facilitation of organisational change. A small number of respondents also suggested that they were being required to work longer hours with reduced budgets.

Anticipated challenges nominated by respondents included preparing the organisation for technological change and the need to adapt to changing learning and development technologies (e.g. computer-based, interactive learning technologies, multimedia and open learning). Several respondents also indicated that they anticipated that their role would require them to address the issue of development of part-time and contract employees. Performance-based training, managing organisational change, and the move to team-based organisational structures were other challenges that respondents anticipated facing. Several expected that they would have to justify the maintenance of the HRD department and its existing budget, and predicted the possibility of further outsourcing of the HRD function.

Skills and Understandings Needed for HRD Practice

The final question in the study asked respondents to nominate the skills and understandings they felt were most needed to operate effectively as an HRD practitioner. Communication skills were the most frequently identified, with responses suggesting a need for both general communication skills and more specific skills in areas such as negotiation and group management. A second cluster of responses related to the traditional skills of training, with respondents listing competencies connected with instruction, facilitation, program design and training needs analysis. A third cluster of competencies was concerned with organisational awareness. Skills here included planning skills, knowledge of corporate culture, manage-

ment of projects, time and resources as well as general administration, budgeting and marketing skills. Other respondents indicated the need for well-developed skills in analysis, investigation, problem solving and consultancy.

In the following year, Kostos (1998) reported a further set of profiling findings from a focus group of learning and development professionals with varying levels of responsibility from within both large corporations and small business. This study revealed that there was a definite shift in the skill requirements of people currently involved in the field with the greatest change being “in the area of trainer to consultant” (p. 19). Her study also found that the learning and development function required professionals to be more aware of business issues in order to make the linkages in the delivery of learning. Skills in consulting, high-level communication, analysis, resource and project management, using behavioural transformation approaches, organisational development and managing change, use of new technologies, and managing cultural diversity were also required. Participants also nominated the need for a refined capacity for knowledge management.

To summarise briefly, the profiling studies reveal some evidence of change in the HRD practitioner role. While the traditional practices of training and development still constitute major tasks of this role, there is evidence of the need for HRD practitioners to have an enhanced capacity to operate strategically. As such, HRD practitioners could be seen as requiring an increased understanding of the organisational drivers and the capability to work with the dynamics that operate within specific organisational settings. These studies also highlight the ubiquity of change in organisations and the need for practitioners to be able to work within and develop others within a change context. These studies could be seen as presenting the designer of HRD preparation programs with the challenge of providing learners with both the traditional skills associated with training and development using a classroom-based delivery mode as well as the skills to use alternative strategies both to improve performance in line with business goals and to assist both organisations and individuals to manage change.

Some Implications for Preparation of HRD Practitioners

The preceding sections of this paper have identified some of the challenges that confront those who are developing programs to enhance the skills of HRD practitioners. These challenges have been identified from an analysis of recent literature. There is also some convergence in this literature about the skills and understanding that are needed for contemporary HRD practice which can be used as a guide for determining the content of preparation programs in HRD. This final section highlights some of the areas that could feature in such programs.

HRD Preparation Programs Should Foreground the Context of Practice

There is ample evidence, both from the theoretical discussions of the field and the profiling studies cited, of the importance of organisational awareness for HRD practitioners. Such evidence suggests that this aspect should be foregrounded in

HRD development programs in order to assist learners to work strategically and overtly align their practice with organisational directions and the achievement of organisational goals. Even though it can be anticipated that many learners undertaking such formal programs will have had some experience within organisations, developing skills in organisational analysis, strategic thinking and planning, translating business objectives into action, financial awareness and planning would seem valuable. Similarly, there would seem to be a need for students to be able to develop the communicative capacity to establish the alignment between HRD initiatives and organisational goals at both interpersonal and organisational levels to avoid being marginalised at best or replaced at worst.

HRD Preparation Programs Should Address Traditional Training Areas Such as Presentation, Program Design, Needs Analysis and Training Evaluation

Profiling studies from Australia and Europe clearly show that the more traditional areas of training/HRD practice are still common HRD activities. It cannot be assumed, however, that the technologies associated with best practice orthodox training are well known or well practised, as many practitioners come into HRD practice as a second career resulting from the expertise they have displayed in a technical or functional role. To better equip practitioners who have entered the field in this way, program designers need to ensure that their learners develop capacities to implement the learning technologies and strategies (including design as well as delivery and evaluation strategies) that are used within organisational settings. These should include, but also go beyond, the traditional classroom-based models of instruction. Skills in developing employees at their work site are being increasingly required as the workplace becomes the source of working knowledge. Similarly, as some of the studies discussed above show, skills in designing electronically provided learning experiences become pivotal as learning becomes a process that is called up when needed rather than an activity attended when directed.

Even with the shift in some HRD work from the specialist HRD function to workplace-based supervisor or consultant/coach (Kostos, 1998) there is still a need within organisations for expertise in accurate training and development needs analysis and in the design of effective development and support experiences that are appropriate for the learner and the task.

HRD Preparation Programs Should Foster Capacity of HRD Practitioners to Become Managers of Change

A theme pervading most current organisational literature is the need to recognise that organisational change will be a continuing and accelerating feature of post-industrial society. Respondents in the profiling studies also indicated that they anticipated playing a role in implementing organisational change as well as confronting change both in terms of the learning and organisational technologies they would be using. Such findings would therefore suggest there is a strong need for HRD students to gain a sound understanding of the diverse dimensions of change that

impact on their role, and to develop the capacity to assist with the design and implementation of individual and organisational change.

HRD Preparation Programs, Particularly for the Australian Context, Should Provide Some Focus on Competency-based Training, Workplace Assessment and Performance Assessment

The notion of competency-based training and the process of developing industry competency standards were features of industry training and skill formation policies in the early 1990s in Australia. This approach to training subsequently became a major feature of much vocational training conducted in educational institutions within Australia. The level of adoption of this approach within enterprises is not so clear. For example, a large study of enterprise training in Australia in 1996 by Smith and Hayton (Smith & Hayton, 1999) revealed that most of the enterprises in their sample were not using competency standards to guide their training activities, and that the incidence of competency-based training in enterprises was very low. They did comment, however, that there were notable exceptions in their sample. The study by Anderson and Johnston (1997) cited earlier, however, suggests that some elements of competency-based approaches were being enacted in organisations. A number of respondents in this study indicated that assessment of competencies/capabilities/performance was a common HRD activity in their organisations. More extensive evidence indicating support by Australian enterprises for competency approaches is reported in a study of 350 companies completed in 1999. Seventy per cent of the respondents in this study indicated that they supported a competency-based training approach for their employees, even though not all companies supported the use of formally developed national industry competency standards. Some companies reported developing standards for their own organisational contexts (Allan Consulting Group, 1999).

Despite some of the contradictions in these findings, it could be argued that HRD preparation programs should provide learners with understandings of issues and processes associated with competency-based training and assessment, as elements of the approach are being used to varying degrees within organisations in Australia. Similarly, calls for the use of performance management approaches and the need for performance management and improvement competencies in HRD practitioners (American Society for Training and Development, 1996; Dunphy *et al.*, 1997) could be seen as reinforcing the argument for enhancing skills in developing performance standards and assessing competence in performance in HRD learners.

HRD Preparation Programs Should Equip Practitioners to Prepare Employees for New Forms of Career Planning

The literature that discusses the changing world of organisations and work predicts the disappearance of career structures as we know them. It has also suggested that the individual employees will need to develop an expanding portfolio of skills for ongoing employment in the contemporary workforce (Handy, 1995; Lawler, 1994).

This suggests, therefore, that HRD preparation should equip learners with the capacities to understand and utilise the processes of multi-skilling employees as well as facilitating individual career interventions. Such skill on the part of the HRD practitioner will allow for more flexible use of organisational workforces as well as enhancing the employability of individuals both within and outside organisations. Career planning emerged fairly strongly from some of the profiling studies as an important competence for HRD practice. This evidence suggests that some of the tools of the practice associated with this area need to be addressed in the preparation of HRD practitioners. Such preparation may also be salient for the practitioners themselves, as their own careers in HRD will also be subject to the same forces of change as many of the employees in the organisations in which they work.

HRD Programs Should Recognise that Those in this Field of Practice are not Located Solely Within a Specially Designated HRD Function

Employee development is occurring at various levels in organisations and hence students participating in preparation programs may have a range of organisational responsibilities and work backgrounds. This could also suggest that in the preparation of HRD practitioners there is a need to provide education in other HR disciplines in order to provide participants with a broad framework for practice. Similarly, there is a need to help participants develop the capacity to work in close association with those in other positions within organisations, as employee and organisational development initiatives are frequently shared.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to foreground some of the challenges that confront designers of preparation programs for human resource developers. These challenges arise from the contested perspectives of HRD, the complexity of the sites of HRD practice, and the divergence in findings in recent profiling studies of the field. There is also a degree of convergence in the writing and research about the field which would seem to suggest that the role scope and hence required working knowledge and skill of HRD practitioners is broadening. This convergence provides a basis for determining the substantive content needed for formal preparation programs for practitioners from this field. There remains, however, a need for further research into the role of HRD practitioners in contemporary organisations and the practice skills and working knowledge HRD practitioners require. Such research will contribute to the development of relevant preparatory educational programs and may also lead to increased recognition of the role that HRD practitioners play in the achievement of effective organisational practice.

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