HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

Reid A. Bates

School of Human Resource Education and Workforce Development,
142 Old Forestry, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, USA

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1. Introduction

The Performance/Integrity Workgroup at the 2000 Academy of Human Resource Development conference sculpted the following definition: The purpose of human resource development (HRD) is to enhance learning, human potential and high performance in work-related systems. This chapter argues that this definition is incomplete and must include the notion of sustainable human development. Thus, the purpose of human resource development is defined as the capacity to enhance learning, human potential and high performance in work-related systems *and* contribute to sustainable human development. Pursuing this purpose is vitally important: at no time in history has HRD been called upon to play a more fundamental and key role in solving critical economic and social problems faced by communities, organizations, and nations. As a consequence, HRD is being challenged to pursue an extensive and expanding agenda of objectives. This chapter offers a framework that effectively captures the breadth and complexity of objectives addressed by HRD as a field of practice. Within

this framework, two critical mission level objectives are offered as guideposts for HRD practice.

2. The Importance of Human Resource Development

To understand its objectives, one must first appreciate the evolving importance of HRD. This is evident, for example, in the growing number of organizations looking to HRD for help in developing the capacity to compete in a global economy. Global firms need individuals capable of operating effectively in diverse cultural environments, using increasingly complex organizational structures and communication patterns, and managing change using multiple integrative business strategies with an embedded international perspective. Similarly in developing countries, the opening of internal markets, the adoption of new competitive strategies to meet market challenges, and demands of supplying products to meet the quality requirements of international firms are powerful forces driving organizational change. These changes have led to an expanded emphasis on HRD as a tool to develop the teamwork, problem and process analysis, communication, and other needed capabilities.

Drucker has observed that changes in market dynamics, technology, and the structure of labor have created work that is more complex, abstract, and knowledge-based. As a result, an increasing proportion of jobs now require higher levels of reading, math, problem solving, interpersonal, and other work place skills. However, data indicate that many countries throughout the world suffer from a substantial gap between the knowledge and skills needed for economic and social progress and those that are available. The 'skill gap' problem has drawn increasing policy attention and financial investment aimed at implementing HRD systems capable of upgrading human resources to meet emerging needs and opportunities.

Perhaps the most enduring failure of humankind in the last century is the persistence of poverty. Poverty is a tremendously important personal, social, and economic issue because it deprives people of choices and significantly reduces the level of well being that they can achieve. It limits people's participation in political and development processes, and is associated with unemployment, underproductivity, poor health, nutrition, housing, and personal security. Unfortunately, as Finsterbusch and VanWicklin observe, over fifty years of development efforts directed at countering poverty and associated problems through infusions of financial and technological assistance have largely failed to significantly benefit the poor. Many areas of the world have, in fact, seen increases in the absolute degree of poverty. Castells postulates this trend will continue because poor countries are being further marginalized by a competitive global economy that values information over production as a source of wealth.

Recent efforts to overcome poverty and the problems it spawns have placed HRD at the top of many national development agendas. Here the value of HRD is seen in its ability to adopt both a production-oriented and a people-centered role. In the production-oriented role, HRD is viewed as a crucial tool for building and maintaining the reservoir of skills needed for economic and social development. Singapore, Korea, Taiwan, and a number of African countries present lucid examples where HRD has been key part of

the national strategy to foster sustainable economic development. In the people-centered role, HRD is seen as the primary tool to more directly address the needs of the poor by building their potential for political and development participation, self-help, and improvement. Cernea, Low, Ridker and others see this role as particularly important because enhancing this potential is fundamental to the effective use of resources and the sustainability of economic and social development processes.

These examples illustrate the evolving leadership role that HRD plays in solving a number of significant economic and social problems faced by communities, organizations, and nations throughout the world. It is clear that HRD is a fundamental tool for change and adaptation and the primary mechanism through which the human capital of nations is increased and preserved. The recognition that human resources and their development play a critical role in human progress (a position well articulated in M. E. Porter's 'The Competitive Advantage of Nations') has put increasing demands on the field of HRD practice to address an ever widening range of objectives.

3. The Challenge of Defining HRD Objectives

Defining HRD objectives is important because it provides a framework for clarifying and understanding of the growing capabilities of HRD as a field of practice. However, defining HRD objectives is neither simple nor straightforward. HRD is an expansive and often nebulous field that includes a complex range of activities and interventions (e.g., training, education, coaching, counseling, career development, work system design, process improvement, organizational development, and so on) that are used in different ways to produce a variety of specific outcomes. This repertoire is necessarily dynamic because, as Karin Watkins points out, ongoing changes in economic and social needs, and work system processes, culture, and structure continue to expand these activities and outcomes even further. Also, the practice of HRD includes a range of philosophical orientations, each of which has profound implications for how HRD is carried out. Finally, HRD practice draws on a variety of scientific disciplines including economics, psychology, sociology, adult learning, anthropology, ethics, systems, management and leadership, human resource management, industrial engineering, and organizational development and change.

Despite the complex and evolving nature of the field, some initial steps have been taken toward arriving at consensus on the core purpose of HRD. At the 2000 Academy for Human Resource Development Conference, a small group of researchers and practitioners (the Performance/Integrity Workgroup) set out to understand and overcome the practical and philosophical diversity within the field and to reach consensus on the overarching purpose of HRD. The group agreed to the following statement:

> *The purpose of HRD is to enhance learning, human potential and high performance in work-related systems.*

Although it is argued later in this chapter that this preliminary statement of core purpose must be expanded to include the concept of sustainable human development, this statement provides the crystallizing agent necessary for distilling the practice of HRD

into a manageable and understandable framework of objectives. Building this framework, however, requires a clear understanding of terminology. Therefore the following definitions are offered.

3.1 Human Resource Development.

As noted above, HRD is a broad field of research, theory and practice directed at the development of human resources, their rational and optimal use, and the establishment of an enabling environment in which these resources can find their full expression. The purpose of HRD is to enhance learning, human potential, and high performance in work-related systems and contribute to sustainable human development.

3.2 Performance

Performance is defined as the outcomes or achievements that result from goal-directed work system behavior. Performance represents an aggregation of behaviors and outcomes over time and across tasks, groups, individuals and so on. Campbell notes that performance is distinguishable from effectiveness (an evaluative judgment of outcomes), productivity (level of effectiveness divided by the cost to achieve that effectiveness), and utility (value of performance effectiveness or productivity).

3.2 Work system

A work system is defined as an interdependent, organized architecture of human activities directed toward the accomplishment of a valued goal or outcome. This broad definition extends the concept of work system from a loose collection of individuals to organized work teams and formal for-profit and public service work organizations. It includes informal organizations, such as community-based organizations, composed of a varying number of individuals without a formal organizational structure, that act interdependently to accomplish often vaguely defined goals. The concept also extends to collections of interdependent work sub-systems, such as those reflected in regional or national workforce development systems, educational systems, health or social service systems. These larger work systems reflect organized networks of smaller work systems that are fit together in ways that allow the larger system to respond to a broader range of customer demands and environmental threats or opportunities. Nadler and Gerstein suggest high performing work systems are those that optimize the fit between system elements (people, processes, information, technology, or sub-systems) in ways that enable the work system to meet or exceed its performance goals.

This definition makes several fundamental assumptions. First, it assumes that work systems are created to enhance the human condition. Second, it assumes that work systems are entities that do not exist independently from the people that comprise them. Rather, work systems are composed of people and processes, often multiple collectives with complex systems of social relationships, which have a shared set of symbols (e.g., language) and experience. The fact the work systems are composed of people makes them the appropriate focal point for HRD activity. Finally, the structure and complexity of work systems as well as the nature of their goals distinguish work systems from organized human activities directed at play or recreation.

3.3 Learning

For the purposes of this discussion, learning is defined as a relatively permanent change in work system capabilities. It is a primary process through which HRD accomplishes its objectives. It can result from formal, planned learning experiences such as those that occur in training situations. It also includes structured and unstructured self-directed learning, as well as unplanned, spontaneous learning that often occurs when one learns from one's work. Traditionally for HRD, learning has been conceived of as occurring at the individual level. At this level, it involves the acquisition of verbal information, intellectual skills, motor skills, attitudes, and cognitive strategies that enhance the ability or potential of individuals. The notion of learning can also be expanded and applied to larger work systems (e.g., groups and organizations) through the concept of a learning organization. Senge defines learning organizations as complex work systems that have developed the ability to continuously acquire, share, create new knowledge, and use this knowledge generating capability to transform themselves.

3.4 Human potential

Human potential refers to the latent capabilities in humans for growth and development. Human potential is a critical element of HRD because of the implications it has for the ongoing adaptation, change, and well being of individuals and work systems.

3.5 Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is defined as the ways in which societies and other work systems manage economic, social, political, and ecological processes to shape their development in ways that preserve the preconditions of development for future generations. Drawing on Becker, Jahn, Stiess, and Wehling's discussion, the concept of sustainable development has at least two important distinguishing dimensions. The normative dimension of sustainable development acknowledges that economic processes are necessarily subordinated to social and ecological constraints. Markets, for example, are dependent on societies and other work systems, neither of which can exist without a natural environment. The strategic dimension of sustainable development implies the existence of a system of governance capable of instituting policies that move societies and work systems away from non-sustainable processes and towards sustainable ones.

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