

STUDENT SUMMARY NOTES

chapter 7 learning and human resource development

Chapter overview

The chapter considers ideas and practices relating to Human Resource Development (HRD) that move beyond a narrow conception of training and development. It will explore how the attention to learning throughout an organisation is considered the only strategy to cope with change. Particular attention is given to the importance of establishing HRD at strategic levels of decision-making, implementation and the attraction of ideas such as the learning organization (LO), organisation learning (OL) and knowledge management (KM) as moves towards finding ways to integrate work and learning.

Chapter objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Understand the connections between human resource development (HRD), strategy and workplace learning
2. Discuss the effectiveness of a national infrastructure for HRD
3. Explain how HRD may be implemented
4. Understand the contribution of coaching to HRD implementation
5. Explain key features of learning technologies

Introduction

HRD is an organization's investment in the learning of its people and acts as a powerful signal of its intentions:

- By replacing the words ‘training cost’ with ‘investment’, there is an indication that a longer-term view is being taken, particularly with respect to the outcomes of HRD.
- HRD acts as a triggering mechanism for the progression of other HRM policies that are aimed at recruiting, retaining and rewarding employees who are recognized as the qualitative difference between organizations.
- HRD is crucial for organizations seeking to adopt a ‘high-road’ HRM strategy engendering the conditions whereby loyalty and commitment towards an organization’s aims can be encouraged.
- In recent years, HRD has moved beyond a narrow conception of training and development and many organizations now attempt to take a holistic view that embraces the idea of learning at individual and organizational levels as a crucial source of competitive advantage.

The meaning of HRD

Learning processes can work at different levels and as such HRD can include ‘planned interventions (By employer) and individual learning (informal, incidental) processes in the workplace. We suggest our own definition of HRD:

“any intervention or activity that enables and results in learning at work”
(p. 222)

Study tip: Learning at work is an obvious ‘good thing’ but not all organizations have responded positively to the message of the virtues of HRD. In the UK, there continues to be a continuing concern about investment in workforce learning; one that is inherently ‘systemic and cultural’ (Bloom et al, 2004) There is also a questioning of assumptions that underpin an organization’s investment in people, especially if they are framed in terms of the mutual interest of employees and employers in the benefits of learning at work (See, for example, Rainbird 2000).

Strategy, HRD and workplace learning

An organization’s HRD provision represents the pivotal component of the ‘bundle’ of HR practices required for a ‘high road’ HRM strategy. A key image is that of a high performance working where high level skills and high discretion in the performance of work. Key implications include:

- employees are recruited for a skilled working role that will require learning and change

- line managers are fully involved in the development of their staff to such an extent that the differentiation between learning and working becomes virtually impossible to discern

Leadership is said to be a key variable in linking strategy, culture and the commitment of employees.

Using the Design School model of strategic work, HRD became a feature where senior managers sense important environmental trends and signals in HRD terms.

A contrasting view is where strategies can emerge from the actions of employees.

An orthodox view of strategic HRD makes it business-led and thus responsive to organisational strategy and most probably to the requirements of a broader HRM strategy. HRD is tied to the Performance Management System and its contribution will be judged on the benefits it brings in achieving performance targets.

Alternative versions of strategic HRD provide for a more reciprocal and proactive influence on organizational strategy. HRD specialists are able to play an important role by developing new ideas, which both match strategy and take it forward. There is scant evidence that strategic HRD has made significant progress in the UK.

Study tip: You can use the work of Coleman and Keep (2001) to explore where strategic management is taken seriously, in the UK in most cases, the focus is on profit maximization and cost minimization making HRD and skills a fourth-order consideration. Strategy-making involves choosing from a number of possible paths – for example cost, mergers, IT, marketing and using the skills and learning of the workforce is only one of them. Choosing a path other than skills and learning lies at the core of a UK problem of low-priced and low-quality production and low demand for skills. See also Keep (2004) for consideration of an organization's 'low skills trajectory'.

Developmental humanism based on the personal empowerment of the workforce through learning is in contrast to human capital theory.

The case for HRD is made at the different levels of individuals, the organization and the economy/society.

Workplace learning and knowledge creation

Strategies can emerge from the actions of employees. Through employees' interaction and production processes, customers, both internal and external to their organization, employees can monitor, respond to and learn from evolving situations. Employees therefore develop "local knowledge".

This view of SHRD gives attention to how informal and incidental learning in the workplace can contribute to dealing with change, coping with uncertainty and complexity: a useful strategy in post-Brexit Britain.

Differences between organizations and nations will depend on the extent to which information can be obtained, turned into knowledge and applied to production. A plethora of new concepts highlight the interest in knowledge management (KM) knowledge workers, knowledge-intensive organizations, knowledge networks and knowledge societies.

HRM in practice 7.1 Managing knowledge

Refer to this feature (p. 226) for an explanation of the concept of a 'knowledge economy' and the need to develop one in Britain to ensure lasting growth.

Knowledge workers are the owners of intellectual capital therefore human capital accumulation has become one of the new reasons for an investment in HRD and a contrast to previous narrow conceptions implied by human capital theory.

A key reason for the interest in KM has been the advances made in the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), especially in combination with the Internet.

Study tip: if you have formed a peer study group, ask the group to reflect on this question: Can all knowledge be managed? What is meant by 'knowing-that' and 'knowing-how'? What is informal, coincidental and tacit knowledge?

In considering knowledge creation, it's common to distinguish between "knowing that" and "knowing how" (p. 225). Many organizations have attempted to introduce KM, including the appointment of managers as learning officers or knowledge officers and installing networked software to accentuate the process.

Some organizations are now seeking to exploit social learning by becoming project-based.

The learning organization

Many organizations have been attracted by the idea of becoming a learning organization (LO) (sometimes referred to as a learning company). The LO is seen as a strategy for performance improvement and competitive advantage.

The LO was encouraged by Senge's (1990) idea of five disciplines:

- Personal mastery
- A shared vision
- Team learning
- Mental models
- Systems thinking

Study tip: See the ideas of the LO developed by Pedler et al. (1988) and the dimensions that could be used to differentiate an LO from a non-learning company. Among the dimensions were a learning approach to strategy, participative policy-making, 'informating' (that is, the use of information technology to inform and empower people), reward flexibility and self-development opportunities for all. See also Senge's (1990) support for LO and his idea of five disciplines that were required as a foundation.

Integrating workplace learning and strategic HRD

Giving attention to workplace learning and the potential for knowledge creation allows for a more reciprocal and proactive influence on organizational strategy (p. 230). Thus, an integrated approach highlights key interdependencies within organizations such as the link to strategy, the role of line managers, the link to individual and team-based informal learning and knowledge transfer. It is therefore an approach to which the label HRD seems more suited.

The development of competency frameworks seeks to link business objectives and employee performance via a performance management system to provide a performance and development plan that will include an identification of training needs and a plan to meet such needs. However, such frameworks may not reflect skills gaps.

A policy of HRD has to be translated into the structures, systems and processes that might be called a learning climate composed of subjectively perceived physical and psychosocial variables that will fashion an employee's effectiveness

in realizing learning potential. An organization's 'learning environment' can be considered as expansive or restrictive.

At the heart of the learning climate lies the line manager-employee relationship. Some organizations have recognized this and have included 'developing others' within their competency frameworks for managers and a number of roles have been associated with managers to support the fusion, including coaching and mentoring.

Coaching and mentoring are both processes that can provide a link between HRD activities, transfer to work and evaluation. The activities of managers to support transfer within HRD are a key feature of the evaluation of HRD. Evidence is needed to prove the benefits of HRD against costs to show a positive Return on Investment (ROI).

Study tip: Use the Kirkpatrick model of evaluation to consider some of the challenges of measuring the outcomes of training as though in a chain of causality (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Go back to Chapter 3 and look at the methodological challenges of measuring the HRM-organizational performance relationship. How do these challenges relate to HRD?

There is growing interest in a more critical view of HRD. Where management presents HRD to pursue policies of 'lean' production, employees may be reluctant to learn new skills. Also where strategy is focused on cost reduction and profit maximization, HRD and skill development is a "fourth-order" consideration.

Diversity and HRD

Diversity is usually considered in terms of a need to conform to the law and therefore as a cost, but there is signs that a more inclusive culture is being given prominence.

CIPD survey found that many organizations had policies to support an inclusive culture and practices such as HRD. However, there was less evidence of measuring change and using Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to monitor impact.

The shift towards diversity and inclusion requires the adoption of a long-term view of cultural change – it's not a "one-off" effort and needs a "supportive learning organizational climate" (see also **Chapter 15**).

National HRD

While organizations wrestle with the theory and practices for SHRD, at national level, most countries have developed interest and policies around skills and economic growth.

The attention to skills and commitment to HRD can be seen as part of a broader agenda connected with visions of a 'learning revolution' incorporating 'lifelong learning' and the 'learning society'.

The '**voluntarist**' and the '**interventionist**' approach to HRD are examined (see **Figure 7.1**, p.232). Mostly in the UK, the voluntarist approach relies heavily on market forces for skills.

The general supply of skills to the economy was the subject of the Skills Task Force (STF) in the UK, providing a rigorous investigation of skills and commitment to HRD.

Study tip: See the most recent review of skills in the UK by going to http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/leitch_review/review_leitch_index.cfm for a copy of the Leitch Review of Skills.

Research supports a pattern of a self-reinforcing cycle of low-quality products and low skills in the UK.

Working on the basis of a voluntarist approach to HRD, successive governments in the UK have framed their policies on the idea of a market-led system for skills where demand and supply determine the amount of training provided.

Within a market-led approach, the role of government and its agents has been to improve the UK's training infrastructure and provide funding for interventions to support the smooth working of the system where markets fail. This includes:

- efforts to stimulate the demand for skills within organizations
- the establishment of a framework of vocational qualifications based on national standards (National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)) and a National Qualifications Framework
- a national network of regionally based institutions to coordinate national HRD initiatives aimed at improving the functioning of markets.

For a market-led approach to operate to ensure high demand for skills, action is required principally from within organizations. Organizations may adjust to low skill requirements for production and lose awareness that this is holding them back.

Of most importance is the definition of the firm-specific skills required for the specific production requirements of an organization.

The recognition of trade unions may also lead to more effective HRD strategies. Under provisions in the 2002 Employment Act, recognition can be granted to Union Learning Representatives (ULRs), who can have paid time-off to arrange learning for members.

The notion or vision of high performance working may not necessarily be equated with high skills. There is limited evidence of such a link and production is still frequently organised around Neo-Fordist principles of job design.

Investors in People in the UK plays a role in providing a rationale, a process and a positive language for HRD where managers are already convinced of its virtues. In pursuance of its lifelong learning agenda, government has sought to increase demand for learning.

Implementing HRD

A crucial feature of HRD is the measurement and assessment of learning. In any organization, a range of factors influences learning, and HRD practitioners may not be the best judges to assess the link between HRD and OP (see **Chapter 3** for a detailed discussion on the potential HRD-performance relationship). The problem is compounded when we consider both formal and informal approaches to learning at work.

Traditionally, employees learnt their jobs by exposure to experienced workers who would show them what to do ('sitting by Nellie') and line managers did not see it as their responsibility to become involved in training. Survey evidence suggests that line managers play a crucial role in what is learnt on an everyday basis.

Theories of learning

To implement HRD, managers need to understand and explain learning in the organization. There are however many theories of adult learning. A traditional distinction is between 'associative learning' (or behaviourism) and 'cognitive learning'. **Table 7.1**, p. 236) shows the main differences between the two approaches.

In recent years, the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky has influenced HRD practitioners. Vygotsky suggests that adult learning occurs through participation in action and social interaction with others. An '**integrated experiential learning**' approach brings together social context, cognition and action.

Study tip: Kolb's model has been very influential for many HRD practitioners and it has heightened awareness of the factors that contribute to learning or prevent learning at work. But there has been a growing critique and reassessment of the model (Holman et al., 1997). Other views of learning can be considered from the 50 theories of learning at <http://tip.psychology.org/theories.html>. A key writer in adult learning has been Stephen Brookfield: http://stephenbrookfield.com/by_sb.html links to papers which include coverage of self-directed learning and critical reflection.

A systematic training model

Whatever theory of adult learning is preferred, it needs to inform how HRD is implemented. A popular training model emerged during the 1960s, based on a systematic four-stage process (see figure 7.2 p. 238).

Evaluation can occur throughout the process with an emphasis on managers taking responsibility for encouraging the transfer of learning that occurs during training, into workplace performance.

Table 7.2 (p. 239) provides a list of possible approaches to assessment and analysis of training needs.

Study tip: In your peer study group or individually, use the Reflective Question (p.240) to consider whether the four-stage model is a model of HRD.

Refinements to the basic four-stage model of training imply a more sophisticated view of training and learning. This involves taking account of reality and organizational context, including sensitivity to organizational culture and climate as well as organizational politics and power.

HRM and globalization 7.1: Access to informal workplace learning opportunities

This feature (p. 241) examines whether age or gender can be a significant predictor of workers' opportunity to engage in formal or informal training.

An integrated and systematic approach

In recent years, organizations facing rapid change and uncertainty have adopted an integrated approach that highlights key interdependencies within the organization – link to strategy, the role of LMs, link to team-based learning and knowledge transfer.

Movement from 'training' that is instructor-led, to learning based on self-direction by employees. The role of HRD professional is one of 'strategic business partner facilitating learning activities. **Figure 7.3** (p. 243) shows a variety of HRD roles from traditional trainer to strategic business partner.

Evaluation and transfer of training

For HRD to be effective, it's important to provide evidence of impact and value-added. This requires attention to evaluation and the transfer of knowledge. See **Figure 7.4**, p. 245).

Activities to support learning transfer within HRD are a key feature of the evaluation of HRD. Within the traditional mechanistic view of training, evaluation often appears as the final stage. In alternative model measurements can be taken at four stages to show a chain of causality in order to prove a result (See **Figure 7.5**, p. 246).

Coaching

Coaching has become a significant activity in HRD theory and practice. It's mainly concerned with current performance and development issues, based on a relationship between LM and another employee, and structured around specific issues and goals.

The focus of attention in workplace coaching is on combining performance improvements with HRD, increasingly as part of a talent and development agenda (see **Chapters 5 and 6**).

Coaching provides two benefits: first, LMs who are coached are more likely to improve their performance, and second, LMs who coach are more likely to learn about their staff and improve their performance.

A framework for developing a coaching culture:

- Coaching is linked to business drivers
- Encouraging and supporting coaches
- The provision of training for coaches
- Reward and recognition for coaching
- A systematic perspective
- Management of the move to coaching

A change in organizational culture and climate is difficult, but coaching can it support such changes. For a coaching culture to emerge, there needs, at some stage in all cases, to be momentum based on good practice, training for coaches and support from senior managers who see the value of coaching.

The following behaviours or competencies are associated with effective coaching:

- Shared decision-making
- Listening
- Making action plans
- Questioning
- Giving feedback
- Developing staff personally and professionally

HRM in practice 7.2 Ensuring the transfer of learning for managers at BUPA Care Homes

This feature (p. 251) provides an insight into knowledge transfer and the concept of 'action challenger'.

Learning technologies (e-learning)

Learning technologies or e-learning is having a significant impact on HRD. CIPD defines 'learning technologies' as 'The broad range of communication and information technologies that can be used to support learning'.

Study tip:

Go to the *HRM As I See It* (p. 252), which features a HRM professional, Helen Tiffany, discussing her approach to HRD and how HRD is related to business strategy. Helen also explains why coaching has become so important in the workplace.

Benefits of e-learning include:

- the ability to learn ‘just in time’ at the learner’s pace
- the provision of updateable materials with reductions in delivery costs
- collaborative working with learners sometimes spread over large distances, with tutor support.

Several larger organizations have attempted to use e-learning to recast central HRD provision through the creation of corporate universities. Further, HRD specialists will inescapably be affected as adult learners move from being present in training classrooms to being members of virtual communities.

Engaging in critical thinking

Chapter case study: Volunteers Together

This chapter case study requires students to demonstrate an understanding of learning and training in work organizations, particularly the HRD-performance relationship and the concept and practice of knowledge transfer.

Reflective question/essay question

Is learning always a ‘good thing’ in organizations?

Tip for students: This question invites students to challenge the ‘obvious’ message that emanates from governments, organizations and others that learning is virtuous. The learning movement suggested by Gold and Smith (2003) depicts learning as a ‘good thing’ providing the resources to persuade others. Students can be guided to pose the question, good for whom? This can then lead to an examination of the ownership of the learning agenda and the dominance of a management ideology manifested in a concern for corporate values, strategy and competencies. Bratton (2001) outlines some of the conditions where employees may be reluctant to learn. The community of practice perspective also shows how learning in practice may vary from learning in abstraction, as required by management (Brown & Duguid, 1991). The move towards a more critical view of HRD can be suggested (Fenwick 2004, Turnbull & Elliot 2005).