HRD PRACTICES AS KEY FACTORS IN ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Relationships between HRD practices and organizational learning were explored through a literature review. Organizations that learn and develop their HRD practices have more opportunities to obtain and integrate the nine HRD outcomes in the learning process: organizational missions and goals, top management leadership, environmental scanning, HRD strategies and plans, partnerships with line management, partnerships with HRM, trainers as organizational change consultants, influence corporate culture, and emphasis on individual productivity and participation.

Key words: *HRD Practices, Organizational Learning, HRD*

INTRODUCTION

Effective organizations have employees who are committed and make contributions to organizational success. Hale (1991) pointed out that human resource development (HRD) professionals must support organizational learning in order to establish performance expectations, address higher-level problem-solving skills, and account for societal outcomes. Thus, HRD professionals are primarily responsible for creating HRD strategies within a learning culture that fosters continuous employee learning.

By organizing, integrating, and evaluating previously published material identified in a comprehensive literature review, this research identified the relationship between HRD practices and organizational learning. We argue, first, that HRD has a responsibility to provide strategies, training, and development opportunities to help organizations and their employees to achieve their business goals. Then, we argue that the characteristics of HRD are important in providing organizational learning. We also believe that HRD practices have the same responsibilities to influence organizational learning as to provide organizations with the key capabilities to enhance their organizational outcomes related to HRD practices.

QUESTIONS FOUND IN RESEARCVH AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

This research clarifies the relationship between HRD practices, organizational learning, and organizational outcomes by exploring the following four research questions:

1. What are the key factors of HRD practices in organizational learning?
2. Can strategic HRD practices help to maximize organizational outcomes by embracing organizational learning?

3. What is the relationship between organizational learning and strategic HRD practices?

4. What are the implications of strategic HRD practices for the workplace?

HRD professionals need to develop an approach that helps the organization focus on their strategic business goals. Such an approach must focus on organizational learning and the key factors that it influences. In this study, the key factors are HRD practices (Brinkerhoff & Gill, 1994). In an organizational learning context, strategy emphasizes the importance and critical nature of employees and organizations in achieving their business goals and organizational effectiveness. To fulfill this objective, HRD needs to be well organized and planned, as well as integrated into every aspect of the organization. Therefore, the above research questions have demonstrated the significance of this approach.

DEFINITIONS

Definitions are provided below for HRD and organizational learning.

HRD: Several definitions have been provided for human resource development (HRD) during the past few decades (Gilley & Eggland, 1989; Lee, 2003; McCracken & Wallace, 2000; McLean & McLean, 2001; Nadler, 1983; Nadler & Wiggs, 1986; Smith, 1988; Swanson, 1995). There are three areas of professional practice including learning, performance, and change that are generally identified in the definitions of HRD. For example, Swanson (1995) defined HRD as "a process of developing and unleashing human expertise through organization development and personal training and development for the purpose of improving performance" (p. 207). Nadler (1983) defined HRD as "organized learning experiences in a given period of time to bring about the possibility of performance change or general growth for the individual and the organization" McLean and McLean (2001) described HRD in a global perspective:

Human resource development is any process or activity that, either initially or over the long term, has the potential to develop…work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation or, ultimately, the whole of humanity.

Most definitions include, at minimum, the need for organizational efforts to result in performance improvement and organization development that enhance the organization's competitiveness and effectiveness

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Conceptualized organizational learning in the following dimensions:

1) Knowledge acquisition, which, due to its distinctive characteristics, can be subdivided into external and internal knowledge acquisition.

2) Distribution, by means of which knowledge is spread among the members of the organization.

3) Interpretation, in which individuals share and incorporate aspects of their knowledge that are not common to all of them, thereby achieving shared understanding, as well as coordinating the decision-making.

4) Organizational memory, which tries to store knowledge for future use, either in organizational systems designed for this purpose or in the form of rules, procedures and other systems.

Integrating the above definitions from the literature, we conclude that organizational learning is a process of learning in order to acquire knowledge and improve business performance, and it consists of four dimensions: knowledge acquisition, knowledge distribution, interpretation, and organizational memory

RESEARCH METHODS

For the literature review, we first identified key words to use in the literature search: HRD, HRD practice, and organizational learning, as discussed earlier with their definitions. Second, we identified the databases to search; all of the several electronic databases available in the university's electronic library, including both journal and book sources, were used, as well as Google Scholar and Google.

Garavan's (1991) paper was used as the foundation of this study, with additional input emerging from the search to provide information on ways in which HRD has changed since 1991. The literature enhanced our understanding of the nine key factors influencing the framework for HRD practices in organizational learning. In addition, Gilley and Maycunich (2000) and Pérez López, Peón, and Ordás (2006) provided the concept of organizational learning transformation used in this study. The study supported the importance of helping employees learn effectively through knowledge acquisition, distribution, interpretation, and organizational memory. McCracken and Wallace's (2000) findings were applied to the discussion of HRD outcomes in this study to combine HRD inputs, transformations, and HRD outcomes.

In addition to this literature, the system model in organizations discussed by Swanson (1996) was used to examine the improvement of HRD performance in organizational learning.
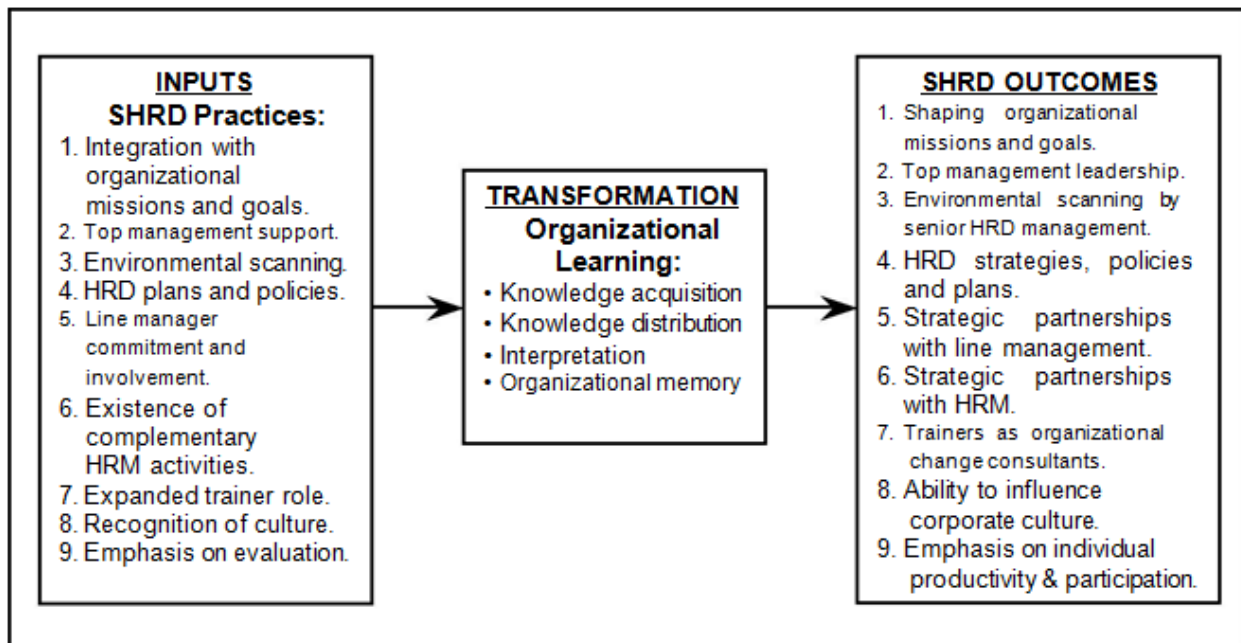
Figure: 1. Framework for Strategic HRD Practices in Organizational Learning

OUTCOMES OF HRD

According to the literature, facilitation of such learning and development can only take place in a supportive environment where there is a clear link between HRD and corporate strategy, where HRD is developed into the new enhanced version of the nine HRD characteristics as shown in Figure 1. These effects are not mutually exclusive but are interrelated in such a way that employees and the organization use all or a combination of them simultaneously to direct and control their learning.

Relationships between HRD Practices and Organizational Learning

In Figure 1, the nine key factors of HRD practices for organizational learning are examined in the framework.

1. Integration with organizational missions and goals: HRD practices in this context are seen as a vital factor in organizational learning, and training and development are viewed as making an effective contribution to business goals. Barham, Fraser, and Heath (1987) pointed out that HRD involves a move from activities that are fragmented to a situation where training and development is either more systematically linked to such goals or else is so systematically integrated with organizational needs that it is seen as a necessity for organizational survival.

2. Top management support: In many organizations, expenditure on training does not reflect investment in a financial sense but is instead perceived as a cost. Brown, Peccei, Sandberg, and Welshman (1989) illustrated from their research that when management training is considered it is concentrated towards the bottom end of the management hierarchy. Senior level managers were often not included in training strategies. It is obvious that increased investment in organizational learning requires the active participation of top management.

3. Environmental scanning: Garavan (1991) argued that a competitive environment presents major opportunities as it highlights the role of human resources as a key component of business success. This in turn will present the opportunity to discuss HRD strategies at the highest level and ensure that the first characteristic discussed, that of integration, is achieved. The environment can also act as a threat to the HRD function. Stiff competition, if not tackled effectively, can reduce profit margins and consequently lead to a reduction in training budgets. This situation clearly points to the need for HRD strategy to be well positioned in the overall business context including organizational learning.

4.HRD plans and policies: Organizational learning should engage in HRD policy and plan formulation because it acts not only as a source of information for all managers, but also clearly sets out for employees the different types of education, and learning and development activities that they can undertake to help develop their skills and knowledge, and therefore it complements career development activities.

5. Line manager commitment and involvement: The line manager is best placed to assess, on an ongoing basis, the training and development needs of subordinates and can facilitate identifying development routes for subordinates and is ideally placed to provide advice, direction,

and counseling to subordinates. Therefore, the competence of line managers is vital to a successful implementation of strategic HRD and organizational learning.

6. Existence of complementary HRM activities: Buckley and Caple (1990) rightly pointed out that in the past HRD has adopted a closed system mode of thinking. This has had the consequence of making it unresponsive to organizational needs, unaware of how its activities link in with HRM activities, and lack of any significant evaluation. HRD must view itself as one strategy available to an organization wishing to retain, develop, and motivate its human resources to increase the value of organizational learning.

7. Expanded trainer role: The HRD role is burdened with many role conflicts. Three types of conflict in particular, namely the trainer's internal conflicts, managing conflicting priorities between the HRD function and the wider organization, and managing conflicts between line departments, were highlighted (Garavan, 1991). These conflicts place high demands on the skills and credibility of the HRD specialist and the probability of failure in the role is high. Thus, it is important to expand the trainer role.

8. Recognition of culture: Culture must be viewed as a central factor in the overall process because the HRD function has a key role in maintaining and changing corporate culture. An examination of these various perspectives is necessary if a strategically-focused HRD function is to establish options, policies, and plans that fit the strategic logic and cultural web found in the organization. Thus, HRD efforts cannot ignore the prevailing and desired culture of an organization in the learning process.

9. Emphasis on evaluation: A key component of the strategic learning process is that of strategy evaluation. If the HRD function wishes to have a strategic focus, then it must evaluate its activities. Zenger and Hurgis (1982) pointed out that strategically-oriented HRD functions spend time evaluating their activities, and they use measures that seem most relevant to the management of their own organization.

Relationships between Organizational Learning and HRD Outcomes

Nine levels of HRD outcomes are created, Garavan (1991) suggested, when HRD practices help to maximize organizational outcomes by embracing organizational learning:

Top management leadership: Maneu (2005) argued that leadership factors have strong effects on top-management innovation influence. In support of the HRD-specific view of leadership, the human resource management context directly influences leadership and moderates its relationship with organizational learning.

Environmental scanning by senior management. There is a significant relationship, resulting in greater firm performance, between the frequency that senior managers conduct environmental scanning and a firm's level of commitment to the planning process (Newkirk-Moore & Bracker, 1998).

HRD strategies, policies, and plans: McCracken and Wallace (2000) explained that HRD has a role in systematic implementation of strategies, policies, and plans. HRD practices develop the internal learning consultancy capabilities, allowing the organization to shape further its mission and goals, as well as HRD strategies, policies, and plans.

Strategic partnerships with line management: It is necessary to draw on consulting experiences within a network organization to focus on issues related to creation, maintenance and assessment of HRD. Lessons learned for managing and consulting in such partnerships are essential (Buono, 1997).

Strategic partnerships with HRM: HRM is a key component of corporation's competitive strategy. It offers flexible means of achieving market access, scale economies, and competence development (Garavan, 1991).

Ability to influence corporate culture: Gordon (1995) analyzed the management of racial and gender identities and conflicts as core components of corporate culture. Developing the ability to influence corporate culture is very important in the process of organizational learning transformation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research finds that, when all of the practices of HRD are implemented as key factors, organizational learning will have a developmental effect on the nine related HRD outcomes.

In order to develop the strategic HRD practices that must be introduced in the organizational learning process, then the HRD practices, as defined by the nine components, must be in place, including integration with organizational missions and goals, top management support, environmental scanning, HRD plans and policies, line manager commitment and involvement, existence of complementary HRM activities, expanded trainer role, recognition of culture, and emphasis on evaluation.

This research recommends that organizations that take the initiative to learn and develop their HRD practices have more opportunities to obtain the nine HRD outcomes in the process of learning. On the other hand, the nine HRD outcomes are cultivated through learning by integration with organizational missions and goals, top management leadership, environmental scanning by senior HRD management, HRD strategies, policies and plans, strategic partnerships with line management, strategic partnerships with HRM, trainers as organizational change consultants, ability to influence corporate culture, and emphasis on individual productivity and participation. Therefore, organizations can become more effective when they know the intended business goals and HRD outcomes regarding their practices in HRD during the learning process.

IMPLICATIONS OF HRD PRACTICES FOR THE WORKPLACE

In the workplace, learning is the crucial component in the transformation from the traditional organization to the developmental organization (Gilley & Maycunich, 2000). In addition, HRD practices have been the valued components of management by contributing to business strategy and organizational learning. That is why HRD practices are very important for organization learning. For industrial implications, our propositions are that instilling more HRD practices through organizational learning may lead to more desired organizational outcomes.

First, greater flexibility in the workplace would become a benefit when organizational learning is headed by HRD practices. Second, HRD practices would help the organization integrate its vision, mission, strategy, and practices. Third, the organization would become more diversified

and equal in the workplace. Fourth, individuals and organizations improve their performance. Fifth, implementing these practices will encourage employees to create innovation including the process of bringing new problem-solving and value adding ideas into use. Finally, such practices will provide greater customer and employee satisfaction.

Organizations should increasingly establish alliances and partnerships with each other, with universities, and with governments to provide services such as training and development, career and financial counseling, and development of portable benefits and other systems necessary to nourish the new workforce. Further, new resources must continue to become available to a workforce struggling to adapt to the changing employment environment.

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