Influencing People and Technology Using Human Resource Development (HRD) Philosophy

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, and notably since Zakaria's (2010) statement that "technology and globalization are shattering the middle class" in America (p. 31), American workers are continuing to be displaced by the productivity gains of technology and the competition for cheap laborers in a globalized economy. Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals are seeking ways to address rapid, continuous changes in technology and some, unfounded, fears and concerns regarding the influence of globalization on middle class workers. Globalization efforts do not need to equal unemployment for American middle class workers. Globalization can add opportunities for American middle class workers to increase their job prospects by learning new skills including how to leverage technological innovations for their advantage within the global job market. HRD professionals have an opportunity to assist workers with their skill development and improvement.

HRD professionals are engaged with workers in training and development, career development, and organization development initiatives (Mankin, 2001; Swanson & Holton, 2001). These initiatives are vital to employee development within organizations and many employees seek training and development opportunities so that they can build successful careers and the ability to adapt to organizational and marketplace changes.

Workers are beginning to recover from the Great Recession of 2007 and HRD professionals are tasked with making their employees' recovery more viable. Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) suggest that there was "[a]n important challenge for the practice of training… to integrate the training function with employee selection, performance, management, rewards, and other human resource practices (Aguinis, 2009; Aguinis & Pierce, 2008; Cascio & Aguinis, 2005)" (p. 467). Their assessment is currently still needed and will be needed for the forseeable future as artificial intelligence using robots, computer technology, simulations, avatars, and other technological innovations are being used to realign and displace workers. The current post-fordism era is associated with significant changes to American culture, organizations, and individuals (Heffernan, 2000). However, the influence of technology on the development of people has rarely been discussed within the HRD research literature (Githens, Dirani, Gitonga, & Teng, 2008; Hughes, 2010; 2012).

HRD, a relatively new field of study, has scholars and professionals who are continuously examining and testing its theories and philosophy. Organizations are mutable and strive to succeed through the people and technology in which it

invests and employ. The management and development of both people and technology is essential to the competitive advantage of organizations. The management of these critical domains is led by individuals whom often have limited interaction and different vantage points through which they examine and determine success. The dynamics of HRD theory and philosophy on the relationships between people and technology within organizations is an area requiring more exploration within the HRD field.

This chapter explores the extent to which HRD philosophy influence the relationship between people and technology. We have examined whether or not HRD professionals and researchers deny that there is a viable relationship between people and technology, and whether or not HRD professionals and researchers are limiting the field because of their ethical beliefs which juxtapose people to technology.

BACKGROUND

HRD has evolved from sociology, to business, to education and is still looking for a place of its own within academia (McLean, Lynham, Azevedo, Lawrence, & Nafukho, 2008). HRD has a rich history that is not well known or explained in the HRD research literature (Gosney, 2014; Gosney & Hughes 2015). Without an explanation and chronicling of its history, HRD's search for a clear philosophy is continuous and debatable amongst HRD researchers and professionals.

HRD Theory Building

Swanson (2001) identifies three foundational theories of HRD: psychological theory, economic theory, and systems theory that make up the legs of his three-legged stool model; however, they are not the only theories that can support the field. Some of the theories that have contributed to defining HRD are as follows:

1. Commonly held theories of HRD (Weinberger, 1998);
2. Operational definitions of expertise and competence (Herling, 2000);
3. Organization development: An analysis of the definitions and dependent variables (Egan, 2002);
4. An investigation into core beliefs underlying the profession of HRD (Ruona, 1999); and
5. Philosophical foundations of HRD practice (Ruona & Roth, 2000).

There are also examples of HRD theory building efforts which include:

1. Systems theory applied to human resource development (Jacobs, 1989);
2. Foundations of performance improvement and implications for practice (Swanson, 1999);
3. A theory of intellectual capital (Harris, 2000);
4. A theory of knowledge management (Torraco, 2000); and
5. The development and validation of a model of responsible leadership and performance (Lynham, 2000).

These theory building efforts have all contributed to the emerging field of HRD; however, McLean et al. (2008) suggested that HRD has much to learn from "EVERY field and discipline that touches on human behavior" (p. 249). Gosney (2014) and Gosney and Hughes (2015) propose in Gosney's Model of Modern Era Theory & Practice Generation in HRD that HRD theory and practice is influenced from a variety of sources, including philosophy and psychology. Openness to new concepts and formulations provide opportunity for continuous development within HRD.

HRD Philosophy

An oftentimes unexplored element of theory-building is an examination of the philosophies upon which the theory rests. Philosophy, literally

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