

Human Resources Development in a Technology–Infused Workplace

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INTRODUCTION

Human resources development (HRD) focuses on improving employees as they progress in an organization. Traditionally scholars conceptualize HRD as distinct from HRM (Ruona & Gibson, 2004), but with the growth of electronic Human Resource Management (eHRM) systems, HR development and management functions become more intertwined. For example, today HRD can get involved in training employees on social media policies, helping dispersed global teams web conference across time zones, and making sure that the correct talent is recruited.

This article focuses on the changing role of HRD now that information and communication technologies (ICTs) are a central part of most organizations. We discuss contemporary issues like social media, cybervetting (evaluating job applicants online), online training, trends in dispersed meeting practices and personal technology use. We frame this discussion by examining how eHRM has influenced traditional human resource functions.

BACKGROUND

According to Swanson (1999), “HRD is a process of developing and/or unleashing human expertise through organization development and personnel training and development for the purpose of improving performance at the organizational, process, and individual/group levels” (p. 2-3). Essentially HRD functions to train, teach, and develop employees (Jeung, Yoon, Park, & Jo, 2011). A recent state of the industry report by the American Society for Training and Development

(ASTD) revealed that US organizations spend 150 billion dollars annually on training (Miller, 2012). Furthermore, HRD is not only a US concern, as countries like India established a Ministry of Human Resource Development in 1985 (Rao, 2004), and Poland views its quest for further globalization dependent on the “development of national human resources via training, education, and research” (Szalkowski & Jankowicz, 2004, p. 350).

Organizations now have more ways to provide training content, due in part by the infusion of ICTs in the workplace. We define ICTs broadly—including information technology software and platforms such as intranets, and communication channels like email, webconferencing, and face-to-face communication. As of 2011, 22% of the training delivery is online, as opposed to being instructor-led (Miller, 2012). One of the core reasons for this shift in training delivery is the evolution of eHRM systems that allow human resources professionals to streamline many of their operations. eHRM is a broad term that encompasses how organizations integrate their information technologies and HRM practices to create value for their group (Bondarouk & Ruel, 2009). In other words, eHRM is the “integration of people, process, and technology” (Sareen & Subramanian, 2012, p. 121).

Because of eHRM, the scope and responsibility of human resources has changed and there is now a renewed focus on developing resources. Whereas “HRM’s primary role was to add value by aligning its people strategies in support of the organization’s business strategies,” now, “the continued development of HR technology [has] allowed line managers to actively handle more of the tasks related to recruitment, salary administration, and succession planning (Patel, 2002),

thus freeing up HRM's time to assume more strategic roles" (Ruona & Gibson, 2004, p. 55). The growth of technology has triggered a shift where many HRM functions have shifted to HRD. Furthermore, as technology has become intertwined with all HR functions we see that many HRD tasks previously conducted in person have been shifted to computer mediated contexts. This shift has important implications for HR-related communication in organizations. The objective of this article, therefore, is to discuss the core personnel development and management issues resulting from the use of technology in HRD.

THE CHANGING FUNCTIONS OF HRD

ICTs change HRD's role in several ways. Now that technologies allow HRD to send and receive many types of messages to employees, there are new challenges with large-scale message dissemination. To understand these challenges, we begin with a discussion of how eHRM has fundamentally changed how organizations share information with employees. Next we review literature discussing how HRD uses technology to attract and develop new talent, to train employees, and to teach new skills.

Consequences of Large-Scale Message Dissemination on HRD

The rise of technology use in the workplace has altered how organizations share knowledge with employees. Specifically, research in eHRM describes how "recent developments in technology have made it possible to create a real-time, information-based, self-service, interactive work environment" (Lengnick-Hall & Moritz, 2003, p. 365). Through eHRM, managers and employees can access relevant benefit and training information, and HRD professionals can engage in large-scale communication (Ruck & Welch, 2012). Organizations benefit from sharing knowledge electronically, since this approach saves printing costs, enables employees to be immediately notified of changes, and allows HR staff to serve a more strategic, developmental role rather than handle administrative HR issues (Lengnick-Hall & Moritz, 2003).

By helping organizations disseminate information and share knowledge more effectively, technology systems in HR have transformed several functions of HRD. Below, we discuss how technology shapes the development of a) new talent, b) employees through training, and c) skills in the workplace.

Developing New Talent

HRM procedures, such as recruitment and selection, are a subset of HRD (Grieves, 2003), since attracting, selecting, and retaining personnel are key to improving an organization's performance. Yet new technologies have shifted the way that businesses develop new talent.

Recruitment: Organizations often cultivate top talent through technology. Firms rely on ICTs to promote job openings and inform potential employees about work expectations. Whereas organizations used to publicize job openings through newspaper advertisements or employment agencies, ninety-percent of today's Fortune 500 companies use online recruiting tactics (Capelli, 2001). Businesses promote positions and communicate their company's brand to potential employees in at least three ways.

First, companies use recruiting sites, such as Monster or Career Builder to source talent. Monster worldwide, the largest online recruiter, lists more than 80,000 job posts a day (Backhaus, 2004). Job-posting aggregators—search engines that crawl job boards—also help organizations promote open positions (Bradt & Vonnegut, 2009). Second, corporate websites directly inform potential employees about jobs. Third, companies use social networking sites to promote job openings and inform potential employees about work expectations. According to Jobvite's (2012) survey, 52 percent of job seekers use Facebook to look for a job, 38 percent use LinkedIn, and 34 percent use Twitter. Social media sites with company reviews and workplace factor ratings (e.g., Glassdoor) allow organizations to track their company's reputation as an employer. Sites like LinkedIn also offer options to target recruiting to certain candidates.

As these examples show, ICTs allow companies to reach a larger pool of applicants and fill positions quicker through standardized applications and automated search tools to screen applicant resumes (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2010). These changes, however, indicate the growing need for tech savvy professionals

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