Chapter 5
Strategic Human Resource Development Alignment:
Conceptualization from the Employee's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The critical role of human resource development (HRD) in helping organizations identify and meet their strategic objectives in today's competitive and ever-changing global marketplace is increasingly being recognized by both scholars and practitioners. While many HRD scholars have examined the importance of HRD alignment with the organization's strategic objectives, there exist few conceptualizations of this alignment from the employee's perspective. Drawing on strategic HRD and management "line of sight" literature, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the theoretical conceptualization and a proposed model of employee perceptions of the strategic alignment of HRD in their organizations. Strategic HRD alignment from the employee's perspective is explored, and future research directions are discussed, in relation to strategic HRD, organizational learning culture, perceived investment in employee development, and performance-related outcomes for which HRD scholar-practitioners strive in their quest to facilitate organizational strategic objectives.

INTRODUCTION

Considering the relevance and value of strategic human resource development (SHRD) from the perspectives of employees and workers is a way to understand and link their individual everyday performance to that of the organization. In this chapter, the relevance of SHRD is reframed by addressing employees' views, responses and perceptions about HRD strategy. The (re)framing of SHRD primarily from the employee point of view helps to identify the linkages already

established in the extant HRD and management literature between organizational strategy, SHRD and employee line of sight, organizational learning culture, employee perceptions of the organization's investment in their development, and employee behavioral outcomes that can impact organizational performance metrics. In addition, emphasizing the importance of frontline employees and workers in SHRD can assist organizations in finding new ways to achieve a position of competitive advantage.

The objective of this chapter is to conceptualize and develop a model of HRD strategic alignment from the perspective of the employee. Based on literature suggesting the importance of individuals' understanding of how their learning and competencies may contribute to organizational strategic objectives (Buller & McEvoy, 2012), employee perceptions of the extent to which their organization's HRD aligns with the organization's strategic objectives and supports their ability to meet these objectives in their jobs are explored. A model is formulated that delineates linkages established in the extant literature between employee perceptions of SHRD alignment and behavioral outcomes important for organizational performance.

BACKGROUND

The critical role of HRD in helping organizations identify and meet their strategic objectives in today's competitive and ever-changing global marketplace is increasingly being recognized by both scholars and practitioners (Garavan & Carbery, 2012; Gilley & Gilley, 2000; Hughes & Byrd, 2015; Siikaniemi, 2009; Tseng & McLean, 2008). In line with this recognition, the role of SHRD has been evolving to include both strategy formulation and implementation foci (Brockbank, 1999; McCracken & Wallace, 2000; Ruona & Gibson, 2004). HR functions in organizations not only have a "seat at the table" but are also increasingly key drivers of organizational strategy (Alagaraja, 2013).

While many HRD scholars have examined the importance of alignment with the organization's strategic objectives, there exist few conceptualizations of this alignment from the employee's perspective. Employees' perspectives of the strategic alignment of HRD opportunities in their organization are important to the extent that these perceptions are related to the learning culture, their perceptions of investment in their development, and performance-related outcomes for which organizations strive in their quest to attain and maintain a competitive advantage in today's marketplace (Ruona, 2014; Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2013). Although the strategic alignment of HRD is crucial for firm performance, the ways in which management and HRD scholars and practitioners actually develop and utilize measures for this assessment, including multiple levels of the organization, are relatively unexplored.

SHRD is critical to firm performance. At the organizational level, HRD partnerships with other functions improve organizational performance in specific ways such as collaboration, information sharing and partnering with key stakeholders to meet business objectives (e.g., Alagaraja, 2013; Alagaraja & Egan, 2013; Maxwell, Watson and Quail 2003). At the department level, HRD's expertise in the design and execution of best practices such as selection, training, and coaching also benefit and improve organizational performance (Garavan, 2007). Overall, research at the organizational and HRD functional levels suggests that organizational performance can be improved when SHRD is aligned with the goals and objectives of the organization (Hughes, 2012). A key implication of this research is that HRD involvement in the alignment of organizational strategy as well as its goals and objectives can greatly benefit firm performance (McCracken & Wallace, 2000). When organizations develop strong alignment of SHRD with their objectives, SHRD practices, initiatives, programs, and policies are likely to be essential for improving firm

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