Chapter 65
People, Technology and Human Resource Development (HRD) Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Technology and people are present in all organizations. How they are managed and developed is essential to the competitive advantage of organizations. Understanding the dynamics of this relationship is an area that needs to be better understood within the Human Resource Development (HRD) field. This chapter will explore the extent that HRD philosophy addresses the relationship of people and technology. Comparing people and technology has been a debate since the industrial revolution occurred in America (Swanson, 1982; Swanson, & Torraco, 1994). Man and machine are as essential to organizational prosperity as air and water is to living; yet, it is not often researched and published in HRD literature (Githens, Dirani, Gitonga, and Teng, 2008). Could this be why HRD professionals do not have a seat at the proverbial table in corporate America? Are HRD professionals and researchers denying that there is a relationship between people and technology in organizations? Are HRD professionals and researchers limited by their beliefs concerning the comparison of people to technology?

INTRODUCTION

According to Zakaria (2010) "technology and globalization are shattering the middle class" in America (p. 31). American workers are being displaced by the productivity gains of technology and the competition for cheap laborers in a globalized economy. Until these issues are acknowledged and addressed within the field of HRD, middle class workers will remain at a disadvantage within the global job market.

The field of HRD covers training and development, career development, and organization development (Mankin, 2001; Swanson & Holton,

2001). All of these areas are vital to employee development within organizations. Employees want to be trained and developed so that they can build successful careers and work within viable organizations. The current global recession with its high number of unemployed workers has shined a light on the need for HRD. Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) suggest that there is "[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).

Since the industrial revolution, when Henry Ford introduced the production line into the manufacturing of cars, technology has a huge presence within organizations. With the introduction of robots, computer technology, simulations, and avatars, employees are being realigned and displaced by the use of technology in the workplace. Yet, the impact of technology on the development of people has rarely been discussed within the HRD literature (Githens, Dirani, Gitonga, & Teng, 2008).

Organizations and theories that define or explain human behavior within organizations has been the focus of research studies in fields including sociology and business. HRD is a relatively new field of study and its theories and philosophy are dynamic and continuously under debate. Organizations are mutable and have goals of success through the people and technology that are present within all organizations. The management and development of both people and technology is essential to the competitive advantage of organizations. Understanding the dynamics of the relationships and influences upon the relationship of people and technology within organizations is an area of study that should be explored within the HRD field.

This chapter will explore the extent that HRD philosophy addresses the relationship between people and technology. We will examine if HRD professionals and researchers deny that there is a relationship between people and technology, and if HRD professionals and researchers are limited by their beliefs concerning the comparison of people to technology.

BACKGROUND

The field of HRD has made its way from sociology, to business, to education and is still looking for a place of its own (McLean et al., 2008). HRD has rich history that is not well known or explained in the HRD research literature. Without an explanation and chronicling of its history, HRD's search for a clear philosophy of HRD is ongoing, and remains under debate 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. These three theories are important to HRD and many theories have been derived from these three to support the development of HRD as a discipline; however, they are not the only theories that can support the field. The following theories are some that have been used to contribute to defining HRD:

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, 2000);
4. An investigation into core beliefs underlying the profession of HRD (Ruona, 1999); and
5. Philosophical foundations of HRD practice (Ruona & Roth, 2000).

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