



Human Resource Development in Multinational Organisations: Introductory Forward to Special Issue

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From The Editors

Traditionally the term Human Resource Development (HRD) focused on understanding learning by individuals and organizations with an emphasis on the augmentation of knowledge, improving skills and capabilities (“training”), and shaping the values and attitudes of people in the workplace. Human Resource Development has evolved to encompass employee development (“development”), careers, talent management, and how these can enhance the efficiency and performance of individuals, groups, teams, organizations, and nations. The interdisciplinary nature of HRD means that it falls under the remit of scholars in a broad range of disciplines including (but not exhaustive of) economics, education, management, psychology, and sociology (Chalofsky, 2007). A better understanding of the context of facilitating the learning process both for individuals and organizations has also emerged. These matters are currently examined in the context of challenges as derived from an economy based on knowledge, companies based on knowledge (“knowledge enterprises”) as well as on knowledge workers and learning organizations. In this setting, a major challenge for the discipline of human resource development is the translation of learning processes into organizational knowledge by way of coupling individual, group, and organizational learning (Clarke, 2004).

Strategic HRD emphasizes the importance of the critical alignment between organization’s and nation’s strategies and their HRD policies and practices. This stems from the growing role of human capital, which is an integral part of intellectual capital as a competitive factor of the company, economy, or of the individual on the labor market. Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD) is a unique form or model of human resource development. It is made up of a cohesive set of vertically and horizontally integrated actions in the realm of learning and development that play a role in achieving strategic goals. Strategic Human Resource Development is a logical consequence of the development of Organizational Development (OD), the growing complexity of change management, and the new proposal that sees 21st century HRD putting people first as well as promoting values first in the change process.

During the past two decades, HRD research has broadened to examine HRD in international contexts (Garavan & Carbery, 2012). The focus on international HRD reflects a variety of political and macro level trends such as the fall of communism, globalization, rapid technological change, changes in organizational forms, and the rapid expansion of foreign direct investment (FDI), especially into economies that were previously relatively closed to foreign capital – eg China, India and Central and Eastern European (CEEC, hereafter) economies. Morley (2007) conceptualizes international HRM as three distinct but overlapping trajectories: international, comparative and cross cultural. This uncertainty has had a significant impact on the state of HRD in theory and practice (McCarthy & Sheehan, 2014, forthcoming).

This issue of *Human Resource Management* represents a unique juxtaposition of contributions each of which are set within at least one of the international HRD trajectories identified by Morley (2007) and are situated in an overall broader context of ongoing global economic and

financial uncertainty. The issue contains carefully selected articles prepared for the University Forum for Human Resource Development (UFHRD) Conference held in Brighton, June 2013, whose theme was “HRD in Turbulent Seas”.¹ The conference title made reference to the already mentioned global economic uncertainty and encouraged contributors to critically reflect on opportunities and threats for the development and sustainability of HRD.

The issue opens with an article by Katarzyna Susabowska and Eduardo Tomé entitled “Human Resource Development, Sects, and Culture: Theoretical Basis for a Comparative Study.” In it, the authors present a theoretical basis for conducting comparative studies on relations between human resource development, sects, and culture. This important critical theoretical contribution addresses all three international HRD trajectories. Moreover, it posits that cultedness is a significant potential check on the future extension and penetration of globalization.

In the successive article, Mrudula Anne, Jamie Callahan and Hyounju Kang discuss the concept of *intersectionality* in the context of the phenomenon of discrimination for reasons of sex of caste membership in Indian society. The authors also challenge the frequently espoused notion of often unchallenged positives attributed to globalization. They show that while globalization has accelerated economic development in India, it has also deepened the legacy of class, caste and gender inequalities. Using a lens of cultural conflict, the authors show how HRD interventions can help to redress complex dynamics of gender and caste intersectionality and their associated inequalities. While this analysis is based in India, the tools used and lessons learned from their analysis has important implications for demonstrating how HRD can contribute to addressing class, racial, religious and gender intersectionality globally and especially in the developing world, where intersectionality can be a matter of life and death.

The importance of cross-cultural intelligence and having a global mindset are the focus of Robin Hurst’s contribution which examines the complex cross-cultural relationships associated with international mergers and acquisitions (M&As). Dr Hurst shows how HRD can contribute positively and significantly to employees’ assimilation and subsequent contribution to their organization in a post-acquisition environment. Critically, he shows how the organization’s strategy (a relatively young (10 years) US company) which welcomed learning and development from the organization it acquired (a well established (30 years) family-owned Indian company) had a significant influence on the success of this M&A. Hurst’s analysis should be studied by all stake holders involved in M&A activities.

The focus of the next two articles shift to the relationship between nation states & HRD. Oleksandr Tkachenko and Alexandre Ardichvili provide a detailed analysis of human capital development in Central and Eastern Europe, using Estonia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia as examples. Utilising national level data bases, they show that the intersection of three critical systems – education, training and labour markets - fundamentally affect human capital development outcomes, especially in relation to performance in maths and sciences. These are disciplines which will be essential for ensuring the competitive advantage of EU countries in the future and as the authors illustrate are in need of significant HRD interventions from both the public and private sectors.

¹ Information on this conference is presented in the “Information, Chronicle” section.

Katarzyna Susabowska, in her article entitled “The Quest for HRD in Poland” analyzes factors influencing the development of HRD in Poland. She demonstrates how external political influences and internal political and cultural factors have all contributed to the current state of HRD in Poland. Her analysis provides a valuable framework for future analyses of the evolution of HRD in CEEC countries.

In the next article, Anna Szabowska–Walaszczyk, Andrzej Brzozowski, and Anna Maria Zawadzka present an analysis of the critical positive synergies between HRD interventions, employee engagement (EE) and organizational performance. They show that HRD interventions have a positive effect on EE, which in turn is positively associated with organizational performance outcomes. While there is a growing body of empirical evidence of such relationships, this is one of the first set in the context of a transition economy. Again, this study provides an invaluable framework for future research on the relationship between HRD, EE and organizational performance. Such studies, however, must be cognizant of their cultural context (e.g., a transition/former communist country; newly emerging economy; developing economy).

Anny Laura Hidegh and Sára Csillag article examines how HRD can contribute to the employment welfare of people with disabilities. Not only is this critical issue- HRD & diversity - very limited in the literature even in the context of countries somewhat “ahead” of the curve with these issues – eg US, UK, Germany, Sweden – the silence from the rest of the world resonates for those attuned to issues of HRD and diversity. The authors show how a champion for diversity can intervene through HRD and have very positive effects not only on individual/participant outcomes but for society more generally. Linked to global uncertainty and the ongoing financial crisis, HRD funds for the authors’ study were cut thus highlighting how the global environment adversely impacts on micro-level HRD interventions, perhaps disproportionately in recent transition and/or emerging economies.

In the “Case Study” section, Eva Maria Emma Wuellner discusses the challenges facing specialists in HRD in international companies operating in Russia. She examines key issues in terms of talent management facing HRD professionals in Russia. The study shows how important the cultural trajectory is for attracting and retaining talent, even in a context of high global uncertainty.

In the “Methods and Tools” section, Alison Hail and Milena Gojny present a tool known as the “Impact Gap Profiler,” which serves to diagnose and develop language skills for communication among managers. This article shows how individual managers and leaders hone speaking skills to create more impact and influence on their target audience. This is an invaluable example of implementing HRD and should be read by all practitioners who have a remit of delivering cross-cultural and language skills to their clients.

The above papers found in this issue of *Human Resource Management* confirms the broad scope of problems undertaken within the framework of human resource development. As the editors of this issue of *Human Resource Management*, we hope that the works it contains will interest people involved in the theory and practice of human resource development and that they will serve as inspiration for further research and improvements in practices, especially in emerging and developing economies, applied in this field.

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