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Exploring Human Resource Development: A Levels of Analysis Approach

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Levels of analysis perform an important function in framing research and practice in human resource development (HRD). The purpose of this article is to examine the concept of HRD from the individual, organizational, and community-societal levels of analysis. The article highlights both the distinctiveness and usefulness of each level of analysis, identifies tensions within and between them, and outlines differences in underpinning assumptions, characteristics of HRD provision, and delivery of HRD interventions. By adopting this approach, the article draws attention to variations in meaning, intent, content, and practice with implications for developing both the theory and practice of HRD.

Keywords: *human resource development; level of analysis*

Introduction

In the past decade we have witnessed major growth in human resource development (HRD) as an academic discipline and field of study. This growth has taken place in a number of different ways, including attempts to define HRD (Kuchinke, 2000; Swanson, 1997), specifications of the disciplines and theories that inform HRD (Weinberger, 1998), identification of fields of historical and philosophical foundation (Lynham, 2000; Ruona & Roth, 2000), examination of the dominant paradigms (Garavan & McGuire, 2001; Lee, 2001) and, in more recent times, calls for the investigation of new

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theoretical avenues and pathways (Torraco, 2004). These important contributions have generated specific debate concerning the boundaries of HRD, the complexity of its subject matter, its multidisciplinary nature, the role of time and change in understanding HRD, and the influence of cross-cultural variables. HRD academics have called for more and better HRD theory to facilitate both researchers and practitioners (Lynham, 2000).

There is an increased confidence within the HRD academic community concerning the current standing of HRD and its potential to further develop as a field of study. Notwithstanding this confidence, there is a significant gap in the current body of HRD theory and research. This concerns the investigation of multilevel questions and the adoption of multilevel perspectives. Both Dansereau, Yammarino, and Kohles (1999) and Morgeson and Hofmann (1999) argued that through engaging in multilevel research, our ability to choose better lenses, focus on phenomena, and capture images of people shifting and organizing themselves dynamically throughout time will improve. Despite the acknowledged benefits of multilevel research, relatively few contributions propose a multilevel conception of HRD. The precise gap, to use the terms provided by Rousseau (1985), concerns three strands of multilevel research. First of all, there is a lack of compositional or integrated models that examine a variable at multiple levels of analysis. A number of studies, particularly those in the area of motivation to learn and learning climate, have attempted to examine multilevel variables but predominantly through the lens of the individual (Poell & van der Krogt, 2003; Tharenou, 2001). Second, there are relatively few cross-level models that investigate relationships between independent and dependent variables at different levels of analysis. Finally, at a more fundamental level of contribution, few studies focus on examining relationships among variables generalized across two or more levels. We do acknowledge that research and theory within the field need not all be multilevel in focus to make an important contribution; however, we suggest that it is a reflection of the confidence thoroughly characterizing the field that it is now at a point where it can be more explicit in considering the philosophical, theoretical, and pragmatic issues that pertain to different levels.

The concept of multilevel research is more established in the industrial and organizational psychology literatures. The HRD field is characterized by a predominance of the individual- and organizational-level contributions. These contributions are valuable but tell us little about more macrolevels of analysis. There are, however, signs that HRD is moving into more community and societal levels of analysis. For example, there is an emerging dialogue concerning the contribution of HRD at a national level (McLean, 2004) and the role of HRD at a community level where the community is construed more generally as a set of networks, a cognitive community, or a social construction.

In this article, we respond to calls by Swanson (2001), Ruona (2002), and Torraco (2004) with respect to identifying new theoretical avenues, and we focus on the contribution that a levels of analysis perspective may make to our understanding of HRD. Specifically, we focus on the content of the different levels, particularly philosophical issues, assumptions concerning learners, characteristics of HRD, and modes of delivery. We contend that the discussion will have value in clarifying discourse within the HRD profession (academic and practitioner) and in facilitating an understanding of HRD across a number of levels of analysis. We acknowledge the inevitability of tensions that exist between and across different levels and that in an organizational context these various levels are likely to coexist, each having different goals and priorities. We propose a framework that identifies the possible categories that may be considered in a multilevel discussion. We do not, however, say how they may be integrated in practice or in a research context.

Individual Level of Analysis

The individual level of analysis largely emphasizes the human aspect of HRD. As Rummler and Brache (1995) pointed out, organization goals can only be achieved through individual performance. Consequently, this level of analysis focuses on the examination of constructs such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, motivation to learn, motivation through expectation, personal development, and the need and expectations of learning. We suggest that a significant amount of individual-level research within HRD is reflective of the humanist philosophical perspective, but not exclusively so. We acknowledge that humanist perspectives may also inform organizational, community, and societal levels.

Two strands of the individual level are manifest in the literature: development of self as a person and development of competencies and capabilities that have value in the labor market. The managerial HRD literature provides limited primacy to the individual other than as an organizational resource (Antonacopoulou, 1999; Reid & Barrington, 1997; Belcourt & Wright, 1996; Rainbird, 1990). One can reasonably argue that HRD needs to consider how organizations take into account individuals' needs to discover "potential meaning through work" (Chalofsky, 2000, 2001). Elliott and Turnbull (2002) argued that "the ways in which individuals' everyday working lives are regulated and governed focuses increasingly on them as individuals"—what Russ-Eft (2000) denoted as a focus on the "development of the resources of the humans" rather than the "development of human resources". Du Gay (2000) suggested that contemporary research conceptualizes the employee as an individual in search of meaning and fulfillment. In addition, there is evidence of increased individualism in the employment

relationship reflected in discourse on employability. The basic argument here is that individuals take responsibility for planning and mapping their own development with the organization being responsible for ensuring that development opportunities are available.

Legge (1999) noted that this focus on the individual and free choice has its roots in Kantian philosophy, specifically the idea that individuals have freedom of self-determination and should be considered as ends in their own right. She acknowledges a paradox with a more collectivist or organizational notion, reflecting a more Aristotelian position, and suggests that the latter will prevail or remain dominant in the employment relationship.

It is arguable that opportunities for development may arise out of interest or necessity; individuals may seek out development to enhance job- or person-related competencies or may participate in development for the purposes of self-enhancement. On this latter point, Chalofsky (2000) argued that issues concerned with spirituality, the meaning of work, autonomous learning, and social responsibility are becoming increasingly important in the workplace. Wager-Marsh and Conley (1999) advocated the spirituality-based firm and define it as an attempt to focus on both individual and spiritual growth in addition to a broader collective focus. Most discussions of the spiritual dimension emphasize its individual and personal nature and highlight characteristics such as concentration, refinement of awareness, and wisdom as well as addressing constitutional concerns of religious expression.

Empirical research at the individual level of analysis emphasizes characteristics considered important to explaining participation in development activities. Examples include training and learner motivation (Baldwin & Majuka, 1991), age and learner commitment (Cleveland & Shore, 1992), learner attitudes and beliefs regarding development activities (Noe, 1986; Noe & Wilk, 1993), motivation to transfer (Yelon, 1992), transtheoretical change (Madsen, 2003), self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992), and so on. Research has also focused on the impact of HRD activities on individual-level concepts such as job satisfaction (Mathieu, 1991), career satisfaction (Mathieu & Martineau, 1997), motivation, and commitment (Bontis & Fitzenz, 2002).

We are conscious that it is possible to consider individuals in terms of their skills and capabilities and the value of these capabilities and skills to the labor market. This perspective makes different assumptions concerning who is responsible for development, whose needs are to be addressed within the HRD context, and the way in which HRD is valued.

Organizational Level of Analysis

An organizational level of analysis typically emphasizes the resource aspect of HRD. As Rummler and Brache (1995) pointed out, the organiza-

tion provides the context and driver for human and system performance. The purposes of HRD are therefore concerned with issues surrounding resource maximization, productivity enhancement, and realizing the full potential of employees toward achieving organizational goals.

An organizational level analysis understands HRD to be a specialized set of developmental activities or interventions that focus on supporting the achievement of organizational objectives. Organization-level discourse places an expectation on HRD to deliver a set of specific, tailor-made solutions to satisfy organizational or system needs. One of the prominent theoretical perspectives in this regard is systems theory. Swanson (2001) argued that systems theory captures the “complex and dynamic interactions” (p. 304) of a range of organizational characteristics, including environments, work processes, and group and individual variables. Kuchinke (2001) cautioned that systems theory should not be viewed as the primary disciplinary foundation for HRD. He acknowledged that it has the potential to provide valuable insights into how HRD operates in organizations but should not be the dominant frame of thinking.

Managerialist discourse, unsurprisingly, dominates the organizational-level practice literature and, in particular, the strategic HRD literature. Wognum and Ford Lam (2000) argued that the word *strategic* emphasizes the company perspective and connects the link between HRD and the organizational goals and objectives. Burgoyne (1998) and Walton (1999) argued that HRD is concerned with the strategic leveraging of learning and development processes to enhance the core competencies of the organization. It emphasizes an HRD provision that is conscious and proactive rather than unplanned; it focuses on the maturity of HRD provision to reflect organizational growth and clearly envisages that HRD interventions are valuable only to the degree that they facilitate the organization in achieving its goals. Kuchinke (1998), for example, suggested that within this narrow construction the value of HRD is judged according to the contribution it makes to financial performance—the imperative of the liberal-capitalist economy. Likewise, Ruona, Leimbach, Holton, and Bates (2002) argued that one of the core challenges facing HRD has been and continues to be that HRD professions must better demonstrate strategic and bottom-line impact—a perennial topic in the literature at this level.

Another example of an organizational-level HRD discourse is found in the literature on knowledge management and intellectual capital. Salisbury and Plass (2001) envisaged HRD contributing to the development of intellectual capital and argued that the management of local knowledge is considered vital to the success of the business. Traditional HRD models focus on an explicit knowledge discourse, knowledge that is gained through formal learning interventions. However, contributions by Ahmed, Kok, and Loh (2002); Gupta, Laksham, and Ahonson (2000); and Sveiby (2001) shift

the emphasis to tacit learning and informal learning. Smith (2001) reported that nearly two thirds of workplace learning comes from face-to-face contacts, including conversations, stories, apprenticeships, and so on.

HRD priorities at an organizational level of analysis are determined by organizational decision makers rather than by individuals. There is, however, some evidence to indicate that individuals may influence the less central or core elements of HRD such as program design and delivery but have limited impact on the organization's overall HRD agenda.

The notion of humans as resources is a dominant theme in organizational analysis of HRD; however, there is some evidence that individual-level concerns and values are reasserting themselves. Three trends are cited: employability, entrepreneurial behaviors, and team working. These are said to contest the notion of humans as resources, which Russ-Eft (2000) and Ruona (2000) argued dominate both HRD practice and the underlying belief and values of many HRD scholars and practitioners.

Employability, for example, emphasizes the need for people to acquire competencies that are of value in the marketplace as well as within the organization. It acknowledges that both individuals and organizations have a responsibility to develop generic competencies (Baruch, 2001; Ghoshal, Bartlett, & Moran, 1999). Elliott and Turnbull (2002) pointed to the need for employers to demonstrate entrepreneurial behavior and for individuals to take responsibility for their "own show" within an organizational setting. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1996) pointed out that although individuals are expected to interact with others and demonstrate effective teamwork, they are also expected to demonstrate individuality and "added value" (p. 43).

In summary, Martin, Pate, and McGoldrick (1999) argued that two competing philosophies and strategies, the investment strategy and the employability strategy, dominate the research agenda at the level of the firm. In addition, it is arguable that research has also focused on the development of appropriate learning climates to support workplace learning. Sonnenfeld, Peiperi, and Koller (1988) found that firms who are the dominant competitor in the marketplace tend to place greater value on HRD and ensure that extensive development opportunities are available to employees. Learning-climate research focuses on the perceived existence of supports and constraints to HRD investment in organizations and the impact of learning climate differences on employee participation in HRD. This literature argues that an effective learning climate is one that has strong social support, in which employees are encouraged to participate, and where there is an emphasis on the utilization of competencies to achieve organizational goals. It also examines how attributes of reward systems influence HRD activities. This research emphasizes the benefits of HRD to the organization as the primary focus with individual benefits secondary.

Community and Societal Level of Analysis

The community-societal level of analysis focuses on development and emphasizes, among other things, the development of communities and society, national competitiveness, and the facilitation of networking. The purpose of HRD at this level is concerned with the provision of education and the development of human capital toward improving national competitiveness and the quality of life of citizens.

Three strands of the community-societal level of analysis are distinguishable: national cultural influences and HRD, HRD and human-social capital enhancement in the economy, and the notion of learning communities. The distinctive nature and impact of national cultures and societal models of HRD are underresearched considering the growing realization that national, institutional, and cultural differences are important in determining how HRD professionals operate and the specific definitions and purposes attributed to HRD (Ashton & Green, 1996; Hillion & McLean, 1997; Maurice, Sellier, & Silvestre, 1986; O'Donnell, Garavan, & McCarthy, 2001; Okongwu, 1995; Yang & McLean, 1994).

The first strand of national cultural influences is expressed in the relatively new development in the HRD literature of the notion of international HRD. Jankowicz (1999) argued that the techniques and practices of HRD are primarily Western in orientation with an abundance of literature focusing on the difficulties of generalizability because of cultural constraints. Cross-cultural differences represent one dimension of the community and societal level of analysis. Weiss (1996), for example, argued that effective communication with culturally diverse individuals and groups requires an understanding of both cultural assumptions and differences.

Cultural differences and national contexts have important implications for our thinking about HRD. McLean and McLean (2001) illustrated in their review of definitions that differences in national context are reflected in the types of definitions used. Dimensions of national context that they consider important include the nature of the economy (Lee & Stead, 1998), government and legislative influences (Deligny, 1998), educational system influences, and the role of professional organizations. They represent under-researched dimensions of HRD.

A second strand of the community-societal level of analysis is concerned with the contribution of HRD to the human and social capital of the wider economy. Zidan (2001) argued that HRD possesses the potential to create economic development benefits at a societal level. Using human capital theory, he posits that societal approaches to HRD will have a significant influence on the effectiveness of firms operating within these societies. Kessels and Poell (2004) positioned HRD at the core of the knowledge economy and learning society. Similarly, both Woodall, Alker, MacNeil, and Shaw (2002) and Maurice et al. (1986) emphasized the significant role that labor-market

institutions perform in determining the shape and structure of HRD policies across Europe.

Economic development agencies have also been strong advocates for HRD as a means of engendering economic growth and competitiveness. European commission initiatives such as the white paper "Teaching and Learning: Towards a Knowledge Society" (European Commission, 1996) have encouraged a greater focus on training and knowledge management, promoted continuing education, and supported the development of greater linkages between educational institutions and the communities they serve. Similarly, Harrison and Kessels (2004, p. 12) noted the role of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in encouraging investment in training and education in developing countries.

Porter (1990) argued that

there is little doubt from our research that education and training are decisive in national competitive advantage. The nations that invest most heavily in education have advantages in many industries that can be traced in part to human resources. What is even more telling is that in every nation, these industries that were most competitive were often those where specialized investment in education and training has been unusually great. (p. 628)

This perspective, also dominant in the World Bank and the OECD, argues that investment in HRD is primarily for economic benefit. McLean and McLean (2001) pointed out, however, that where governments are involved in shaping HRD investment, performance or economic return is rarely the sole objective. They assert that HRD is often used in the context of social development such as in the investment in workplace reforms in Australia.

Researchers are also beginning to focus on how HRD enhances the social capital of the economy. The concept of social capital is increasingly used in discussions of economic development; it reflects a dominant feature of societies that social ties of many types are used for different purposes. Loury (1992) defined social capital as

naturally occurring social relationships among persons which promote or assist the acquisition of skills and traits valued in the marketplace . . . an asset which may be . . . significant for the maintenance of inequality in our society. (p. 100)

Some researchers raise questions about how HRD interventions might enhance the social capital accumulation process, but there are few answers as yet (Alder & Kwon, 2002).

A third strand of community-societal levels of analysis concerns the notion of learning communities. A learning community is considered as an umbrella term to describe a range of situations where learners come together to meet, share resources and competences, and meet unique learning needs. Tosey (1999) highlighted that learning communities emphasize self-direction, participative evaluation, equality of consideration and opportunity, education

of the whole person, and political modes of power sharing. The HRD literature has given little consideration to the learning community as a mechanism to facilitate change at a community-societal level (Boot & Reynolds, 1997; Brookfield, 1987; O'Donnell, 1999).

Reynolds (2000) considered notions of community from a critical theory perspective in the context of the design of management development interventions; however, he came to a somewhat negative conclusion: It ignores issues of power, and it imposes a pressure to conform. He does not see much potential for learning community ideas either in an organizational context or outside of that context.

Consideration of HRD from a community-societal level of analysis remains underresearched and has yet to establish itself within mainstream HRD discourse.

Tensions Within and Between Levels of Analysis

To proscribe, describe, and analyze the substantive issues and tensions within and between different levels of analysis, we have analyzed the levels of analysis under a number of important dimensions. First of all, we argue that there is a philosophy underlying HRD practice, research, and theory building (Ruona & Lynham, 2004). Each level emphasizes particular philosophical orientations that inform all of the other issues within our framework.

Our framework also proposes that it is possible to make different assumptions about individuals and organizations. These assumptions are primarily derived from the industrial and organizational psychology literature, sociology, and economics (McGuire & Cseh, 2004; Passmore, 1997). Third, we consider the characteristics of HRD provision as an important component of our framework. There is a strong literature highlighting specific characteristics of HRD such as whether it is voluntary or mandatory, current or future oriented, and formal or informal. Finally, there is a category of issues that focuses on the delivery of HRD. They are essentially pragmatic in nature, but they reflect the theory-practice divide that exists within the discipline of HRD. We are conscious that the framework presented is complex and may not meet the requirements of parsimony; however, the purpose of our framework is to highlight the complexity of the issues and debate currently within the HRD literature.

Philosophical Assumptions

A number of important dimensions of ontology, epistemology, and axiology are considered of direct relevance to HRD. Within an HRD context, these typically focus on freedom to learn, whether learning is about harmony or critical reflection, whether learning is emancipatory, whether

learners are independent or interdependent, and whether learning is about trust or power.

Philosophical assumptions represent the backdrop within which to consider the issues within and between each level of analysis. Chalofsky (1992) has argued for the incorporation of philosophical considerations in the development of HRD.

A significant amount of the personal development literature, for example, assumes that learners are authentic or free to be themselves, encouraged to be critically reflective, and free to participate in learning activities. It focuses on openness, trust, and self-disclosure in the learning process; learning is considered a right and an opportunity for all, and it usually espouses a humanistic and Rogerian notion of learning. Organizational-level analysis espouses a contrasting set of assumptions. It places a strong focus on social engineering, cohesion, loyalty, conformance, and the performance imperative. Norms of harmony are valued, organizational systems and structures shape learner behavior and issues concerned with hierarchy, and power and politics dominate. Learning is often viewed as the privilege of an elite group, and the learning process is usually considered in behaviorist terms. A societal level of analysis emphasizes a more pluralist set of assumptions. Freedom to learn and macrolevel social engineering are considered important, and there is a strong focus on both critical reflection and harmony. Learners are shaped by social structures and values, and societies are essentially considered to be hierarchical in nature. There is a strong assumption that learning activities bring benefits for all members of society.

Assumptions About the Learner

The majority of theories in the social and psychological sciences make certain assumptions about individuals in society and in organizations. We have chosen particular dimensions that are relevant to the HRD context. Motivation to learn is a critical assumption common to all levels. Individual-level analysis assumes a strong intrinsic motivation, organization-level analysis often assumes strong instrumental or extrinsic motivations, and societal-level analysis recognizes that extrinsic and intrinsic motivations may drive the learning process. Specific notions of career underpin the three levels of analysis. Individual-level analysis does not solely focus on career or consider it to be central. It views development to be independent of career. Few distinctions are made between work and nonwork elements. In contrast, organization-level analysis makes strong assumptions about careers. They are generally assumed to be linear, progressive, and vertical in nature with a strong and predominant work focus. Increasingly, lateral career shifts are viewed as necessary for vertical advancement in organizations with compressed hierarchical structures. This trend has given rise to

what has become known as the protean career. The societal level of analysis espouses certain work-based notions of career but set within a much broader context related to national economic growth and welfare provision.

The three levels differ in their assumptions concerning change. Individual-level analysis is premised on assumptions about developmental change rather than stability. Organizational-level analysis traditionally emphasized instrumentalism and relative stability, although most organizations now accept the inevitability of change. Societal-level analysis is more likely to reflect dynamic and changing contexts rather than stability.

Assumptions about the nature of organization focus on whether they are unitarist or pluralist entities. The individual level of analysis makes few if any assumptions about organizations because the organization is not its focus. Organizational-level analysis increasingly espouses unitarist assumptions, including sharing of goals, harmony, and little difference or conflict. Societal-level analysis reflects pluralism and the need for consensus.

Character of HRD

HRD can be analyzed in terms of its character, specifically whether it is voluntary or involuntary, formal or informal, current or future in its orientation, incremental or frame breaking, interactive or introspective, situation specific or generic, focusing on binding people to organizations or encouraging mobility, and whether it emphasizes individual agency or structuration by institutions. These eight characteristics build on the five original characteristics identified by Noe, Wilk, Mullen, and Wanek (1997).

Individual-level analysis tends to characterize HRD as voluntary, both formal and informal, focusing on the future, largely incremental, predominantly introspective, emphasizing the development of generic competencies, and enhancing labor mobility, and it assumes that the individual is the decision maker. Organization-level analysis emphasizes a contrasting set of characteristics. HRD provision is more likely to be involuntary, organizationally sponsored, focusing on formal activities, dealing with predominantly current issues, incremental, increasingly frame breaking, and emphasizing interactive learning processes rather than introspection.

Organization-level analysis tends to place emphasis on organization-specific competencies and HRD provision that binds the individual to the organization, and there is a strong focus on structuring the learning process. Societal-level analysis largely assumes that HRD activities may be multidimensional, including combinations of voluntary, involuntary, formal and informal, current and future, incremental as well as frame breaking, interactive and passive learning activities, and generic and specific competencies.

(text continues on p. 434)

TABLE 1: Analyzing Human Resource Development: Levels of Analysis

	Definition of Criterion	Individual Level	Organizational Level	Community-Societal Level
Philosophical assumptions Authenticity versus social engineering	Learners are authentic or themselves versus learners are highly socialized and conforming	Emphasis on development of the whole person; mind, body, spirit, and affect; learners free to be themselves	Focus on cohesion and loyalty to a group or organization; strong socialization of organizational values	Elements of both socialization and freedom to learn and be oneself. Some opportunities for personal growth but emphasis on learning a particular societal discourse
Harmony versus criticality	Consensus and harmony are inherent versus the need for learners to challenge and engage in critical reflection	Strong emphasis on critical reflection; to question personal attitudes and values and gain personal insights	Strong emphasis on harmony, conformance to norms; some scope for debate but the organizational value system prevails	Focus on harmony and conformance to the values of the learning community or society; emphasis at a societal level on equity and equality but marginalization of less powerful groups is often the reality
Independence versus inter- dependence	Learners are independent and participate voluntarily in learning versus the fostering of interdependencies	Assumption that individuals are independent human beings who participate voluntarily in learning activities	Organizational structures and systems shape individual learner behavior; strong emphasis on interdependence, teamwork, and organizational goals	Individuals are shaped by social structures and settings; interdependence of values as well as collaboration and cooperation; citizenship
Peer relationships versus hierarchy	A focus on openness, trust, and self-disclosure versus a focus on power, differences, and conflicts of interest	A strong emphasis on openness, trust, self-disclosure, self-sufficiency, self-direction, and lack of dependence on others	Strong focus on hierarchy; power relationships influence boundaries and organizational culture that delineate expected behavior patterns	Strong focus on hierarchy at a societal level, albeit democratic; learning communities may emphasize peer relationships, but these are overshadowed by issues of power and politics

Elitism versus universality	Learning is the exclusive privilege of elite groups who are committed to personal development and have strong personal awareness and responsibility versus the meritocratic essentialist view that learning is open to everyone	Does learning focus on changing behavior versus enhancing the thinking and self-esteem of learners?	Learning is a right for everyone; all people have opportunities and potential for self-development; individuals have equal capacities to be self-aware, reflective, and have well-developed skills in these areas or the capacities to achieve them	Some argue that learning is for the elite (i.e., managers and knowledge workers who are considered to be more valuable in achieving organizational goals); research evidence strongly supports this	Learning benefits all members of society; learning can be emancipatory; learning context is prescribed by particular societal and cultural contexts
Behaviorism versus humanistic-cognitive development	Does learning focus on changing behavior versus enhancing the thinking and self-esteem of learners?	Strong focus on cognitive development and views the human being as a primary agent in the learning process	Strong focus on behavioral change; specific competency sets, learning values, and organizational norms	Emphasis on both behaviorist and humanistic-cognitive development perspectives of learning	
Assumptions about the learner	Are learners motivated to learn by external rewards versus by internal self-developmental needs?	Assumes that learners are motivated by personal needs or drives such as self-actualization, self-esteem, and self-efficacy	Learning activities may be motivated by external rewards or requirements rather than a specific internal need to develop	Learning may be motivated by a mixture of motives related to securing a job, better mobility within the labor market, or development of the personal dimensions	
Linear versus nonlinear careers	Do learning activities assume linear career development versus assuming that career development is nonlinear in nature?	Does not make any particular assumptions about the individual's career simply because development activities are not necessarily bound to career issues; it can be in a work or nonwork context	Much HRD provision based on vertical progression models of career, and there is a strong work focus. Increasing horizontal career progression in organizations may signal shifting emphasis	Assumes that employee may have work-nonwork dimensions to career and that there may be many career changes, not necessarily linear in nature	

(continued)

TABLE 1 (continued)

	<i>Definition of Criterion</i>	<i>Individual Level</i>	<i>Organizational Level</i>	<i>Community-Societal Level</i>
Transactional versus relational centered relations	Do learners have long-term contracts with organizations versus short-term and instrumental contracts? Learning activities assume relatively stable conditions versus dynamic, changing conditions	Learners may have no specific organizational relationship; however, much individual provision is posited on transactional contract relations Learning or HRD activities based on assumptions of change or continuous evolution rather than stability may not be tied to organizational change issues	Much contemporary HRD provision is based on transactional-type relations Traditional assumption of incremental change and relatively stable conditions; however, greater acceptance of inevitability of change in dynamic global markets	No specific contractual relationship, other than citizenship, envisaged; however, provision increasingly reflecting changes in the employment relationship Increasingly reflects dynamic changing contexts rather than more static conditions
Static versus dynamic conditions	Learning activities assume relatively stable conditions versus dynamic, changing conditions	Learning or HRD activities based on assumptions of change or continuous evolution rather than stability may not be tied to organizational change issues	Traditional assumption of incremental change and relatively stable conditions; however, greater acceptance of inevitability of change in dynamic global markets	Increasingly reflects dynamic changing contexts rather than more static conditions
Unitarist versus pluralist learning environment	Are organizations comprised of goals and actions agreed by all members versus are they characterized by differences in goals that are then accommodated?	Makes no particular assumptions about organizational goals unless development takes place in an organizational context where it may be unitarist or pluralist assumptions	Strong focus on unitarist assumptions in Anglo-U.S. cultures. Organizations assumed to have commonly shared goals. A team approach and buy-in from all employees	No specific assumptions about organizations articulated; changes in work relationships, move toward partnership; societies do in general espouse agreement but recognize difference
Character of HRD	Employee participation in HRD may be dictated by organizational policy or prescription versus employees may participate because of personal interest	HRD activities not prescribed by organization. Employees participate because of a personal need to acquire knowledge or skills or out of an interest in confirming (or disconfirming) an interest in gaining specific skills	HRD activities largely dictated by organizational policy, strategic imperatives, and identified learning gaps. The majority of learning issues predetermined by the organization	HRD activities may be both voluntary and involuntary; they may be driven by individual actors in society or mandated by institutions or legislative frameworks

Formal versus informal	Formal development activities are usually sponsored by the organization and target specific competencies, whereas informal development is not sponsored by the organization	Personal development activities may consist of both formal and informal development activities	Formal development activities sponsored by organizations; usually target the development of specific skills, knowledge, or behavior; increasing recognition given to more informal learning activities	Much of the discourse at this level emphasizes formal developmental activities financed by institutions, government, or individuals
Current versus future orientation	To what extent do HRD activities relate to competencies for a current role or job versus anticipated changes	Strong future orientation with an emphasis on change and improvement	Many development activities are reactive and relate to current roles or to promotion chances	Emphasis on both current and future orientation with focus on future opportunities
Incremental versus frame breaking	Incremental learning situations are those in which time to clarify role expectations is provided and flexibility for self-paced learning is available, whereas frame-breaking learning situations place individuals in difficult situations requiring the acquisition of a broad range of competencies	Strong emphasis on self-paced learning activities and incremental development; some personal development activities may be characterized as stretching, requiring significant shifts in competencies	Many development activities are incremental in nature and designed to clarify role expectations and some flexibility; some organization-level interventions focus on frame-breaking activities designed to stretch employees competency but not necessarily the possibility of failure	Much societal level HRD provision is incremental, providing individuals with opportunities to develop skills or experiences through specific learning events; no significant emphasis on high-risk learning events

(continued)

TABLE 1 (continued)

	Definition of Criterion			Individual Level	Organizational Level	Community-Societal Level
Introspective versus interactive development	Do HRD activities require the individual to interact with other learners versus are they required to explore their own values, attitudes, goals, and learning preferences?	Strong emphasis on introspective development where individual explores values, interests, attitudes, career expectations, learning styles, and potential to develop	Strong emphasis on interactive development activities through interaction with peers, subordinates, and managers and the acquisition of skills, experience, and behavior changes	Emphasis on both interactive and introspective development; however, learning communities place strong emphasis on interaction with peers		
Situation specific or generic competencies	Does the learner acquire competencies that are portable versus competencies that are of value to specific contexts?	Development of generic competencies that have application to different contexts of a work and nonwork nature	May place strong emphasis on unique competencies that are distinct to a specific organizational context but may also be concerned with generic competencies designed to be portable	Dominant focus on generic competencies that are of value for different roles within society and designed to enhance mobility		
Bindings versus mobility enhancing learning activities	Do learning activities tie the learner to a specific organization and context versus do they enhance mobility?	Development as a personal journey and the opening up of new opportunities and values	Strong emphasis on binding in the sense of locking the employee into the organization; however, some organizations increasingly espouse employability- and mobility-type values	Dominant focus is on job and labor mobility in both vertical and horizontal directions		
Agency versus structure	Do learning activities require the learner to be a self-managing agent versus are they highly structured or prescribed?	Strong emphasis on personal agency; individual, key decision maker in respect of development activities and timing of development	Significant focus on structure; needs and timing of development prescribed to a large extent by organizational imperatives	Strong elements of structure prescribed by educational institutions and others responsible for HRD in society; assumes democratic elements of agency within this framework		

Delivery of HRD Target of HRD provision	Who is the target of HRD? Is it the individual, organization, community, or society?	Individuals and their needs independent of organizational context	Organizational needs reflected in organizational values and goals	Individuals as members of a society or as part of a learning community and diverse societal institutions
Metaphor of learning underpinning delivery	Is learning understood as a knowledge transfer process, a shaping process versus one of self-development?	Dominant metaphor is gardener and plant; conditions must be fostered where individuals can participate in development	Dominant metaphors are jug and mug and potter and clay; assumption that individuals must acquire knowledge and that their behavior should be changed to fit organizational values	All three metaphors are valid at this level; gardener and plant metaphor informs community of learner ideas; however, shaping metaphor relevant to other societal-level HRD interventions
Temporal context of learning	To what extent are learning activities contrived, artificial, isolated, and artificial, isolated, and continuous versus learning activities that are continuous, real time, and situated?	Learning situated in personal context of individual; learning activities may be contrived, continuous, discontinuous, real time, and asynchronous	Much learning provision is contrived, isolated, and artificial; some adoption of e-learning strategies by organizations makes it more real time	Learning may reflect a mixture of temporal contexts from real time and situated to contrived and artificial
Key actors in delivery process	Who are the key actors or drivers in terms of the provision of HRD?	Individual learners are the key decision makers	Organizational decision makers who provide resources; line managers who set the agenda; HRD specialists who coordinate and facilitate learning	Individuals, institutions, educational organizations, and a multiplicity of other actors including ideological elites

(continued)

TABLE I (continued)

	<i>Definition of Criterion</i>	<i>Individual Level</i>	<i>Organizational Level</i>	<i>Community-Societal Level</i>
Outcomes of HRD activity	How are the outcomes of HRD understood? Are they considered in quantifiable, payback terms versus more qualitative, pay-forward terms?	Strong focus on personal-level, qualitative-type outcomes emphasizing pay-forward criteria such as self-confidence, enhanced personal competences, and employability; longer term focus	Strong focus on quantitative, business-type metrics; emphasis on payback and return on investment criteria; learner process and individual-level outcomes not given high priority; strong short-term focus on measurement of outcomes	Outcomes may reflect both economic and social-type outcomes. Emphasis on both quantitative and qualitative-type criteria; longer term focus; strong emphasis on capability enhancement and potential-type criteria

NOTE: HRD = human resource development.

Delivery of HRD

The delivery of HRD represents our fourth component of the framework. We derive many of the categories here from the managerialist literature and the more prescriptive literature on organizing and delivering HRD. We consider this along five dimensions: the dominant metaphor of learning utilized, the temporal context of learning, key actors in the learning process, and the nature and extent of evaluation of HRD. Individual-level analysis considers the learner the driver as well as target of learning. The dominant metaphor is one of personal growth, learning as a journey, and learning as a continuous process. Learning activities may be contrived, real time, continuous, or discontinuous. Outcomes of HRD are measured in an interpretative, qualitative way with a limited emphasis on precise measurement. Organizational-level analysis considers the organization the primary target and senior managers and line specialists the key drivers. Metaphors of learning emphasize knowledge transfer and shaping; the temporal context is understood in terms of continuance, isolation from work, and artificial learning settings, and there is an increasing emphasis on real-time learning processes. With the emergence of learning, the outcomes of HRD are measured in positivistic terms focusing on quantitative financial measurement with return on investment as a key concern. Societal-level analysis understands the delivery of HRD to be targeted on individuals and institutions in society with a multiplicity of metaphors of learning valued. The learning context is complex and variable with a multiplicity of actors relevant to delivery. HRD is evaluated to reflect economic, social, and individual concerns.

Conclusion

If we examine HRD from a multilevel perspective, then it is possible to more fully understand and allow for a wider variety of theoretical formulations of HRD. We propose a framework to encourage HRD academics to go beyond one particular level, focus on relationships between levels, and study the impact of variables at different levels of analysis. We believe that by beginning to focus on multilevel analyses, the field will be able to generate and test theories that provide a better understanding of the impact of HRD interventions.

The proceeding discussion has highlighted a number of conceptual issues surrounding the consideration of HRD in a multilevel way. A number of the categories or issues that we identify have already received attention in the literature; however, others have gone unacknowledged and unaddressed. One of the most important insights to emerge from this article is that HRD should be considered multidisciplinary, multiperspectival, and multilevel. Different concepts have different constructions depending on

the level of analysis. We have not factored time into our framework but are conscious that the constructs we propose may change throughout time.

Our discussion emphasizes the complexity of conducting research in HRD and that HRD can occur in a multiplicity of forms and achieve a multiplicity of outcomes. Each level of analysis has unique assumptions within it, and our framework highlights that a much richer conception of HRD can be derived from considering it in a multilevel way.

The organizational level of analysis has dominated discussion and research in HRD to a large extent, particularly in the strategic HRD literature. It is arguable that this correlates to the power of organizations and provides strong evidence to those who claim that HRD has become a valuable strategic tool in the organizational economics toolkit. It is justifiably arguable that the dominance of the organizational level of analysis has overshadowed both the individual and community-societal levels of analysis and that the HRD agenda at the individual and community-societal level remains comparatively ill-defined and underresearched.

Our discussion highlights that there are many questions yet to be answered at the community and societal levels of analysis. We as yet do not fully understand the dynamics of HRD at the societal and community level. The emergence of research on national systems of HRD, the influence of national culture on HRD, and the role of national economic systems on HRD is a welcome development. Further studies in these areas will help to address the current imbalance.

The discussion of HRD as a multilevel phenomenon raises important issues of measurement of variables. HRD academics should not make the assumption that it is the same at each level of analysis. Researchers must distinguish between the level of theory and the level of measurement. The level of theory focuses on the targets (e.g., the individual or organization), whereas the level of measurement focuses on the sources of data. This suggests that although a construct may reside at one particular level, measurement may occur at another level. If we are to treat individuals as informants about organizational- and societal-level issues, then that demands that we frame our questions in a particular way.

The concept of HRD as a multilevel phenomenon also speaks to practitioners. Our framework may have value in highlighting the complexity of managing HRD in organizations and in identifying the potential conflicts that are inherent in designing, delivering, and evaluating HRD interventions. HRD practitioners are most likely faced with an organization-individual tension. They are required to make choices that have implications for the freedom of learners to participate in learning, the extent to which learning addresses multiple needs, and issues concerning the types of criteria used to evaluate HRD.

The delivery of HRD presents a separate prescription for each level of analysis. HRD responds to a distinct set of needs at the individual, organizational, and community-societal levels, and the outcomes of HRD activity are different and unique to each level. It also suggests that the type of learning context may be contingent on the resources available and argues that HRD may result in productive outcomes at all three levels of analysis.

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