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Abstract

HRD is no longer “training and development,” instead it is played out in the boundaries between individuals and amongst communities and societies. Lee 2007 established a case for the adoption of a holistic perspective of HRD and argued that we are moving into a world of shifting boundaries, conflict, and change. This article extends the argument to examine more closely the nature of HRD in relation to the challenges that are faced; question what it is about the nature of HRD that might lend itself to mediating the future; and outlines some examples and dilemmas that are exposed by this.

Keywords

boundaries, climate change, technology, population, futures, HRD

The traditional view of HRD is that of “training and development”—in which HRD is seen as a subset of HRM—in which HRM is seen as a subset of “Management”—in which Management is seen as the control of organizations, contribution to the bottom line, and shareholder satisfaction.

This view is rooted in the western economic command and control paradigm of production lines and giant corporations, in which people are indeed seen as and managed as “assets” or “resources”—to have their corners chipped away at until they fit the hole in the organization’s matrix that is their destination—and preferably to be encouraged in a way that makes them leap up and jump into that hole with great glee.

In this view, each organization has clear boundaries, and each of the many little pegs that comprise the organization knows its role within the organizational matrix. Each organization also has a drive to expand and to profit (financially, metaphorically,

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and literally) from the destruction of its competitors. Bigger is better so long as all the pegs fit in their holes, so long as the environment remains static, and so long as resources remain unlimited (in other words—an endless supply of more pegs, more competitors to submerge, and more paying customers from which to profit)

This view has been consistently challenged since the early 1990s particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States, by groups of academics and reflective practitioners who formed the University Forum for HRD in the United Kingdom, and the Academy of HRD in the United States (as Stewart et al, 2009, and Ruona, 2009 document). Since that early start other groups have formed, some national, some as professional bodies, others around areas of special interest but the vast majority are characterized by a broad discipline base and a recognition of alternative arenas for the theory and practice of HRD.

As a different approach began to emerge, time was spent trying to find a name for it that broke away from the idea of humans as resources to little avail. The name remains the same, but the boundaries by which we conceive of, and portray, HRD have shifted. HRD is now seen by many no longer as a subset of HRM, but as a discipline in its own right. Indeed, if HRD is the glue that holds the organizational members together, then HRM is the set of rules by which those people choose to operate—in other words, HRM is better seen as a subset of HRD (Stead & Lee, 1996).

As this alternative form of HRD emerged, time was spent in trying to define what it was—also to little avail. Lee (1997) visualized it at the core of what she called “Phenomenological Management” in which the activities of the organization are a central and inextricable part of the organization and its management—a fundamentally different conception to that which sees activities as an output. One of the most commonly used definitions that emerged from the debate is that of McLean and McLean (2001, p. 325) “Human resource development is any process or activity that, either initially or over the long term has the potential . . . work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation or, ultimately, the whole of humanity.” The success of both views lies in their ability to encompass much of human Endeavour and thus points to a dilemma in placing HRD at the core of the human condition. Is it so all-encompassing that to define it is an irrelevancy? (Lee, 2001a).

Despite (or because of?) this, it is clear that the way in which we theorize and practice HRD has changed and continues to change. Our conception of it has moved from an organizational function within a stable bureaucratic environment to encompass settings such as not-for-profit organizations, family firms, high-tech environments, and SMEs. We have come to appreciate that HRD occurs on the national stage, (McLean, 2004) and that for many nations and NGOs the profit-motive of the west (that has dominated academic conceptions of HRD) plays only a minor part in the equation.

In so far as this process is part of the core of the human condition, then, whether it is called “HRD” or something else, it plays out wherever people are. HRD is there in the local family shop as well as the multinational corporation, and the nature and shape of HRD is influenced by a range of factors that embrace the political, cultural, technological

and economic. Lee (2007) argued that we need to adopt a holistic perspective—that as we conceive of, or operate within, that which we call “HRD” we are not working in isolation. We are part of a global community and our thoughts and actions stem from response to wide philosophical, economic and political concerns that impact upon our lives on a daily basis.

These arguments were based in part upon an analysis of possible future global changes that were first discussed in 2004 (Lee, 2004a). At that time the global interconnectedness of our lives was less obvious than it is now—since then it has been thrown into focus by events such as the comprehensive disruption of global air traffic caused by a small volcano in Iceland; worldwide and profound economic effects catalyzed by a couple of problems in the US banking system, or; the need for a global response to support those facing aberrant climatic events, such as the floods in Pakistan. Three main areas of global change were examined (climate, technology and the aging population of the west) and used to argue that we are moving into a world of shifting boundaries, conflict and change. In the next section these arguments will be briefly revisited with more recent data, and, through this, the nature of HRD in relation to the challenges that are faced will be examined, as will the questions of what it is about the nature of HRD that might lend itself to mediating the future, and what dilemmas are exposed by this.

Some Global Changes . . .

The Intergovernmental panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its first assessment report in 1990 and now, 20 years later, and with prominent champions (Gore, 2007) most people are aware that the climate is changing, though many find it irrelevant to their daily lives. The 2007 report (IPCC, 2007) emphasizes that the risks are now assessed to be stronger, and of higher likelihood than identified previously. These include risks to unique and threatened systems and species extinction; risks of extreme weather events; greater risks to the vulnerable such as the poor and elderly not only in developing but also in developed countries; greater risk for those in low latitude and less developed areas and in dry areas and megadeltas; a greater risk over time of an increasing net cost of global warming; and, a greater risk that the additional contributions to sea level rise from both the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets as well as from thermal expansion will be larger than previously projected. It is beyond this article to show them here, but some of the projected regional impacts can be found in Table SPM.2, (IPCC, 2007).

The more recent data emphasize the high degree of confidence with which most of these projections are now made, and they strengthen earlier analyses. All large scale predictions of the effects of climate change involve scarcity and shift in renewable resources such as water, fertile land, wood for fuel, and fish stocks. In some cases, such as small island states, whole communities are at risk, and in others the impact within the community varies in relation to wealth, gender, age and ethnic origins. Although richer communities will be affected they are more able to develop technological solutions

(amongst others) to many problems than many vulnerable populations who have little option left but to migrate. In many places, such as Pakistan, climatic changes will exacerbate present environmental conditions in a cyclical feedback loop, that give rise to land degradation, shortfalls in food production, rural poverty and urban unrest. Such changes will affect not only internal migration patterns, but also migration to other countries. Typically the most adversely affected will be landless people, the rural poor, the sick or elderly, those with little family support, whereas migration tends to be undertaken most often by young males. In other words, those most vulnerable are not necessarily the most likely climate change migrants.

As migration (particularly of the young and fit males) increases so will conflict over resources, both within and across national boundaries. Furthermore, scarcities may act to strengthen group identities based on ethnic, class or religious differences, most notably by intensifying competition among groups for ever dwindling resources. At the same time, they can work to undermine the legitimacy of the state and its capacity to meet challenges. As the balance of power gradually shifts from the state to the challenging groups, the prospects for violence increase. Such violence tends to be subnational, diffuse and persistent.

In summary, climate change is having an enormous effect upon the world, and this will increase. Geographical boundaries are submerged (literally in some cases); Resource boundaries come into dispute; Populations migrate and alter, however, the highly vulnerable do not have this option. Both migration and the search for scarce resources create potential sources of internal and cross-national conflict

Boundaries are also shifting through technological change, and, as with the data on climate change, the last few years have demonstrated an increasing rate of change, particularly within intelligence technologies—data management and communications technology have revolutionized the western world. (Lee, 2004b; Friedman, 2006). Biotechnology, nanotechnology and health technologies offer the prospect of new ways to enhance our living conditions, longevity, and add to the adaptive strategies that can be employed in climate change as well as enhancing our response to the climate related erosion of barriers to infectious agents and pandemics. . . by those who possess such technological advantages.

Similarly, changes in the profile and speed of population growth are causing boundaries to shift. Although the world's population is continuing to grow, the rate of increase has dropped and for the technologically rich world the continued collapse of fertility is set to become the dominant demographic feature of the 21st Century (Pearce, 2002, Drucker, 1999). The US total population rate is expected to continue to grow because of its high migrant population, however the balance of racial backgrounds within the population will change considerably.

In technologically rich worlds the population is also growing older as people delay having children. The reasons for the ageing population appear to be enhanced expectations of longevity and a stable environment (Coyne et al, 2003). Those nations that have social support systems that enable care givers to maintain employment are maintaining a low but steady birthrate. In contrast, in the technologically poor world, high

child and male parent mortality are linked to early marriage and many children (Rodal, 1994), leading to rapid growth of a young population, and yet more pressure on resources in those places that can least afford it.

Global Changes—Personal Impact?

Global environmental changes and associated negotiations over global resources, responsibilities, and population shifts are going to require global political and economic responses, despite the consequent erosion of the legislative, political and economic boundaries of nation states. As Gore (2007) suggested with respect to climate change, if we are to do anything about it then there is a need for global action. Since then we have seen more willingness between those in power to reach compromise on global issues, particularly around issues where the danger is obvious, such as climate change and pandemics.

These are all large issues that appear to have little to do with the individual “here and now” and rehearsing them could be seen as little more than an intellectual exercise. Part of the argument here, however, is that these changes form a cluster of shifting boundaries through which our society and the nature of the world as we know it is changing—they cannot be dissected and addressed effectively on a singular basis, and though global, they have a direct local impact upon our understanding of ourselves and our relationships, our world of work, and how we conduct our lives. Global change has a personal impact.

Our understanding of ourselves shifts in concert with shifts in geographical, cultural, economic, and social boundaries. Climate related migration and the ageing population mean that skilled migrants will be needed, if not welcomed, in many countries, which, otherwise, will not be able to maintain a sufficiently large workforce to support the children and those too old to work. Cultural identity will be challenged as populations shift and absorb such immigrants, who bring their own ways of being with them. Similarly, communications are opening up relationships across the world. For the technologically rich, family and friends can remain close despite geographical separation—and thus the nature of the family unit is changing. The web, email and messaging are available to those with access to the systems and our conception of the world is becoming wider and deeper as the information platforms become increasingly realistic. At the same time, our world is becoming smaller as we patrol our boundaries in an attempt to reframe our identities. We need the comfort of smaller groups in which we can feel that our contribution to them is recognized and valued—with which we belong. As the traditional boundaries shift we need to create others by which to know who we are (Lee, 2002). The tensions associated with multiculturalism and change will affect us all.

Similarly, the world of work is changing. As boundaries become more uncertain, so the nature of the traditional organization becomes eroded. In the permeable boundaries of the cyber world the power and economic influence of large multinationals challenges that of some nation states. Traditional bureaucracies are being replaced by cross national

network organizations and clusters of smaller, innovative, entwined organizations who work for each other providing goods and services to whoever may want them across the world. As such they do not have all the separate functional areas usual for traditional organizations, but in association with the flattening effect technology has upon communication and the chain of command, individuals and offices within such organizations are more likely to be multifunctional—or, internal portfolio centered. This fundamentally changes traditional notions of work and organization and “home” becomes a mobile concept. “Wherever they are located, skilled individuals can work for several organizations from across the world at the same time, and similarly, wherever they are located, adept organizations can call upon the services of skilled individuals from across the world. Skilled workers need be no longer bounded by geography or loyalty—they can sell their human capital to those that offer the best packages of pay and benefits” (Lee 2007, pp. 163-164).

Organizations need to be able to manage high turnover, attract skilled staff, and retain those already employed (Poe, 2000; Friedman, 2006) As McGuire et al. (2007) reported, the presence of many older employees in the workplace is prolonging workforce regeneration cycles and this has now led to the participation of four separate generational groups in the labor market. One of the main employee benefits identified by Coyne et al (2003) is the ability to offer flexible work patterns. They suggest that this will become increasingly important as the population ages, leading to a greater need for care, and thus more flexible work conditions for care givers. Indeed, organizations are now able to manage their internal statistics and systems more fluidly, such that keeping track of flexible working and a wide system of varied benefits no longer presents the logistical problem that it used to do, however, Brown (2002) suggests that they have been slow to realize the value of human capital, and slow to develop the skills to be able to evaluate it.

This world of movement, tension and conflict, offers rewards to the skilled, flexible and technologically aware populations at the expense of the technologically poor, and this influences our jobs, our security—and how we conduct our lives.

As boundaries become eroded so ownership and identity become contested and conflict increases within nations and between nations for power, resources and around local, national and global issues; between governments and multinational bodies, and also between governments and dissatisfied populations; between the have's and have-nots, between residents and immigrants, and so on. Where do we stand on war? Armed forces? Peace keeping?

Governments, political parties, organizations, marketing teams and so on gather information on their own side and the opposition. Conflict is waged through technology and information—and through the disruption of information and the denial of service. Who do we trust with what information? What liberties are we willing to give away in order to support the maintenance of power and order? Or to prevent possible acts of terrorism?

Our information sources have become economic and political tools in which the news has become a form of live soap opera, played around sound bites. We learn to

ignore the bits that don't interest us and we become hardened to the many tales of woe and the plight of other communities. Where do we stand on the plight of others? How much do we rely on the "system" to take responsibility for us? Or to take on our responsibility for others? What do we hold ourselves responsible for? How much are we willing to change to help reduce global warming? How much tax are we willing to pay to support equality?

What About HRD?

These are the sort of questions that we might muse upon if the situation arose, but might not seem to have much to do with an article on HRD. Let us restrict our notion of HRD to the world of work. . . this gives us a large remit. Do we include child labor, the self employed, NGO's or even virtual organizations? Whichever we chose, the questions above can be rephrased to be relevant to the situation, because, they are about self and other; power and control; identity and ownership; inclusion and exclusion. These issues are an essential part of the human condition, as is HRD (Lee, 2005).

We could, for example, question what form of governance and leadership the organisation should adopt, and how that is supported by the HRD function. This points to a dilemma that is at the core of HRD (Hatcher & Lee, 2003) in which HRD espouses and promotes democratic values in organizations that are, in their very essence, non-democratic. Therefore, merely by fulfilling their role, HRD professionals are likely to come into conflict with others who are fulfilling the nondemocratic managerial role assigned to them. As a reviewer of this article noted. HRD has shown "an utter failure to engage widely with the economics of humans in organizations"—and yet, if HRD develops its economic voice, how does it strike a balance between the thrust for organizational growth (including year on year increase in profit) and notions of sustainability (and concomitant steady-state economy)? Discussions of this can be found at CASSE, for example, Deitz (2010).

To what extent do we expect the "workforce" to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of the "organization"—and what is meant by this? Does the organisation have a life outside the workforce, and if so, are we really talking about the shareholder? And senior management? At what stage does HRD become the mediator (and facilitator?) of exploitation?

To what extent are employees treated equally? There are, of course, the usual questions about racial, gender, religious, and disability discrimination, what about more hidden discrimination against caregivers, for example, or those who do not do the usual 9 to 5 (Coyne et al, 2003). Where does HRD stand on issues of cultural imperialism—particularly in relation to migrant workers or satellite organisations?

To what extent are the rules of the organisation really followed—in the spirit as well as the letter? How is information about employees managed—does the written information match that which "everyone knows" through rumour, innuendo and off-record discussions? How transparent are the organisational processes? To what extent are ethical codes really followed?

These sorts of questions are related to HRD, but they, also, are not new. As before, they are the sort of question we might muse over, but if we are located in a nice stable organisational environment they hold no bite. As we move outside that comfort zone, and as our boundaries shift and our roles become complex (Lee, 2003a), so then, the questions develop more personal meaning. In a world full of conflict, HRD practitioners and the organisations and people they work with come face to face with hard choices on a daily basis and within their own spheres of operation

As our boundaries shift we can no longer say “this is what HRD is—this is my definition.” We can only describe it in terms of what does and doesn’t happen, and what we would like it to be. For example, as the nature of work changes and becomes more fluid, so job descriptions which play an excellent part in a stable and more traditional organisational environment become outdated and instruments of job limitation. HRD can play an important role negotiating more flexible alternative forms of job description.

In all of the questions above, and despite codes of ethics, individuals find their own points of balance (Lee, 2003b). In so far as HRD is a facilitative process then in a world of multiple shifting boundaries and different understandings it plays a crucial balancing role in enabling the needs of the organisation and employees to be met.

An excellent practical example of these issues was given by Szűts (2010), who was CEO of the Hungarian Postal Services, (Magyar Posta Zrt) She analysed the HRD strategies that she put into place to manage the “Borderless Postal Market” in Europe from a Hungarian Perspective. She talked about the challenges of managing such a large and complex organisation within an increasingly borderless environment, and of the need for restructuring employment, motivational programmes and labour force retention, reshaping competencies, training, knowledge management, career management, and issues around diversification. She concluded that the biggest dilemma was around liberalisation vs. social dumping (the problematic side of migration), arguing that this was no longer just a business issue, but was also a regulatory and social issue—one that government as well as HRD needs to take responsibility for.

This balancing role of HRD is likely to include the more traditional “training and development” in which there is increasing emphasis upon areas such as cross cultural awareness, diversity, and conflict resolution. These areas will be needed both in terms of managing these within organisations and also as key skills that employees will need as they work flexibly across a range of situations. Similarly, HRD’s role in establishing the qualities and abilities required in successful employees and in promoting, developing and assessing these remains essential, though the attributes that are sought are likely to shift towards those of the flexible portfolio worker. HRD also has a part to play in balancing the structures of the organization: overseeing how the rules of working together are developed and monitored; overseeing alternative forms of employee benefit that might retain staff in a world of high staff turnover where promotion and more pay are not the only drivers; developing the organizations culture in a way that balances the needs of all employees; benchmarking and making sound judgments about the comparability of qualifications, attainment and provision; and, taking a proactive

part in the development of strategy, sustainability and longevity. The role of HRD in SME's and alternative organizations is less functionally clear (Stewart & Beaver, 2003; Sambrook & Stewart, 2006) but the processes involved, and particularly, the balancing within shifting boundaries, remain the same. The HRD balancing act could be seen as value free mediation (which, of course, is not really value free) but HRD does have clear sets of values, as emphasized by the professional bodies (AHRD, 2009). Those acting in HRD roles are regularly (and increasingly) faced with ethical dilemmas and expertly manage the local balancing act, yet feel powerless to address the sorts of global imbalance raised here.

As geographical and organizational boundaries lose their rigidity, people are increasingly turning to their professional bodies to enhance their sense of identity at work and provide a sense of permanence. After all, an individual is likely to be a member of one or more professional bodies all their working life, but may only be with a single organization for a few years—and it is through these professional bodies and collective action that HRD can take a stance that addresses issues that are wider than “what happens in my own organization.”

Professional bodies can act as mediator, between the organization, the individual and the state. They can adopt the broader view and concern themselves with global issues. Some, such as the need to bridge the increasing skills and technology gap are directly within the HR remit; in others, such as displacement and conflict, it is the necessary mediation skills for which people will turn to HRD.

I see many of the changes to HRD that I have described above as inevitable—nations and organizations are changing in response to global changes, and people adapt. The educational sector would do well to work hand-in-hand with professional bodies in order to prepare for change in a proactive manner. The skills and knowledge needed to be able to work in and influence a complex environment with shifting boundaries and daily personal and ethical dilemmas to face are very different to those needed for a stable state environment with clear externally specified performance outcomes. This does not mean that we need detailed new curricula or mandatory courses in public policy, they might help—but it seems to me that what is needed more is the development of professionals who are able to think and work independently and ethically within the whirlwind of changing circumstances. We need to be developing people's skills and attitudes as well as their knowledge—and to do so we need to look at those forms of education that do more than turn out a few more cogs for the machine. Self defined curricula, action learning, problem based learning and so on . . . all a thorn in the side of the traditional transmission of knowledge and the structures that support it, but increasingly being seen to offer a type of education more in line with the challenges of the future (Lee, 2001a).

Conclusion

In this changing world of shifting boundaries and global challenges, and in which the divide between the rich and the poor grows increasingly large, HRD is no longer a

bureaucratic subfunction. Instead, it can patrol the boundaries and engage in areas such as politics and policy; law and economics; strategy and structures; philosophy and morality. It is time for HRD to come of age.

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Bio

Monica Lee is visiting professor at Northumbria University, and is a life-member of Lancaster University, UK. She is a chartered psychologist, and is a fellow of CIPD, and associate fellow of British Psychological Society. Founder editor in chief of *Human Resource Development International* (1998 to 2002) and Editor of the Routledge monograph series "Studies in HRD." She came to academe from the business world where she was managing director of a development consultancy. She has worked extensively in Central Europe, CIS, and the United States, coordinating and collaborating in research and teaching initiatives. She is intrigued by the dynamics around individuals and organizations and most of her work is about trying to make sense of these. This can be seen in recent publications in *Human Relations*, *Human Resource Development International*, *Management Learning* and *Personnel Review*.