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Connecting HRD and Creativity: From Fragmentary Insights to Strategic Significance

Stephen Gibb
Consuelo L. Waight

The problem and the solution. The previous articles indicate that there are connections between creativity and human resource development (HRD) but that these connections are fragmented. The growing strategic concern with creativity and the workforce and the workplace presents a challenge to all those concerned with HRD. This article focuses on the underlying themes among the six articles and presents concerns with meanings, strategies, and challenges.

Keywords: *creativity; human resource development; learning; change*

The challenge is to move beyond the fragmented research insights to fully connect human resource development (HRD) and creativity. This issue is a step in that direction as we open up questions about matters of meaning and areas for research. In this article we explore six important themes that reflect the messages of the six previous articles. Then reflections on these themes and on how the connections between creativity and HRD can be rendered less obscure are given. Lastly, some challenges, which HRD as a field and practice will need to address as the connection between HRD and creativity is explored, are presented.

Themes

First, these articles all acknowledge that HRD, as a discipline and a profession, seeks to identify, support, and lead the creative revolutions of the 21st century workforce and workplace. These articles reinforce the issues others have identified—the importance of goal setting, job self-efficacy, and job characteristics in fostering individual creativity (Amabile, 1996, 1998; Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Connecting creativity with HRD means having to extend our knowledge about learning and

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building capacity for change at all levels. In making a more conscious and explicit link between creativity and HRD, the gestalt of realizing personal and organizational potential may be perceived anew. Creativity is becoming a more prominent concern as creative revolutions at work are sought (Allan, Kingdon, Murrin, & Rudkin, 2002; Roffe, 1999) and as the nurturing of a creative class is seen to be the foundation of prosperity and civilization (Florida, 2002; Homer-Nixon, 2000).

Second, it appears that creativity and HRD both have strong links with knowledge and learning and with HRD practitioners' roles in promoting individual, group, and organizational learning; but they have not received the attention this warrants in HRD research. Creativity, as all the previous articles demonstrate, is a significant issue in its own right, and it can be related to core HRD issues. HRD can be connected with creativity through developing the creative class (Waight, 2005), enhancing the social context to enable creativity (Egan, 2005; Madjar, 2005), changing cultures to promote innovation (McLean, 2005), understanding and leveraging individuals (Egan, 2005), and analyzing organizations using diverse paradigms to explore challenges (Taylor & Callahan, 2005).

Third, exploring and connecting creativity and HRD can lead to rethinking core HRD constructs. As the link between personal creativity and organizational performance has been acknowledged, there has been interest in research on the factors that affect and effect creativity. For creativity to become an accepted construct in HRD, it has to be better articulated with accepted HRD-related constructs such as goal setting, self-efficacy, work design, job characteristics, leadership, and work groups. This articulation could inform the fragments of and opportunities for connecting HRD and creativity.

Fourth, the kind of challenge represented by connecting creativity and HRD mirrors past challenges. There were other challenges for HRD to connect with and orient itself on a major transcendent capability or competence; examples would be the transcendent capability of generic problem-solving, critical thinking, interpersonal skills, or emotional intelligence. The construct in question here is creativity. These articles show that this construct has been given considerable attention and analysis elsewhere, specifically in the worlds of the arts and design (Lawson, 1997) and the worlds of the sciences and associated fields such as engineering (Amabile, 1998; Madjar, Oldham, & Pratt, 2002; Norman, 1990; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003; Tierney & Farmer, 2002; Tierney, Farmer, & Graen, 1999; Zhou & George, 2003). These previous studies, the authors in this special issue conclude, provide starting points. Yet they cannot in and of themselves provide the knowledge, concepts, and theories needed in the discipline of HRD.

Fifth, there are concerns about possible biases and distortions of HRD as these connections with creativity are explored in the discipline and the profession. In the discipline, the dominant value systems associated with creativity may be organizationally biased (Taylor & Callahan, 2005) or discipline biased by one of the HRD pillars of psychology, economics, or systems thinking. The consequences can be fairly minor: trying to reconcile what economists believe about effective work processes with what psychologists may conclude about effective work processes where enhancing creativity is an issue. Or they may be more significant. Krohe (1996), for example, suggested that because creativity is so important to individual and organizational functioning, it ought to inform a whole new employment paradigm with employees being artisans in ateliers, or studios. Working to realize that kind of employment paradigm could be a role of HRD. The articles in this issue embody notes both minor and major. This mirrors other researchers who have concluded that training is not enough and that the environment needs to be altered as well as aligned with supporting creativity (Baer, Oldham, & Cummings, 2003; Simpson, 2001; Williams, 2002). The authors represent a range of ideas about how, what, and why to alter for creativity. Although their views cannot be succinctly synthesized, they certainly share the view that these issues are central to organization development, a component of HRD.

Sixth, questions about how the connection of creativity with HRD affects HRD professionals, an issue that has exercised minds before (Johnson, 1992), are also seen throughout the previous articles. There are practical and actionable conclusions from exploring the connections of HRD and creativity. These are related to the areas of the creativity in learning, learning creativity, organization creativity, and the socioeconomic context of creative capabilities. Some of these concepts, such as knowledge management and learning organization, are already being considered alongside other factors.

The spirit of all these articles is making creativity a distinct and central focus rather than a part of another, more general construct. These themes can be explored in more detail to highlight the future and further concerns for the profession.

Creativity Revolutions: Why Now?

To explore these shared themes and common issues among the articles, we present some further analysis of our own, building on these themes. The reason these issues matter now is that we are living and working within a knowledge economy, and our workplaces are either consciously or unconsciously expecting creativity as a component of our process and outcomes (Coy, Symonds, Baker, Arndt, & Hof, 2004; Lapierre & Giroux, 2003). In the United States, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary

Skills identified creative thinking and the ability to generate new ideas as foundational skills for today's workplace (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). Florida's (2002) analysis of the creative classes and creativity as multifaceted and multidimensional and not limited to technological innovation or new business models depicts the underlying impetus of creativity in the workplace. Madjar et al. (2002) reflect this trans-workplace view of creativity by arguing that creativity can be generated by employees in any job and at any level of the organization, not just in jobs that are traditionally viewed as necessitating creativity.

The unacknowledged yet strategically interdependent relationship between HRD and creativity cannot continue. Marsick and Watkins (2003) alluded to this interdependence by stating that organizations often expect that learning and knowledge creation will take place continuously for individuals and that they will share what they know in ways that promote learning in groups throughout the organization. Human resource development has communicated the importance of the social context in its emphasis on performance, systems, transfer, futures, and human capital theories, for example. However, HRD has not explicitly applied this knowledge to creativity, which is a major facet of HRD's role in workforce development for the 21st century and beyond.

The pace of change and technology and the increasing integration of viable knowledge in work processes and outcomes all connect to the power of creativity for success and the competitive edge. Bates and Phelan (2002) added that today's workplace is characterized by many complex, tactical, and strategic tasks that require the assimilation of increasing amounts of new knowledge; personal thinking, application, and problem-solving abilities; heavy work loads; and jobs with extremely variable content. Marsick and Watkins (2003), via their nine dimensions of the learning organization, indicated a connection between workplace expectations and creativity. Their second dimension, promoting inquiry and dialogue, states that people must gain productive reasoning skills to express their views and must have the capacity to listen and inquire into the views of others. This dimension also references culture that must change to support questioning, feedback, and experimentation.

Development Strategies for Creativity

There are several strategies available in HRD that may be used or adapted to develop the creativity of people directly or as an element of their development in some specific domain. Table 1 shows three strategies: facilitation, play, and dialogue and community. Some of the strategies may be better suited for the goal of nurturing creativity. Research into what works, when it works, and with whom it works needs to be undertaken.

TABLE 1: Learning Engagements for Creativity

Human Resource Development Strategies			
Strategies	Sources	Forms	Issues
Facilitation: What learners can do to construct understanding	Experiential learning	Small group work; coaching; mentoring	Learner resistance to doing the work of creativity; abilities of coaches and mentors to nurture creativity
Play: Fit with what engages people	Organic and natural forms (e.g., arts, computer games)	User engagement; goals; decision making; game play	Digital natives (youth) and digital immigrants (educators); don't suck the fun out of learning about creativity
Dialogue and community: Encourage relations	Social construction; making sense in creative communities	Bringing people together; allowing exchanges; building with each other; open spaces	Can we design such creative communities?

For example, consider play. Can we encourage greater creativity through play? Play is a category that can include many practices such as games, outdoor experiential learning, and the use of theatre. The perceived leading edge of play, which can be explored more closely, is the use of computer games. Prensky (2003) identifies the norms and expectations of digital natives (see Table 2), the generation that has grown up with computers, networks, and communications technology such as mobile phones as the norm, as setting the primary challenge for learning design.

This generation, like all others, encounters a system that not only requires them to learn things that they do not want to bother learning but also uses methods that they perceive to be outdated, which further demotivates them. For proponents of play and games, the solution is obvious: If the methods change, the learners can be engaged and will want to learn. Prensky (2003) believes that games embody the qualities that the digital generation is attuned to and that its members want as part of their learning experiences. The nature of gaming includes playing and competition, qualities that are not just exciting and engaging but that are also intellectually stimulating.

TABLE 2: Prensky's (2003) Digital Immigrants and Natives

	Digital Immigrants	Digital Natives
Speed of learning	Slow	Twitch speed
Processing skills	Single	Parallel
Search skills	Linear	Random
Mode of communication	Text	Graphic
Individuality	Stand alone	Connected
Ethic	Work ethic	Play ethic

The Creativity Process

The creative process requires in-depth understanding. Like definitions, the process of creativity has been developed in and for many discrete areas such as graphic design, product design, and building design. Lawson (1997) provides a way of framing this by initially locating creativity via design thinking as a phenomenon that can be located in the middle of a continuum (see Table 3). At one end is a kind of thinking that is about informed but mechanical calculation—logical, problem solving, thinking oriented, and focused on utility. At the other end of the continuum is free, imaginative thinking—associated with aesthetic value. Creativity involves being able to produce solutions that combine both calculation and imagination and that are functional and beautiful and novel and useful. In this sense, creativity is a capacity that draws on an appreciation of both objective science and subjective artfulness, requiring a combination of quantitative and qualitative judgment.

The development and enhancement of creative thinking, consistent with a naturalistic approach as defined here, is possible and valuable in many areas. As well as giving weight to an appropriate aesthetic appreciation, it also involves understanding users and their needs, for creativity may not be the free act of an independent individual. It may be a social act learned in close contact with others and practiced in specific social relations. Novices need apprenticeships because, in seeking to be creative, they often begin by offering solutions of great complexity, but they eventually recognize the need to keep things as simple as possible. They move from overly self-conscious and introspective thinking to being more un-self-conscious and action based. This produces better functioning and more appropriate solutions.

The creative process can be defined in various ways. Two can be considered here. The first option is to define a sequence of defined activities completed in a logical order. One logical sequence for guiding creativity is the following:

TABLE 3: A Continuum of Creativity

Using informed mechanical calculation	Producing the functional and beautiful	Free imaginative thinking
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- Assimilation—collect information
- General study—investigate problems and solutions
- Development—refine solutions
- Communication—communicate solutions to others

Although this makes sense, it can be a flawed model. In real rather than ideal creativity, there are transitions, revisions, and unpredictable jumps rather than logical and sequential progressions. Creators can get stuck at each stage; for example, slavishly collecting more and more information rather than moving on to development. It is not unusual to reach the end of stage four, communication, only for clients to then see that they have defined the problem incorrectly; then it is back to stage one. Creativity is better defined as involving three activities that are applicable at all these sequences or stages: analysis, synthesis, and appraisal. Analysis is exploring relations, looking for patterns, classifying objectives, generating divergent outcomes, and so on to open an order and structure for dealing with the problem. Synthesis is needed to move forward, to distil from among the relations and patterns and to create a solution. And appraisal of solutions in relation to preset objectives is needed before decisions move from abstract creation to actual making. This kind of definition is more helpful as it exposes how the issue for the creator is that “problem and solution emerge together” (Lawson, 1997, p. 47). This means that the problem is never fully understood until some solution to illustrate it is provided.

This way of thinking about creativity also raises a further problem for the creator and creative thinking: the problem of escalation or regression in redefining problems. The definition of a problem may be perceived, when a creative solution is offered, to have been too narrow; problem redefinition then escalates. This means that what is to be analyzed, synthesized, and appraised increases. Take as an instance an organization seeking to improve the security in its premises. Organizational leaders may think of a solution in terms of new types of locks for their doors. They may be offered a solution using new locks that are far more secure than the existing locks. Yet, as they appraise the solution, they may have thoughts about the additional time needed to open and close these doors given the new locks’ complexity. Maybe, instead, they should be restricting the movements of some people in some areas rather than increasing security everywhere. Indeed, do they need doors at all in some areas? Maybe they should redesign the existing building

to allow for certain areas to be relocated, some into more secure areas, others into less secure areas, with fewer doors. Or perhaps the existing building is inadequate for that and they then need to relocate to a new building. Thus, an escalation into broad questions ensues as a result of creativity. Regression is the opposite movement. This is where a big solution that is initially proposed becomes revised down to a smaller act. So, in this example, the problem of security in the organization's premises might have led the organization to consider moving to another building. However, as lesser options are also considered, they may ultimately decide to become more secure by simply replacing the locks.

The underlying issue is expecting the use of creative thinking to be able to produce solutions that fix specific symptoms or to identify and deal with the underlying causes of problems. In fact, creative thinking may open Pandora's box when looking at general causes of problems. There are always multidimensional and interconnected elements to problems. It can then appear as if more and more analysis, synthesis, and appraisal is needed, and no natural end, or point to stop design thinking, can be found. But to escape this trap is often to fall into another—the trap of overprecision, defining a discrete problem to fix. But that may not actually help creative thinking, rather precluding it. If the value of creative thinking is that it is needed where subjective judgment is important because there is no correct or optimal calculable solution, then being overly precise in determining the problem initially is not helpful.

Challenges for HRD

Exploring creativity and HRD as these articles have shown is unlikely to mean following a straight path. Various pathways are reflected in the multiple definitions of creativity reviewed in this volume. Creativity has been conceptualized as a product-oriented definition (Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Tierney et al., 1999), a personal nature or trait (Guilford, 1959; Maslow, 1959), an intellectual or artistic outcome that can be critiqued to be novel or useful (Glynn, 1996; Rogers, 1959), or a dynamic process involving individuals' interactions and transactions with their social, psychological, and physical environment (Guastello, 2002; Sternberg & Lubart, 1996; Stokols, Clitheroe, & Amuidzinas, 2002; Tierney & Farmer, 2002). The predominant definition derives from Amabile (1988, 1998), reflecting the duality of newness and usefulness.

Like definitions, and like this issue as a microcosm, creativity research is also diverse, being concerned with defining models (Bundy, 2002; Lubart, 2001; Wallas, 1926), analyzing work group and environments (Madjar et al., 2002; Stokols et al., 2002), psychological factors (Amabile, 1996, 1998; Feldhusen, 1995; Tierney & Farmer, 2002), cognitive style (Bundy, 2002;

Guastello, 2002; Hardy, 1998), education (Driver, 2001), and gender (Reis, 2002). Although these research areas do not capture the abundance of research on creativity, they highlight the diversity of factors and issues that need to be synthesized and conceptualized.

Understanding what HRD means within the realm of corporate creativity needs clarity. It is the first phase of creativity that presents the most challenges in the organizational setting. More than the provision of training courses designed to develop creativity is needed. There is also a need for a learning culture “where collaborative creativity in all contexts, relationships and experiences is a basic purpose of the culture” (Jaccaci, 1989, p. 50). For Jaccaci (1989), the pursuit of creativity radically alters thinking about learning because it sanctions idealism as the core of learning, recasts mentoring as focused on purpose and fulfillment, and demands that training become HRD. The encounter with creativity transforms trainers, training, and organizations, producing higher-level goals and aspirations for potential development. Stern (1992) studied the factors that contribute to the expression of corporate creativity in Japan. His research noted several OD- and HRD-initiated behaviors that contributed to creativity such as study leave, participation in in-house training, team communication, and professional conferences and self-development. Robinson and Stern (1997) described environmental considerations for the development of creativity around five features that the corporate world can manage. The first feature is alignment. Creative ideas must be directed toward organization goals so that employees will recognize and respond positively to even a partially useful idea. The second feature is self-initiated activity. Intrinsic motivation is needed, so people need to be allowed to pick a problem they are interested in and feel able to solve. The third feature is unofficial activity. Informal meetings should be a safe haven, giving ideas a chance to develop until they are strong enough to face judgmental resistance. The fourth feature is serendipity—discoveries made by fortunate accident in the presence of sagacity. The final feature is diverse stimuli. New settings or situations provide fresh insight and drive people to react differently or to try something new.

On the other hand, there are those (Lyman, 1989) who have counseled more circumspection about what the encounter with creativity entails within the organizational environment. To be creative, people do not need to be taught anything new; they only need to resurrect the child-like mind, the spirit of wonder, and the natural curiosity they have shut away. Creativity entails being able to make mistakes, to fail, and to shed conformity. Caudron (1994) acknowledged that creatives are high maintenance. The underlying challenge is getting creatives and noncreatives to work together. Yet there are those (Kao, 1996) who say that the two worlds are not that different. Van Slyke (1999) connects creativity with optimum conflict. Stimulating con-

TABLE 4: Traits of Creative People

-
- Different, and they do not mind being so
 - Playful; nothing is taken seriously
 - Do not play by the rules; be outlaws; thumb nose at conformity
 - Adventurous
 - Not bothered about being accurate, punctual, and proper
 - Spontaneous; need no script for life; take direction from events
 - Independent; work alone or be alone; against objections; stubborn
 - Sensitive to art and beauty in all things, not just art
 - Enthusiastic, idealistic, and responsive; hyperactive
 - Bold; ready to charge ahead; single minded
 - Seeing things where others do not
 - Like acting; even mistakes lead toward the goal
 - Driven and passionate to overcome obstacles in the way
 - Not content with the obvious, the mundane, the mediocre, the cliché; go beyond the first answer
 - Are alright with feeling lost or experiencing ambiguity
 - Faithful to their vision and their craft and the belief that the creative process will work
 - Courageous; able to withstand objections and criticism; able to focus and concentrate on a single purpose
-

Source: Solomon, 1990.

flict to ideal intensity means creating opportunities for conflict to occur, seeing through disaffected behavior. It means having people who can listen and understand perspectives, needs, and interests of others rather than reasoning for their own position. The qualities of creative people listed in Table 4 (Solomon, 1990) are distinctive. Are these qualities that organizations want to nurture, and, therefore, develop cultures for? If so, what are the implications for HRD within the organizational environment?

For strategic significance to be secured, the meanings of creativity in HRD need to be clarified so that the HRD strategies can be successfully aligned, designed, and implemented. There still remains, though, another major issue that may yet undermine the connection of HRD with creativity at a strategic level. This is the clash of value systems (Allport, Vernon, & Lindsey, 1970) around connecting creativity with the HRD context.

Value systems are acknowledged to affect the identity and actions of individuals, organizations, and societies (Rokeach, 1970). They can also affect disciplines and professions. The discipline and profession of HRD is one that has been formed around tensions in values, with contests between economically grounded and socially grounded valuing. These each imagine the

purpose of developing people's potential distinctively. For the former, people potential is developed for its greatest utility. For the latter it is to be developed as an organic part of the loving and caring relations people share in their families and communities. The tensions between these are well-established in the HRD literature. Indeed the antagonism between them may be seen to enliven and indeed animate the whole subject of HRD.

The issue here is somewhat different though. It is that the economic and the social value system interpretations are only two among the set of all possible value systems. Other value systems are commonly acknowledged, among which are the theoretic or veritistic, the political or power oriented, the spiritual or moral, and the aesthetic or creative (Spranger, 1928). To connect HRD with creativity is to open up a new tension in values about how creativity introduces the values associated with artfulness.

It has been argued (Postrel, 2003) that we are now in an age of aesthetics where the substance of style is affecting commerce, culture, and even consciousness much more so than in the past. The heart of an aesthetic values system is a belief that creativity as a means and an end is of the highest value. The attainment of the right form and harmony to elicit affective reactions, from experiencing beauty to being shocked, is what is to be sought and admired. All experience, events, and products are to be judged in relation to style, grace, and symmetry. Aesthetes need not themselves be creative artists but will find their chief interest in the artistic elements of life.

If creativity is now more important and is to be connected more with HRD, then the aesthetic value system and its fit or conflict with other value systems becomes an issue in HRD. Previously, HRD has sought to align itself and to be associated with the social values of being concerned with human welfare and the economic values of business performance. But in contrast with socially grounded, welfare-oriented valuing, aesthetes may be mainly interested in understanding people as material for their creative endeavors, not for any humanistic reason. Indeed, the aesthete can be strongly individualistic and self-sufficient, detached from the group and disinterested in the welfare of others. That would hardly be a good foundation for HRD. And those adhering to aesthetic values may view the dominant economic values permeating business performance—the number crunching, budgeting, and profit seeking—as distorting, if not entirely undermining the values they hold most important. For aesthetes, those concerned with perfecting the beautiful or producing the shocking, the conditions and goals of human development in business organizations offer an environment in which their creativity is embraced only conditionally, and those conditions, around being useful and productive, impede its proper expression. Also, in this form there is then doubt about the suitability of aligning HRD with creativity if such tensions and problems follow.

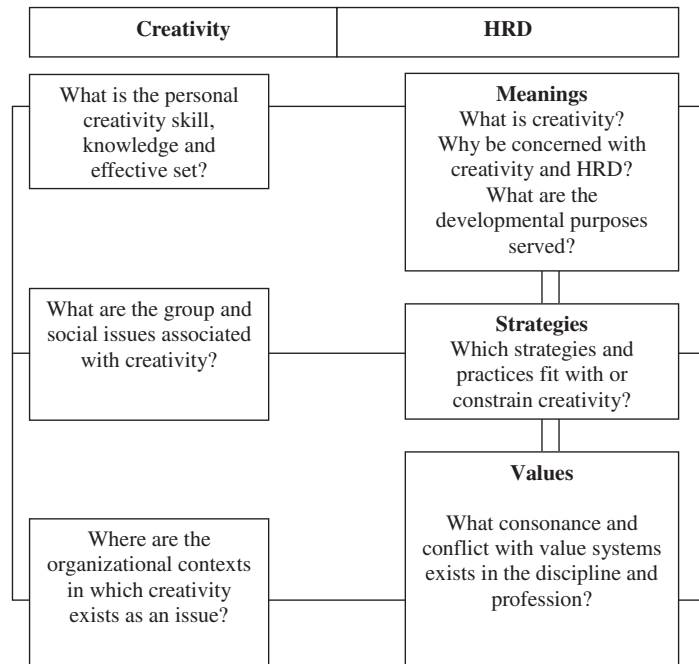


FIGURE 1: Connecting HRD and Creativity

Conclusion

In conclusion, we suggest a framework (see Figure 1) for continuing the exploration of connecting HRD and creativity. There are creativity themes and definitions that connect directly with traditional HRD concerns about the kinds of expertise, knowledge, and affective capabilities needed to map and guide the realization of people's and organizations' potential. There are challenges in adapting the various methods that HRD typically uses to realize people's and organizations' potential because some methods are not suitable for eliciting and reinforcing creativity. It is entirely possible that the methods and systems of HRD may in themselves preempt the development of creativity by defining HRD needs in ways that neglect the whole person, by acting in ways that require passive compliance among learners, and by assessing learning in ways that seek adherence to customary and regulated standards. If these, rather than the needs of the future person for the future workplace and world, provide the infrastructure for HRD, then HRD may oppress and defeat creativity rather than support and realize it.

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