DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 441 130 CE 080 141

TITLE	Research Methods in HRD. Symposium 40. [Concurrent Symposium Session at AHRD Annual Conference, 2000.]
PUB DATE	2000-03-08
NOTE	24p.; In: Academy of Human Resource Development Conference Proceedings (Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, March 8-12, 2000); see CE 080 095.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - General (020) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Action Research; *Comparative Analysis; Data Collection; *Educational Research; *Electronic Mail; Foreign Countries; *Labor Force Development; Literature Reviews; Partnerships in Education; *Research Methodology; *Theory Practice Relationship; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS	*Partnership in Research; United Kingdom; United States

ABSTRACT

This document contains three papers from a symposium on research methods in human resource development (HRD) that was conducted as part of a conference on HRD. "Utilizing Electronic Mail To Survey Human Resource Development Practitioners: A Comparison between Electronic Mail and the U.S. Postal Service for the Purpose of Data Collection: Reducing the Costs of Bureaucracy" (Harold Shoemaker, James J. Kirk) reports on a study establishing that electronic mail elicited a significantly higher response rate than regular mail (41% versus 25%) but did not alter response patterns by gender or years in the HRD profession. "Trends in the Literature: A Comparative Analysis of 1998 HRD Research" (Loretta L. Donovan, Victoria J. Marsick) documents the following three trends in HRD research: (1) HRD has made strong inroads as an area of professional practice; (2) the field continues to use qualitative and quantitative tools relatively equally; and (3) the number of articles published in the field increased by 50% this past year. "Reflection-in-Action of a Research Partnership" (Wendy E. A. Ruona, Darren C. Short) outlines the learning points identified as key to successful research partnership projects by two researchers who spent more than 2 years in such a partnership. The papers contain reference sections. (MN)

2000 AHRD Conference

Research Methods in HRD

Symposium 40

Raleigh-Durham, NC

March 8 - 12, 2000

Utilizing Electronic Mail to Survey Human Resource Development Practitioners: A Comparison Between Electronic Mail and the U.S. Postal Service for the Purpose of Data Collection: Reducing the Costs of Bureaucracy

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Electronic mail (E-mail) has enabled researchers to collect data systematically from any location in the world in seconds, and charges for online services have been less than for postage and free to educational users. E-mail was utilized to solicit and collect data as part of a study of transfer of training strategies among industry trainers and supervisors. The findings hold implications for HRD researchers using E-Mail to collect data.

Keywords: E-Mail, Data, Collection

The utilization of the U.S. Postal Service (regular mail) has been more costly than the utilization of E-mail for data collection. Preparing a document for regular mail has been more difficult to edit and analyze, change, and sort than preparing a document for E-mail. Regular mail has also taken longer to deliver than E-mail. According to Thach (1995) response rates to surveys have been considerably lower using regular mail than with E-mail. Other problems found in using regular mail have included less honesty of responses and slower responses than E-mail.

Utilization of E-Mail

E-mail has allowed users with a computer, a modem, and an on-line service to transmit and receive information from virtually anyplace in the world (Steinfield, 1990; Zuboff, 1988). When utilizing E-mail for survey research, the user has been able to collect data systematically by composing questionnaires and delivering them to an online sample of the population. Respondents could then receive, complete, and return the questionnaire via E-mail. Research utilizing E-mail for data collection has been projected to increase because of the growth of online services throughout the world (Thach, 1995).

Strategies for Using E-Mail

E-mail has had four important features that make it useful for survey research:

1. 1.Messages could be transmitted to any location in the world in seconds (depending on the scope of the network).
2. Messages could be sent, read, and replied to at the convenience of the user. Participants could take their time to think about their response and answer when they were ready.
3. The intended receiver has normally been the only person who read the messages. Typically, there have been no secretaries or office personnel opening or sorting mail (there has been some change in larger organizations, however, where executives received over 100 E-mails per day and secretaries have been required to sort them). However, E-mails have had a better chance of being opened and read by the intended receiver than traditional mail might (Sproull, 1986).
4. E-mail messages have not required a hard copy, adding an ephemeral quality to E-mail that could not be duplicated by traditional mail. E-mail messages could be saved and printed to a hard copy at the discretion of the receiver (Sproull, 1986).

Limitations in Use of E-mail

The use of E-mail has been limited to populations who had access to the equipment required and had the knowledge to use the equipment. However, as technology improved and equipment costs and online fees have fallen, more diverse populations have had access to E-mail (Thach, 1995). Utilizing E-mail for research has had some potential problems, however. Data could be lost due to software or hardware problems. To overcome these types of problems, it has been considered prudent to make back-up copies of files (Synodinos & Brennan, 1988). As illustrated in Figure 1, Thach (1995) listed the advantages and disadvantages of using E-mail for mail surveys.

Technology has increased user expectations of format issues such as color, spacing, and location of items. These issues, on the other hand, were more easily addressed because of the possibility of sending colored surveys complete with graphics to users on networks for less than the cost to reproduce and mail colored copies of paper surveys. Technology has created more potential for development of effective questionnaire layouts and presentations in the future (Thach, 1995).

Advantages	Disadvantages
Cost-savings—less expensive to send questionnaires over online network than to pay postage for paper questionnaires or interviewers salaries.	Sample demographic limitations— population and sample are limited to those with access to a computer and online network.
Ease of editing/analysis—simpler to make changes to questionnaire after pretesting and easier to copy and sort data, since it doesn't have to be re-typed.	Lower levels of confidentiality—due to the open nature of most online networks, it is difficult to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality.
Faster transmission time—questionnaires can be delivered to recipient in virtually seconds, rather than days as with traditional mail.	Layout and presentation issues— constructing the format of a computer questionnaire can be more difficult the first few times, due to lack of experience for some researchers.
Easy use of preletters (invitations) — invitations to participate can be sent and responded to in a very short time, thus providing the researcher with an estimate of the participation level.	Additional orientation/instructions—extra instructions and even orientation to the computer and online system may be necessary in order for respondents to complete the questionnaire online.
Higher response rate—research shows that response rates on private networks are higher with electronic surveys than with paper surveys.	Potential technical problems with hardware and software
More candid responses—research shows that respondents will answer more honestly with electronic surveys than with paper surveys or in interviews.	
Potentially quicker response time with wider magnitude of coverage—due to the speed of online networks, participants can answer in virtually minutes or hours, and coverage can be global.	

Figure 1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Electronic Mail Surveys
Thach, L. (1995). Using electronic mail to conduct survey research Educational Technology, 35(2), 31.

Pretests

Pretests (pilot or field tests) could be sent directly to a small pilot group of users at virtually no cost and returned with suggested revisions in the same manner. Editing and revisions were also quicker than with hard copy, because the questionnaire was already developed using a computer format. Any changes could be made directly on the screen (Kiesler & Sproull, 1986; Synodinos & Brennan, 1988).

Confidentiality

Confidentiality has been an important issue in using E-mail surveys. Because electronic networks have been open in nature, it has been more difficult to guarantee anonymity or confidentiality to respondents than with regular mail surveys (Price, 1975). Most online services sent the E-mailrespondents' E-mail address along with the survey response, allowing the researcher to know who responded and how. Although this eliminated anonymity, it did not preclude confidentiality (Thach, 1995). In an anonymous questionnaire, no one knew the name of the respondent, not even the researcher. Confidentiality, however, has implied a promise that the researcher would keep the name and responses of the respondent confidential (Berdoe et al., 1986).

Cost-Saving

When surveys have been implemented online, postage fees have been avoided. Charges for online services have been less than for postage, and educational users of the Internet have not been charged for personal use time (Thach, 1995). Kiesler and Sproull (1986) reported that the cost-savings benefits of using E-mail for research will be one of the major reasons for the growth of E-mail in the future.

Response Findings

Response rates for E-mail have generally been found to be positive (Thach, 1995). Sproull (1986) found response rates from E-mail surveys to be 20% higher than hard-copy mail questionnaires.

Kiesler and Sproull (1986) found that E-mail respondents answered more items and made fewer mistakes on the questionnaire than their typical mail counterpart. In a later study, Walsh et al. (1992) achieved a 76% response rate to their E-mail survey using a random sample. That improved to a 96% response rate when a self-selecting group was surveyed. Online questionnaires have proved to improve speed of transmission. Rather than waiting for surveys to arrive by traditional mail, the online questionnaire could be delivered in virtually seconds (Sproull, 1986; Synodinos & Brennan, 1988).

Candid Responses

Kiesler and Sproull (1986) found that respondents tended to answer more honestly and with fewer social inhibitions than did comparison groups who answered paper questionnaires and/or face-to-face interviews. It was suggested that this type of candid responseis due to the shielding of social context of traditional communication. Many users have had the option of using alias E-mail addressnames which allowed them to disguise their identity. Although these same attributes were true of paper questionnaires, E-mail elicited morecandor (Sproull, 1986; Synodinos & Brennan, 1988).

Speed and Magnitude

Speed and magnitude of coverage of response rates have been much better than traditional paper questionnaires and interviews largely because of the large number of people on private online networks and the ability to send a large number of questionnaires out very quickly (Thach, 1995). The magnitude of E-mail has been growing to the point where many networks could reach remote locations around theworld and receive responses in seconds (Walsh et al., 1992).

Research Questions

1. Is there a significant difference between results from surveys sent by E-Mail and surveys sent by regular mail?
2. Is there a significant difference between results from surveys sent by E-Mail and surveys sent by the U.S. Postal Service with respect to the gender of the respondent?
3. Is there a significant difference between results from surveys sent by E-Mail and surveys sent by the U.S. Postal Service with respect to the experience as a human resource development professional of the respondent?

Methodology

Based on the findings in the literature, E-mail was utilized to solicit and collect data as part of a study of transfer of training strategies among industry trainers and supervisors who were members of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD).

The ASTD was chosen for this study of trainers and supervisors because of its claim of a membership of over 70,000 professionals in the area of training and development throughout the United States and other countries. ASTD has supported (a) professional growth and learning, (b) leadership skill development, (c) networking opportunities, (d) useful current information, and (e) training career opportunities for trainers, supervisors, and others in related professions.

Sampling Method

The sample used in this study was selected from a randomized list of trainers and supervisors provided by ASTD during the summer of 1998. Krejcie's and Morgan's (1970) Table for determining sample size from a given population was used to determine the sample size of 383 trainers and supervisors.

Response Rate

Out of the 383 subjects (383 original subjects less 35 subjects who stated that they were not interested in the study), 118 were completed and returned. Of the 118 returns, 7 were unusable, leaving 111 usable responses, yielding an overall 29% usable response rate.

Prior to the actual survey a pre-survey letter requesting participation was sent. From that request, 92 respondents indicated interest in taking part in the study, 35 respondents indicated that they were not interested in taking part in the study, and 205 were returned as undeliverable. Fifty-one subjects received the pre-survey letter but did not respond.

Of the 348 subjects remaining, the survey was sent via E-mail to 143 subjects (92 who had agreed to participate and 51 who did not respond), and 205 were sent via regular mail to the undeliverable E-mail group. Of the responses 59 were returned from the E-mail surveys (41% response rate) and 52 were returned from regular mail (25% response rate).

Results and Findings

Research Question One

Research question number one: Is there a significant difference between results from surveys sent by E-Mail and surveys sent by regular mail?

Total responses from each respondent group (E-Mail group and regular mail group) were compared to the non-respondents. A Chi Square was used to compare the respondents from the E-Mail surveys, the respondents from regular mail surveys, the non-respondents from the E-Mail surveys, and the non-respondents from regular mail surveys. Table 1 displays the actual response rates for E-Mail returned, not returned and total and for regular mail returned, not returned and total. The respondents from the E-Mail surveys were found to be significantly greater than the respondents from regular mail (2, 205) $X^2 = 9.795$, $p = .002$.

Table 1

Rates of Return from E-Mail and Regular mail Surveys

	Returned	Not Returned	Total
E-Mail	59	84	143
Regular Mail	52	153	205
Totals	111	237	348

$X^2 = 9.795$, N= 348, df = 1, p = .002

Research Question Two

Research question number two: Is there a significant difference between results from surveys sent by E-Mail and surveys sent by the U.S. Postal Service with respect to the gender of the respondent?

Mean scores for each respondent group and combined mean scores were used to determine any differences in responses with respect to the gender of the respondent. AChi-Square was used to compare the mean scores of the respondents who indicated that they were female to the respondents who indicated that they were male. There was no significant difference between the responses of the females and the males. F (1,107) p = .075.

Research Question Three

Research question number three: Is there a significant difference between results from surveys sent by E-Mail and surveys sent by the U.S. Postal Service with respect to the experience as a human resource development professional of the respondent?

Mean scores for each respondent group and combined mean scores were used to determine any differences in responses with respect to the experience as a human resource development professional of the respondent. AChi-Square was used to compare the mean scores of the respondents among the four experience groups (less than 3 years, 4 to 8 years, 9 to 15 years, and over 15 years). There was no significant difference between the responses of the four groups. F (3,107) p = .875.

Conclusions

The higher rate of response from the overall E-mail surveys (41% compared to 25% from regular mail surveys [a 64% improvement]) heavily exceedsSproull's (1986) findings that response rates from E-mail surveys were 20% higher than hard-copy mail questionnaires.

However, the findings did not support Walsh etal's (1993) findings of 76% and 96% response rates from E-mail surveys. As the literature suggested, when surveys have been implemented online, postage fees have been avoided, charges for online services have been less than for postage, and educational users of the Internet have not been charged for personal use time (Thach, 1995). Kiesler and Sproull (1986) reported that the cost-savings benefits of using E-mail for researchwill be one of the major reasons for the growth of E-mail in the future.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and from the studies ofSproull (1986) and Brennan (1988), E-mail data collection results would yield response rates similar to those of Walsh et al (1993) by (a) sending an E-mail letter to all subjects in the population who have E-Mail addresses asking them if they are interesting in participating, and (b) randomly selecting the desired sample size from those who agreed to participate.

New Knowledge for Human Resource Development Researchers

Utilizing E-mail for data collection, HRD researchers would be able to (a) improve response rates, (b) collect data in a timely manner, (c) collect data at a lower cost than other methods. Other benefits discussed in the literature review should also be considered.

HRD researchers using E-Mail to collect data are not restricted to the same limitations of sample size that might be experienced using regular mail. UtilizingE-Mail to conduct surveys saves time in preparing multiple mailings collecting data, and conducting follow-up mailings; saves paper and envelopes to enable hard copies of mailing materials; and saves postage.

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Trends in the Literature: A Comparative Analysis of 1998 HRD Research

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Contributions of the literature of the field are significant indicators of trends in the profession. Evidence of the direction of the field is presented in a qualitative analysis of the HRD articles published in 1998. The types of research articles and the sources of studies are compared similarly to the previous work of Hixon and McClernon (1999), and are classified by research journals, research methodologies, analytical and statistical tools, and organizational participants.

Keywords: HRD Research, HRD Research Trends, HRD Literature

This analysis is focused on journal articles that report research meaningful to both the theorist and the workplace learning professional, a category that has appeal to scholar-practitioners (Ruona, 1998; Leimbach, 1997; McClean, 1997; Watkins, 1994). The review extends the earlier analysis by Hixon and McClernon (1999) of research articles considered for a major award given by a professional association in the field of HRD. The review demonstrates the continuing increase in the rate of publication for HRD articles across a broad range of journals in related fields. Following a discussion of context and the rationale for such analyses, we describe methods used for this analysis and strategies employed in identification of articles to be included in the pool of research articles considered for the award. We then present and interpret our findings.

Context and Rationale

Human Resource Development (HRD) has established itself as a professional field with its own theory base, research and practice. It is ". . . a process of developing and/or unleashing human expertise through organization development (OD) and personnel training and development (T&D) for the purpose of improving performance" (Swanson, 1998). The literature of the field is a meaningful gauge of trends in this profession which has comprised the development of the individual, the group and the organization with a focus on relevant business results. HRD research is often published across a broad range of articles in journals associated with a variety of disciplines. An inventory of journals that published HRD research articles grew from twelve for the period 1990-1994 to twenty-two as identified by Sleezer and Sleezer in 1997, and reviewed by Hixon and McClernon in 1999. This indicator alone demonstrates an increase in the attention to the field by refereed research journals.

Scholars in the field have also paid attention to systematizing the process of review. By building on the work of Arnold (1996) and the Sleezers (1997), Hixon and McClernon provided a more consistent picture of the emerging field. Those authors categorized not only the research journals, but also the percentages of research articles by type, and the number of studies by participant source. They were therefore able to conclude that more HRD research was published in 1997; that a variety of journals published the articles; and that the relative types of research differed from those reported in previous studies (although not necessarily a trend). Their research also suggested to them that a more concise and comprehensive definition of HRD would result in the identification of literature that is more relevant to the field. The work of identifying and classifying the literature is continued by the present study. A comparative analysis of the HRD research literature published in 1998 has been analyzed and is reported here using the framework developed by previous authors.

Purpose and Methods

The purpose of this study is to review and report trends in HRD research literature that is interest to scholar-practitioners and that has been published in scholarly journals in 1998. Donavan screened and collected articles as the first phase of a search for research articles in HRD to be considered for a prestigious professional association award. Content analysis was used to determine similarities and differences to the findings of Sleezer and Sleezer (1997) and Hixon and McClernon (1999) as to: the research journals, types of research articles, the sources of studies, research methodologies, analytical and statistical tools, and organizational participants represented by the articles published.

The researchers employed content analysis to develop an integrative view of the trends in the HRD research articles published in 1998 that were considered for this award, and to then compare the results with previously published studies of similar HRD research. To achieve this goal, the literature was inventoried, and research articles were surveyed and categorized. Data collected for each article included in the review were: the research journal in which it was published, the institutional source of the study, the research methodology and tools applied, and the keywords used to describe the article. The resulting data have been analyzed and interpreted.

Inventory of the Literature

In order to systematically compare the 1998 HRD research to studies collected and analyzed in 1997 and prior years, the literature was selected for review using the criteria established by Hixon and McClernon (1999):

(1) The article was published in a refereed journal in [1998];
(2) The article addressed the practical implications of some issue of relevance to the practice of workplace learning and performance;
(3) The article was published in English;
(4) The article reflected systematic research;
(5) The article fit with Swanson's (1998a) definition [of HRD].

The process of identifying the research articles began with ABI/Inform, ERIC, and PsychLit, the same sources used by the Sleezers (1997), and Hixon and McClernon (1998), to review the journals previously surveyed. The abstracts and articles were matched to the criteria listed above. Additionally, Donavan used ProQuest and Article First to locate articles in journals not formerly referenced. The tables of contents of copies of journals suggested by members of the community of HRD academics and practitioners were manually examined as well.

Keywords that were used to search the databases came from HRD, OD, and T&D. The terms included: change management, employee development, human resource, human resource development, learning, management development, organizational behavior, organizational change, organizational learning, performance, research, return on investment, studies, training and development, transition, workplace learning.

A total of 101 potential articles were identified in 21 journals from all database and manual searches conducted. For those journals not previously known to be refereed, ProQuest was used to determine that criterion. In some instances, it was necessary to read the contributor guidelines to confirm that the journal was refereed. When Swanson's definition was applied, a total of 97 research articles in 15 journals proved to be relevant.

Categorizing the Articles

As each article was read, Donovan classified the article by journal title, the participant source, the research methodology and tools used, and the subject of the research. As had been previously done, the list of journals were compared to previous ones, first to Hixon and McClernon (1999) and then to Sleezer and Sleezer (1997). The types of research were matched to Arnold's (1996) typology. The industry or participant group was classified along similar lines to those used by Hixon and McClernon (1999). A new category, the occurrence of certain keywords to describe the articles in particular journals, was added in this study. The process of categorization did not involve other criteria such as quality of the research, length of the article, or whom the researchers were.

Findings

Analysis of findings yielded a comparison of current and previous journals reviewed and a list showing the distribution of research articles according to Arnold's (1996) typology and compared to Arnold's (1996), Sleezer and Sleezer's (1997) and Hixon and McClernon's (1999) data. The analysis highlights the number of studies by industry or participant source, similarly compared to data from the studies completed by Arnold (1996) and by Hixon and McClernon (199). In addition, a new analysis has been done of the areas of focus of the research.

Table 1. Comparison of HRD Research Articles in 1997 and 1998 Study Data Bases

Journal	Number of HRD Research Articles Published in 1998	Number of HRD Research Articles Published in 1997[1]
Adult Education Quarterly**	6	
Academy of Management Journal ++		1
The Academy of Management Review	0	1
Applied Psychology: An International Review ++		1
Educational Psychology ++		1
European Journal of Operational Research**	1	
Group & Organization Management	0	4
Human Relations	11	4
Human Resource Development Quarterly	16	7
Human Resource Management	4	1
Industrial Relations	0	3
International Studies of Management & Organization**	4	
Journal of Applied Psychology	5	4
Journal of Applied Behavioral Science	7	5
Journal of European Industrial Training ++		1
Journal of Management**	0	
Journal of Organizational Behavior	8	7
Journal of Vocational Behavior	0	5
Management Learning**	4	
Management Science**	3	
National Productivity Review ++		1
Organization Development Journal ++	0	4
Organizational Dynamics	8	1
Organization Studies	5	3
Performance Improvement Quarterly	10	4
Personnel Psychology	5	3
Public Administration Quarterly ++		2
Public Administration Review**	0	
Public Personnel Management ++		2
Training Research Journal ++		1
TOTAL ARTICLES	97	66

[1] Hixon & McClernon (1999)
**Not included in a previous study.
++Not included in this study.

Data analysis has resulted in a report of the distribution of HRD research articles by journal as shown in Table 1, which includes both the 1997 and 1998 data. The journals that published HRD research in 1998 included Human Resource Development Quarterly, Human Relations, Performance Improvement Quarterly, Journal of Organizational Behavior, Organizational Dynamics , Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, Adult Education

Quarterly, Journal of Applied Psychology, Organization Studies, Personnel Psychology. The number of articles published in each journal included (or omitted) from the 1999 and current studies is shown.

We repeat the caution here of Hixon and McClernon (1999) who noted that their study was not an exact replication of those previously conducted. This study, as well, differs from the others. It has used the same criteria for article selection, but the journals included in the study are not identical to those reviewed in either the 1997 study by the Sleezers or the 1999 work of Hixon and McClernon. As can be seen in Table 1, additional new journals in this review focused on adult and management learning, as well as on international studies. However, some journals not included were also international; several journals in 1997 that were not included here focused on public administration.

Type of Research

Each of the articles identified was categorized according to the typology of Arnold (1996). He characterized research using four classes: field or lab experiments, descriptive case of field studies, library research/speculative, and theoretical model or instrument construction. Among the 1998 articles analyzed, the distribution among these classes were: 11 field or lab experiments; 58 descriptive case or field studies; 15 library research/speculative studies; and 13 works on theoretical model or instrument construction.

A comparison of the occurrence of each type of research in Arnold's study (1996), Hixon & McClernon's study (1999), and the current study are shown in Table 2. Of the 1998 articles reviewed, 11% of the articles were field or lab experiments, as compared to 7% in 1996 and 20% in 1997; 60% were descriptive case or field studies, as compared to 53% in 1996 and 65% in 1997; 16% were library research or speculative, as compared to 35% in 1996 and 12% in 1997; and 13% were theoretical model or instrument construction, as compared to 5% in 1996 and 3% in 1997. The differences noted in the numbers of studies in each category to the previous year are not as marked as those found by Hixon & McClernon (1999). Experiments seem to be moving downward; and there are slight increases or decreases for field studies and library / speculative research. The largest increase is in theoretical model or instrument construction. As has been stated before, the selection of journals and the bias of the reviewers may account for the magnitude of these increases or decreases.

Table 2. Percentages of Research Articles by Type in 1996, 1997, and 1998 Study Data Bases

Research Type	Articles in Arnold's Study [1]	Articles in Hixon & McClernon's Study [2]	Articles in 1998
Field or Lab Experiments	7%	20%	11%
Descriptive Case or Field Studies	53%	65%	60%
Library Research/Speculative	35%	12%	16%
Theoretical Model or Instrument Construction	5%	3%	13%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

[1] Arnold (1996) p. 819
[2] Hixon & McClernon (1999) p. 900

Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research

The next analysis of the research studies determined whether the type of data, methods and tools were oriented to qualitative or quantitative research. A total of 46 articles reported using qualitative measures; that represented 47% of the studies. Quantitative measures were used by 51 of the studies; or 52% of the researchers. This is somewhat of a decrease in quantitative studies from Hixon & McClernon (1999) who had found 68% of the studies in 1997 to be quantitative and 32% to be qualitative. The vast majority of the current qualitative research were primarily interview studies and case studies. This may reflect an increased intellectual interest in constructivism and post-modernism which pay close attention to context and to the meaning that people make of their unique situations.

The quantitative studies were categorized using Arnold's (1996) list of methods: factor analysis, Chi square, ANOVA, correlation, means, proportions, variance and none. Of the quantitative studies reviewed most relied on simple measures such as means and variance. Factor analysis was used by 10 studies; ANOVA by 11; correlation by 25; and complex measures by 4.

Research Settings and Focus

Research setting and focus of articles reviewed in 1998 could, in part, be influenced by the selection of journals for review. Table 3 shows a comparison of number and percentage of studies by setting. A total of 59.8% of the articles reviewed in 1998 reported on studies conducted in business and industry, which is a large increase from Hixon and McClernon's (1999) review of 1997 research. Mixed organization types (combinations of business, education, government agencies) were used for 10.3% of the studies. Higher education accounted for 7.2% of the research reported. A total of 7.2% of the studies were done in governmental agencies. Another 7.2% of the articles reported no subject audience. The remaining 8% of the research articles included studies conducted in professional services organizations, healthcare settings, non-profits, and the community.

Table 3. Comparison of Number of Studies by Setting

Setting	Articles in 1998		Articles in 1997 [1]	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Business/Industry	58	59.8%	22	33.3%
Mixed Organizations	10	10.3%	5	7.8%
Education	7	7.2%	9	13.6%
Government	7	7.2%	9	13.6%
Unknown	7	7.2%	8	12.1%
Professionals	3	3.1%	2	3%
Healthcare	2	2.1%	2	3%
Non-profits	2	2.1%	0	
Community	1	1.0%	0	
Military	0		3	4.5%
Financial	0		4	6.1%
Proprietary Education	0		2	3%
TOTAL	97	100%	66	100%

[1] Hixon & McClernon (1999)

The research reported in 1998 was conducted in a variety of countries although the overwhelming majority (about 85%) of articles focused on studies completed in the United States. The remaining 15% of the articles reported research from the following regions of the world (in order of frequency): Western Europe, primarily the UK; Eastern Europe, including Hungary, Poland and Russia; Canada; the Far East, including China and Japan; and Northern Europe.

The research studies reviewed in 1998 focused largely on employees across the organization, from senior management and entrepreneurs to new hires. Table 4 articles shows the distribution of articles by area of focus using the following categories: learning theory and practice, performance, managerial behavior, change, diversity, business development, leadership development and practice, learning organization, technology, organizational culture, human resource development, instructional design, return on investment, and knowledge management.

Table 4. Percentages of Research Articles by Focus

Area of Focus	% of Articles
Learning Theory and Practice	22%
Performance	14%
Managerial Behavior	11%
Change	9%
Diversity	9%
Business Development	8%
Leadership Development and Practice	8%
Learning Organization	5%
Technology	4%
Organizational Culture	3%
Human Resource Development	2%
Instructional Design	2%
Return On Investment	2%
Knowledge Management	1%
TOTAL	100%

Discussion

The status of HRD research has been reviewed in this study. With the insights gleaned from this review, our comments will fall into two broad areas the state of HRD research as reviewed here and the limitations and difficulties of a study such as this one.

It seems that the amount of published research continues to grow, and that the number of journals that include HRD research have expanded. One cannot infer too much regarding trends from such a limited data set, especially given the differences between the data base of journals for 1997 and 1998. A few clear trends seem to stand out, most notable among them being the increase in number of studies in business and industry; and the paucity of research in English outside of the United States.

However, numbers alone do not tell the story of research in Human Resource Development. There is some variance in the nature and focus of the studies conducted, although it is difficult to say why these differences exist or to be sure that they are not due to the nature of the sample. On the other hand, studies of interest to scholar practitioners are bound to be sensitive to rapid environmental changes that might explain an interest in contextualized studies that provide descriptive analyses of forces within a given industry, sector, or employee base. Such exploratory research may eventually give rise to cross-case analysis. Additionally, postmodernism calls into question the very possibility of conducting large-scale causal studies with high levels of cross-context explanatory power.

Although findings with respect to setting and focus may well be influenced by the choice of journals, this analysis reports an increase in research with a focus on business and industry along with continued interest in studies in other settings. A decrease in the number of journals reviewed in the area of public administration may well account for the drop in studies considered here in the public and not-for-profit sector. One can speculate that the increase of interest in HRD in business and industry is caused by positive factors, such as an increase in understanding of the field of HRD and its potential for positive impact on business results; or the increasing influence of HRD practitioners, consulting both internally and externally; or the availability of resources for research given the strong economy. It is also possible that funding for HRD research is not as available in the other

sectors. Or that the number of practitioners working in those sectors is somewhat lower. Nevertheless, there are practical implications in many sectors and settings related to issues significant to the practice of workplace learning and performance. Is it possible that scholars in HRD are focusing more attention on sectors that promise more lucrative work? On the other hand, are there other reasons for the distribution of research studies? If so, what are they?

Continuing challenges to literature review in the field of Human Resource Development have become evident to the researchers involved in the current and previous studies. From our vantage point they can be grouped in three realms. The first of these is related to publication and availability of refereed journals. The second results from inadequate abstracts and the wide variance in the selection of keywords that identify articles. The final challenge is the experience and professional interests of the researcher.

Any comparative literature search of HRD articles to survey the work of the field is affected by the accessibility of journals and the availability of articles. The issues that appear to impact access are continued publication of the journal and the role of academic libraries in providing online or paper subscriptions. Several journals included in the 1997 and 1998 studies did not appear in library databases as this research was conducted. Individual academic libraries may subscribe to a limited number of publications. Contractual agreements prevent interlibrary loan of more than a single article from one issue of a journal.

The online research resources include, at the disposition of publishers, a citation, and/or abstract and/or full-text for an article. Authoring an abstract is an inexact process at best. In the early stages of this research, abstracts of more than 50 articles, for which full-text was not available online, were earmarked for possible inclusion in the study. Fewer than ten of those abstracts represented articles that met the criteria established. Most often the abstract did not differentiate a field or descriptive study from a theoretical article; or a position paper from model building. Literature studies were not distinguished from those involving human subjects. These shortcomings can easily result in the omission of articles when initial selection depends upon an abstract.

Researcher experience and professional interests are limitations that affect literature review as well. Special interests, previous research and practice often expose HRD scholars to certain segments of the field. In doing so, they are prone to recognize certain terminology, be aware of emerging trends, and examine particular literature. At the same time, other terms, trends and publications may lie outside of their practice. The selection of articles for inclusion in a study such as this is thus necessarily subjective.

Conclusions

Human Resource Development has made strong inroads as an area of professional practice. The field continues to use both qualitative and quantitative tools in a relatively equal balance. An increase of 50% in the number of published articles in the field occurred in one year. As the balance of interests and sources of research continue to evolve, we support continued process of self-examination. We must know more about the sponsors and venues that make research possible, and about the journals that are willing to publish it. We encourage future researchers to study the types of research being done, and to analyze those data in both comparative and in new ways. Both annual and five-year reviews would be beneficial to members of the field of Human Resource Development.

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Reflection-in-Action of a Research Partnership

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In an applied field like HRD it is vital that practioners be active participators in the research enterprise. To ensure that participation, HRD professionals must continue to explore and address the multitude of challenges inherent in research/practice collaborations. This paper reports two researchers' reflection-in-action during a 2+ year research partnership, and outlines learning points they have identified as key to successful research partnership projects.

Keywords: Partnership research, Theory-to-practice

It is commonly agreed upon that Human Resource Development (HRD) is an applied field driven by its practice. In recent years, there has been much lament about the disconnect between theory and practice, yet this gap only seems to be widening as the pace of organizations today steadily increases and theory continues to be labeled as invaluable for the practical problems that organizations face. Although this problem is extraordinarily multi-faceted, a certain contributing factor is the extent to which academics and practioners partner together to conduct HRD research.

Research and practice must be more strongly linked to ensure a solid foundation on which the field can build and be more successful in achieving its goals. Modern views of the relationship between theory and practice have helped to downplay, and many would argue entirely remove, the superiority of theory to practice. Rather, practice is and should be viewed as the starting and ending place for research. Carr (1980) urges us to no longer view "practioners as objects for theoretical inspection or as clients who accept and apply theoretical solutions" (p. 67), but rather to recognize that it is their "... active participation in the theoretical enterprise that is an indispensable necessity" (p. 67). Carr and Kemmis (1986) urge us to take a praxiological view of theory and practice— they are dialectically related and "to be understood as mutually constitutive, as a process of interaction which is a continual reconstruction of thought and action" (p. 34). In order to garner the active participation of HRD practioners in building and then using HRD research/theory, HRD professionals (both academics and practioners) must make great strides in improving the design and implementation of successful research-practice partnerships.

It is quite possible that the field's professionals need new models on which to build a solid research and practice partnership. One of the major contributors doing work to lessen the gap between research and practice has been Jacobs (1996, 1997, 1999) who is developing a model for partnership research, which he defines as the "process of improving HRD practice through research" (Jacobs, 1999, p. 874). With each revision of this evolving model HRD professionals are offered more specific advice on how to collaborate using a different model than that which has been commonly accepted and employed in past HRD research. The real emphasis of this model thus far has been on collaboratively defining a research study out of problems found in organizations.

Less work has been done around exploring the multitude of challenges inherent in research/practice collaborations. Leimbach's and McLean's rousing 1997 Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) town forum provided some insight into perceived challenges through both the eyes of the practitioner and the academic. Bassi (1996) also contributed in this vein in identifying motivations for partnering as well as "Deal Makers" and "Deal breakers" (p. 709). Nimtz, Coscarelli, and Blair (1996), Jacobs and Moore (1998) and Kehrhahn and Verrilli (1999) have all recently offered systematic case studies of corporate-university partnerships.

While a handful of other studies of HRD-specific research partnerships exist, and even many more within the broader social sciences, there is an on-going need to continue to surface and share critical reflections and lessons being learned by research partners. Bassi (1996) stated, "before developing a set of principles for guiding partnership research, it is useful to delineate the perils and opportunities inherent in partnerships" (p. 707). As a field, HRD must continue to expand its understanding of the unique challenges being faced by HRD researchers and practitioners attempting to partner to address organizational problems as well as to produce valuable research.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to contribute towards the effort of understanding more about research and practice partnerships in HRD. This paper will describe and document the course of a 2+ year research collaboration, exploring challenges faced, what was achieved, and key lessons learned from both the perspectives of the academic and the practitioner.

Methodology

The researchers, one a University professor and the other the Head of HRD Consultancy for a large British public-sector organization, began a partnership to address an emerging organizational problem as well as to conduct HRD research beginning first quarter, 1998. Parallel to this research, the authors studied the partnership itself. Each of these efforts is briefly described below.

The Research Project

The authors collaborated as part of an effort to contribute to the validation of an instrument entitled The Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI) (Holton, Bates, Ruona, Leimbach, 1998). During May to September 1998, the LTSI was administered in 40 non-residential, non-mandatory training courses that were at least one-day-long. Those courses were mainly "soft skills" and statistics. In total, 330 trainees were invited to complete the instrument, and 182 complied (a response rate of 55 per cent). Results of the inventory were analyzed and fed-back to the organization during late-1998 and early-1999. Efforts to act on the results of the LTSI are currently being developed and implemented throughout the organization.

Reflection on the Partnership

In 1983, Schön introduced the notion of an epistemology of practice manifested through reflection-in-action. Reflection-in-action is based on the premise that knowing is tacit and demands critical analysis and reflection to turn thinking back into action. Usher and Bryant (1987) describe how the professional employs reflection to:

> ...bring to the surface the implicit and tacit knowledge in the action which is integrated with that action and its outcome. The process involves an integral relationship between understanding (thinking), action (doing), and change. It is transactive in that an attempt to understand a situation through action leads to changes in the situation which themselves generate new understandings and renewed actions... . The metaphorical nature of the understanding enables problematic situations to be coped with by relating them to experience... As a result, new knowledge is being generated. (p. 205)

The purpose of this study was simply to share practice-derived knowledge that was gained through the course of this research partnership by these two research partners. During the past two years, the authors have engaged in reflective analysis (Boxer, 1985) about the partnership itself parallel to the LTSI project. Data was gathered through observation, dialoguing with each other (typically followed-up by written notes), exchanging e-mails, and each research partner keeping periodic personal journals. The researchers actively discussed, framed, and interpreted activities and results associated with the project and the partnership. These discussions plus any existing notes and documents were then analyzed to extract key themes that are detailed below.

The two-fold aim of our reflection-in-action was to (1) improve the LTSI research and the research partnership itself throughout the course of this still evolving partnership as well as to (2) more consciously analyze and document the partnership and the lessons that were being learned about conducting research in a practical setting. Schön (1983) explains that reflection-in-action is bounded by the "action present, the zone of time in which action can still make a difference in the situation" (p. 62). Much of what is shared in the next section of this paper did indeed impact the LTSI project directly as well as the nature of the research partnership at the time. Other lessons shared here bear witness to fresher learnings that we hope will impact our future actions as we continue to push the "reflective envelope" and the research agenda within the host organization.

Results

The reflection and analysis of the two-year partnership identified three broad themes of learning points. These were: (1) involvement and understanding within the organization (dealing with stakeholder groups, education, language, and champions); (2) designing research for practice (linking to existing systems and strategies; and strategies for marketing, dissemination, and implementation); and (3) partnering for success (partnership objectives, relations, opportunities, and challenges). These are all explored in the following sections.

Involvement and Understanding within the Organization

This research project highlighted the importance of key stakeholder ownership, their understanding of the research process, and their need for assistance when interpreting and using the research results.

Stakeholder groups. There were several key stakeholder groups for the LTSI project, other than the two researchers. Within the HRD department were trainers who would administer the instrument, HRD managers responsible for funding the project, and administrators responsible for data input. Organizationally other stakeholders included employees who would complete the instrument, training liaison officers who advise employees on training issues, and the organization's Human Resources committee who had the power to action changes identified by the research.

The project initially lacked an explicit strategy for managing the research-stakeholder interface and for developing a sense of ownership among all stakeholder groups. As a result, not all stakeholders received full and timely information about the research project and its progress which ultimately caused some resistance from stakeholders. For example, some of the trainers felt the project was an unnecessary addition to the HRD function's workload, some work areas outside of HRD showed little interest in the research and the findings, and there were doubts about whether the project would be funded beyond the initial research period. These could have been lessened had the affected stakeholders felt a greater sense of ownership and been strategically involved from the outset.

One method that should have been implemented much earlier in the process was to have enlisted several members of these various groups to act as champions and active participators. Although they were not all identified during the project, reflection has led us to believe that it would have been immensely useful to enlist a champion at the Board level to raise awareness of the research process and findings, a champion in the organization's HR committee to foster the implementation of the findings, champions in each of the main work areas to encourage employee participation, and champions in the form of key trainers to encourage participation of training participants.

Employees. In this organization, employees were viewed as a key stakeholder group as they would, after all, be invited to spend twenty minutes completing an instrument when attending a training course. Three methods were used to increase their sense of ownership: (1) the significance of the research was described to employees in a covering letter included with the instrument; (2) trainers gave a short verbal explanation of the research before handing out the instrument; and (3) a short article about the research was published in the monthly employee magazine. All three methods were delivered in commonsense and practical language used by employees rather than the language of research and academia. The hope was that the response rate would be bolstered by employees understanding of the reasoning behind the research and how the results would be used to benefit them and the organization.

Even after this effort, the response rate was only 55 per cent. Informal surveys of non-respondents identified several reasons. Most notable was that employees did not perceive much benefit for investing the twenty minutes necessary to complete the instrument. Also, some respondents only completed part of the instrument because of what they viewed as "the repetitious nature" of the items. Others reported that they could not see the link between the items and the improvement of learning transfer.

Language barriers. Language issues emerged in two distinct places during the project. First, items on the generic instrument had been written for use in a cross-section of organizations, but the generic language tended not to match that used commonly within this organization. Before administering the instrument, the researchers undertook an analysis of the questionnaire and changed references to better fit with the organization while also ensuring the validity of the instrument. Even with these types of edits, there were items and words that were difficult for some participants to understand.

Another place that a language issue arose was when delivering results to key stakeholder groups. Wording of factor descriptions was considered by many in the organization to be "academic" rather than "plain English". This created a barrier to understanding the results. Here again, to reduce these effects, the researchers translated the results into the language of the organization, and most documents containing summaries of the research results

contained such translations. In both of these instances, the researchers had not anticipated such difficulty with the language and had deemed the documents as relatively consumable. It was a challenge for both the academic and the practioner to have the organization continuously ask for more practical language and to try to fulfill these requests while also being clear and accurate and maintaining scholarly integrity.

Understanding research. This project drove home the importance of viewing the research process as educative within the host organization. Stakeholders in the organization required education on the research process and, most importantly, on accurately interpreting the results. The desire for practical and actionable results led to particular difficulty in three areas. First, was the tendency to overgeneralize given the sample size and strategy that had been implemented. Towards the end of the research, for instance, an interest emerged in comparing results between various courses, however the sample size for many individual courses was simply too small to produce reliable results at such a detailed level. It was also difficult to continuously remind stakeholders of the sample size in comparison with the population and to focus them on using the results effectively.

A second area that demanded extensive education was around the distinction between items and factors. Stakeholders tended to want to interpret results at the item-level rather than the factor-level, which violates the statistical intent of factors and can lead to ineffective action within the organization.

Finally, there was a need to educate stakeholders about the value of research and to help them gain patience for the process. In an organization experiencing much change, there was little patience, for instance, for what the researchers considered to be a thorough reporting of results. When stakeholders were provided with what the researchers considered to be succinct and thorough 5-10 page summaries of the results (derived from much longer reports), stakeholders reacted negatively and requested one-page summaries that were more like other business reports that circulate in the organization. Here again the researchers took steps to make the summaries shorter and more consumable, while also educating stakeholders to help them see the value of a longer description and its accompanying valuable detail.

Designing Research for Practice

Design of the research project is a critical component of its success. When researching in a practice-setting it is important that special considerations be factored into the design. Four critical strategic issues in this vein were identified through this project: (1) the importance of linking the research with existing strategies, (2) the need to support the organization in designing implementation strategies, and (3) the need for a systematic strategy for disseminating research findings.

Links to existing strategies. The partnership research experience highlighted the benefits of building the research into existing strategies and systems. The LTSI was viewed in the organization as a tangential research project. Consequently it operated independently of existing systems, although its results were interpreted in light of outputs from existing systems and its findings were used to adapt existing systems.

This perceived independence negatively influenced stakeholders' perceptions. For example, some key stakeholder groups only began showing an interest in the research after being presented with the first results which illustrated the potential of using the LTSI. This then created interest at a senior management level, and resulted in additional funding for an expansion of the LTSI program. One way of linking it into existing strategies would have been to position the research from the outset as helping to explain the differences between the organization's existing evaluation results at the learning and behavioral levels, which was an organizational problem that was already gaining some critical attention. This was not done and the momentum that this could have contributed could simply not be recovered.

Finally, the LTSI instrument was not presented to course participants and other organizational parties as a part of the existing evaluation system already in place at the organization. It was marketed as a research project and consequently viewed as separate from the evaluation systems already in place. This was a particular challenge because part of the reason that the LTSI was set-up to participants this way was due to procedures around informed consent and wanting to ensure that LTSI participation remained voluntary. If it had been able to be done differently, it may have been easier to work it more seamlessly into existing systems.

Implementation of research findings. The current project also emphasized the need for organizations to have a timetable and systematic strategy for implementing research findings. In this project, the results were made available to the HRD function in November 1998, however actions to address identified problem areas were only beginning to be planned in Spring 1999. Barriers to earlier implementation included the lack of a supporting champion in key committees within the organization and a view within stakeholder groups that the research results were of long-term importance rather than requiring immediate attention. Not having a solid plan to act on research results only reinforced stakeholder perception that research was an "extra" thing to do.

Another barrier that was uncovered during the time that researchers delivered results to the organization was a perception that the research, and thus addressing the findings of the research, were the responsibility of the HRD function rather than of key people/functions in the organization. Stakeholders perceived HRD ownership for a combination of several reasons including: poor marketing by HRD of the benefits of the research to the organization, HRD initiation of the research without more intense subsequent development and involvement of stakeholders, and HRD sole-funding of the research. To a lesser extent, the perceptions of ownership by some managers reflected a deeper assumption that employee training and development are the responsibility of HRD (rather than of those managers).

Dissemination. The research experience also highlighted the importance of the organization needing a systematic strategy for disseminating research results. Different stakeholder groups have varied needs for detail, timing, and format. In this project, it became clear that one format could not satisfy every stakeholder group— some formats provided too little information and others too much information. Different dissemination methods were therefore adopted. These included presentations to managers, materials for training courses, white papers for HR committees, and Powerpoint presentations for trainers. Although this approach increased stakeholder access to research information, the design and dissemination of the various formats was labor-intensive and time-consuming, especially for the internal researcher. The critical strategic disadvantage however, was that the full details of the research findings were primarily made available only within HRD (although were available on request to others). The main "experts" on the research findings were HRD employees, thus supporting the perception that this research was HRD-owned rather than owned by managers and employees.

Marketing. The marketing of the research process has been a recurring theme throughout this paper, and merits recognition as a powerful lesson learned. Marketing is absolutely critical to the success of a research project inside an organization. Along with learning to conceive of the research process as educative, the researchers also learned how important it is to effectively market the project. It became clear that these researchers had much to learn about getting the message out there in an effective, engaging way. Some of the things that were done to address this included using a variety of internal mechanisms (e.g employee magazine), adapting formats and level of detail presented to various groups, and trying to keep the research project visible.

Partnering for Success

Reflecting on the two years of research collaboration, a few main issues emerged as important in influencing the quality and effectiveness of the partnership.

Mutual roles and goals. The two partnering researchers were aware and explicit from the outset that the research was seeking to address two sets of objectives. The first set came from the organization and included:

- that outputs be sufficiently robust for practical application;
- that the project be kept within financial resource limits;
- not placing an undue burden on HRD trainers and administrators;
- not requiring course participants to spend too long completing the instrument;
- working within organization timeframes;
- moving the research through its various stages only when necessary financial support was secured.

The second set of objectives came from the desire to contribute to the validation of the LTSI instrument. This required academic rigor on data collection methods, sufficient sample size, using the instrument as originally designed rather than too adapted for the organization, discipline in administration of the instrument, and data management.

In this project the partners were fortunate that, for the most part, the academic's goals and those of the practioner were quite compatible. As Jacobs (1999) advises, it was important to define and discuss these at the beginning of the partnership and ensure that the goals of each researcher are not mutually exclusive. This was a relatively easy task in this project because the academic's goals were rather minimal in that the research activity was simply the administration of the instrument. Beyond that, much was negotiable to easily accommodate the organization. This flexibility also allowed the researchers to pursue the secondary and tertiary research questions depending on various levels of organizational commitment.

Another thing that emerged as a powerful theme during the analysis of this research partnership was how the academic and the practioner involved in this project both positioned themselves as *researchers*. A review of the literature has shown that it is not uncommon in case studies describing research/practice partnership to clearly differentiate between the "researcher" and the "practioner". This was not done during this project, and it

fundamentally shaped the project and the partnership. Rather, each partner involved here was viewed as an HRD professional who offered a specific set of competencies, expertise, and resources and who's primary goal was to research and then contribute new knowledge to the field of HRD. The practitioner of the team is an active and developing scholar with a clear commitment to research. The academic of the team was, of course, highly motivated to research, while also striving to be an excellent practioner. So, when necessary, each of the partners worked hard to put on the "researcher" hat or the "practioner" hat. These roles and their responsibilities were shared as much as possible rather than delineating specific things to a specific role because one person happened to work in academia and the other in an organization. Due to this, mutual goals included wanting to ensure robust and actionable findings for the organization and, for instance, the goal of publishing article(s) together related to this project.

Viewing the roles as shared in this way also emphasized the importance of each partner educating the other throughout the process. From the academic's perspective, that included providing key (but certainly not *all*) information on the research process, research design detail (such as sample sizes), the interpretation of results (for example, interpreting item-level and factor-level results), and on the publication of results. From the practitioner's perspective, that included providing important (but once again not *all*) knowledge about the organization, on the stakeholder groups, advice on issues of timing and how much to "push", and on how best to communicate aspects of the research project in the organization. All of this was negotiated with both partners holding both sets of goals as equally important and by seeing each role as central to achieving those goals.

Building and sustaining the partnership. The experience highlighted the importance of three factors in the building and sustaining of a successful research partnership. First is simply the issue of time. Relationships take time to develop, and time is necessary for the partners to learn about each other's values and beliefs, working styles, objectives, and goals. Such an understanding emerges over a period of working together, and effort is needed to maintain the relationship once built.

Second, frequency of contact was very important to these researchers during this project. Building the partnering relationship required regular contact, both in the planning of the research and during the subsequent stages. Regular contact allowed both researchers to explore each other's experience of the research in greater depth than would be possible with occasional dialogue. In this project, it was noticeable that the momentum was greatest around the time of a planned contact between the two researchers and tended to slacken if the gap between contacts was too great.

Finally, trust is a central tenant of this partnership and the researchers invested the energy to ensure it. In the case of this research, trust was developed through frequent open dialogue about the research process itself. This included making plans, airing any concerns that emerged, and diligently working to clear up any confusions.

Working "virtual". This partnership research was completed across a four thousand mile divide between the academic in the US and the practitioner in London. This introduced a few special challenges. For instance, the project was rarely discussed face-to-face, so we committed to regular telephone calls (arranged around the six hour time difference between MN and the UK). Much of the communication between the researchers was via e-mail, which led to delays in responses and a need to anticipate activities/events.

Another big challenge was that the researcher was unable to visit the organization or meet any of the stakeholder. She thus had to rely on the practitioner researcher for all contextual information and, from the organization's perspective, key stakeholders never met the academic researcher, which meant their relationship with the research was exclusively with the internal partner. The latter consequence could have influenced stakeholder perceptions of the research. None of these problems were sufficiently large to cause major problems, but all added (in one way or another) to the challenges of partnership research.

Implications

Merriam (1986) once stated that "research and practice... can each be enriched through closer contact with each other". Closer contact, though, brings with it inherent challenges and these must be explored. This reflective piece from two researchers is not any kind of model for effective partnerships— but it does document some of the lessons learned in the course of administering and acting on results of the LTSI at this large public organization. These implications for other researchers to consider as they design and implement their research partnership are offered in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Key Lessons for a Successful HRD Research Partnership.

INVOLVEMENT AND UNDERSTANDING IN THE ORGANIZATION
• Identify and enlist the support of main stakeholder groups. Pay particular attention to budget holders, stakeholders within HRD, key decision makers outside of HRD, and employees who will be invited to participate.
• Create a strategy for developing champions for the research project within HRD, in key committees, and within work areas. Involve them as much as possible in the design and implementation of the process.
• Reach out to employees who participate in the research and help them to see the value of their participation.
• Use the language of employees - avoid the language of research and academia where that creates a barrier.
• View research in applied settings as an educative one. Be ready to educate, educate, educate! Stakeholders and champions need education about many aspects of the process (objectives, timeline, resources) and must be helped to understand the process and its value.
• Educate key stakeholders and champions about research design in advance of research implementation so that they understand the implications of design issues. (e.g. sample size, generalizability, etc...)

DESIGNING RESEARCH FOR PRACTICE
• Where possible, link the research project with existing organization strategies and systems.
• Develop an implementation strategy with the involvement of key champions to increase support for early consideration of findings.
• Be clear from the outset who/what function must be primed to act on the findings of the research project. Involve them in the research design and implementation.
• Begin planning to take action on the research findings during initial design of the research project.
• Develop a systematic dissemination strategy that provides each stakeholder group with the right level of detail in a language they will understand, and at the right time.
• Develop a comprehensive marketing strategy based on the needs of various stakeholder groups and utilizing different delivery formats and varied levels of detail (based on those needs). – Access internal communication avenues to market the research (e.g. employee magazines). – Keep the research visible throughout the research process, particularly during data collection and analysis stages, when stakeholder groups may otherwise see less in terms of progress. – Market the research in the language of stakeholder groups, avoiding academic language. – Emphasize the practical benefits of the research to stakeholder groups.

PARTNERSHIP
• Explicitly identify each parties objectives at the outset and design the research to best address all mutually-agreed upon goals. Within those objectives, include the organization's financial and non-financial resource constraints, organizational timeframes, and the desired utility of results beyond the immediate organization.
• View both (all) partners as researchers, rather than "researcher" and "practioner". Share the researcher role and responsibilities.
• Work to build and sustain an effective trusting relationship over a long period of time, based on frequent contact and an awareness of each others'motivations and goals for the research and the relationship.
• Take advantage of the development opportunities of working with each others, accepting that each brings different knowledge, expertise, and experiences to the partnership.
• Anticipate and address challenges presented by partnering long-distance (such as logistical problems like time differences, lack of face-to-face contact between partners, and lack of contact between the academic partner and key stakeholders.

Limitations and Conclusion

The findings reported here are not to be overgeneralized. Once again, the purpose of this paper was simply to share practice-driven knowledge that these two researchers have gained and applied during the course of this evolving

research partnership. These findings are specific to this situation and these researchers, and the lessons that have been extracted are necessarily limited by the state of development of each of these researchers.

However, it is hoped that, like other pieces of this nature, the results will help other HRD professionals who are working together as research partners "to engage in reflective observation and dialogue about their own efforts" (Kehrhahn & Verrilli, 1999) and encourage them to share their learnings with others so that we may all continue to develop additional specific expertise around research partnerships.

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