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ABSTRACT

Despite increased attention to learning within the workplace and investigation into the distribution and nature of learning-related activities, how these trends have impacted the role of human resource (HR) professionals has been less extensively examined. Studies examining their role indicate that HR development (HRD) positions name traditional responsibilities associated with an orthodox training role--instruction, program design, and administration. Some HRD professionals are expected to provide advisory and diagnostic services, perform expanded training oriented roles, handle organizational change or development, analyze needs, conduct skill audits, and advise on individual career development. Later studies have reflected expanded roles. Personal attributes essential for senior positions are flexibility, tenacity, and capacity to accept challenges and question the traditional way things have been done. Arguably, the role of HRD professionals now requires an acute awareness of the business of their enterprise, a strategic focus, and flexibility in modes of delivery along with skills associated traditionally with training and development. Areas of uncertainty concerning the nature of this area as a career field are whether the role is more strategic; whether the role is enhanced or degraded; how outsourcing affects HRD as a career field; the challenge of knowledge management; and organizational positioning. (Contains 20 references.) (YLB)

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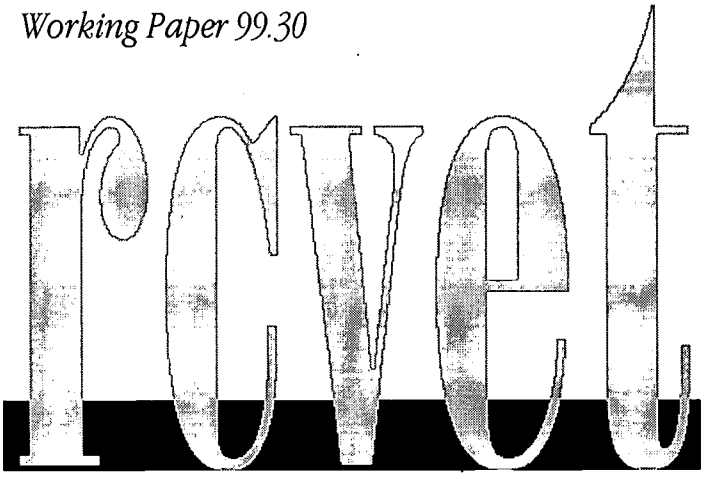
Working Paper 99.30



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The position of Human Resource Developers in the new learning landscape: a discussion paper

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An intensified interest in learning in and for the workplace has emerged over the past decade in Australia as learning increasingly has been identified as a determinant of the competitiveness of both organisations and the nation generally. Evidence of such a trend is apparent from sources including government policy documents, commissioned research, academic journals and texts through to organisational mission and policy statements. As part of this growing interest Australia has witnessed legislation directed towards the up skilling of Australian workforces, the revision of vocational educational systems, the vocationalisation of the school curriculum and the movement of community education sector into the vocational field. Similarly there is evidence of large and medium sized organisations searching for and sometimes embracing strategies that foster new forms of learning amongst their employees which are often linked with performance management or total quality management approaches. The comments of Robinson and Arthy (1999,vi) reflect dimensions of this current interest in learning in Australian workplaces when they state:

> There is considerable evidence, on the surface at least, that there is already an extensive "training culture" in Australia. Most medium and large enterprises in Australia provide some kind of training to the employees- spending over $4 billion annually on training. Over 80% of employed people receive some kind of training from their employers. Nearly 1.5 million Australians re-enrol in a publicly funded vocational education and training program each year. The real question is how to turn all this activity into a genuine learning or training culture where continuous learning and new skills become the drivers of our economic future.

Robinson (1999,1) drawing on Australian Bureau of Statistics data, also reports that:

> a widespread training culture is prevalent among large enterprises , whether they are private businesses or public sector organisations. Most medium sized enterprises also provide some kind of training to their employees. The same cannot be said for small-sized enterprises, particularly micro-business.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 1998a) research shows that, from an organisational perspective, most development undertaken in organisations could be classified as on the job training. This type of development was undertaken by 6.3 million (60.4%) of the economically active component of the population. This research also indicated that 25% of the economically active workforce undertook in house training courses with their employers. It could be argued, therefore, that over the past decade, there has been both an increase in the amount of training and development provided in organisational settings, as well as more extensive research and reporting on the amount and distribution of such activity.

There has also been some significant research examining both the drivers of such activity as well as the learning and skill formation practices used in individual enterprises (eg. McIntyre, Petocz, Hayton, Noble, Smith and Roberts, 1996; Smith, Hayton, Roberts, Thorne and Noble, 1995). These studies, which involved in depth examination of 42 enterprises and a survey of 1760 enterprises, suggested that training activity in Australian organisations was triggered by more operational concerns such as the introduction of new forms of work organisation or new technology rather than more strategic concerns and was significantly influenced by a range of moderating factors that were often unique to each enterprise. Findings from these studies also revealed that industries differ in the amount of training that they engage in and the way in which they do it and that, within any given industry, enterprises shape their own course (McIntyre, Petocz, Hayton, Noble, Smith and Roberts, 1996,7).

Another facet of this increased interest in learning in the workplaces is concerned with fostering organisational learning as opposed to individual skill formation as dimension of organisational activity and a driver of organisational competitiveness . While determinants and features of such learning often vary amongst those theorising this concept and much of this literature is prescriptive with a potential for more rhetoric than reality, there is evidence in some of Australia's leading enterprises of change processes fostering increased commitment and shared learning (Dunphy, Turner and Crawford, 1997; Field and Ford,1995). Field and Ford(1995) claim the overriding goal in such enterprises has been to "translate the general rhetoric of organisational learning into reality - detailed concepts, new learning opportunities, new ways of working, more harmonious employee relations and more positive work attitudes. (1995,35). Dunphy, Turner and Crawford(1997), arguing from a strategic management resource based perspective, more specifically assign the achievement of such organisational learning to ensuring that managers have been developed in a way that they acquire skills in both engagement competence and business technology competence. Engagement competence, they argue, includes competence in commitment formation, motivating and enthusing, enaction, integration, communication and pathfinding: business technology competence is seen as including financial, operational and technical competencies. They claim:

> For learning organisation, the development of engagement and other reshaping competencies is critical. These are the competencies that enable the organisation to adapt to change overtime and thus are necessary for continuing corporate performance. Their development and use is the central process in organizational learning (240).

Despite such increased attention to learning within the workplace and investigation into the distribution and nature of learning related activities there has been however a less extensive examination of how these trends have impacted the role of those who have had a designated responsibility for such activities in organisations and this area as a field of professional practice. This paper is designed to raise discussion on this aspect of the intensified focus on learning in the workplace.

For the purposes of the discussion the paper therefore focuses on those whose their prime organisational responsibility involves the design, provision, management or co-ordination of learning and development activities or initiatives within organisational settings. As such it is seen that this discussion should encompass those involved in enterprise training (be it technical, procedural or more behavioural), staff development, organisational learning and development and performance improvement consultancy or with other positional labels

that reflect dimensions associated with learning in organisations. For the purposes of this discussion the labels Human Resource Development and Human Resource developer will be used as an umbrella term to encompass the broad "church" of those practising within this field of practice.

SOME STUDIES EXAMINING THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPERS

A number of studies which have had a focus on the roles of Human Resource developers or, at least a part focus, form a starting point for such discussion.

One interesting study by Moy (1991a,b) provides some insights into the area. In 1989, Moy (1991a, 1991b) conducted an analysis of positions vacant in the field of HRD through an examination of 819 HRD positions vacant advertisements taken from 4 major newspapers on prime employment advertising days from 3 states. Data from this study revealed that, while at least 12 job labels were used to describe positions associated with this field of practice, the traditional responsibilities associated with an orthodox training role such as of instructing /facilitating (64.83%), program design (51.65%) and administration (25.64%) continued to rate highly as key responsibilities nominated in the advertised positions. She also reported a trend towards the HRD professional as a provider of advisory and diagnostic services being affirmed by the ratings for internal consulting (31.38%) and analysing needs/ skills audits (26.4%). The data further revealed that the majority of organisations at this time were seeking practitioners able to perform expanded training oriented roles rather than broader HRD roles in that comparatively small numbers of advertisements sought applicants with skills to provide individual career development, organisational change /organisational development, policy implementation and strategic HRD planning.

Further analysis of advertised positions, which had been newly created, however, yielded a slightly different picture. The study of a 196 of such positions (23.93% of total sample) showed that the most frequently mentioned responsibility areas included organisational change/ development (55.36%), analysing needs and conducting skills audits (30.41%), advising on individual career development (28.57%) and strategic HRD planning (27.59).

Other findings reported from this study (Moy 1990b) suggest that organisations advertising HRD positions placed greater emphasis on identification of desired competencies and personal characteristics than educational qualifications. HRD practitioner competencies sought were broadly based and included subject expertise and business understanding rather than having a narrow focus on function specific HRD skills.

Dunstan conducted another study examining practitioner roles in this area in 1993. This study reported findings from 233 practitioner respondents representing both private and public sector from a range of industries. The study revealed some findings, which were similar to Moy's in that they showed a continuing training/trainer emphasis associated with this role in organisations. Dunstan, in fact, asserts of this professional field, "there is no indication here of the shift to a broadened 'HRD role' or the greater role specialisation envisaged by Stace"(36). Dunstan reported

> Many of the findings reported here point to a marginalised role for T and D practitioners. Despite the prevalent rhetoric of senior managers, employee training and development is not

central to business goals of most organisations. There is no evidence from this study to support a view that "training and development" is undergoing transformational change of the kind described by Stace (986) or Dunphy and Stace (1990).

Some later studies of examining the role of HRD practitioners however reflect a greater degree of role expansion. The first by Johnston and Anderson (1988) focused on perspectives of organisational practitioners using a small sample of 33 practitioners (with between 6-20 years experience) who all identified themselves as operating within the field of HRD, although, like the previously discussed studies, none used this nomenclature in their positional labelling. From this snapshot study it could be seen that the most common practice of these practitioners continued to be orthodox (classroom based) training. These respondents, however, identified other common practices as including program evaluation, one on one training and assisting with the implementation of change. Respondents also indicated that other significant tasks were assessment of performance, career planning activities, facilitating team development, process improvement and provision of internal consultancy services. Additionally several respondents stated that they undertook tasks traditionally associated with the personnel function including, payroll administration, award interpretation, recruitment and counselling as well as training resources development, and maintaining training record systems.

Participants also were asked to explain ways in which they perceived their roles had changed in recent years. The most commonly identified change nominated by these practitioners was the need for a closer linkage between HR activities and the core organisational directions as well as the need to demonstrate greater accountability for achieving outcomes related to organisational goals. In reflecting on change participants also reported a diversification in the range of development strategies they were using. Newer approaches nominated were the use of more outsourced provision of training and the use of learning centres and individualised learning plans. Several respondents also reported much greater involvement by managers and line supervisors in HRD activities. Many respondents' anticipated that they would need to address issues associated with both the introduction of new technologies within their organisations and the use new technologies for delivery of learning experiences. Others commented of need to continue to manage change and to provide much more performance related training. Several respondents foresaw an ongoing need to justify the maintenance their area of professional activity as a specialised function.

This study also investigated respondents' perceptions of the competencies, which they saw as critical to practice. Skill in communication (which included skills in negotiation and group management as well as general communication skill) was seen as the most critical competence. A second cluster of critical competences nominated included the traditional skills areas associated with training provision. These included skills in instruction, facilitation, program design and training needs analysis. A third cluster of skills included competencies associated with organisational awareness. These included planning and administration skills as well as skills related to general organisational awareness.

While this study indicates that some of the skills associated with a traditional training role remain salient for the contemporary HRD practitioners, there is also some evidence of an expansion in roles played within this field and a need for more strategically oriented practice.

A second study (Johnston, 1998) more directly suggests a broadened role for practitioners from this field. This study focussed on critical competencies of senior HRD practitioners. In depth data was gathered from 9 participants occupying senior positions in HRD. These participants were nominated by an executive recruitment firm specialising in HR/HRD recruitment and selection. All participants were practising in large organisations in metropolitan NSW and represented industries including banking, construction, insurance, information technology. The practitioners from this study had had careers in the public, private and not for profit sectors and in a range of industries. Seniority was marked by different characteristics. For some participants it included management of a team of more junior practitioners. For others, seniority resulted from access to the most senior members of the organisation, or responsibility for large budgets.

Findings from this study indicated that senior practitioners perceived there was a need for them to have an extensive understanding of the business of the enterprise in which they were operating. This included the need for a clear understanding of business strategy, the way the management team operated, the goals and business drivers, and then the related capacity to quickly establish the relevance of HRD practice for organisational direction. This was also expressed as a need to operate strategically both in terms of the business goals and the agendas of senior decision makers. They identified the specific skills they required as including influencing skills, which were seen as imperative to gain, top management "buy in" for programs. In a related vein, respondents nominated skills in establishing their own credibility which was often related to being able to "articulate clearly across the board table the key things driving the business", highly developed presentation skills and skills in relationship management. Respondents frequently discussed the need for relationship management skills with more senior decision-makers, which allowed them as the HRD practitioners to be seen as partners in establishing organisational goals rather than as subservient supporters in achieving organisational goals. Such relationship management also involved working with peers, subordinates and clients, partners and suppliers. Some comments typifying this position included:

> You've got to look into what the business wants...Intellectually (CEOs) understand the need to develop people but unless they have actively seen it happen or got bottom line results they do not understand or care. You have got to be appealing to how you link into those corporate goals the whole time

and

> It's (HRD) is hugely about relationship management and it's about having those networks and being in touch with them and being able to manage this and not being just a servant in the relationship but to use input from the process to feed upward into management and then achieve the outcomes the organisation needs.

All respondents also indicated that the senior HRD practitioner required a capacity for both understanding and managing change.

Respondents were also asked to discuss the personal attributes they saw as being essential for practice in senior positions. Most frequently mentioned were the capacities to be flexible and yet, at the same time, tenacious. Several indicated that other important attributes required were both the capacity to accept new challenges, with the anxiety that comes with such a stretch, along with the capacity to question the traditional way things have been done within the organisation in the past.

The more strategic dimension of practice which is so apparent in the previous study and some of the shifts in practice in the Johnston and Anderson(1997) study are also reflected in a report of a professional association focus group meeting on the career field reported by Kostos in 1998. The focus group comprised learning and development professionals with varying levels of responsibility from within both large corporations and small businesses. In reporting the results of this small study Kostos argued that there was a definite shift in the skill requirements of people involved in training. She stated,

The biggest change was in the area of trainer to consultant. Learning and development professionals need to become more consultancy- focussed. The learning and development function has moved towards a business driven focus, therefore learning and development professionals are now required to be more aware of the broader business issues in order to make the linkages in the delivery of learning (19).

This study also suggested the need for high level skills in consulting, communication, analysis, resource management and project management; the need for HRD staff to become the facilitators of learning rather than delivers of training with a detailed understanding of the entry level knowledge and skills to their learners as well as expertise in behavioural transformation approaches, organisational development and managing change and a flexibility in terms of approaches to delivering training as well as the provision of other learning solutions. Further, participants stated that practitioners needed the capacity to manage cultural diversity, to more effectively manage their knowledge and know how in order to add value to the organisations.

This group suggested that issues confronting learning and development managers were not very different to those confronting all learning and development professionals except that learning and development managers needed to have access to " the big picture" and have a clear understanding of the organisation's business objectives. They also needed the capacity to develop relationships with senior managers in order to be involved with strategic development and planning process.

The position advanced in Kostos article resonates with findings from Johnston and Anderson (1997) and Johnston (1998). There is also some resonance with findings from a more extensive US survey carried out by American Society for Training and Development briefly discussed below.

This study of practitioners in the US, completed by the American Society for Training and Development in 1996, could be seen as reflecting the need for an expanded range of competencies for practice in this field. Based on a comprehensive survey of its members, the report was entitled "Competencies for HRD Practitioners". The labelling, in itself, could be seen as representing a significant shift as the study was conducted to update an similar study in the 1980s which used Training and Development as opposed HRD as a label This 1996 study, like its antecedent, defined the range of professional competences that its member practitioners saw as necessary to meet the demands of a changing society and the changing workplaces in which they were working. The critical roles respondents identified included: providing performance support services (which required competences in all interventions not just training); using technology for delivery support interventions (which required competencies in technology planning and implementation); managing

human performance systems (requiring an ability to apply business system skills), promoting continuous learning at individual, team and organisational levels, and managing change processes (requiring capacities with technologies that facilitate change and change management consulting). The report argued that the critical competencies for practice included: an awareness of industry or corporations which included an understanding of vision, strategy, goals and culture and how to link HRD practice with organisational goals more than ever before; management skills including leadership skills; understanding the customer focus and project management skills; interpersonal skills and technological literacy (AITD, 1996).

Of interest from this study is the seemingly increased focus on awareness of business and the need for the integration of practice with organisational direction and a broader range of capacities than may be traditionally associated with training roles in organisations.

UNCERTAIN DIRECTIONS AS A CAREER FIELD

It is arguable, drawing on evidence from the studies discussed above that there is some indication of a shift in the role required of HRD professionals within organisations. It would seem, that, as this role is being currently articulated, there is an increasing need for practitioners to have an acute aware of the business of their enterprise and a strategic focus as well as a capacity for flexibility in modes of delivery along with skills associated traditionally with training and development. This perspective of the need for the adoption of expanded and more diverse roles by HRD practitioners is certainly evident in writings of those advocating that organisations strive towards becoming learning organisations, with some writers arguing the concept of the learning organisation forms an integrating vision for the field of human resource development and its practitioners(Watkins and Marsick, 1992).

However it could also be agued that there remain many areas of uncertainty concerning the nature of this area as a career field given the dynamics of the new economy despite the increased activity and attention related to learning in organisational settings. Some of the areas that need further examination are now explored.

Is the role more strategic?

One area of uncertainty and indeed contradiction in the research about the role of HRD practitioners is concerned with the assertion that HRD practitioners need to operate more strategically. While some of the studies (Johnston, 1998; Kostos, 1998; Johnston and Anderson study, 1997) discussed earlier and much of the HRD literature report the need for a strategic competence there was certainly contrary evidence from the early years of the nineties of the lack of this focus within the HRD role in practice. Kane, Abraham and Crawford in 1994 indicated that training and development activities were not always used in the most strategic or purposeful way. They report from a study of 53 top 500 revenue organisations that there was a lack of relationships between training and development activities and other HRM or organisational variables and that such activities tended not to be an outcome of organisational strategy formulation even when organisations were extensively involved in training and development (130).

In a similar vein the Smith and Hayton (1999) drawing on data from the research study discussed earlier in this paper (McIntyre, Petocz, Hayton, Noble, Smith and Roberts, 1996) argued that training and development activity in enterprises was not a driver of change but in fact an operational response to other change drivers which included workplace change, introduction of new technology and quality assurance. Such forces provided the impetus for training. They argue from their study,

> The relationship between training and business strategy was not straightforward. While the survey showed that 75 percent of the enterprises had a business plan and that a further 75 percent of the respondents claimed that the business plan contained provision for training, the case studies revealed a more complex situation. For many of these enterprises, the growth in competition was a recent phenomenon (as tariff barriers were dismantled and the Australian economy deregulated) and was only beginning to focus management attention on the need for strategy. Training was not regarded as a strategic issue in itself but as a requirement to help support the changes that emerging strategies brought (p.263).

and

> The process of strategy formulation was only in its infancy in most enterprises investigated and the direct connections between strategy and training were, to all intents and purposes , non-existent (p.269).

While the above finding puts enterprise training marginally within the strategic loop within some organisation it certainly does not provide evidence of the foregrounding of development activities as a direct response to the changing economic environment and the resulting business strategy despite increased training activity.

Such contradiction between the assertion that human resource development activities and practitioners need to be strategic and findings suggesting that organisations were only remotely if at all including such activities as part of the strategic loop suggests that this is an area that requires further investigation. Is this linkage more proposed that real, more an "I wish" position of HRD literature and many practitioners than a reality of organisational life? Or more optimistically are we beginning to see this requirement as a faintly emerging feature within this field of practice as its practitioners increasingly recognise a need to add value to the organisational endeavour? If so, are there signs which indicate that the HRD function and HRD practice has gained a more strategic status ? Is this recognised in the positioning of the function within organisations? Is practice in this field becoming more integrated with other strategic human resource management approaches? And further, what are the specific skills competencies required by practitioners to assist in such a movement?

An enhanced or degraded role?

A second dimension concerning uncertainty of directions for this area as a career field that needs to be more closely explored pertains to the area of the HRD practitioners and the prevalence of on the job training. The ABS study reported by Robinson stresses this is the most significant component of structured training activity within organisations. There is also a plethora of evidence indicating that team leaders and line managers are being required to take on an increased and explicit responsibility for development of their immediate reports. Position descriptions and industry competency standards documents for a range of occupations often foreground the role of facilitating learning in subordinates and

team development as key competencies for employees who have attained supervisory status.

Such positions raise a set of questions about the nature of the role being played by those whose prime concern is learning and development, the HRD specialists, in such employee or team development. For example, has this opportunity to involve team leaders supervisors or managers in learning led to the integration of HRD within the organisations as a central activity and produced a genuine learning training culture, or, has this movement dissipated HRD area as a specific organisational function and hence a diminished career role for its specialist practitioners? Are specialist and developed skills and qualifications in learning being required of team leaders/ supervisors and managers or recognised as being important for generating the new forms of learning required or has the involvement of these stakeholders been limited to development of routine reproductive task skills? Has there been an increase in training activity within organisations which has not necessarily led to the development of a learning cultures? What is the relationship between those who have development of others as part of their role and those whose prime role is fostering learning? Does this explain the focus on developing internal consultancy skills with HRD practitioners working in a consultative capacity with those in part time development role or have HRD practitioners, with their set of specialist skills, been marginalised in the process of such up skilling and development of learning within organisations?

For a more transparent picture of this as a career field closer examination of these dimensions of practice is warranted to clarify both the nature of what an internal consultancy role in HRD means and the relationship between the roles of those who are full time development personnel and those who are part time.

How is outsourcing impacting on HRD as a career field?

A further challenge to this area as a professional field could be seen as emerging from the uses of external consultancy services by organisations. There is extensive reportage of the growth of servicing arrangements as the nature of work changes across all industry areas. This is frequently seen as one of the by products of the emergence of the information age with its call for organisations to establish structures which accommodate those with the core organisational competencies required by an organisation and outsource those areas that are peripheral to the organisation and can be delivered on "just in time" or" just as needed" bases.

Several research studies referred to earlier(the Johnston and Anderson(1997); Johnston(1998) Anon, ASTD,1996) studies indicated to a perceived need on the part of HRD practitioners for external consulting contracting competency . The Kostos(1998) study highlighted consultancy skills as critical requirements for those in the profession. Smith and Hayton(1999,265), in more detail, also more specifically report use of external suppliers. They argue new process technologies training was in most cases supplied by the vendor of equipment in the organisations they had studied. Enterprises looked to the vendor for training of key personnel, often a mix of engineers and shop floor employees who would in turn be responsible for training other staff involved in the new process. Given this situation what role is played in the process by the designated HRD practitioner, and how is this process impacting on the area of a career field? Is this movement an

example of expanding opportunities within the field? Can we see , for example, manufacturers of processing technologies taking on more responsibility for developing a cadre of learning experts, just as they have developed and deployed marketing experts to market their process technology? Is this process seen as creating additional and different career opportunities for learning professionals, or, is such developmental activity being seen by the providing organisation as a tangent of the selling function where the prime focus is follow up sales service rather than a service about fostering learning?

Similarly questions could be asked about the emergence of the phenomena of instituting workplace based degree programs provided predominantly and accredited by tertiary education institutions as part of the learning process in organisations. This is a model increasing used as part of a management and executive leadership development strategy. On the one hand such activities may provide an increased focus on learning within organisations. Has, however, this process contributed paradoxically to the de-institutionalisation of the HRD function within the organisations? In so doing has the approach contributed to de-professionalising the role of practitioners, much, as some have argued, as the process has contributed to the de-institutionalisation of university study? Questions can also be asked about using externally based change teams to bring about organisational change. The use of an external change agent has been long associated with processes of organisational development and has also seen as a way of bringing about change, without the negative baggage, if such change has been or is associated with downsizing and driven internally by the HR department. However, how has this practice impacted on the nature of HRD as a professional field and its position as an institutionalised function within organisational settings? Has this use of external consultants opened up new career opportunities for those with specialist skills in learning, or, in fact diversified the field to such an extent, that the specialist learning requirement often associated with change is subordinated to other areas of expertise? At a time of lean staffing. has this approach to change reduced the career opportunities for HRD practitioners located within organisations and allowed those with expertise in fields other than learning to assume a prominent role forcing the learning dimensions of change programs into the background despite the fact that change is seen to be about new learning?

Alternatively has this trend provided new career opportunities for practitioners who align themselves with broking agencies or establish themselves as viable single owner operator businesses and if so what skills do such practitioners need in this new form of working with organisations?

Similar questions can also be asked about to the increasing use of online intranet services and computer based training packages. It may be that the use of alternate technologies of learning has changed the role a of HRD practitioners in organisational settings and significantly altered their contribution to the individual skill formation process.

The challenge of knowledge management

Another challenge potentially confronting HRD practitioners is their response as a professional group to the growing emphasis placed on knowledge generation and management in organisational settings as a determinant to competitive positioning . It has been argued that the concept of knowledge management represents attempts to provide a

more tangible grasp on the concept of the learning organisation. With this refinement placing the responsibility for implementation of knowledge management within the management function (CCH, 1997) where then is HRD fitting within this arena in Australian organisations? While there is some evidence of HRD practitioners and their activities as being aligned with knowledge management practices in the US literature (Stuller, 1998;Davernport, De Long and Beers,1998) in what ways are HRD practice and the role of the HRD professional being linked with these processes within organisations? Is this another example of a shift in ownership of an area resulting in further possible marginalisation of HRD as a career field? Are HRD practitioners confronting this phenomenon and redefining their activities and potentially reinventing themselves and their role in relation to this process?

A question of organisational positioning

The research and writing about this field of practice has been extremely quiet about positioning of HRD within organisations. Smith and Hayton as mentioned earlier have indicated the weakness of linkage between business strategy and training and development. While respondents in Johnston study (1998) clearly advocated that there was an ongoing need for influencing decision makers, they were in very senior positions within organisations who obviously had "invited" HRD to the board table. Where is this field located in most organisations? How central is it to other organisational functions? Is the diversification of practice and involvement of multiple internal and external providers influencing the positioning of HRD in organisations and, if so, what further differences is this making to the nature of practice? Has this positioning changed in recent years as a result of the growing attention to HRD?

CONCLUSION: RESEARCH ISSUES

This discussion has raised a broad range of questions about the profile of HRD as an area as a professional practice. Certainly many commissioned research studies have shown an increase in training, development and learning activity within organisations, albeit often focussed on immediate short term ends. We have general pictures about the distribution of training activity and some indications about the nature of some forms of development, however, in the process there has been less analysis and reportage of the impact on specialist careers and positions in this field. Questions remain as to whether the field provides opportunities for HRD strategists predominantly working at a corporate level with many of traditional roles associated with learning being picked up by non learning specialists or external contractors?

Further, research needs to clarify whether HRD as an area of organisational practice has gained a heightened profile within organisations given the prominence of learning in much organisational literature, or, almost paradoxically, has the focus on learning, traditionally sought as an outcome in organisations primarily by HRD practitioners, in fact become so much a province shared with other non specialist members of organisations that there has been some devaluing the skills of learning specialist? Given these possible scenarios closer examination of the extent to which such specialists have needed to either expand their core competences and even reinvent themselves professionally in order to accommodate the new types and modes of learning so required by organisations. Answers to these questions may yield a more complete understanding of the nature and quality of the training and

learning culture that is emerging in Australian organisations and provide insights which can inform policy formulation which may assist in promoting forms of learning that become drivers of our economic future.

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