

## Human Resource Development in Newspaper Recruitment Advertisements: A Resource for Curriculum Design

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*This paper explored HRD-related job advertisements in the state of Arkansas over a five-year period. This analysis was part of the curriculum revision process for a graduate Workforce Development Program at the state's "flagship" university. Classified advertisements from newspapers of major cities across the state were examined to determine if changes in recruitment terminology represented the changing needs of business and industry and if the curriculum of the graduate Workforce Development Program reflected those needs.*

Keywords: HRD, Human Resources, Recruitment

Arkansas, like other rural states, faces major challenges inherent with increasing economic growth and development while mitigating poverty. Poverty impacts the entire state but is more pronounced within specific regions, such as the agriculturally based and less densely populated south delta. Existing data show that the employable workforce in Arkansas is inadequately educated to meet current and future needs of business and industry. The percentage of adults in Arkansas with a bachelor's degrees or higher was 16.6 percent — lower than the U.S. average (SREB, 2003).

Research supports the notion that the changing landscape of global economies requires employees to become more knowledgeable and technology-savvy in order to compete for and maintain continuous employment. The economic problems facing Arkansas, especially in the depressed rural areas, require developing a better-trained and educated workforce. The process of planning programs to transform Arkansas's economy is literally an HRD issue. Higher education plays a crucial role in supplying business and industry with employees that are competent to meet the demands of diverse work environments. In a rapidly changing economy, HRD activities such as training and development assume greater significance to organizations (Bartlett & Porter, 2001; Ulrich & Lake, 1990). Therefore, academic programs that prepare HRD professionals are compelled to ensure that competencies taught are aligned with competencies needed and sought out by business and industry.

To evaluate the alignment of current programmatic content with competencies needed by business and industry, the data from this research functioned as a resource for revising a graduate Workforce Development Program at the state's "flagship" university. By comparing the HRD skills and positions for which business and industry were soliciting, the curriculum could be revised to better reflect the changing needs of employers within the area. The stakeholder evaluation and environmental scanning are well-established practices in program planning and assessment. Data from a comparison of HRD-focused classified job advertisements could document the need to adjust programmatic content to meet employer needs.

### Problem Statement

While empirical evidence exists regarding the increasing role of HRD in organizational transformation, no research in the State of Arkansas currently exists to show the extent to which training, training & development, career development opportunities, and organizational support enhancement opportunities are made explicit in job advertisements. In the last five years, Arkansas has experienced rapid population and economic growth in the Northwest region. This, due in part to the phenomenal growth of Wal-Mart, the largest and most profitable private organization in the world which is headquartered in Northwest Arkansas. To better serve this retail giant, a number of international manufacturers and vendors have established sophisticated "teams" in the area to ensure that the Wal-Mart – supplier relationships flourish and that profits increase. Given that in 2003, Fayetteville Arkansas was rated the top city in the U.S. with respect to growth and diverse, stable economies (Milken Institute, 2003), it seemed reasonable to assume that considering the state's changing demographics, escalating global penetration of businesses within the state, and its expanding economic development, that the HRD-related skills that employers needed had

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also changed. Therefore, the primary objective of this study was to determine the degree to which recruitment advertisements from organizations' within the State of Arkansas made explicit references to the role of HRD in job descriptions or required skills. Classified job advertisements from 1997 and 2001 were compared to determine if there was an increased number of references to HRD over the five-year period and how those references differed, and possibly identifying trends that will impact the profession and the institutions that prepare HRD professionals.

The data from the study were intended to be used by faculty members at the state's flagship university to help determine if ongoing curriculum revisions within a graduate Workforce Development Program were aligned with the espoused needs of business and industry within Arkansas. The classified advertisements were one of many data sets used to assess stakeholders' needs during the curriculum revision process within the university.

### **Research Question**

One primary research question guided the study. This exploratory study analyzed the changes in HRD-related terminology and job descriptions that business and industry solicited in classified advertisements in the years 1997 and 2001. These changes were then analyzed to evaluate the degree to which the current graduate Workforce Development Program at the state's flagship university was aligned with the espoused needs of business and industry.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Organizations scan the environment in order to understand the external forces of change so that they may develop effective responses which secure or improve their position in the future, to avoid surprises, identify threats and opportunities, gain competitive advantage, and improve long-term and short-term planning (Choo, 2001). Environmental scanning as part of program planning and evaluation is commonplace. Reviewing the changes in job postings associated with HRD-related functions over a period of time is a form of environmental scanning. Choo (2001) states that "Environmental scanning includes both looking at information (viewing) and looking for information (searching)" ( p. 1) . A number of studies have found environmental scanning linked to organizational performance (Choo & Auster, 1993; Ptaszynski, 1989). In this study, the researchers looked for differences in the way HRD-related jobs were advertised and described in classified advertisements in 1997 and 2001 to identify trends that could assist faculty in curriculum development.

Stakeholder evaluation, the process of analyzing the perceptions and preferences of those that are impacted by a particular service or event, is a response to manage the mercurial nature of customers. Higher education is not immune from this pressure. A recent report by the University of Twente (2001) discusses how institutions of higher education, due in large to the network economy, are forced devise efficient methods to meet the demands of business and industry, the local community and society at large. The report suggests that adaptive organization that monitors its environment, identifies trends and key actors with whom to relate (stakeholders), has sufficient intra-organizational flexibility to respond to need of it stakeholders and constituents is more likely to remain competitive.

While the importance of HRD activities to organizational health is well documented, there is limited research regarding the programs offered by academic institutions to prepare future HRD professionals (Kuchinke, 2001). Abbot (1988) suggests that as the field matures, university degrees and other credentialing programs become critical to preparing HRD professionals. Kuchinke (2001) points out that given the decentralization of education accreditation within the U.S., there is no national body charged with identifying and maintaining the skill standards and professional certification of HRD professionals. While many institutions have used the extensive research of McLagan (1983) to guide the development of curricula skills and competence ties for HRD programs, Baylen, Bailey, and Smardzija (1996) found that programs focused primarily on training roles of HRD practitioners and barely covered the more strategic roles such as budget/cost analyst, strategic planner, manager of change, and performance technologist Kuchinke (2001).

In the spirit of continuous improvement, similar to those used in business and industry, some educational institutions have adopted a multi-rater assessment method to evaluate existing programs and identify trends among stakeholders. Triangulating data sources allows cross-validation of findings from different individuals and groups who have been identified as accurate sources of information (Willis & Kahnweiler 1995; Atwater & Waldman, 1998). Collection and analysis of job recruitment advertisements provide information regarding powerful stakeholders, the potential employers of HRD students. To consider employer needs that are reflected in job announcements is consistent with stakeholder methodology of assessment and evaluation.

Because this study explores HRD-related job advertisements, we must consider the research regarding expectancy theory and motivation. Expectancy theory assumes that motivation is a process of conscious choice and

that people choose to put their effort into activities they believe they can perform (Desimone, Werner, & Harris, 2002). Therefore, the language and descriptors used in job advertisements influence a person's perception of their ability to perform and could, therefore, influence their inclination to apply for these positions. This is an important antecedent to the psychological contracts and the social exchange theories that Bartlett & Porter, 2001 & Blau, 1964 discuss regarding job advertisements. The degree to which there is a perceived match between the needs and expectations of employers and employees depends on there being a shared meaning of the terminology as it relates to performance and ability. For this to occur, job advertisements should correspond with the expectations of those seeking employment in a given occupation. Whenever a match occurs, there is the expectation for each party to maximize their objectives.

## Method

The methodology employed in this study was patterned after a similar study by Bartlett and Porter (2002). In their study entitled: *the role of training and development in newspaper recruitment advertisements*, Bartlett and Porter explored at a national level if firms were more likely to mention training and development opportunities in their newspaper advertisements. Our study focused on how job advertisements could help in the curriculum reform process of a graduate Workforce Development Program. While macro level studies are important, there is need for micro level studies to shed light on what is happening at state levels. Just like the Bartlett and Porter (2002) study, the researchers in this study thought by including human resource development in recruitment advertisements, business firms in the State of Arkansas would be demonstrating their commitment to the human resource frame of organizations (Bolman & Deal, 1997) and suggesting trends that would be beneficial to the curriculum redesign of an academic program.

Research in the field of human resource development and recruitment advertisements has established that opportunities for career growth have been ranked high among job attributes by job seekers (Bartlett & Porter, 2002, Jurgensen, 1978). This is in line with the human resource frame that focuses on the need to provide opportunities for job growth and advancements as a powerful way of developing human resources in organizations. For instance, Barber and Roehling (1993) established that job postings with more detailed information were more attractive to prospective applicants than those with less details. Redman and Mathews (1995) found that newspaper advertisements had changed over time to reflect the changing job duties of human resource development managers. The only study known to focus on the wording of recruitment advertisements in relation to references of employer provided training and development was conducted by Bartlett and Porter (2002).

Content analysis was the primary method employed to gather data in this study. Data pertaining to frequencies and percentages were collected to establish if references to training and development in newspaper job advertisements in the state of Arkansas occurred more frequently in 2001 than in 1997, a five-year period. The researchers relied on content analysis technique of Kassarian (1977) and Bartlett and Porter (2002) to examine the exact text in the newspaper recruitment advertisements. Thus, content analysis has been defined as "being a scientific, objective, systematic, quantitative, and generalizable description of communication content" (Kassarian, p.10). It is also noted "this method of inquiry is well established in marketing, social psychology, political science, and consumer research, yet no evidence exists within the HRD literature" (Bartlett & Porter, 2002, p. 807). In order to establish HRD-related advertisements were more frequent in 2001 than in 1997, a five-year difference, classified job advertisements from newspapers of seven major towns in Arkansas with a population over 30,000 people were examined. The researchers also analyzed the changes in terminology in the job ads from these two years to determine occupational trends within the region. Given the accelerating change within organizations and in the field of HRD, a five-year period was considered adequate to notice increased usage of HRD terminology and analyze changes in terminology in job listings.

### Sample

The procedure for selecting the towns to be studied focused on giving every town with over 30,000 people an equal and independent chance of being included in the study. The analysis was limited to the main newspapers from seven major towns in the state of Arkansas. The U.S. census (2000) data were used to identify towns having a population of or greater than 30,000 people. Table 1. shows the main towns studied, populations, region, primary newspapers, and the leading economic activities.

### Procedures

The newspaper recruitment advertisements were read and classified by the absence or presence of the following HRD terms: training opportunities, training and development opportunities, development opportunities, career development opportunities, tuition reimbursement policies, and organizational support enhancement opportunities.

Table 1. *Population in Arkansas Towns and the Primary Economic Activities 2001*

Counties	Cities	Population	Region	Newspaper	Economy
Craighead	Jonesboro	47,008	NE	Jonesboro Sun	Manufacturing Trade, service
Jefferson	Pine Bluff	57,074	SE	Pine Bluff Commercial	Agriculture, Trade, Service, Government
Pulaski	Little Rock	177,086	Central	AR Dem-Gazette	Service, manf, trucking
Pulaski	N. Little Rock	62,838	Central	AR Dem-Gazette	Service, manf., Trucking
Sebastian	Fort Smith	72,803	West	SW Times Record	Man., trade, utilities
Washington	Fayetteville	42,754	NW	NW AR Times	Trucking, poultry, manf.
Washington	Springdale	30,279	NW	Morning News of NW, AR	Trucking, poultry

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2000).

Additionally, the recruitment advertisements were examined for the presence of the following key terms associated with HRD: personnel manager, production manager, benefits manager, human resources, content developer, program designer, director of human resources, human resources manager, manager of human relations, chief learning officer, learning and development, performance management, organizational management, director of change, human capital manager, knowledge manager, and chief learning officer. The analyses of these terms was considered important in terms of comparing what business and industry solicits and what our own HRD programs were offering prospective practitioners. The Mullins library at University of Arkansas keeps all the Sunday papers, including job advertisements. With the assistance of the library staff, all the papers for the two years were identified. The relevant pages were all copied and read by the three researchers who subsequently highlighted the relevant recruitment advertisements. A total of 41 job postings fit the research criteria and were included in this study.

## Results

An unexpected outcome of this analysis was a decrease in the number of HRD-related classified advertisements in 2001 when compared to 1997. Out of the 41 total number of job postings that fit the criteria of the study, only 10 were from 2001. The remaining postings were from 1997 advertisements. While the scope of this study did not include determining why there was an increase or decrease in HRD-related jobs, there are several possible explanations for this phenomenon. One explanation could be the decline in newspaper subscriptions over the past 30 years. The Baltimore Business Journal citing a recent study indicated that nationwide readership dropped to 54.7 percent in 2000, down from 60.7 percent in 1997 (2002). The Silicon Valley / San Jose Business Journal reported that in 2001, 45.3 percent of those who responded to a media research survey covering 85 markets within the U.S. were not exposed to local daily newspapers and local daily newspapers struggle to keep 45 to 50 percent of adults as readers (2002).

Another explanation for the decrease in the number of HRD-related print job postings in 2001 could be linked to the increasing number of employers that post jobs electronically. Many employers now have links on their own web sites that display employment opportunities and others use independent employment web sites, such as Monster.com. According to a recent article in the Silicon Valley / San Jose Business Journal, those who consistently access newspaper web sites are more inclined to go to Monster.com than to the employment section of the daily newspaper that they regularly access (2002). Results of data analysis for HRD-related job postings for 1997 and 2001 are summarized in the following sections: type of organization soliciting HRD-related job, job titles, primary duties specified in the recruitment advertisements, qualifications, and required work experience.

### *Types of Organizations Soliciting HRD-related jobs*

The types of public and private organizations that used print-based media to solicit job applicants represented: education, health care, information technology, retail, manufacturing, services, and consulting.

### *Job Titles of HRD-related job postings*

The job titles used to advertise these positions included: HR manager, HR generalist, assistant director of HR, personnel supervisor, recruitment manager, project advisor, education liaison, training coordinator, benefits administrator, training supervisor, education manager, services director.

### *Major Duties of HRD-related jobs*

The major duties of these jobs used the following descriptors: occupational and educational development,

program development, training development, training facilitator, benefits administration, compensation development and management, staffing and employee education, coordinate staff education, education advocate, relationship management, labor relations management, policy administration, recruitment development, salary and benefits administration.

#### *Qualifications*

The following is a summary of the various qualifications that were required for the positions: demonstrated leadership ability, teaching skills, computer skills, goal oriented, clinical administration, management experience, labor relations, highly developed communication skills, assessment development, motivated, self-starter, supervisory experience, business experience, resilience, and bilingual.

#### *Education / Experience*

Of the 41 advertisements included in this study, only three (3) did not require a college degree. The other 38 required a college degree and six (6) either required or preferred a graduate degree. All 41 job postings required between two (2) and seven (7) years of related experience.

#### *Changes in Terminology*

When the job postings from 1997 were compared to those from 2001, there was no appreciable change in the terminology used to solicit jobs. Clearly, with only one quarter of the job postings from 2001, no trends were identified that might benefit curriculum development. However, when the entire 41 job postings were considered, there were several indicators that need to be considered when competing program design.

While the data clearly indicate that employers are asking for skills in training, training and development, program development, these skills are not well reflected in our graduate programs. Current workforce development programs within the institution use the language of vocational education and adult education, not training and development and organization development. This study enabled the researchers to see a disconnect between the language of program offerings and the skills and competencies for which business and industry were asking. This analysis led to the creation of the Task Force on Curriculum Reform within the department to further examine this phenomenon. This task force will focus not only on content, but how we can provide our students with bone fide HR experience as a part of the curriculum. This will involve not only programmatic changes, but necessitate the development of external partners from business and industry who can provide incubators for experience.

## **Discussion**

This study raises several areas that need further exploration to explain why job advertisements referring to HRD did not substantially increase over a five-year period. One possible explanation is that a disconnect exists between the vocabulary among business, industry, and academia regarding HRD skills and competencies. For example, having good oral and written skills may signify a person's ability to lead change in the mind of prospective employers. Business and academia may be speaking languages when it comes to describing HRD skills. Another possible explanation could be that many of the strategic skills that HRD practitioners should cultivate are less quantifiable than those that can be tested or documented. Strategic abilities such as those associated with change agent are less easily demonstrated in the job application process. In other words, metrics to evaluate the level of strategic skills may not be known to the prospective employer. Still another possible explanation is that the majority of businesses within the state are not "high tech" enterprises. While production and service sector businesses certainly have a need to develop human capital, the degree to which they depended on employees for strategy differs from those within the high tech fields that are born and thrive on the fringes of innovation.

While existing literature supports the notion that organizations now recognize the value of providing training opportunities to their employees (Bartlett & Porter, 2002), no advertisements cited in this study mentioned the availability of training opportunities to the prospective employees in their advertisements. What emerges clearly in the job advertisements is the demand for employees with training, training and development and program development skills. This information is important for curriculum design purposes. Implications from the results of this study suggest that HRD scholars should work closely with HRD practitioners, HR managers and recruiters in terms of developing programs that meet the needs of business and industry. It is obvious from the results of this study that training is becoming important among the recruiters.

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