

National Human Resource Development: A Multi-Level Perspective

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Although there are have been some studies on National Human Resource Development and HRD practices in certain countries, literature shows that we have just scratched the surface in terms of the number of countries we know about. This exploratory study reviews research associated with HRD policies and practices in Brazil, China, India, Italy, Japan, Lebanon and Qatar. National policies on HRD were examined and a comparison of HRD practices in selected countries was made.

Keywords: National HRD, Comparative HRD, International HRD

Huge advances in the sphere of information technology has enormously increased the sharing of, and access to, information amongst countries. The impact of this information revolution can be seen in the way Human Resource Development is viewed today. HRD, as a field of academic study, owes its origins to the United States (Metcalf & Reese, 2005) but the popular definitions used in the US are limited in their scope because they are focused solely on organizations and are not comprehensive (Kuchinke, 2003; McLean, 2004). A holistic approach to understanding HRD would be one that includes concerns for national or global needs (McLean, 2004). Current efforts to explore human resource development policies and practices in different countries are guided by this approach.

This paper explores HRD policies and practices in seven countries: Brazil, China, India, Italy, Japan, Lebanon and Qatar. The study proposes to compare and contrast HRD practices and policies in these countries. Considering the extremely diverse and complex political, social, ethnic and economical nature of these societies, it will be valuable for HRD scholars to understand how Human Resource Development systems operate in these countries.

Problem Statement

McLean and McLean (2001) laid the framework to understand HRD in a national context and provided the impetus for exploring HRD in other countries. In the last few years, many studies have attempted to look at HRD at a national level. Exploratory studies about HRD policies and practices in Brazil, Canada, China, Kenya, Korea, India,

Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Philippines, Poland, Singapore, South Africa, St. Lucia, Sultanate of Oman, Taiwan, United Kingdom and the United States have been conducted (Ahn & McLean, 2006; Budhwar, Al-Yahmadi & Debrah, 2002; Dirani, 2006; Hasler, Thompson, Schuler; 2006; Cooper, 2004; Lien & McLean, 2004; Lutta-Mukhebi, 2004; Yang et al, 2004; Ke, Chermack, Li & Lin, 2006; Rao, 2004; Rangel, 2004; McLean (2006), Nijhof, 2004; Paprock, Yumol & Atienza, 2006; Szalkowski & Jankowicz, 2004; Osman-Gani, 2004; Lynham, Cunningham, 2004; Scotland, 2004; Lee, 2004; McLagan, 1989). There have also been some training and development focused studies in Asia (Alzalabani, 2002; Yadapadithaya & Stewart, 2003) and Europe (Heraty & Collings, 2006; Hytonen, 2003; Lehner & Dikany, 2003; Lucio & Stewart, 2003; Skule, Stuart & Nyen, 2002). In many of these countries training and development is considered a part of HRD.

While the studies listed above indicate the progress HRD research has made in exploring HRD policies and practices in countries across the world, it also indicates that our current knowledge of HRD is limited to countries in North America, Europe and a few in Asia. This means that there are many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America whose HRD policies and practices are yet to be explored. Further, what we know of countries that have already been explored, is limited and disjointed (Metcalf and Reese, 2005). In other words, although HRD related research has been done in several countries across the world, there is still much to be done in terms of how we do research and what our research focuses on. The International Labor Organization (ILO) points out the need to investigate HRD related developments (global or across firms), “to address broader economic and social goals such as to improve good governance systems and human resource capabilities” (as cited by Metcalfe and Reese, 2005, p. 451). McLean’s (2006) suggestion that NHRD form a mechanism for addressing key developmental issues that afflict nations across the world points to the need to shift the focus of HRD research to critical issues that impact HRD policies at a national level. Thus there are two areas that call for the attention of HRD researchers: 1) the need to explore NHRD policies and practices in countries that have not been explored so far and 2) the need to expand our scope to include certain core developmental issues that have not been addressed so far.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The review’s scope includes foundational HRD studies. It does not include topics on other HR practices such as compensation, recruitment or employee turnover. The following criteria helped to define and narrow our search: (1) studies on national human resource development (2) country-specific and cross-national studies relating to training and development, organizational development and career development practices. We limited our search to leading HRD peer-reviewed journals mentioned in the methodology section.

Since our article tries to explore what HRD means in different countries, it is essential to look at some foundational scholarly work that contributed to the development of HRD as a field. The origin of HRD as a concept or notion dates back to the 1960’s. Harbison and Myers (1964) have recently been credited for being the first to provide a definition for Human Resource Development (Personal Communication, AHRD conference, 2005). According to them HRD is “a process of increasing the knowledge, the skills, and the capacities of all the people in a society” (p. 2). Three core principles underlie their conception of HRD 1) HRD is described in a societal context, and 2) HRD is viewed from three dimensions, political, economic and socio-cultural, and 3) Education forms the crux of human resource development. A more organization-specific definition was proposed by Nadler in 1970 which described HRD as “organized learning experiences provided by employers within a specific period of time to bring about the possibility of performance improvement and/or personal growth” (as cited in Nadler & Nadler 1989, p.4). HRD is characterized here as an organizational process that could lead to increase in performance and individual growth. While Nadler and Nadler (1989) defined HRD as a process, McLagan (1989) introduced HRD as a unified set of functions. According to her, HRD is the “integrated use of training and development, organization development and career development to improve individual, group and organizational effectiveness” (p.53). Development is cited as the primary process by McLagan and according to her it is development that differentiates HRD functions from other Human Resource activities. Swanson (2001) terms HRD as a process that aims primarily at performance improvement and involves the utilization of organization development and training development to develop individuals to meet set organizational performance goals.

All the three definitions (McLagan, 1989; Nadler & Nadler, 1989; Swanson, 2001) talk of HRD as a multi-functional entity, but they do not go beyond the organizational context. Many argue that HRD should be considered beyond an organizational context (Garavan, McGuire and O’Donnell, 2004; Kuchinke, 2001; McLean & McLean, 2001). McLean & McLean (2001) contend that the growth of the field depends on the expansion of boundaries of our definition. Kuchinke (2001) suggested the need for a more comprehensive model for HRD. Garavan et al (2004) proposed that HRD be “considered multidisciplinary, multiperspectival, and multilevel” (p. 435). A multilevel approach would consider HRD at the individual, organizational, and community-societal levels. This approach

becomes very relevant especially when researchers try to understand how HRD is perceived and practiced in different countries or societies around the world.

Since our research effort involves understanding HRD policies, practices and activities in selected countries around the world, we needed a more holistic definition of HRD that would consider not just organizational, but national and societal contexts. McLean and McLean's (2001) definition fits this criterion. According to them, HRD is "any process or activity that, either initially or over the long term, has the potential to develop adults' workplace knowledge, expertise, productivity and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation, or ultimately the whole of humanity" (p. 322). The definition takes into consideration community/national-level activities, and national policies and practices that affect development of people including core developmental issues concerning "health, culture, community, safety and a host of other considerations..." that have not been covered by traditional definitions of HRD (McLean, 2004, p 270). It is based on inputs provided by scholars and practitioners from around the world (McLean & McLean, 2001) and is widely accepted (Hasler, Thompson & Schuler, 2006; Ke, Chermack, Lee & Lin, 2006; Rangel, 2004; Yang, Zhang & Zhang, 2004).

Metcalf & Reese (2005) present a distinct categorization of international HRD research. According to them, international HRD research can be categorized under three headings: "*global HRD*, *comparative HRD* and *national HRD*", based on an economics and development sociology perspective (p. 449). *Global HRD* deals with global HRD practices and policies which include "international management and development, international HRD policy, including cross-cultural training, competency development and international organization development" (p. 456). Hansen (2003) examined the "cross-cultural transferability of occupational assumptions, in the form of work myths, to a foreign setting" (p.16). In this case the HRD models were from the US and the foreign settings were organizations in Germany and Ivory Coast. Her findings suggested that work myths reflected national differences. *Comparative HRD* deals with "evaluation of different countries' HRD systems, including education and vocation systems, institutional analysis, and cultural analyses" (Metcalf & Reese, 2005, p.456). This could include comparative analysis of any two systems, be it two departments with an organization, two organizations, or even HRD systems of two countries. Kuchinke (2003) while comparing the national systems (of higher level education) between UK and the US found that in the UK there was a central system of HRD accreditation and certification which strongly connected to the national system of education, and the US had a decentralized system with no national-level coordination for certifications and accreditations (p. 296). *National HRD* deals with "government skill formation and employment policy (HRD), institutional development, partnership development with international agencies" (Metcalf & Reese, 2005, p. 456). Many studies lead by McLean (2006) have used Harbison and Myers's (1964) three dimensional (economic, political and social) approach to understand the impact of HRD in different countries (Ke, Chermack, Lee & Lin, 2006; Paprock, Yumol & Atienza, 2006; Cunningham, Lynham & Weatherly, 2006; Hasler, Thompson & Schuler, 2006). These studies indicate the strong influence of national educational policies on the general development of the country. Studies in China, Kenya, India, Philippines, and the UK, provide the evidence of the critical link between national educational policies and the development of the country's human resources (Ke, Chermack, Lee & Lin, 2006; Lee, 2004; Lutta-Mukhebi, 2004; Paprock, Yumol & Atienza, 2006; Rao, 2004). This supports Harbison & Myers (1964) model that educational development forms the crux of Human Resource Development. Ke, Chermack, Lee & Lin (2006,) for instance, outline the various economic and social forces that drive HRD policies in China. In the Philippines, an unstable economy was identified as posing a national challenge to the nation (Paprock, Yumol & Atienza, 2006). Cunningham, Lynham & Weatherly (2006) identified twelve factors that either supported or impeded the successful implementation of NHRD strategies in South Africa. These strategies concerned the political, social, economic and educational systems in the country.

HRD needs to have a global perspective that involves core developmental issues. McLean (2006) draws our attention to the eight core goals set by the United Nations for the development of countries through out the world that include, achieving universal primary education, preventing HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and developing a global partnership for development. Many of these can be directly linked to a country's HRD policies. This study utilizes some of these developmental aspects as a framework to explore and examine NHRD policies and practices and their impact on human resources in the selected countries.

Methodology and Limitations

In order to address the research propositions, the authors conducted a review and analysis of the currently available literature. Where literature was not available, government electronic sources and information from practitioners from the field (in the case of Italy) were used. Our search was limited to Advances in Developing Human Resources, Human Resource Development Quarterly, Human Resource Development International, Human Resource

Development Review, and the International Journal of Training and Development journal within the past five years, 2002-2006. The search was conducted through EBSCO, ABI-Inform and some university supported search engines. The search was limited to HRD related studies that looked at country specific practices and HRD studies of national scope. For example, we included training and development studies, because, in some countries this is a HRD related function. A limitation of the study was that it depended largely on available literature and had limited direct data from the field. Also the interviews were conducted electronically, via email. Most of us being in different locations, our main source of correspondence was through emails hence communication were slightly hindered. The information collected were examined and the findings are discussed in the following section.

Findings

Before summarizing the findings we would like to describe terms such as “developing country” and “developed country”, which would be used often to refer to the countries being studied. The Human Development Index (HDI) provides a good framework to identify if a country is developed, developing or underdeveloped (Wikipedia, 2006). The HDI is described in Wikipedia as a “standard measure of overall well being” (para. 2) It includes economic and social factors such as life expectancy, literacy, education, and standards of living and is “used to distinguish whether the country is a developed, developing, or under-developed country, and is also used to measure the impact of economic policies on quality of life” (para. 2). It is compiled by the United Nations Development Program. The HDI measures social, educational and economical development factors that are very relevant to understanding national HRD policies and practices (McLean, 2006). The HDI report categorizes countries, based on their development measures, into high, medium and low. The countries with a high HDI score are considered developed, the countries under the medium category are considered developing and those under “low” are considered underdeveloped. Based on HDI data collected in 2004, Italy, Japan and Qatar fall under developed nations, and Brazil, China, India, and Lebanon, under developing nations (Human Development Report, 2006 as cited in Wikipedia). In order to understand the meaning of HRD, how it’s practiced, and issues and challenges that face HRD, the findings are categorized under four major headings.

Clarity of HRD Concept/Definition

In general, developed countries seem to be having a clearer definition of HRD than developing countries. This may be due to the concept being derived here. However, our findings indicate that HRD has been present in other countries although what constituted Human Resources Development varied. Furthermore HRD and HR seemed to be used interchangeably in countries outside the USA. Also to be noted was the distinct differences between developed countries and between developing countries. For example, although Qatar and Lebanon are both Middle Eastern nations, there is a lack of consensus among practitioners and academicians on what HRD is. Little attention has been given to HRD and human capital investment in the Middle East and other developing countries (Ozbilgin & Healy, 2003). The trend seems to be the same in Qatar and Lebanon. HRD in the State of Qatar is viewed as a process of preparing the workforce to develop and implement organizational/governmental goals and objectives in efficient and effective manners. Searching for an overriding model for HRD in Lebanon is difficult (Dirani, 2006). However learning is considered a lifelong process that is holistic, encompassing the transfer of new knowledge and skills (through education and training) and involves the strengthening of existing knowledge and values of the Arabic social, cultural and spiritual norms (Bartlett & Rodgers, 2004). For the developing countries, the concept and definition of HRD are still evolving as economy grows. A search of the website of the Brazilian Ministry of Work and Employment indicates the existence of a national HRD policy named “National Policy of Professional Qualification”. After two decades’ development from the founding of the People’s Republic of China, China has made progresses in developing its HR functions at the national level (Yang, Zhang & Zhang, 2004). In the field of HRD at the organizational level, China is still in the transition from personnel system to the Westernized HRD system, and there is still no distinction between HR, HRD and personnel (McLean, 2001).

Purpose of National HRD

For countries that are both economically and socially developed such as Japan, education is no longer the main purpose of HRD because statistics show that 99% of the Japanese workforce is literate. Whereas for those that are only economically developed such as Qatar and Lebanon, HRD is to develop and implement organizational/governmental goals and objectives. In the State of Qatar, the NHRD policy was often referred to as Qatarization. The goal of Qatarization is to nationalize (Qatarize) 50% of total workforce. The NHRD policies in India focus largely on education, which is in contrast to Japan where literacy is no more a problem. For the developing countries, HRD takes on a national in scope and HRD policies target educational development. In India, NHRD policies such as the National Education Policy in 1986 and Program of Action in 1992 increased enrollments in primary education to 95% (Rao, 2004). By the year 2000, India had 839, 000 primary schools (p. 289-290). China

has a tremendous pool of human resources on one hand and is lacking high-level professionals on the other hand (Ke, Chermack, Lee & Lin, 2006). Therefore, “the top HRD priorities in China are to raise the education level nationwide and to train more high-level human resources” (p.42). The focus of HRD in Brazil has been shifted from education to training, more specifically to vocational training. The Brazilian Ministry of Work and Employment leads this effort. The government is the lead agency in planning and implementing HRD policies in India and Qatar. However, here the focus of HRD is in on education and not training.

Practices

As data has shown, developed countries have much more diverse HRD practices with different focuses, responding to different national growth needs. Japan has a labor force of 66.4million in 2005, of which 67.6% are in the services sector, 27.8% in the industry sector and 4.6% in the agricultural sector (Japan Institute of Labor). Responding to the challenges of globalization, as a leading economy in East Asia, Japan has increased spending on training, education and HRD activities (Zhu, 2004). According to a Qatar government agency document , HRD in Qatar focuses on education, job training, and vocational training in the areas of leadership, organizational change, organizational development, organizational theory, strategy, and culture. The State of Qatar reached its goal for NHRD through education and training. More specifically, education reform initiatives, Qatar’s academic city, and state sponsorship program. With social impediments in Italy, HRD development in the country shows its disparity in regions (Personal Communication from a practitioner in the field, 2006). For example in the southern portion Italy there are relatively few policies in place regarding human resource development mainly due to cultural values. Comparatively, in northern Italy (the more industrialized location), there are advanced policies set in place to advanced the theory and practice of HRD. The majority of HRD has come out of large, multinational firms whose presence and practices are on a global scale. There a far fewer multinationals in Southern Italy, than in Northern Italy which is why HRD is seemingly more evident here in the North. In developing countries, the majority of HRD practices are led by governments. In Brazil the term HRD is used by government agencies, universities and private organizations and describes a wide variety of practices and interventions. Activities included in the HRD category are, training and development, management development, team-based forms of work, innovation and/or change (Fischer and Eboli, 2000; Pollit, 2004; Wallace, 2004). In India, the term HRD refers to education when it concerns government agencies, and in corporate organization it means training and organization development activities. For the Ministry of Human Resource Development (a government agency) which manages and implements NHRD policies, the focus is solely education (Rao, 2004). Nationally, most training is done by the Ministry of Personnel which is independent of the Ministry of HRD.

Major Challenges

With too much focus on training in organizations, HRD in developed countries needs more attention and assistance from the government. Historically HRD training programs, within enterprises in Japan, are mostly specialized and higher education is more generalistic (Marquardt, Berger, & Loan, 2004; Warner, 1992, p.56). Aging and high unemployment rate are also the common problems that developed countries such as Lebanon and Japan are facing (Zhu, 2004). Japan needs to attend to the uneven distribution of job training opportunities between enterprises of different industries and between different age groups. People below 34 and above 45 receive less training than people aged between 35 and 44 (JIL, 2003a).The service sector industries like finance, insurance and real estate have the highest percentage of implementing job training with 94%, compared to other industries like transport and communication being 51% (JIL, 2003a; Zhu,2004). In addition to the above problems, for countries that are socially developing such as Lebanon, and Italy, HRD interventions often face impediments. For Lebanon, maintaining sustainable development, decreasing unemployment rate and decreasing levels of poverty are crucial to maintaining social stability. Developing human resources is one approach to alleviating these conditions (McLean, 2004). By facilitating shared knowledge and developing competencies through vocational training, HRD can assist in filling the new emerging gaps and help diminish the impact of poverty and unemployment in Lebanon. In Italy, the target level of HRD investment including training is around 6% of GNP, yet this has been hindered by a lack of commonly held social policies as a nation. Another issue contributing to the stunted development of HR is Italy’s stance on social dialogue. Although they are often portrayed as a loud culture, Italians rarely speak of issues concerning societal adversity. The best place for advancing HRD in Italy will come from a combination of the academic and business communities. The number of universities offering programs or classes regarding HR is less than five and the majority of these are non-Italian universities operating a study abroad program.

Challenges for developing countries are quite different from those in developed countries. Generally speaking, those countries are in great need to improve their education. Population is a double-edged sword in terms of developing human resources and economies. On the one hand, a large labor force means having the numbers in terms of volume of human resources, but if most of them are illiterate or unskilled, it means investment of capital in educating and training the workforce. Two most populous countries in the world-China and India are facing such a

challenge in developing their human resources. Besides the challenge of such a large population, India also faces a challenge of having to deal with the diverse population in terms of different ethnic, linguistic and religious orientations. India has 18 official languages and it is home to seven different religions. So what does Human Resource Development mean to a vast and diverse country such as India? Although much has been achieved in the areas of basic literacy and primary education, secondary school and college level education are still inaccessible to many (Rao, 2004). According to Rao (2004), besides direct educational support, India's policy makers should also address other key developmental issues such as poverty alleviation and basic infrastructure. Similarly, China in the face of an unprecedented growth in its economy is challenged by a slow progress in education, a shortage of skilled workers, compounded by low capital investment in developing and training its labor force (Ke, Chermack, Lee & Lin, 2006). It would be insightful to learn how these countries overcome these challenges in the future.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

In our analyses of the literature and data collected, on the selected seven countries, we found that: 1) Developed countries have clearer definitions of HRD functions such as Training and Development, Organizational Development, Career Development etc., 2) Developed countries, whether in the East or West, focused more on training and organizational related activities compared to developing countries where the focus was on education and social development 3) In developing countries HRD'S focus was largely or solely on education and the government played a big role in planning and implementing HRD policies . 4) The distinction between HR, HRM, HRD, is unclear in the countries we studied.

We list below recommendations and what we think should be key HRD focus areas for future research:

- *The impact of national HRD*: To research the role of government in implementing HRD policies in western nations. For developing countries, the role of government and other organizations in training and developing their huge workforces.
- *UN millennium goals*: In line with McLean's (2006) suggestion, to research whether countries are adopting some of the goals outlined by UN (see McLean, 2006), such as eradicating extreme poverty and fighting HIV/AIDS. If so, what progress have they made in achieving them?
- *Models for NHRD*: To continue working on improving current theoretical models that help to understand HRD in global settings.

Implications for HRD Theory, Practice and Research

The implication of exploring HRD practices and policies in different countries and the significance of a multilevel approach to HRD research has been emphasized by many scholars (Garavan, McGuire and O'Donnell, 2004; Duchene, 2001; McLean & McLean, 2001). Although such a multilevel approach has been initiated we still do not know how HRD practices and policies impact majority of the countries in Asia, Africa and South America. Furthermore, we have been viewing HRD from a "western" perspective while the "developed west" represents only a fraction of the world's "Human Resources". McLean's (2004) suggestion that HRD "focus its research and pay more attention to larger issues that affect whole countries" (p. 391), is very relevant, and underlines the importance of expanding the scope of HRD to include policies and practices that have national impact. This paper has made a small but important contribution towards this effort. What we know from this study further substantiates the argument that Human Resource Development has moved beyond training, business, and performance to basic education, infrastructure development and human welfare.

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