

# Performance and Learning, But Where's the Social Justice? Ideology and Human Resource Development—Critical Analysis, Synthesis, and Future Research

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*This paper critiques the debate about the purpose of HRD. Furthermore, it presents an integrative literature review that provides a meta-theory, hitherto missing, to explain the reasons for which there are endless disputes in the literature about the purpose of HRD. The synthesis explains that ideology provides the guiding meta-theoretical framework from which contending literatures can be classified into a taxonomy that includes the conservative, libertarian, and critical HRD schools of thought.*

Keywords: Defining Human Resource Development, Diversity, Change

## Introduction

### *Statement of the Research Problem*

The literature on human resource development is cluttered with debates about what is the supposed purpose of HRD. Authors engage in continuing debates and are enmeshed in irreconcilable disagreements, as there is an absence of a meta-theory that provides an over-arching structure that can explain the reasons for which they disagree. In fact, they talk past each other and compare apples with oranges. This paper addresses this problem and fills a research gap, since the existing literature does not raise questions regarding the bigger picture, meaning raising questions as to why such differences in opinion exists. This paper uses ideology as the meta-theory to show that, among others, there are three major views of HRD: conservative, libertarian, and critical. This paper explores some possible questions that the literature has not yet addressed. It uses an alternative framework—critical HRD theory—to appraise the current state of the debate as well as add new knowledge by critiquing the gaps within the critical HRD literature.

### *Research Questions*

This paper addresses the following questions:

1. Why are there endless and inconclusive debates about the purpose of HRD? Or, put differently, what is the missing link?
2. How can the existing debates be neatly classified into different categories? How do the different sides to the debate compare with or contrast to one another?
3. What should be the directions for future research?

### *Theoretical Framework*

In this essay, I use critical theory as the basis upon which I deconstruct and re-read the HRD literature. The critical-theory lenses provide me with the tools by which I assess HRD literatures. Critical theory takes into account the interconnections between (1) ethnicity, class, and gender, (2) power and oppression, and (3) the production and consumption of knowledge (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Sambrook, 2006; Sambrook & Hatcher, 2006).

## Methodology

I conducted an extensive research of literature on the purposes of HRD. I used the key words “purposes,” “goals,” and “HRD” or “human resource development” to look for entries in both the Business Source Elite database and indexes of major HRD textbooks. I used and combed through the literature that emerged. The major themes that emerged include performance, learning, and social justice to understand the reason for which there is no agreement about the purpose of HRD. However, nowhere have I found the linking of the words “conservative,” “libertarian,” or “ideology” with the purposes of HRD. But there were a sprinkling of literature that mentioned “critical” (Cunningham, 2000; Sambrook & Hatcher, 2006). As there was no unifying framework that explains the motley explanation about the purposes of HRD, therefore, there clearly was a gap in the literature. Lacking systematic categorization in the literature, I took it as my academic duty to provide a taxonomy that matches ideology with the purposes of HRD, which advances knowledge and contributes to theory. I investigated the relationship between

ideology on the one hand and performance, learning, and social justice on the other hand. As this work is pioneering in many respects, many of the assertions here are new and original, as a result of which some of them have no references. In terms of procedure, I synthesized the state of the art in the literature that lay out the debates regarding the ends in view of HRD. Afterwards, I presented ideology as an organizing meta-theory. I subsequently categorized the existing literature in a classification and taxonomy that included (1) conservative, (2) libertarian and (3) critical HRD as well as compare and contrast their worldviews. Finally, I summarized the findings and offered directions for further investigations based upon the acknowledged convergence, divergence and research gap. The next section, called Current State of the Literature, presented the results and the findings.

**Current State of the Literature: Analysis and Synthesis**

Swanson & Holton (2001, p. 4) defines human resource development (HRD) as “a process for developing and unleashing human expertise through organization development and personnel training and development for the purpose of improving performance.” However, there is a debate that brings to fore two major schools of thought regarding the purpose of HRD. The first school of thought emphasizes individual and organizational performance (Craig, 1976; Swanson, 1996; Jacobs, 1997), while the second school of thought stresses individual and organizational learning (Nadler, 1970, Chalofsky, 1990). There are eclectics who consider both performance and learning as the purposes of HRD (Jones, 1981; Nader & Wiggs, 1986). Because I see a missing link in the performance vs. learning equation (Swanson & Holton, 2001), therefore I ask the question: “Where’s the social justice?”

HRD and adult education (AE) are closely connected (Bierema, 2000; Cunningham, 2004; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). For this reason, I compare the purposes of adult education with the avowed purposes of HRD in the old and current literature. The purposes of adult education include the following: to facilitate change in an ever-changing society, to support and maintain the good social order, to promote productivity, and to enhance personal growth (Beder, 1989). AE’s productivity is related to HRD’s performance, while AE’s personal growth is linked to HRD’s learning. AE’s maintenance of the good social order is an unwritten preference in both conservative HRD and libertarian HRD which both accept the premises of consensus building that underlie the systems equilibrium theory. Lacking in HRD purposes to match AE is the facilitation of social transformation, which needs to be filled to correspond to HRD purposes.

Table 1: *Relationship between the Purposes of Adult Education and HRD*

<i>Purposes</i>	<i>Fields</i>	<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Adult Education</i>	<i>Mainstream HRD Debate</i>
1 <i>Production</i>		Right	Maintenance of the Good Social Order & Promotion of Productivity	Performance
2 <i>Knowledge</i>		Center	Enhancement of Personal Growth	Learning
3 <i>Change</i>		Left	Facilitation of Transformation in an Ever-Changing Society	*Absence of Parallel Purpose

I commend the emerging and new critical HRD writers (Cunningham, 2004; Freire, 1992) for critiquing the gaps in the current HRD state of the art. Due to the limits in the current thinking among the major debaters in the mainstream literature about the purpose of HRD, namely, learning versus performance, there is a need to rethink the definition and purpose of HRD. In concurrence with Cunningham (1992, 1993, 1998, 2000, 2004), Cunningham & Curry (1997), and Freire (1970), I add social justice as another, in fact, more important purpose, of HRD. This point of view lies in the margins and must be brought to the center of HRD debate. Thus, I propose a different definition of human resource development that includes but goes beyond the debate over performance versus learning. A product of clashing social forces and ideologies, human resource development is a pro-active, forward-looking process that responds to social forces as well as overhauls organizational and social structures. It taps inter-individual human potentials and talents as well as takes into consideration gender, ethnicity, class, environment and other critical issues, thereby paving the way for a new transformed organizational and social order that promotes social justice and lasting peace. Thus, there emerge, among others, three major schools of thought regarding the purpose of HRD: conservative, libertarian, and critical HRD, which promotes (1) performance, (2) learning, and (3) social justice, respectively.

*Conservative, Libertarian, and Critical HRD*

Conservative, libertarian and critical HRD practitioners have different emphases. Conservative HRD puts premium on the elite or people at the top and views the organization from top down. Libertarian HRD puts emphasis on the middle class and views the organization horizontally, while critical HRD puts weight on the lower class and marginalized groups and views the organization from the bottom up. At worst, conservative HRD can be

authoritarian as the emphasis is the power of the echelon over the other members of the organization. Libertarian HRD, however, struggles for the greater recognition of the individual within an organization, while critical HRD views issues from a structural perspective and adopts a collective-based orientation.

Conservatives see HRD as a tool of domination, whereas libertarians see HRD as a touchy-feely tool that makes the employees happy. But critical people see HRD as a tool for profound changes within an organization. Conservative HRD persons support the static functionalist systems-equilibrium approach that maintains the harmonious status quo. Libertarian HRD persons advocate the dynamic systems-equilibrium approach that has room for changes within the established system. Critical HRD folks, however, do not only seek to change within the system but more importantly to change the organizational or social system as a whole or the “rules of the game” in particular, such as issues that relate to social, economic, political and cultural status within an organizational system. Conservative HRD focuses on the need to improve the individuals’ performance and increase their productivity within an organization, which leads to greater profits, while libertarian HRD focuses on personal growth and learning. Critical HRD, however, is focused on the social realm. As with libertarian HRD, conservative HRD belongs to the uncritical theory, which does not problematize labor, class, color, gender, and religion. Critical HRD, however, puts said issues at the forefront of its concerns. Thus, conservative and libertarian HRD assert that there are universal ideas of virtues and ethics that apply to everyone within an organization. However, critical HRD assert that virtues and ethics are not universal but are relative to one’s position of economic wealth, political power, and cultural dominance.

Both conservative and libertarian HRD advance meta-narratives, as their advocates speak of HRD in broad strokes, such as focusing on performance or learning. However, critical HRD supporters are engaged in micro-narratives, showing examples of the struggles of diverse persons—in such terms as class, ethnicity, age, gender, ability, or religion—for social justice and transformation within an organizational context. If conservative HRD is concerned with higher bottom-line profits based on improved performance, libertarian HRD is concerned with providing equal learning opportunities to all employees, whereas critical HRD seeks social change. In short, they view capital very differently: conservative HRD advances economic capital, libertarian HRD advances human capital, while critical HRD advances grassroots social capital. Based on the foregoing statements, both conservative and libertarian HRD assume that consensus is a preferred organizational “good,” while critical HRD assumes that conflict is the mother of the growth of new organizational “goods,” such as recognition, empowerment, and advancement of the interests within an organization of workers, women, people of color, non-native English speakers, non-Christians, persons of different abilities, older employees, and gays, to name a few. The spokespersons of the capital-oriented conservative HRD are the white male Protestants. The talking heads of employee-oriented libertarian HRD are White Christians. The representatives of the structurally oriented critical HRD are workers as well as ethnic, religious, gender and other minorities.

In conservative HRD, the so-called “Job Nazis” in the extreme case dictate what kind of learning is needed so that performance can be improved which primarily leads to greater profits. In libertarian HRD, anyone in the organization can propose new learning and changes in order to empower the individual. However, while recognizing the importance of both performance and learning, critical HRD focuses on the grassroots who initiate changes that shake the very foundations of the belief systems, policies, and practices of organizations which promote social justice and a deeper appreciation of durable industrial, organizational, and social peace.

Cunningham (1988, 2004) disapproved of much of the current literature, which I label as being conservative. Cunningham (1988, p. 135) claimed that most programs are devised to maintain the values of the dominant group and therefore “we have difficulty seeing how we ourselves have constructed our world.” Cunningham (1988, p. 133) asserted that training and development in the dominant practice of HRD is “an apparatus for social control.” Cunningham (1988, p. 141) criticized most program planning as based on an individual deficit model instead of looking at “the oppressive structures in which people live.”

To remedy such myopia, Cunningham (1988, p. 143) proposed that program content must be “open to competing ideas” and that programs for professional development must include “content that goes beyond nationalist concerns, including such subjects as peace education and global resource sharing.” Cunningham (1988, p. 143) asserted that such transformation can take place by “encouraging expression by the individual through dialogue, writing, and public expression” which are needed skills for “creating knowledge and action.” Critical HRD folks, such as Cunningham and Curry (1997, p. 78) declared that grassroots people involved in development can “construct their learning by taking advantage of their own cultural tools.” For Cunningham (2004), economic activities must aim to build community, not benefits for individuals, especially those who already have economic, political and cultural power. The critical HRD approach therefore is not top down (the way conservative HRD is) nor is it horizontal (the way libertarian HRD is), but is bottom up.

*Integrative Synthesis*

In this section, I begin by offering an over-arching meta-theory to organize all the motley debates about the purpose of HRD. After that, I provide a synthesis, by developing a conceptual classification or taxonomy of the contending schools of thought and identify the elements, which compare and contrast the three schools of thought in HRD. In addition, I also pose several questions that past researchers have not raised, which therefore caused confusion among the debaters on the subject.

*Meta-theory and taxonomy.* To clarify the confusion in the existing debate, between the proponents of performance and the champions of learning as the purpose of HRD, I resort to the innovative critical perspective of HRD which identifies ideology as a decisive element in understanding and putting order in the discordant arguments about the purpose of HRD. Ideology refers to the different perspectives in viewing the social, economic, political, and cultural world. Ideology from the right to the left that this paper addresses includes conservative, libertarian and critical ideology. Conservatism gives emphasis to the maintenance of the economic and political power of people who dominate the status quo. Libertarianism stresses the importance of the individual and accentuates equal opportunity and equality before the law. Critical theory highlights the need to address social inequalities and actively bring about social change. From this taxonomy, which includes conservative, libertarian, and critical HRD, I identify their similarities and differences for which I use the apples, oranges, and mangoes metaphors, respectively. See table below for the delineation of the relationship between the different ideologies and the purposes of HRD.

Table 2: *Organizing, Summarizing, and Expanding the Literature*

<i>Meta-Theory: Ideology and Human Resource Development</i>			
<i>Criteria \ Ideology</i>	<i>Critical HRD</i>	<i>Libertarian HRD</i>	<i>Conservative HRD</i>
<i>Political Spectrum</i>	Left	Center	Right
<i>Fruit Metaphor</i>	Mangoes	Oranges	Apples
<i>Locus</i>	Social	Individual, Personal	Organizational, Capital
<i>Theory</i>	Critical Theory	Uncritical Theory	Uncritical Theory
<i>Narratives</i>	Micro-Narratives	Meta-Narratives	Meta-Narratives
<i>Authors</i>	Cunningham (1992, 1993, 1997, 1998, 2000), Freire (1970), Sambrook & Hatcher (2006)	Nadler (1970), Chalofsky & Lincoln (1983), Jones (1981), Nader & Wiggs (1986)	Craig (1976), Swanson (1996), Jacobs (1997)
<i>General Purpose</i>	Social Justice through Social Change	Learning and Personal Growth	Performance, Productivity and Order
<i>Specific Purposes</i>	Justice, Diversity, Uniqueness, Gender, Class, Ethnicity, Religion, Environment	Equal Opportunity and Equality before the Law	Bottom-line profit
<i>Focus</i>	Grassroots Social Capital	Individual Human Capital	Economic Capital, Scarce Resources
<i>Systems</i>	Radical Systems Transformation	Dynamic Systems Equilibrium	Static Systems Equilibrium and Status Quo Maintenance
<i>Nature</i>	Conflict	Consensus	Consensus
<i>Class Actors</i>	Lower Class and Marginalized Groups	Middle Class	Upper Class
<i>Social Relations</i>	Conflict	Functionalist Perspective; Harmony	Functionalist Perspective; Harmony
<i>Directions of Social Relations</i>	Vertical, Bottom Up	Horizontal	Vertical, Top Down
<i>Philosophy</i>	Relativism	Universalism	Universalism
<i>Social Analysis</i>	Structural	Humanistic	Authoritarian
<i>Personal Relations</i>	Social Orientation	Individualism	Family Orientation
<i>Knowledge Holders</i>	Employees decide the content and method of learning	Employees are actively involved in decision making	Experts teach ignorant employees new skills
<i>HRD as a Tool</i>	Tool of Change	Touchy Feely Tool	Tool of Domination
<i>Initiators</i>	Grassroots	Participatory	Extremist "Job Nazis" Dictate Tasks
<i>Orientation</i>	Society Oriented	Employee Oriented	Capital Oriented
<i>Voices</i>	Workers and People with Other Abilities, Ethnic, Religious, Gender, and Other Minorities	White Christians	White, male Protestant capitalists

*Questions.* In conducting this research, I have raised several questions that were hitherto not asked or were relegated to the category of assumptions or unimportant matters. However, the answers to these questions are central to understanding the current state of the debate regarding the purpose of HRD. These are some of the questions I have raised: Why are the debates seemingly between apples and oranges, which are not truly comparable? Is it because there is a lack of a meta-theory that provides an umbrella under which different categories have not been clearly delineated? If so, what is an appropriate meta-theory? What are the categories that emerge? How can the debates be classified? Even if these questions are answered, how can this meta-theory explain HRD thinking and doing in other systems of cultures, such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Islam? How do non-Western HRD practices and views concur with or differ from those of Western HRD? Furthermore, I have identified and explained conservative, libertarian and critical HRD. To what extent will discussing social democratic, revolutionary Marxist, and Third World HRD as well as all strains of feminist HRD be useful?

## **Conclusion, Recommendations, and Contribution**

### *Summary*

At the end of the day, everything is ideological. Unfortunately, authors who debate over the purpose of HRD do not bring the question of ideology to the fore. They miss the point and rant at each other and talk pass each other. However, an emerging group of writers, such as Sambrook (2006), Cunningham & Curry (1997), and Freire (1979), however, clearly identify themselves as writing from the perspective of critical theory. They are commendable trailblazers who pioneer in critiquing the dominant literature on HRD which only debate over the centrality of either productivity or learning only. Critical HRD practitioners and theorists add the element of justice and transformation in the equation, thereby broadening the breadth and depth of HRD discourse. The shortcomings of critical theory, however, include, among others, the following: (1) it simply divides the discourse between “us” (critical theorists) and “them” (the other writers in the dominant literature) and (2) it neither identifies nor further categorizes the fine distinctions between “them” (such as conservatives vs. libertarians). This paper advances knowledge (1) by identifying the role ideology plays and (2) by classifying the discourse and debate in HRD to be among conservatives, libertarians, and critical theorists.

### *Implications for Future Research*

There are some implications to future research based on my findings about the role of ideology in HRD and the three schools of thought in HRD. One, future HRD publications must not relegate ideology in the background and assume that everyone is in agreement about a common set of universal assumptions in HRD: far from it. Depending on one’s ideology, one adopts a certain worldview and argues from that perspective. Two, while HRD literatures have greatly contributed to our current knowledge about the purpose of HRD, they remain for the most part Euro-centric and do not reflect the HRD praxis of minorities in the West as well as HRD praxis in general in other parts of the world over time. In a world where globalization breaks barriers in trans-frontier relations, there is a greater need to understand the ways by which other peoples in the world think and act in terms of HRD. By developing multicultural sensitivity, problems in inter-cultural HR development can be mitigated and opportunities for trans-cultural HR development can be advanced for the common good. I argue that HRD perspectives are historically and socially determined. Three, future research can conduct a research on the relationship between other ideologies—such as communitarianism, social democracy, and classical Marxism—and HRD purposes.

### *Contribution to New Knowledge in HRD Research and Practice*

This research contributes to new knowledge in many ways, as it is engaged in a systematic study of the field by offering new methodologies and ways of thinking about the purpose of HRD. One, if past research presented a muddled debate as to what constitute the purpose of HRD, this paper provides a meta-theory in the form of ideology which organizes the debate. Two, this research provides a classification that includes (1) conservative, (2) libertarian, and (3) critical HRD. Three, this classification neatly sorts out the different purposes and features based on the conservative, libertarian, or critical HRD ideology. Four, although this paper uses the critical HRD framework, it also gives a critique of the critical HRD perspective. Critical HRD disapproves of and lumps all the literature that focus on both performance and learning together. However, I make a distinction between conservative HRD, which treats performance as the purpose of HRD and libertarian HRD that considers learning as the purpose of HRD. Furthermore, many critical HRD writings omit the working class and religion. I include religion in the equation and put the working class back into the picture along with other matters related to color, gender, sexual orientation, age, and abilities. This paper therefore provides a finer distinction of critical HRD’s critique of the literature. I argue that while accentuating social justice, critical HRD does not treat performance, learning, and social justice as mutually exclusive. Organizations and society stand to gain by empowering workers and inhabitants respectively, who are of different colors, ethnicity, gender, religions, different abilities, and sexual

orientation. Metaphorically, other literatures wrongly compare apples (conservative HRD) with oranges (libertarian HRD). Not only did I separate apples from oranges, but I also added mangoes (critical HRD) to the basket of HRD goods. Such an endeavor was only possible with the introduction of ideology as the meta-theory that explains the differences and hence the debate. Thereafter, I identified the different criteria with which to compare the three HRD perspectives and proceeded to explain the reasons for which they differ.

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