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TRENDS TOWARD A CLOSER INTEGRATION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

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Running Head: Trends Toward a Closer Integration

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Abstract

New workplaces require broader skills than ever before and place intense pressures on all providers of workforce preparation to enhance the competitiveness of America's workforce. Vocational education and human resource development (HRD) are in the forefront in seeking new approaches to preparing the workforce of the future. This paper presents arguments that trends toward a closer integration of the two fields are appropriate responses to meet the challenges and should be pursued more vigorously. Historical, philosophical and practical contributions of both fields are examined as foundations of commonality upon which to build cooperative efforts. Analyses revealed substantial basis for cooperation that is largely overlooked. Integrative mechanisms and initiatives are discussed.

TRENDS TOWARD A CLOSER INTEGRATION OF

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The U. S. economy is dealing with the effects of competitive global markets that have fundamentally reshaped many elements of business practice. Persistent waves of restructuring and "right-sizing" initiatives are testimony to struggles businesses face to remain economically competitive. Lightning fast change, demands for higher quality, and ever changing technology are making jobs and skills obsolete overnight. Unfortunately, many businesses have discovered that workers are not prepared well enough and lack basic skills.

[The American Society for Training and Development \(1990\)](#) suggested that:

1. The average 1.4% of payroll that U.S. companies invest in training reaches only 10% of the workforce.
2. The K-12 system as presently structured will not be able to help most of the people who will be working in the year 2000.
3. Ninety percent of the people who will be working in the year 2000 were already working in 1990.
4. Within the next 10 years, 75% of Americans working today will need retraining
5. By the year 2000 there will be too few trained and knowledgeable workers to satisfy the nation's economic needs.

Workplaces today require new and broader skills than ever before. Organizations have realized that they must have better trained workers if they are to survive. In response, many are increasing their training and demanding higher levels of entry level skills for all jobs. The 1993 training industry survey ([Filipczak, 1993](#)) showed that organizations increased their training budgets 7% in 1993 and trained 15% more people. As a consequence, all providers of workforce preparation are facing intense pressures and challenges to enhance the competitiveness of America's workforce. Vocational education and human resource development (HRD), two of the leaders in workforce development, are in the forefront in seeking the best approaches to preparing the workforce of the future.

Unfortunately, these fields are seen by many as separate and have tended to operate more in parallel than in partnership, thereby limiting the effectiveness of both. On the surface they may appear to be closely linked, and there are clearly areas such as technical skills training in which the two fields serve common clients and sometimes coordinate quite closely. In reality, the two fields have only begun to exploit possible synergies.

To meet the challenges of preparing today's workforce, closer integration of the vocational education and HRD fields is needed. Integration would represent a powerful and logical partnership of two disciplines that are preeminent forces for preparing the workforce of the future. By forging closer linkages, the joint effect on workforce effectiveness would be even more significant. The purpose of this paper is to examine historical, philosophical and practical contributions of both fields that can be woven together to help build and maintain a world class workforce.

Human Resource Development Perspective

HRD was defined by [Swanson \(1995\)](#) as "a process of developing and/or unleashing human expertise through organization development and personnel training and development for the purpose of improving performance." While others have advocated learning as a defining paradigm for the field ([Watkins & Marsick, 1995](#)), we agree with proponents of workplace performance as the defining paradigm for HRD. According to the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) Models for HRD Practice ([McLagan, 1989](#)), HRD improves performance through the integrated use of three major practice areas: training and development, career development, and organization development.

Training and development focuses on development of the individual, primarily through planned learning

experiences. In the past, formal classroom training programs comprised the majority of HRD activities and the terms training and HRD were often used synonymously. Today, HRD has evolved to a broader focus on improving workplace performance by developing human resources. HRD is moving away from a process identity, which defined the field by a single intervention tool and delivery mechanism (training), to an outcome identity employing a broad tool kit of performance enhancing interventions and strategies. Formal classroom training, while still an important tool, is declining in importance as HRD is pressured to respond to the new workplace with more effective and efficient tools.

As organizations encounter more frequent and complex changes, they are forced to change in very fundamental ways. Practitioners who have cast themselves only in traditional training roles are finding themselves unable to respond to new challenges, or playing only small roles in the change process. HRD practitioners, on the other hand, are finding themselves in increasingly important roles in helping organizations achieve their strategic goals.

Hence, the other two components in ASTD's framework, organization development (OD) and career development (CD), are of increasing importance. Organization development focuses on group and inter-group effectiveness, particularly in managing organizational change. OD practitioners recognize that individuals employ their skills in the broader context of organizational systems. Individual knowledge and skills are but one component of a systems approach to organizational effectiveness. Equally important are organizational level factors such as culture, structure, and strategy as well as group level factors such as inter-group relationships, leadership and work design. OD interventions tend not to be formal classroom training, but rather action learning strategies.

Career development is seen as the process of matching individual and organizational needs and determining development needs that arise from that match. The new employment contract prevalent in organizations today removes the paternalistic notion of careers where career development often meant ceding responsibility to the organization. Today, employees are largely responsible for planning their own careers and development needed to achieve their goals. Thus, career development systems have become increasingly important.

HRD should not be confused with its close cousin, human resource management (HRM) which includes many of what were once called personnel functions. HRM typically includes elements of the human resource system such as staffing, selection, compensation, benefits, union/labor relations, Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EEO/AA). Both HRD and HRM are concerned with productivity and performance of human resources. HRD, however, views employees as an asset to the enterprise whose value is enhanced by development. Its primary focus is on growth and employee development. HRM, on the other hand, tends to emphasize creation and maintenance of the human resource system. Though the distinction between them tends to blur at times (particularly in small companies), there are important differences between them in philosophy, educational preparation, and functions.

HRD shares important philosophical elements with vocational education. Like vocational education, it emphasizes developing individual potential and skills. However, from an HRD perspective, development occurs to enhance the organization's value, not solely for individual improvement. Individual education and development is a tool and a means to an end, not the end goal itself. This can be clearly seen in HRD evaluation and needs assessment methodologies which stress not only job performance, but impact on the organization as the final criteria for success.

Vocational education and HRD share the same historical roots in apprenticeship and on-the-job training systems which were predominant in early years of our country. Only in this century have HRD and vocational education begun to diverge, and it is really only since World War II that HRD's role has expanded beyond worker training. Histories of HRD (Nadler & Nadler, 1989) read remarkably like histories of vocational education until that time. HRD has not stopped focusing on training workers and other populations also served by vocational education, but has continued to broaden its scope as needs dictated. Vocational education has continued to focus mainly on technical skill development which is consistent with

its historical mission. From their histories it might be more appropriate to view these fields as different branches on a tree as instead of different fields. Yet, in practice, these two fields have often diverged and often find themselves pursuing separate initiatives while both are seeking to meet the common challenge of preparing America's workforce. Is it time for vocational education and HRD to rediscover their shared heritage? We think so.

The Vocational Education-HRD Relationship

Vocational education and HRD share many common philosophical roots that can serve as a basis for a closer relationship. These include:

1. Learning as the key to competitiveness and economic progress - Both fields recognize that learning is the key to competitiveness--individual competitiveness for vocational education and organizational competitiveness for HRD.
2. Learning as a means to an end - Both fields use teaching and learning as a means to achieve a broader goal, not simply learning for its own sake. In addition, the end goal is a specific and tangible end product, not just a broad societal goal.
3. Preparing learners for the workplace - Unlike other parts of the educational system, predominant emphasis is on providing learners knowledge, skills and abilities needed for the workplace.
4. Learning as preparation for work performance - Both fields have as their goal enhancement of an individual's ability to perform on the job. The emphasis is on performance which shapes all aspects of their practice.
5. Focus on applied learning - The emphasis on performance leads to a focus on application of knowledge and skills learned.

It is these common goals that differentiate the two fields from other educational and developmental endeavors in our society and underscore the need for them to explore a closer relationship. No other discipline has as their core mission the application of learning and planned development for work effectiveness. Traditional educators certainly focus on learning and other disciplines on human development (e.g. social work), but without close connection to the workplace. Other business disciplines (e.g. HRM) focus on work effectiveness, but without embracing the power of learning and developing human potential. It is only these two disciplines that understand how to link the largely humanistic disciplines of learning and development to work performance and economic competitiveness. The uniqueness, power and potential of this integration should not be minimized.

This is not to suggest that the two fields are identical or should be completely merged. [Evans and Herr \(1978\)](#) noted that there are three basic objectives of any public school vocational education program:

- (1) meeting the manpower needs of society, (2) increasing the options available to each student, and (3) serving as a motivating force to enhance all types of learning. A few vocational education programs sponsored by employers have these same three goals, but most do not. Very often they are designed to meet the short-term manpower needs of a single employer...The managers and stockholders of profit making organizations rarely see justification for using their moneys and facilities to train more people than they need. (p. 4).

Education, they noted, is the only social institution which has increasing individual options as a major goal. They further noted that content of vocational education ranges from that which is specific to a particular employer, to that which is useful in almost any enterprise. A major tenant of vocational education from its earliest times has been a focus on the individual and increasing individual options, particularly as they relate to work. In recent years, the field has also been called on to increase its emphasis on broader societal goals.

Whereas vocational education's primary focus is on the individual, HRD's primary focus is on the organization. Both share an emphasis on the workforce but individual development is the means by which HRD enhances organizational effectiveness. Vocational education has a humanistic mission than can never be fully shared by HRD, which is driven more by organizational self-interest. General vocational education rightly retains a commitment to initial preparation for entry into work while HRD concentrates more on development of those already employed. Unfortunately, these differences have kept the two fields farther apart than they should have.

While some might argue that there isn't much of a division between them, we disagree. Only a limited number of HRD practitioners view vocational educators as an essential partner. Where partnerships exist, they tend to apply only to a limited range of technical skill areas. From the perspective of the shared heritage and similar philosophical roots, one can only conclude that there must be some division because existing partnerships are only a small part of what could exist. Additionally, anecdotal evidence suggests there is only limited overlap in membership between the American Vocational Association and HRD organizations such as ASTD, despite the fact that conference programs indicate many shared interests. It seems clear that divisions do exist.

There is no reason why both can not retain their uniqueness while forging a closer relationship with the other. This is not to suggest that there is not frequent interaction between the two fields. However, this interaction is often more incidental than intentional and falls short of recognizing that both fields have distinct, but interrelated, roles in workforce and career development.

Re-Discovering a Shared Agenda

[Dykman \(1993\)](#), in reflecting on the current status of vocational teacher education, noted that problems facing the field today include declining teacher education enrollments, declining enrollments in secondary vocational programs, low teachers salaries, and significant reductions in traditional sources of state and federal support for vocational teacher education. However, there is a decided lack of literature on how problems can be effectively addressed.

Has vocational teacher education become so driven by its past that it is unable to respond to changes sweeping the workplace? It is often said that the railroad industry declined because its leaders never realized they were in the transportation business, not the train business. Vocational educators must realize that they are not in the vocational education "business" (though some may disagree), but rather are in the workforce education "business" which is changing drastically. [Harrison \(1992\)](#) suggested that "perhaps . . . we have lost the focus on what is important--developing human capital of this nation" (p. 28). The future lies in refocusing on this basic mission and rebuilding natural linkages with other providers such as HRD. Vocational educators must increasingly offer a full range of workforce preparation programs, from entry level preparation to making the oldest employee more productive.

Closer linkages with HRD would help vocational education broaden its workforce preparation role in two major arenas. First, it would help vocational education expand its role in continuing education for workers. At one level, it would help vocational education extend the scope and role of employee training programs it can deliver. Many employers are only beginning to discover how valuable vocational education can be as a training resource. More importantly though, vocational educators must realize that staying in a traditional training role severely limits their potential in the broader workforce preparation arena. The linkage with HRD is necessary to help vocational educators focus on enhancing organizational effectiveness, not just on delivering training.

Second, it would help vocational education strengthen its current role of providing preparation for work entry. By linking preparation for work to continuing education at work, preparation for work becomes one of the anchors for an integrated continuum of workforce development programs. The synergy created should strengthen entry programs and enhance the economic competitiveness of graduates. While current entry programs do not operate in isolation from the workplace, they fall short of an integrated preparation

continuum.

This linkage is consistent with other calls for new relationships between education and work. The loudest call may be from the [U. S. Department of Labor through its Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills \(SCANS\)](#). Its report, titled [Learning a Living: A Blueprint for High Performance](#) (commonly known as the "SCANS Report"), issued a resounding call for a more integrated system of institutions and systems which they called the "learning a living" system (p. xiii) and pointed directly to the integration and "dialogue between two major groups, one based largely in the world of work, the other consisting mostly of educators (1992, p. 23)." Their recommendation to schools and employers was:

Our primary message to schools is this: Look beyond the schoolhouse to the roles students will play when they leave to become workers, parents and citizens To employers we say: Change your view of your responsibilities for human resource development. As an employer, your old responsibilities were to select the best available applicants and retain those you hired. Your new responsibilities must include developing the human resources in your community, your firm, and your nation (p. 17)

While there were many elements to the SCANS recommendations, at the heart of all of them was the concept of a fully integrated system of providers of knowledge, skills and abilities to prepare people for work and maintain their performance once employed.

The establishment of a fully integrated system of work-performance-enhancing institutions and providers will require that bridges be built that are only beginning to emerge. Because of close philosophical lineages and shared histories, it would seem logical that leadership for this integration and development of a "learning a living" system would come from closer linkages between vocational education on the education side, and HRD on the employer side. No other entities in either the educational system or in business and industry have as much commonality, and therefore potential, for weaving together the tightly knit system of work-related human development providers that the United States needs to maintain its economic competitiveness.

Seeds of Change in Vocational Education

Within current debates surrounding the restructuring of vocational education lie some seeds of change in directions we have described. First, there are increasing calls for closer linkages with business. [Cheek \(1990\)](#) and [Doty \(1990\)](#) for example noted the need for programs to evidence clear and functioning relationships with business and industry, regardless of the levels at which they are conducted. While it is generally accepted that programs at all levels should have close ties to the workplace, there is less clarity on how to build the linkages. [Strong \(1990\)](#) surveyed state directors of vocational education and found that how to build linkages remained their largest problem. The two most commonly used approaches were advisory committees and training for business and industry through "quick start" types of programs. However, there was also mention of numerous other efforts such as small business development centers and technical assistance centers. All pointed to the seeds of stronger linkages to HRD and [Strong \(1990\)](#) concluded that:

I would suggest if all schools or school departments at all levels would heed the challenge and take a proactive role in building effective linkages with business and industry, then vocational education's role would not only become more clear, but there would be no question as to the role of vocational education as the workforce provider of the nation (p. 148).

Advisory committees are useful and an important first step. They do not, however, provide integrated linkages to performance building initiatives in which HRD engages.

The second significant seed of change is the ongoing debate about restructuring vocational education curricula. In recent years the fundamental tenants of vocational education have found renewed support as the nation has examined the best means to prepare and maintain a competitive workplace. However, there is debate about the best approach, particularly concerning integration of academic (non-skill specific) content with vocational instruction. Integration proposals range from highly job specific vocational education that

may include only those general education elements that specifically relate to a particular job, to training for a wide range of occupations and a broader base of general education content.

We have moved from a period when highly job-specific vocational education was in vogue, to one based on preparation in an occupational family that may include appropriate general education components. The work of [Carnevale and associates \(1990\)](#) and others in HRD who have sought to identify the kinds of skills needed by employees have stressed broad skill preparation and inclusion of academic skill training. There seems to be some agreement that programs totally devoid of any occupational potential, or those lacking in essential academic components, are equally limiting. Programs that integrate both occupational and general education components offer the best promise for preparing students for productive livelihoods.

At the heart of these discussions is the need to broaden the role of vocational education to focus on maximizing work skills. Because the workplace has changed, business and HRD are demanding a broader and more cross-functional range of workplace skills and competencies. A number of authors (e.g. [Dykman, 1993](#); [Mateen, Tate, Mortwedt, Manspeaker and Krug, 1993](#)) have addressed the role of vocational education in helping employees succeed in a rapidly changing workplace. Business needs a more flexible, adaptable, and highly skilled worker to adapt to increasingly sophisticated technologies. This meshes well with vocational education's desire to maximize individual options and is quite consistent with a broadened and more inclusive vocational education curriculum. The result is new common ground and shared goals that can spawn many productive linkages between HRD and vocational education.

This new philosophy is reflected in Tech-Prep initiatives which provide a means for increasing student options and are an excellent example of renewed linkages. Tech-prep advocates integrating academic and vocational education, resulting in a highly experiential format based on academic rigor. The focus is on developing basic competencies needed to succeed in an evolving workplace in cooperation with business and industry. In addition, this format embraces the concept that education continues across the lifespan. Tech-Prep directly confronts the notion that maintenance of the traditional dichotomy between vocational and academic education will not allow our educational system to produce a world class workforce. At the same time, vocational education is being called on to reclaim its history as a provider of preparation for entry and progression in the workplace. Approaches such as these to preparing and maintaining a competitive workforce provide ready opportunities for cooperation between vocational education and HRD to the collective benefit of employer and employee alike.

Seeds of Change in HRD

The HRD community has also recognized the need for a closer relationship between school and work. Increasingly, employers are caught between demands for more highly trained workers and a shrinking supply of those workers. ASTD commissioned a Workplace Basics study which recommended seven skill groups that are necessary to provide all persons with basic skills for employment of any type ([Carnevale, Gainer & Meltzer, 1990, p. 3](#)). These seven groups were:

1. Learning how to learn
2. Basic skills (reading, writing, computation)
3. Communication skills (speaking and listening)
4. Adaptability skills (solving problems and thinking creatively)
5. Development skills (self-esteem, motivation and goal setting, career development)
6. Group effectiveness (interpersonal skills, teamwork, negotiation)
7. Influencing skills (understanding organizational culture, leadership)

These workplace basics are highly congruent with the tenants and expertise of vocational education, both in philosophy and practice. In HRD's view, equipping individuals with these skills provides them maximum flexibility for employment options within organizations, but they are also a tremendous benefit to the individual. Preparing employees with these competencies then is a logical area for HRD to look to vocational education for guidance and assistance.

Overlooked is the fact that all students, vocational or non-vocational, need preparation in these workplace competencies. Vocational educators are the logical ones to take leadership in integrating these competencies across the curriculum. Such a role would be consistent with other moves to integrate academic and vocational education. However, it will require vocational educators and HRD personnel to change their perspective to see themselves as part of an integrated system.

As noted earlier, one HRD function in which vocational education had a significant presence was preparing supervisory personnel, notably following World War II. The new global marketplace has spawned radically new approaches to supervision and management. Supervising workers in a "do more with less" environment that promises little in the way of job security and perhaps fewer economic rewards has made old methods obsolete. While there are fewer supervisory positions in organizations today, demand for supervisory and management re-training is strong. Vocational education could be a key player as it once was in this arena.

HRD has probably overlooked the contributions vocational educators can make as resource persons. ASTD's data (Carnevale, Gainer, Villet & Holland, 1990) showed that about one-third (\$9 billion) of employer-sponsored training is purchased from outside providers. Of this amount, only \$760 million went to vocational or other schools. The largest share (\$4.3 billion) went to community colleges, technical institutes, and four-year colleges. Clearly there is room for growth. While many organizations look to post-secondary vocational educators to provide skills training, they could also look to them for a broad range of workplace competencies. Vocational educators may also be the logical first step for developing programs to solve basic literacy problems on the job. Because of their shared roots and perspective on education, vocational educators should be a "first stop" when turning to outside providers to solve many training needs.

Conclusion

We have argued that vocational education and HRD grew out of the same roots and share many common goals and clientele. What some might see as an already close relationship, we argue is just the beginning of a trend that needs to be not only nurtured, but significantly expanded. Furthermore, the divergence of vocational education and HRD, while once expedient for both fields, now represents a barrier that needs tearing down. If vocational education is to play a key role in meeting the immense challenges of maintaining the competitiveness of America's workforce, it must evolve by forging a closer relationship with HRD. We agree with other authors that identify HRD and industry training as one of the key strategies to revitalizing the vocational education profession (Adams, Pratzner, Anderson & Zimmerer, 1987).

The evolution need not be difficult. The challenges of preparing tomorrow's workforce and retraining today's workers are rich with opportunity for new linkages. Some of the logical "next steps" where vocational education and HRD can link include:

1. Preparing workers for change
2. Enhancing acceptance of diversity in the workplace
3. Integrating special populations into the workplace
4. Increasing basic skills literacy skills of the workforce
5. Increasing the payoff from learning interventions
6. Re-training obsolete workers

7. Providing continuing education for "upskilling"

Indeed, many partnerships have begun to emerge. While forming working relationships with business is not new for many vocational educators, our proposed evolution requires a rethinking and broadening of the purposes for those relationships.

Where HRD and vocational teacher education programs exist on the same university campus, bridges need to be built to facilitate cooperation in areas of mutual interest. On campuses where vocational teacher education programs exist and a HRD program does not, consideration should be given to redefining the vocational teacher education mission to address both of these functions. Many member institutions of the University Council for Vocational Education have expanded their programs to include some focus on HRD.

Vocational education and HRD have a significant opportunity to be a force for change in preparing a world class workforce. Forging these linkages will help ensure successful, vital programs. We believe that a mutually supportive relationship with HRD is one dimension that should not be overlooked. The potential benefits from this relationship spans all levels from preparation for job entry, through university programs at both undergraduate and graduate levels, to on-the-job training. It is a logical marriage with deep historical and philosophical roots that represents a true win-win for both.

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