Because of its focus on improving work performance at the individual, group, organizational, and interorganizational levels, the field of human resource development (HRD) is affected by and responds to trends in work, organizations, and the global economy. A literature review reveals that the following themes recur throughout the HRD literature: work force diversity; cross-cultural issues; the learning organization; technology in work and learning; increasing numbers of older workers; informal learning; and spirituality in the workplace. HRD practitioners are debating a set of core issues related to professionalization of the field. The HRD research has been criticized for lacking a strong theoretical basis. Qualitative methods and stronger links among theory, research, and practice are a continuing focus. Another set of issues involves the relationship between adult education and HRD. Adult education claims a humanistic, learner-centered, self-directed focus on transforming individuals, whereas HRD is oriented toward bottom-line, behavioral performance improvement aimed at organizational goals. Commonalities and complementarity in the two fields are being identified, especially as many universities merge and integrate these programs. A trend toward aligning vocational education and HRD is also emerging in recognition of their common endeavor of work force education. (A 28-item annotated bibliography constitutes approximately 75% of this document.) (MN)
Human Resource Development
Trends and Issues Alert No. 25

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TRENDS AND ISSUES ALERT

Human Resource Development

Because of its focus on improving work performance at the individual, group, organizational, and inter-organizational levels, the field of human resource development (HRD) is affected by—and responds to—trends in work, organizations, and the global economy. A review of literature, including the annual proceedings of the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD), reveals recurring themes: work force diversity, cross-cultural issues, the learning organization, technology in work and learning (Margeruard 1996), increasing numbers of older workers (Allen and Hart 1998; Bessot and Burroughs 1999; Rose, Stein, and Lee 2000), informal learning (AHRD 1997-2000; Garrick 1998), and spirituality in the workplace (Fenwick and Lange 1998; Kahnweiler and Otto 1997).

HRD practitioners are debating a set of core issues related to the professionalization of the field, including certification (AHRD 1997, 2000; Rowden 1996), ethics and integrity (AHRD 1997, 2000; Burns et al. 1999), and the role and university preparation of HRD professionals (AHRD 1997-2000; Johnston 2001). Cultural differences in HRD roles have been identified (AHRD 1997, 1999; Nijhof and de Rijk 1997; Streumer et al. 1999; Valkaavara 1998). Research has been criticized for lacking a strong theoretical basis (AHRD 2000; Caravan et al. 1999; Holton 1999). Qualitative methods and stronger links among theory, research, and practice are a continuing focus (AHRD 1998-2000).

Another set of issues involves the relationship between adult education and HRD. Adult education caters a humanistic, learner-centered, self-directed focus on transforming individuals; HRD is oriented toward bottom-line, behaviorist performance improvement aimed at organizational goals (Kochinke 1999; Peterson and Cooper 1999; Peterson and Prove 2000; Rowden 1996). Complementarity and complementarity in the two fields are being identified, especially in the many universities that integrate these programs (Greb et al. 1998; Peterson and Prove 1998, 2000). At the same time, a trend toward aligning vocational education and HRD is emerging, in recognition of their common endeavor of work force education (Otto 1997; Holton and Trot 1996; Manz 1995). The following resources provide more information on trends and issues in HRD.


As the work force ages, HRD and human performance technology professionals will need strategies for modifying the workplace, rethinking motivational strategies, and altering training practices.


Analyzes concepts of education and training within the context of lifelong adult education, finding significant differences. Compares the performance and learning models in human resource development, concluding that the learning model is conceptually richer and more comprehensive.


Given population trends and societal views on aging, academic programs preparing HRD professionals should address competencies needed for dealing with an aging work force.


Includes general standards, research and evaluation, advertising, publication of work, privacy and confidentiality, teaching and facilitating, and resolution of ethical issues and violations.


Traces the evolution of HRD into spirituality, identifies associated problems: accommodation between the purposes of spirituality and HRD, religious fundamentalism, invasion of privacy, potential for manipulation, and coercion into the global economy.


Review of the current state of HRD literature includes definitions, models, and dominant biases. Concludes that the literature is fragmented and reflects a diverse range of issues and opinions.


Discusses why informal learning is a current focus in HRD, how informal learning is defined, and contested notions of industrial relations and training.


Prescribes a rationale supporting the compatibility of HRD and vocational teacher preparation based on a common mission.


Top-ranked competencies for graduate education in HRD identified by practitioners were adult learning, presentation, facilitation, needs assessment, and human relations. Seven of the top 10 were allied with adult education graduate program content.


If HRD is to advance practice in significant and substantial ways in the future, it may require that some HRD researchers become less connected to practice in the short term.


Presents arguments supporting the trend toward integration of vocational education and HRD. Contributions to both fields are examined as foundations upon which to build cooperative efforts.
Challenges arise from contexted perceptives of HRD, complexity of workplaces, and divergent research findings profiling the field. The role, working knowledge, and skills required of practitioners are broadening.


Examines the concepts of soul and spirituality and how they apply to the HRD field in terms of values, beliefs, and motivators. Considers ways to nurture the soul of the field.


Previews three views of adult development—person-centered, production-centered, and principled problem-solving—and discusses their applicability to the HRD profession.


Technology is increasingly crucial in HRD. The Internet, intranets, multimedia, virtual reality, distance learning, and electronic performance support systems are some of the technologies with which trainers must become familiar.


Vocational education and training should be considered within the more comprehensive concept of HRD. To ensure that both the human and the practical aspects of vocational education are addressed, two major dimensions should guide the design of HRD: education and work.


The following trends have implications for HRD: (1) the nature of work is changing, (2) the pace of change is accelerating, (3) the Web is a structural model of team rather than pyramid organization, (4) the bargaining power of the work force is rising, and (5) value exchanges are direct.


Responses from HRD practitioners in Belgium, England, Northern Ireland, and Italy were compiled into a profile of roles and competencies that was then compared with similar surveys in the United States.


Explores the practices and philosophies of adult education and HRD, so that integrated communities of practice may be created by understanding the ways in which adult education theory informs the field of HRD.


A survey of 113 members of the Commission of Professors of Adult Education and 50 AHRD members found few differences except in age, rank, and salary. The two faculties are compatible and could be integrated.


Integration of adult education and HRD faculties required the resolution of pedagogical, philosophical, and methodological differences and the identification of places where the fields converge and diverge. The alignment links theory and practice and enables the disciplines to complement each other.


Discusses worldwide HRD trends that were identified in a study of the HRD practices in 35 countries. Outlines four steps for working with the trends.


HRD in organizations can be used as a co-creative tool that reinforces existing power structures. The emerging postmodern organization must consider individual visions, values, and knowledge; recognize differences; remove inequalities; and create opportunities for all voices to be heard.


Different policy, career development, and training strategies are needed for older workers who decide to retire from, remain in, or return to periods of part- or full-time work.


Presents debates over (1) the purpose of HRD (improving individual or organizational performance); (2) whether HRD is part of adult education; (3) origin of the knowledge base (theory and research or practice); and (4) certification of HRD practitioners.


Compared to a U.S. study, Dutch human resources professionals rated the following trends affecting the future of HRD as most important: integration of learning and work, importance of organizational innovation, and measurement of business results using consumer-relevant criteria.


Comparison of trainer surveys in England, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, and Finland showed the culture-bound nature of HRD. English and Finnish practitioners perceived themselves as change agents, Germans as trainers. HRD practice did appear to have a common core of competencies.

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