# Training and Development: An Examination of Definitions and Dependent Variables

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*We explore training and development through the lenses of scholars and practitioners who have provided definitions and frameworks for exploring this area which is essential to human resource development (HRD). Thirty-five definitions of training and development are identified and analyzed. Themes from the analysis are explored, conclusions discussed, and recommendations for future exploration forwarded. The intent of this exploration is to add to the ongoing discussions regarding definitions, theory-building and ongoing development of the HRD field.*

Keywords: Training and Development, Knowledge, Skills

Employee training and development has emerged as a major educational enterprise over the past three decades. This increase is associated with a demand in the workplace for employee at all levels to improve performance in their present jobs to acquire skills and knowledge to do new jobs, and to continue their career progress in a changing world of work (Armstrong, 2001; Craig, 1987). Numerous organizational adages suggest that people are the key to any successful business operation. This emphasis is not empty as it is becoming increasingly clear that no human enterprise can succeed without properly skilled and knowledgeable human resource development professionals (Goldstein & Ford, 2002). Ongoing employee development is critical to the short and long term success of every business profit or non-profit (Becker, 1962; Pittam, 1987).

Although definitions frequently include learning experiences provided to employees to bring about changes in behavior that promote the attainment of the goals and objectives of the organization, the definitions in the literature range from quite narrow to broad and all-encompassing. More often, the definitions use the term human resource development (HRD), rather than training and development, to identify the function (Tracey, 1992). "What should training be called?" This question has larger implication than may be immediately apparent. The issue amounts to much more than a question about semantics or definitions. Confusion over the name of the training field perpetuates a perception that, in general, training lacks focus (Rothwell, 1996). This call for focus is one of the reasons we chose to explore more closely the definitions of training.

We believe the exploration of training and development definitions is a natural question given the ongoing dialogue regarding definitions of HRD. Although some are describing the definitional explorations going on in the HRD field to be representative of confusion, we view this ongoing clarification as a natural part of any human endeavor. Those who seek definition and redefinition are not, in our opinion, adrift or confused but rather are interested in thoughtful comparisons between the past, present, and future. The logic in focusing on training definitions in the midst of this environment of definitional exploration is associated with a definition of HRD forwarded by McLagan (1989) in which she suggests that training and development is a significant portion of HRD along with career development (CD) and organization development (OD). Earlier discussions regarding definitions of OD (Egan, 2002) and CD (Upton, Egan, & Lynham, 2003) have added to our understanding of these two elements associated with HRD. Given prior explorations, we felt that training and/or training and development should also be explored.

## Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this article is to explore the various definitions available in the literature on Training and Development and Training to examine the area of focus, dependent variable and the core elements of the definition. The article is based on the following questions:

1. What are the available definitions of training and development?
2. What are the dependent variables, area of focus and core elements of the definitions?

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## A Brief History of Training and Development

Training and development in public and private enterprise is a vital department to the organization. Organizational challenges today appear unparalleled in history (Tracey, 1974). According to Tracey (1974), the oldest form of training in industry in Western society is the apprenticeship system which was developed in the middle Ages by the trade guilds and during the Elizabethan period apprenticeship began to decline. The industrial revolution speeded the decline of the apprenticeship tradition. However, apprentice training likely remains as an important source for the development of skilled workers in United States (US) as the number of apprentice in training in all trades at the end of fiscal 1947 was 192,954 but buy the end of fiscal 1970 the number had grown to 279,693, an increase of 44.9 percent (Manpower report from the President, 1972). More recent data, located by researchers, indicated the trend is still an important component for the development of workers in the Twenty-first Century. The US Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship Training, Employer and Labor Services reported 482,823 individuals involved in apprenticeships in 2002.

The popularity of the training laboratory and other forms of sensitivity training increased tremendously in the 1960s and the need for management training was recognized more than ever (Miller, 1987). In the 1970s organization development became more popular and most talked about training technique or practice. Introduction to competency based learning came into popular use in the last half of the 1970s (Miller, 1987).

Training became more popular by the 1980s through behavior modeling which was used in the early 1970s and its greatest use was for management training, and skills training. There was renewed emphasis on career development in the first half of the 1980s (Miller, 1987). It was noted that employers spend $30 billion on formal training and approximately $180 Billion on informal 0n-the-job training each year (Carnevale, Gainer & Villet, 1990)

Now the demands of industry and commerce are continually changing and are reflected in the activities of the training department and the training and development programs. New approaches, skills, competencies, operations and procedures require either new training term or modifications of existing ones as the term “training” is very complex (Rae, 1997). These changes indicate the importance of renewing and/or clarifying the focus not only of specific training efforts, but of training and development overall. One way to reinvigorate dialogue regarding HRD-related area such as training and development is to explore related definitions (Swanson, 2001).

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## Three Perspectives as Context for Exploring HRD-related Definitions

There have been many articles exploring definitions of HRD and related topics such as CD and OD. The following section explores three recent discussions regarding the relevance of HRD-related definitions to the development of the field.

*Exploring Definitions as Part of the Theory-building Journey*

Swanson (2001) emphasized the importance of theory building as essential to the growth and ongoing viability of HRD and related enterprises. “Seemingly elementary investigations into definitions and documentation of a range of ideas within a single realm of HRD are fundamental to theory-building stepping-stones. Recent examples in the literature (articles focusing on HRD-related definitions)…add to our understanding of the HRD phenomenon” (Swanson, 2001, p. 301). Swanson emphasized the increasing demand for HRD-related theory that can expand the current horizons of scholarship and practice, and that can prevent practitioners and scholars from wallowing in a theoretical explanations and practice. From this point of view, refinement and exploration of HRD-related definitions, like training and development, can make important contributions to the field (Swanson, 2001).

*Exploring Definitions as Culturally Unique Phenomena*

McLean and McLean (2001) support the concept of HRD and related definitions while, at the same time, emphasizing that the increasingly global and complex nature of HRD does not support a single definition, but multiple perspectives. From this point of view, influences such as government and legislation, national contexts, religious belief systems, and other cultural factors play an active and varied role in the framing of HRD and related definitions around the world. McLean and McLean (2001) and McLean (2000) support the notion of ambiguity in HRD and related definitions as well as the notion forwarded by Mankin (2001) that “practitioners and academics should embrace HRD as an ambiguous concept as it is this ambiguity that provides HRD with its distinctiveness” (p. 80). McLean and McLean’s (2001) introduction of their own definition of HRD affirm the importance of HRD definitions while, at the same time, emphasizing the notion that attempts to remove ambiguity from definitions is “futile and cannot happen” (p. 323)

Table 1. *Training and Development Definitions, Areas Focus, Core Element and Dependent Variable*

| YEAR | AUTHOR | DEFINITIONS | AREAS OF FOCUS | CORE ELEMENT | DEPENDENT VARIABLE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1961 | Black. | Training is defined as imparting job knowledge to employees so that they can carry out orders smoothly, efficiently and cooperatively. | Knowledge | Imparting job knowledge | Carry out orders smoothly |
| 1962 | Becker | Training is defined as a human capital investment that raises the worker's productivity. | Economic | Human capital investment | raises the worker's productivity |
| 1964 | King | Training is a process that provides conditions in which individuals gain knowledge, skills or ability. | Knowledge& Skills | Process | gain knowledge, skills/ability |
| 1966 | Bass & Vaughan | Training is a process of organizational improvement that attempts to make beneficial changes through modifying employee's skills and attitudes which refers to activities ranging from the acquisition of simpler motor skills to the development and change of complex socio emotional attitudes. | Skills & Attitudes | Process of organizational improvements | Acquisition of simpler motor skills, development and change of complex socio emotional attitudes. |
| 1967 | Lynton & Pareek | Training is a well organized opportunity for participants to acquire the necessary understanding and skills. | Knowledge &Skills | Organized opportunity | acquire necessary understanding and skills |
| 1969 | Bienvenu | Training is teaching a skill or task or increasing a job proficiency which involves a means of developing and enlarging traits which will be increasingly pertinent to satisfactory job performance. | Skills & Performance | Teaching a skill or task | developing and enlarging traits, pertinent to satisfactory job performance |
| 1969 | Pigors, Myers & Malm | Training is a planned continuous process with a need for periodic review combining evaluation of past results and analysis of future needs. | Evaluation | Planned continuous process | --------- |
| 1970 | Campbell Dunnette, Lawler, & Weick | Training is defined as a planned learning experience designed to bring about permanent changes in an individual's knowledge, attitudes or skills. | Learning, Knowledge, Skills & Attitudes | Planned learning experience | permanent changes in knowledge, attitudes & skills |
| 1977, 1988 | Armstrong | Training is the systematic development of knowledge, skills and attitudes required by an individual to perform adequately a given task or job. | Knowledge, Skills & Attitude, Performance. | Systematic development of knowledge | To perform adequately |
| 1978 | Katz & Kahn | Training and development is described as a maintenance subsystem, intended to improve organizational efficiency by increasing routinization and predictability of behavior. | Performance | Maintenance subsystem | Improve organizational efficiency |
| 1978 | Laird | Training may be defined as an experience, a discipline, or a regimen which causes people to acquire new, predetermined behaviors. | Skills, Performance | Experience, a Discipline or a regimen | Acquire predetermined behaviors |

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| 1983 | Ribler | Training is defined as the process of preparation for a specific job or set of tasks and activities relating to work. | Skills | Process of preparation | Process of preparation |
| 1984 | Nadler | Training is defined as learning related to the present job. | Learning | Learning related to present job | Learning related to present job. |
| 1985 | Laird | Training is defined as the acquisition of technology that permits employees to perform to standard. It is an experience, a discipline or a regimen that causes employees to acquire new, pre-determined behaviors. | Performance | Acquisition of technology | Employees to perform to standard |
| 1985 | Kllatt, Murdick & Schuster | Training is a systematic way of altering behavior to prepare an employee for a job or to improve the employee's performance on the present job, and development is preparing an employee for improving the conceptual, decision-making, and interpersonal skills in complex, in structured situation | Performance, Skills | Systematic way of altering behavior | Improve employees performance, improving the conceptual, decision making & interpersonal skills |
| 1985 | Holden | Training is defined as a process of learning to improve job performance immediately and is directly related to the job. | Learning, Performance | Process of learning | Improve job performance |
| 1986 | Abella | Training is a scheduled meeting of people under the guidance of an instructor or facilitator for the purpose of acquiring or renewing skills or knowledge. | Knowledge, Skills | Scheduled meeting of people | Acquiring or renewing skills or knowledge |
| 1989 | Lussier | Training is a process of acquiring the skills necessary to perform a job and development is the ability to perform both present and future jobs. | Skills, Performance | Process of acquiring skills | Acquiring Skills necessary to perform a job |
| 1989 | McLagan | Training and development focuses on identifying, assuring and helping develop, through planned learning, the key competencies that enable individuals to perform current or future jobs. | Learning, Performance | Planned learning | Develop key competencies |
| 1989 | Nadler & Nadler | Training is learning provided by employers to employees related to their present jobs. | Learning | learning | Learning related to present jobs |
| 1989 | Ragins & Sundstrom | Training develops knowledge, skills, credentials, and credibility and thus expertise to aid promotion. | Knowledge, Skills & Performance | Develops knowledge, skills, credentials & credibility | Expertise to aid promotion |
| 1991 | Goldstein Braverman & Goldstein | The training process is defined as the systematic acquisition of skills, rules, concepts or attitude that will improve performance. | Skills& Attitudes Performance | Process of Systematic acquisition of skills, rules, concepts, or attitude | Improve performance |
| 1993 | Wilson & Cole | Training is defined as an instruction which emphasizes job-specific, near-transfer learning objectives, traditionally skills-based instruction, as opposed to education. | Learning, Skills, | Instruction | Job-specific, near transfer of learning objectives |

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| 1993 | Sugar | Training is defined as an instruction geared towards developing a specific group of skills or tasks. | Skills | Instruction | Developing a specific group of skills |
| 1993 | Kirkpatrick | Training refers to the teaching of specific knowledge and skills required on the individual's present job. The term development refers to the growth of the individual and preparations for higher-level jobs. | Knowledge & Skills | Teaching of specific knowledge and skills | |
| 1996 | Smith | Training is a planned process to modify attitude knowledge or skill behavior through learning experience to achieve effective performance in an activity or a range of activities | Knowledge Skills, Learning Performance | Planned process | Effective performance in an activity or range of activities |
| 1998 | Davis & Davis | Training is a process through which skills are developed, information is provided and attributes are nurtured in order to help individuals who work in organizations to become more effective | Skills | Process | Help Individuals to become more effective. |
| 1998 | Potts | Training is the gaining of skills with short term output measurements and Development is the extension of skills and in synonymous with long term growth of individuals. | Skills | Gaining of skills | Gaining of skills |
| 1999 | Fuller & Farrington | Training is designed to increase the skills and knowledge of people. | Skills & Knowledge | Design | Increase the skills and knowledge of people |
| 2000 | Kleiman | Training and development are planned learning experiences that teach workers how to perform their current or future jobs effectively. | Learning & Performance | Planned learning experience | Perform current or future jobs effectively |
| 2001 | Armstrong | Training is the formal and systematic modification of behavior through learning which occurs as a result of education, instruction, development and planned experience. Development is improving individual performance in their present Roles and preparing them for greater responsibilities in the future. | Learning, & Performance | Formal & Systematic modification of behavior | Modification of behavior, Improving individual Improved performance. |
| 2001 | Gomez-Mejia Balkin & Cardy | Training is the process of providing employees with specific skills or helping them correct deficiencies in their performance and development is an effort to provide employees with the abilities the organization will need in future. | Skills & Performance | Process of providing | Providing employees with specific skills or correct deficiencies in performance, Abilities the organization will need in future |
| 2001 | Kremple & Pace | Training and development is defined as managing knowledge to develop the organization's culture, to enhance individual performance and to strengthen the organization's capability | Knowledge Performance | Managing knowledge | Develop organization's culture, enhance individual performance, Strengthen the organization's capability |
| 2001 | Swanson & Holton | Training and development is defined as a process of systematically developing work-related knowledge and expertise in people for the purpose of improving performance. | Knowledge, Performance | Process | Improved performance. |
| 2002 | Goldstein & Ford | Training is defined as the systematic acquisition of skills, rules, concepts or attitudes that results in improved performance in another environment. | Skills, performance | Systematic acquisition of skills | Improved performance. |

*Refusing to Engage in the Exercise*

Although many have engaged in the practice of exploring HRD-related definitions, (Chermak & Lynham, 2002; Egan, 2002; Holton, 1998; McLean, 1999; McLean & McLean, 2001; Upton, Egan & Lynham, 2003; Watkins & Marsick, 1995; Weinberger, 1998), not all are in agreement that this practice or "approach does a particular disservice to the development of those who wish to become HRD professionals, as the notion of HRD practice is dynamic, ambiguous and ill determined" (Lee, 2001). From this point of view, definitions are viewed as "scientism"—a conviction to the notion that reductive rationalistic scientific thinking has supremacy over other paradigms or ways of thinking. In refusing to define HRD and related areas, Lee (2001) seeks to be absent from the reinforcement of a particular, limited worldview. Lee's narrative emphasized the importance of individuals coming to experience HRD and related areas without control or influence from a dictatorial professor or a power structure which could limit the manner in which those participating in the phenomena from providing language and description to their own experiences.

**Method**

A review of literature, analysis and synthesis was used to answer the research questions for this study. Keyword searches for "Training and Development" and "Training" were conducted using internal search engines at a library of a major university in the central United States. Books were considered for use when written by Training & Development scholars and a majority of a book's references were from refereed journals and scholarly works. Electronic data bases including ERIC, ABI Inform, and electronic journal databases like JSTOR were searched to identify maximum number of definitions for training and training and development. Searches yielded 147 resources and the vast majority of the sources were from U.S. sources which may be a limitation of the study. Articles and books were closely examined for definitions on "training and development" or "training", "development" and thirty five distinct definitions from the year 1961 to 2002 were utilized for this study. All definitions explored for the purpose of this article were from the academic literature, and definitions developed by organizations have not been included.

**Examining definitions of Training and Development**:

The definitions were examined for areas of focus, core element and a dependent variable or outcome. All of the definitions had at least one area of focus, core element and dependent variable and some definitions had more than one area of focus and dependent variable. The major categories developed form the area of focus and dependent variable are:

- Develop or gain knowledge
- Develop or gain skills
- Improve performance
- Improve organizational efficiency.

The dependent variables listed above overlapped with the area of focus and core elements in the definitions. About twenty four definitions focused on skills, twenty-one focused on performance, thirteen on knowledge, ten on learning, five on attitudes, one evaluation and one on productivity. Of the thirty-five definitions six definitions focused on all the three major categories – Knowledge, skills, and performance. From the list of definitions it was evident that the term "training" is defined most of the time and the "development" part was left out. Only nine definitions were for the term "training and development" and the rest 26 were focused "training". To understand the three major areas of focus, and dependent variable - knowledge skills and performance and their contribution to training and development has been discussed below.

*Knowledge*

According to Swanson and Holton (2001) knowledge is defined as the intellective mental components acquired and retained through study and experience. The definition of knowledge is complex and can be interpreted in many different ways. Knowledge is the cognitive capacity of the organization (Wang, Hielmervik, & Brendel, 2001). Knowledge is the understanding of relations, and is therefore essential in making operations effective, building business process or predicting the outcomes (performance) of business. Finally, Goldstein's (1986) definition of knowledge refers to "an organized body…factual or procedural nature, which, if applied makes adequate job performance possible" (p. 22)

*Skills*

Sims (1998) classified Skills into three types' technical skills which is an understanding of and proficiency in a specific kind of activity, particularly one involving methods, process, procedures or technique. It is occupation related, concrete and functional. The second type is Human skills which is the ability to work effectively as a group member and to build cooperative effort within the team/group. And the third type is conceptual skills which involve the ability to see the enterprise as a whole; it involves recognizing how the various functions of the organization depend on one another and how changes in any one part affect all the others and it extends to visualizing the relationship. Goldstein (1986) refers to skills as "the capability to perform job operations with ease and precision" It usually refers to the psychomotor types of activity. Like all fields, Training and development is affected by demographic, political, economic and social trends. So training needs to focus on the development of skills and human relations (Sims, 1998).

*Performance*

Although many training and development departments have been activity oriented, focus on enhancing human performance is important as it is implicitly result-oriented. "Out of work place upheaval emerged the high performance work organization – a catchall phrase for companies in a perennial search for better results" (Galagan, 1994). For trainers that should signal an important message: shift focus from training activities (input) to the performance of individuals and organizations (output) (Galagan, 1994). Goldstein (1986) refers *ability* as cognitive capabilities necessary to perform a job function. Ability cannot function alone but require the application of some knowledge base.

**Conclusion**

A number of HRD scholars have explored HRD-related definitions (Upton, Egan & Lynham, 2003; Chermak & Lynham, 2002; Egan, 2002; Holton, 1998; Mclean, 1999; Watkins & Marsick, 1995; Weinberger, 1998). The intent of this paper was to explore training and development through the lenses of scholars and practitioners who have provided definitions and frame works for exploring this area which is essential to human resource development (HRD) and to add to the ongoing discussions regarding definitions, theory-building and ongoing development of the HRD field. . The thirty-five definitions of training and development were analyzed for dependent variables, core-elements and areas of focus. It is very clear from the analysis that the definitions do have a focus in them from the above discussions. Training is viewed, by leaders in business and industry has changed dramatically in recent years. Training is now recognized as not just a major contributor to company productivity and profitability but also as critical for the survival of an organization in the global market place. In the quest of a sustainable competitive advantage companies have finally come to realize that, what sustains is the knowledge that is in people in the organization which can be processed as skills and experienced as performance.

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