

Integration of Human Resource Development and Adult Education Theories and Practices: Implications for Organizational Learning

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The field of Human Resource Development has initially evolved and executed practice around a behaviorist business approach which has become inadequate and inefficient in addressing the multilevel challenges of today's complex organizations and meeting the needs of a new workforce that is increasingly becoming diverse. However, this trend is now changing to focus on the learning aspects of both individuals and organizations. This paper discusses the implications of integrating HRD and adult education in the workplace.

Keywords: Human Resource Development, Adult Education, Organizational Learning

Today's workplace faces a number of issues that impacts the lives of adult workers. Among these issues is the challenge of coping with drastically and rapidly changing technology, accepting or adjusting to a diverse work environment, shifts in business trends (production versus service sector), and globalization. The implications of these issues such as an aging workforce, achieving diversity in the workplace, technological changes reflected in the service/customer oriented industry, and the global economy are all intertwined, and, consequently affect every aspect of work, including employees and employers. Therefore, it is suggested that Human Resource Development (HRDP) professionals and adult educators work together to assist employees to respond to these forces prevalent in today's workplace. As a result of this emerging challenge the researchers and practitioners in the fields of HRD and Adult Education face a unique responsibility to help adult learners to increase their human capital. Human capital may be defined as the knowledge and skills (physical and intellectual) that an individual possesses that make that individual a productive worker (Besanko, Dranove, & Stanley, 1996). Consequently, investing in adults' human capital through continuing education is of great importance and responsibility for these fields of practice.

Problem Statement

Several major changes are taking place in today's workplace while demanding different sets of skills and knowledge from workers. Consequently, closing skill gaps among workers has been a contentious yet crucial issue among employees, employers, policy makers, educators, and the public. Since this issue has a number of implications for both HRD practitioners and adult educators, this paper will attempt to examine the potential collaborations and networks between HRD and Adult Education as well as the forces that necessitate the need for continuing education and learning for adults in order to reduce skill gaps and increase their human capital.

HRD is the process of developing/unleashing human expertise through organization development and personal training and development for the purpose of improving performance. The domains of performance include organization, process, and individual levels (Swanson, 1995). HRD provides expertise and tools to help adult learners in their effort to address work-related issues. Adult education, on the other hand, is a process whereby a person whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitude, values, or skills (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). However, a theoretical application to practice model needs to be fully developed and further tested empirically.

Theoretical Framework

Today's rapidly evolving workplace environment as well as instructional methods are forcing employees to be flexible and adaptive to these demands and cope with the challenge of constantly acquiring new skill sets to be up to date with technological changes. Information technology has greatly changed both the content and process of work. In fact, fundamental changes have occurred in organizations as well as adult education settings, whether they are related to blue-collar production or professional management work. Yet the impact of technology advancement has

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been even more drastic on low-skill, blue-collar workers by either eliminating jobs that those workers traditionally held or creating new skills for them to learn in order to remain in the workplace. Production work and methods, for example, have been deeply affected by technology such as robotics, CAD/CAM tools, and process control instruments while necessitating workers to learn new skills and knowledge; however, this transition has not been an easy task for workers who lack necessary education and resources. Akdere (2005) proposed the following model that integrates HRD and adult education within the workplace framework.

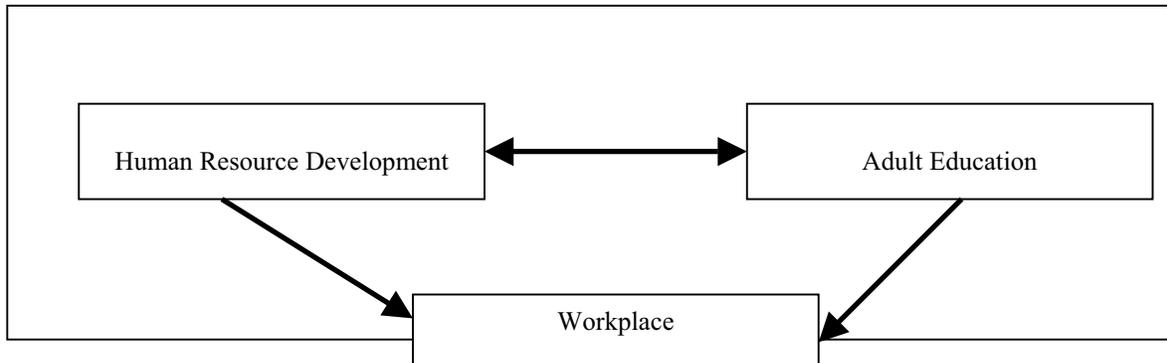


Figure 1. *The Integrative HRD and Adult Education Model*

Theoretical Foundations of Human Resource Development

The debate about the foundations of HRD and its underlying theories has been widely discussed both in the practitioner and scholarly arena. The field of HRD relies on three core theories in order to understand, explain, and carry out its process and roles. These include: psychological theory which captures the core aspects of developing human resources as well as the socio-technical interplay of humans and systems; economic theory which captures the core issues of the efficient and effective utilization of resources to meet productive goals in a competitive environment; and systems theory that captures the complex and dynamic interactions of environments, organizations, work process, and group/individual variables operating at any point in time and over time (Swanson, 2001). Figure 2 illustrates Swanson's HRD theory stool.

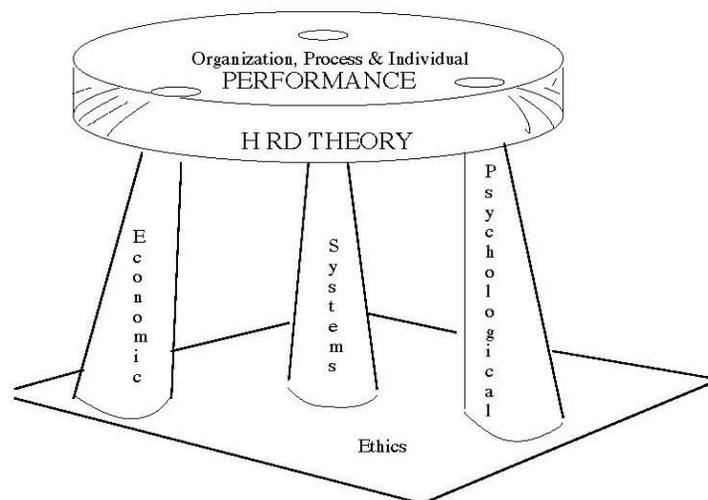


Figure 2. *The Theoretical Foundations of Human Resource Development*

Theoretical Foundations of Adult Education

Learning as a process (rather than an end product) focuses on what happens when the learning takes place. Learning theories provide explanations for this. There are many theories that present different assumptions and offer

insights into adult learning. One may want to start by looking at theories from the perspective of the individual learner, context, and learning process to understand adult learning because it provides a conceptual framework for interpreting examples of learning we observe every day and suggests ways to look for solutions to practical problems. For the purpose of this paper, a few of the adult education theories relevant to HRD and organizational learning will be examined based on the view of the learning process, purpose of education, role of teacher, and the way in which theories manifest in adult learning and HRD.

Behaviorist perspective. This perspective focuses on providing stimuli and creating a response. Proponents of this perspective include Skinner, Pavlov, and Thorndike. This theory posits that instruction involves reinforcing what one may want the student to do again and ignore what one may not want the student to do again (Skinner, 1971). This type of learning is seen in workplace education, skill training, and HRD as human performance technology. Table 1 provides a summary of the Behaviorist Perspective.

Table 1. *Behaviorist Perspective*

<i>Learning Process</i>	Change behavior
<i>Locus of Learning</i>	Stimuli in environment
<i>Teacher's Role</i>	Arranges environment to get response
<i>Manifestations in Adult Learning</i>	Behavioral objectives
	Competency-based education
	Skill development and training

Cognitive perspective. The focus of this perspective is on perception, insight, and meaning. It portrays the idea that the human mind is not just a passive system where stimuli arrive and the response leaves. It believes that the thinking person interprets sensations and gives meaning to the events that impinge upon his/her consciousness. The locus of control of the learning is with the individual, not the environment. Learning means reorganization of experience in order to make sense of stimuli from the environment (McKeachie, 1988). Proponents of this theory include Ausubel, Brunner, Gagné, and Piaget. This theory focuses on three simultaneous processes: (1) acquisition of new information, (2) transformation or the process of manipulating knowledge to make it fit, and (3) evaluation. It involves processing or acquiring the knowledge or skill to learn effectively in whatever learning situation one encounters. It takes into account learners' needs, learning style and training, and organized activity or instruction to increase competence in learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Table 2 provides a summary of the Cognitive Perspective.

Table 2. *Cognitive Perspective*

<i>Learning Process</i>	Internal mental processing
<i>Locus of Learning</i>	Internal cognitive structures
<i>Teacher's Role</i>	Develop capacity and skills to learn
	Structure content of learning
<i>Manifestations in Adult Learning</i>	Cognitive development, critical thinking
	Learning and memory functions of age
	Learning how to learn, concept maps

Humanist perspective. This perspective is based on the work of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Learning is characterized by personal involvement. The main focus is learning and self development. Proponents of this perspective include Knowles, Maslow, and Rogers. Humanists believe that human beings can control their own destiny; people are good and strive for a better world; people are free to act and behavior is the consequence of human choice; and people possess unlimited potential for growth. This underlies much of adult learning theory's emphasis on the self-direction of adults and the value of experience (Merriam, 2001). Knowles (1980), based on Andragogy, proposed five assumptions of adult education: (1) adults are self-directed, (2) adult experiences are a rich reservoir of learning, (3) the readiness of adults to learn is related to social role and development, (4) change in time perceptions and adults want immediate application. It is more problem centered than subject centered, and (5) adults are motivated by internal rather than external factors. For Maslow, learning is a form of self-actualization (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Rogers' (1983) work looks at learning as client-centered in which learning leads to personal growth. For Rogers, learning has the following characteristics: personal involvement, self-initiated, pervasive, evaluated by the learner, and essence is meaning. Table 3 provides a summary of the Humanist Perspective.

Table 3. *Humanist Perspective*

<i>Learning Process</i>	Personal act to fulfill potential
<i>Locus of Learning</i>	Affective needs, self-fulfillment
<i>Teacher's Role</i>	Facilitate development of whole person
<i>Manifestations in Adult Learning</i>	Andragogy Self-directed learning

Constructivist perspective. Advocates of this theory believe that learning is a process of constructing meaning and meaning is made from experience (Fosnot, 1992). Constructivism is a theory of knowing: we transform and interpret experience with mental structures. Knowledge is seen as an interpretive act; it is the process of inventing, and it is distinct from discovery. Learners progress from concrete exploration in meaningful contexts, to symbolic representations and abstract models. Learning is a case of building with and from initial assimilatory structures. It involves teaching for conceptual understanding. Teaching and learning in this framework is a process of negotiation, involving the construction and exchange of personally relevant and viable meanings. Prior learning and experience are important aspects of this learning theory (Walker & Lambert, 1995). This type of learning is manifested in cognitive apprenticeship, situated learning, and communities of practice. Table 4 provides a summary of the Constructivist Perspective.

Table 4. *Constructivist Perspective*

<i>Learning Process</i>	Construction of meaning from experience
<i>Locus of Learning</i>	Internal construction of reality by individual
<i>Teacher's Role</i>	Facilitates and negotiates meaning with learner
<i>Manifestations in Adult Learning</i>	Experiential learning Self-directed learning Perspective transformation Reflective practice

Transformative learning perspective. This perspective focuses on construction of experience, inner meaning, and reflection. Learning is viewed as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action. Transformative learning requires reflection, critical reflection, and perspective transformation. Perspective transformation involves becoming critically aware of how and why one's presuppositions have come to constrain the way one perceives, understands, and feels about the world. As part of the process, the individual reformulates these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective, and makes decisions or acts on these understandings. This perspective comprises four types of knowledge: adding knowledge to meaning schemes, changing old meaning schemes, learning new meaning schemes, and changing perspective. This type of learning perspective can have major implications for the practice of continuing professional education (Mezirow, 1990; 1998). Table 5 provides a summary of the Transformative Learning Perspective.

Table 5. *Transformative Learning Perspective*

<i>Learning Process</i>	Through critical reflection on assumptions
<i>Locus of Learning</i>	Learn new meaning schemes to transform perspective
<i>Teacher's Role</i>	Foster critical self-reflection
<i>Manifestations in Adult Learning</i>	Values and ethics education Diversity training Transformation of practice in Continuing Professional Education (CPE)

Implications for Organizational Learning

Traditionally, the behaviorist approach has been dominant in HRD since individual performance in organizations is often evaluated in terms of tangible, quantifiable, and financial outcomes. However, cognitive, humanist, constructivist, and transformative learning have found their place in the field of HRD. There are also other aspects that differentiate the two fields, such as goals and financial resources. For example, in HRD, since objectives of organizational learning are often aligned with a firm's strategic efficiencies, their learning programs consequently reflect immediate performance improvement accompanied by tailored programs for various firm-specific skills. On

the other hand, in adult education a much broader spectrum of goals, ranging from GED classes to cultural orientation programs, are pursued to meet the needs of diverse adult learners. As a result, content delivery and subsequent resource generation are substantially different from each other in the two fields. For example, while management's discretion ultimately allocates resources in HRD, in adult education public funding as well as government assistance plays a crucial role in generating necessary resources. Yet, the philosophical distinctions have been recently diminished in the two fields with increasing attention on both cognitive and humanistic applications in HRD.

HRD is a very large field of practice and a relatively young academic discipline. Traditionally, HRD has been concerned with the dynamic issues of individual and organizational change. Consequently, the foundations of HRD are deeply rooted in the idea of the human being purposefully developing with the anticipation of being able to improve conditions through a process. An outgrowth, in part, of the vocational education tradition, HRD was intended to encompass more than vocational education, to be seen and applied more broadly to workplace performance and learning, and to provide more support to practitioners (Azevedo & McLean, 2002). Swanson (2005) defines HRD as a process, which aims to develop and unleash human expertise that may be achieved through Organization Development (OD) and Personnel Training and Development (T&D) so as to improve performance in organizations. As such, the key components of this definition are OD, T&D, and performance at the organization, process, and individual level.

It is further argued that cognitive growth, one of the goals of adult education, can be coordinated with behavioral changes in HRD, particularly when facilitated by the humanist vision of the learning organization in which management values self-directed/motivated employees and promote their learning (Peterson & Provo, 2000). Ultimately, organizations which develop/unleash human expertise in their employees by linking the two fields can truly become learning organizations since individual growth is one of the core elements of organizational and group performance improvement.

For Practitioners to be Effective Trainers

With a growing interest in the notion of teaching organizations (Tichy & Cohen, 2000), effective teaching is emphasized as a means to create continuous learning opportunities for both adult and HRD learners. For example, in today's fast changing business environment, individual learning and development should be strategically linked with those of the organization in a systematic way. Similarly, in adult education, a trainer's ability to connect new knowledge into learners' existing knowledge and experience is crucial to create learner-centered and self-directed learning. HRD professionals and adult educators, by virtue of years of academic and practical experience, make effective trainers in that they can make changes relevant to individual needs while synthesizing individual efforts to meet common objectives.

For Practitioners to be Facilitators and Communicators

HRD professionals and adult educators can provide opportunities for adult learners to reflect on past experience, and to find connections between their existing knowledge and new knowledge and skills, thereby helping them integrate these new knowledge and skills. Furthermore, both practitioners can facilitate the learning process by assessing the learners' existing knowledge and skills to identify their strengths and weaknesses for planning the learning context. To expedite this process, it is imperative that practitioners open a channel of communication that is free from threat and further provide support for personal creativity. Consequently, practitioners' roles as facilitators and communicators have a significant impact on learners' motivation and progress although responsibility of learning ultimately lies with each individual learner.

For Practitioners to be Strategic Integrators

Learning, even self-directed learning, rarely occurs in complete isolation from the world in which the learner lives; learning is closely related to others and affected by interactions with them (Jarvis, 1987). As discussed earlier, the forces affecting today's workplace, such as demographics, global economy, and technology, shape the dimensions of adult learning as well as organizational learning. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) precisely captured the nature of adult learning in a single sentence: adult learning does not occur in a vacuum. For example, there seems to be a trend that a number of community/adult learning centers offer academic and computer courses in conjunction with local businesses to equip adult learners with skills to meet growing technological needs, which reflects the dominant trend of integration of the two fields. Similarly, to be effective in managing today's aging and diverse workforce, HRD professionals should also understand and integrate adult learning theories in their practices.

Conclusion

Our workforce has become more diverse and mobile. McLagan (1989) argues that the workforce is becoming more diverse with minority groups, women, and aging workers than ever before. Furthermore, literacy gaps have widened

with increasing proportions of the adult population classified as “functionally illiterate,” and companies are increasingly outsourcing their workforce to cut costs and maintain competitive. To maintain their jobs, the majority of employees are seeking further education and training. As a result, there are emerging groups of learners with special learning needs; however, without an understanding of issues germane to the current diverse workforce, efforts to facilitate adult learning may be ineffective.

As the economy has moved from the industrial/manufacturing era to the service and customer oriented era, job requirements are also changing while creating different sets of skills that workers must learn. Essentially, workers are moving from needing repetitive skills to knowing how to deal with complex technologies and tools, from depending on memory and facts to being creative and adaptive, from focusing on policies and procedures to problem solving and collaboration with others in a team. The global economy has also direct consequences on learning in adulthood. For example, as the world is becoming smaller through advancement in technology, organizational success depends upon the ability of workers to compete globally, not with organizations’ ability to acquire that piece of technology. To prosper in the fierce global competition, it is important that employees acquire knowledge and skills to stay ahead of the competition. Learning, from this perspective, has become a more integral part of the organizational structure and strategic planning.

An aging workforce with a diverse background, technological changes reflected in the service/customer oriented industry, and the global economy are the forces that are intertwined, and thus, affect every aspect of organizational life and adult learning. The definition is restricted to adults and the ways they can change, which is related to adult learning. Adult learning is defined as the process of adults gaining knowledge and expertise; it is inextricably intertwined with the practices and processes of HRD. However, because of HRD’s focus on performance, the significance of adult learning is generally viewed as secondary by most professionals in HRD (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). To enable organizations to achieve “learning organization” through economic growth, organizational effectiveness, and employee productivity, HRD scholars and professionals need to adequately address the process of continuous learning that occurs within organizations. Therefore, HRD practitioners and adult educators need to collaborate more closely to help employees to respond to these forces prevalent in today’s workplace.

As Merriam and Brockett (1997) pointed out in their article, education facilitates a learning process that prepares members of society for changes affecting their lives. Although differences are found between the two fields, we believe that a shared notion can be derived from them: through learning, individuals can become productive members of family, community, workplace, and ultimately the society in which they live. This common thread stems from the fact that both adult education and HRD deal with adult learners with diverse life and work backgrounds.

All the tasks people engage in, whether they comprise paid employment or work in the home, call for new knowledge, skills, and attitudes at various stages of their lives. Although there are differences between the two fields, we believe that a complementary relationship between the two professions has been emerging to cope with the changes that affect individuals and organizations as the line distinguishing them blurs and their applications are becoming increasingly integrated. In light of continuing/life-long education, the ultimate goal of both professionals is to educate people, to encourage them to be accountable for their tasks, and thus to be responsible for their own learning.

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