

# Personal perspective on the challenges confronting the HRD field of study and practice: A 'wake-up' call for HRD practitioners and HRD scholars

Robert G. Hamlin<sup>†</sup>

University of Wolverhampton

## Introduction

Since the early 1980s the human resource development (HRD) field of study and practice has grown into a large and distinct professional domain. However, it now appears to have reached maturity (Harrison et al., 2021) and might possibly be entering a period of contraction or even potential decline, as depicted in Figure 1. According to Greiner, like all living organisms, organizations follow the common life cycle of 'birth', 'growth', 'maturity', 'decline' and ultimate death. However, according to Charles Handy, mature organizations that intend to survive and achieve long-term sustainability can avoid the risk of decline by engaging in a timely process of critical reflection, renewal, and transformation. Literature suggests that HRD has reached a point in its life cycle where choices need to be made regarding what changes and transformations are required to ensure it survives and thrives as a distinct field of practice, and even of study. This emergent situation should be of great concern to all HRD professionals - regardless as to whether they are practitioners, scholar-practitioners, or scholars. Indeed, as Poell et al. (2024) observe, drawing upon Hambrick and Chen (2008), research on fields of study and practice show that not all survive and grow; some linger for a while and then disappear while others languish as competing fields emerge and encroach on their territory. The aim of this 'invited perspective article' is to provoke thought about where HRD is really going, and what could or should be done to prevent or arrest any perceived or actual decline.

The article is targeted primarily toward "HRD practitioners" who, in their respective everyday occupational roles perform all or some of the functions of the HRD field of practice. They include professional HRD practitioners on the full-time or part-time payroll of public, private, or third (non-profit) sector organizations (i.e. trainers and developers who in today's

world are referred to as *training and development (T&D) officers/managers/directors, learning and development (L&D) officers/managers/directors, talent managers/directors, management and leadership development (MLD) specialists, organization development (OD) specialists, organizational effectiveness(OE) managers, etc*), plus other 'people and organizational development' professionals who provide HRD related services to client organizations nationally or internationally such as: *executive coach/mentors, management consultants, and organizational change and development (OCD) consultants*. To provide a perspective on the challenges posed by the above concerns about HRD's future, I offer my retrospective and prospective view which is based on approximately 60 years of continuous experience working as an HRD professional - initially for 20 years as a professional trainer and training manager working in several manufacturing industries, then 20 years as an HRD scholar-practitioner, faculty manager, and ultimately full professor in a UK university business school which was followed by 20+ years in semi-retirement as an emeritus HRD professor and independent MLD consultant.

## My retrospective view of the HRD field of study and practice

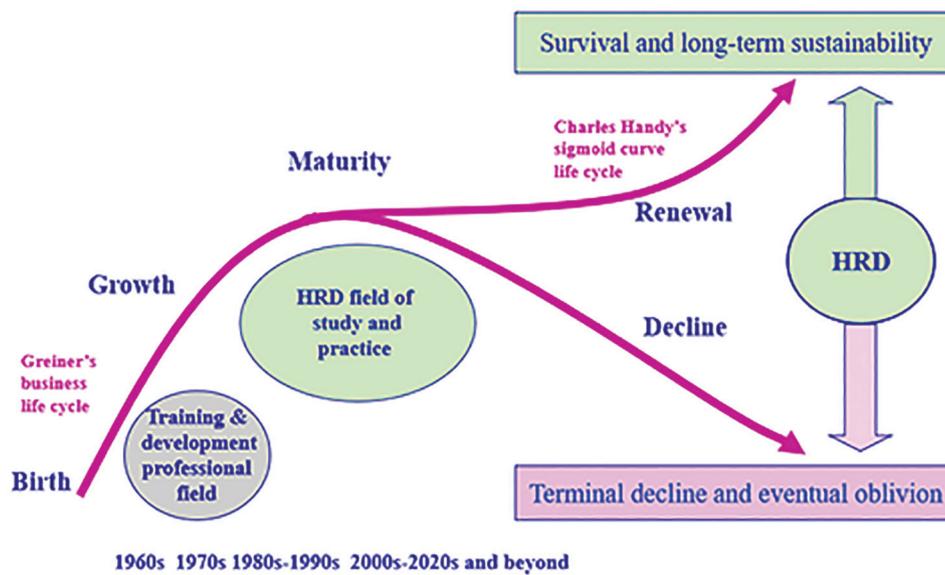
A major challenge confronting the HRD field, besides its perceived or actual decline, relates to how it is seen by people in other professional domains of practice. To my mind, this begs the question - *How much recognition does HRD attract in the UK and the USA?* The uncomfortable answer is *not very much*. From a UK perspective, ever

<sup>†</sup> Corresponding author: Robert G. Hamlin

E-mail: R.G.Hamlin@wlv.ac.uk

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**Figure 1.** Reflecting on the past, present, and future of HRD: A challenge and ‘wake-up’ call for HRD practitioners.

since its conceptualization in the 1980s, the term ‘HRD’ has rarely been used by governments or their agencies (Stewart & Rigg, 2011). It is not even used by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) to describe, represent, or account for any aspect of activity in the occupational field/profession of human resources (HR). Although use of the term human resource management (HRM) is commonplace, the term HRD does not feature in any part of the CIPD’s ‘HR Profession Map’ which outlines the ‘core knowledge’, ‘core behaviours’, and ‘specialist knowledge’ required by HR professionals (Stewart & Sambrook, 2012). The predominant term used is ‘learning and development’ though other core components in my understanding and experience of HRD practice are embedded within what the CIPD refers to as ‘talent management’ and ‘organization development and design’. As Stewart and Sambrook claim, HRD appears to have been talked into being by academics, and the term is more evident in academe than in either the national context or the world of practice. But even in academe, the identity of HRD as a field of study has been eroded with few present-day UK universities offering postgraduate study programmes with HRD in the title. An investigation commissioned by the University Forum for Human Resource Development (UFHRD) in 2018 revealed only seven HEIs (i.e. universities) in the UK were offering an MA or MSc in HRD, although a further five universities offered an MA in HRM/HRD. A similar situation applies today with most universities that teach any aspect of HRD at postgraduate level do so merely as a thin strand of curricula within MA in HRM programmes.

Despite the USA-based Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) having been in existence for over 30

years, the term ‘HRD’ has not taken root as the wellspring of formal training (see Ruona, 2014). Nor does it have a highly recognizable identity in broader society, and HRD professionals cannot claim that what they practice is highly specialized (i.e. *distinctive*). Furthermore, as Ruona (2014) has also argued, what is perceived as the HRD domain is not recognised as a profession by people outside the field, and it is unlikely to become a true profession unless some tectonic shifts take place with respect to other specialisms concerned with ‘people and organizational development (POD)’. She concluded, and continues to claim, that in the USA the HRD domain clearly remains a fragile occupational field which is precariously traversing forward. Based on her observations during the past two years as a senior OD consultant with one of the largest home improvement retailers worldwide, she has never heard the term ‘HRD’ mentioned. Instead, the terms ‘L&D’ or ‘OD’ or ‘OE’ are widely used with practitioners being very clear about their respective roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, she asserts that the construct of HRD is not even on the radar of any of these POD-related practitioners. Additionally, in her part-time roles as a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology and an Associate Professor in the College of Education at the University of Georgia (USA), she observes that her colleague professors rarely talk or think about HRD or even access specific HRD journals.

Hence, as currently focused and constituted, the HRD field (domain) appears in both countries to be struggling and is possibly on a trajectory of travel heading toward terminal decline. I have argued previously that HRD needs urgently to refocus and renew to reverse such a trend and thereby

get onto a trajectory that leads to survival and long-term sustainability (Hamlin, 2017; Hamlin & Ruona, 2019). More recently, other scholars and scholar-practitioners have called for a radical re-thinking of the purpose and remit of HRD and have questioned whether extant taken-for-granted HRD related theories and research are still appropriate (Bierema et al., 2023). As Kwon et al. (2024) lament, to date HRD research rarely contributes to the development of practical knowledge that has relevance and utility for dealing with real-world problems, and this has resulted in the field's dismal impact. Furthermore, the recognised extant 'research-practice gap' within the HRD field appears to be exacerbated not only by the scepticism of many practitioners towards academic research, but also by the difficulties they encounter in using HRD research effectively (Moore & Cho, 2024).

I have suggested elsewhere that a good starting point for refocusing HRD and thereby getting it onto a renewed survival trajectory, should be a SWOT analysis to identify the 'weaknesses' and 'threats' that could be contributing to HRD's apparent risk of further decline, whilst at the same time identifying HRD's 'strengths' and the 'opportunities' that could be capitalised upon if the right type of refocus and renewal takes place (Hamlin, 2017; Hamlin & Ruona, 2019). The key issues of concern and of optimism are set out in Figure 2.

A major weakness of HRD is that too many practitioners lack credibility in the eyes of many if not most managers, particularly practitioners who are attached to the HR function. This is because so often HR professionals are perceived negatively by line managers who place uniformly low role expectations upon them (see Cardillo, 2012;

Hamlin, 2001; Sheehan, 2014; Thornhill et al., 2000). Furthermore, this HRD practitioner credibility problem is exacerbated by too many HR professionals seeing HRD as a subset of HRM that is concerned primarily with the delivery and administration of 'off-the-job' and 'on-the-job' learning and training to meet the needs of individual employees. Another major weakness of many if not most HRD practitioners is their lack of a 'business and management' focus and orientation. Indeed, many line managers perceive HRD practitioners as not having the necessary business-related competencies to be an effective 'strategic partner' in helping them deliver the strategic agenda of the organization (Garavan, et al., 2020).

In my view, a major factor impacting upon and threatening the survival and long-term sustainability of HRD comes from the now well established and expanding field of 'professional' coaching and mentoring which seeks its own 'unique' identity. Hence, many professional coaches identify HRD with traditional 'training and development' (T&D) and not with strategic 'organizational change and development' (OCD) which is also a core component of HRD (Hamlin, 2016). However, the good news is that in some organizations, but sadly in too few, HRD practitioners have high credibility in the eyes of senior managers and operate as their 'strategic partners'. In so doing, their HRD practice is primarily concerned with helping managers bring about 'beneficial behavioural change' that leads to additional or improved 'capabilities' and 'competencies' at the individual, group, and/or organizational level through learning, training, development, and other HRD related activities as depicted in Figure 3. It means that unlike most other functional

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<p>Fundamentally HRD is concerned with performance-related behaviour change at the individual, group and organizational level within organizations or in other host systems</p> <p>Unlike most other functional specialists, an HRD practitioners have a functional right to be concerned with the work and performance of people at all levels of the organization, and to have access to all managers and leaders at all levels of management</p>	<p>HRD practitioners lack credibility in the eyes of many if not most managers</p> <p>Too many HRD practitioners exhibit insufficient understanding of business and management</p> <p>Many managers associate HRD practitioners with the HRM function which they generally perceive in a negative light</p>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<p>Managers having to react to changes that are either imposed by outside events/forces, or instigate change from within the organization to address identified problems or opportunities to achieve high performance and sustainable success</p> <p>To be in control of change managers need to be in control of the knowledge, attitude, skill, and habit (KASH) issues associated with all change</p>	<p>Too many HR professionals perceive HRD as a subset of HRM concerned mainly with L &amp; D</p> <p>Coaching and mentoring professionals see HRD as concerned with L &amp; D, and differentiate C &amp; M as a separate professional field and discipline</p>

Figure 2. A SWOT analysis of the HRD field of study and practice.

specialists, HRD practitioners are individually or collectively concerned with the work and performance of people at all levels of the organization and thereby have or should have functional access to all managers from the top to bottom of their respective organization's managerial hierarchy. Herein lies opportunities for those with the right focus, skills, and mindset to operate strategically, not only in the role as an expert *training and development consultant*, but also as a *learning consultant* who helps managers take proactive ownership of their own self-development and responsibility for encouraging and nurturing all their staff to do the same; and as an *organizational change consultant* who supports 'learning focused' managers to facilitate effectively and beneficially OCD initiatives (see Phillips & Shaw, 1989). Recent research in the UK, USA, and the Netherlands (NL) suggests such strategic influence and partnering with managers happens only in a small minority of organizations. From their study in the UK, Jones and Kah (2022) found most HRD practitioners perceived the HRD role primarily as: i) "meeting the learning and development needs of employees", including how they are onboarded and (career) developed through their lifetime in the organization, and ii) striving to exercise "strategic influence" to effect decisions at a higher level; though with some research participants claiming that HRD was not a strategic function. This UK research was part of a larger study by Lundgren et al. (2024) who explored how HRD role enactment is perceived respectively by two sets of stakeholders (i.e. HRD practitioners: n=36 and non-HRD related managers: n=35) within 16 organizations across three Western countries (NL: n=4; UK: n=6; USA: n=6). These researchers found four organizations (2xUK; 2xUSA) where there was agreement (congruence) between the stakeholders on the "strategic partnering role" of HRD, and four (2xNL; 1xUK; 1xUSA) where there was stakeholder agreement (congruence) on the "operational role" of HRD. In the other eight organizations there was incongruence on HRD role perceptions. The HRD practitioners of three of these latter organizations (2xUK; 1xUS) aspired to be strategic but the line managers saw their role as operational, whilst the HRD practitioners of the other five organizations (2xNL; 1xUK; 2xUSA) were 'on the fence' - being caught between seeing their role as operational or strategic. Overall, this research suggests that a large majority of HRD practitioners strive to build and maintain a strategic presence in organizations, and senior managers in a few organizations readily see, value, and take advantage of their 'strategic partnering role'. However, most line managers in most organizations do not see the value of any strategic input from HRD practitioners but instead expect them to provide more hands-on support performing in 'operational roles.' This finding lends support to Garavan et al. (2020) who revealed *role conflict* existing in many organizations in

many countries; and this was because L&D practitioners found it difficult to disentangle themselves from operational as opposed to strategic activities due to the demands of line managers who only expected them to perform in L&D operational roles.

Hence, as other researchers have demonstrated, the HRD roles adopted and enacted by HRD practitioners in organizations are strongly influenced by the attitudes and expectations of line managers (Stewart et al., 2022). A major challenge confronting the HRD field of practice is how to change the expectations of line managers within organizations such that they welcome HRD practitioners as their 'strategic partners' in formulating and/or implementing organizational strategy - whether at the 'corporate', 'business', 'functional' or 'operational' level.

### My prospective view of the HRD field of study and practice

To address the above concerns and challenges confronting HRD, the key question that needs to be asked is: *What should HRD practitioners and HRD scholars do to change the expectations of line managers regarding the HRD function?* To answer this question, I suggest it will be essential for HRD practitioners progressively to gain *credibility* in the eyes of managers. And this will only come about if HRD is embedded into the *fabric of management* and the *bloodstream of the organization* so that it becomes part of the top-down pressure system which drives performance within organizations. What top managers decide as 'first order' considerations are invariably considered important by lower-level managers and their staff. Consequently, these considerations usually receive the amount of time and serious attention they deserve. Unfortunately, few managers of many if not most organizations, whether in the public, private (for profit), or voluntary/third (non-profit) sectors, devote sufficient time and effort to HRD related issues on a daily, weekly, monthly, or even yearly basis. As Gold et al. (2003) lamented, HRD is at best only a 'fourth order' consideration. Thus, a major challenge confronting HRD practitioners is finding ways of HRD becoming a 'first order' consideration in the minds of all managers. But how can this be achieved? In my view, HRD practitioners need to: i) clarify and reach consensus with HRD scholars on what HRD is as a field of study and practice and where its boundaries lie; ii) find opportunities for maximizing the contribution that HRD can make towards organizational effectiveness and high performance; iii) proactively explore ways to embed HRD into organization wide managerial practices such that managers use it as an everyday tool of management; and (iv) become 'evidence-based' by

using extant 'best evidence' to inform, shape, and critically evaluate their own professional practice, and by conducting or instigating internal research in collaboration with HRD scholars if necessary to generate a better understanding of workplace performance-related problems. I now offer some thoughts on each of these challenging requirements.

### Defining the HRD field of study and practice

Despite over 25 definitions of HRD having been offered since the 1960s, Wendy Ruona in her Keynote Address (Ruona, 2014) at the 2014 UFHRD International Conference on HRD Research and Practice Across Europe suggested that in the absence of a definitional consensus HRD professionals could lean on the assertion of Hamlin and Stewart (2011) that:

[HRD is:] *in essence a process or activity that helps or enables individuals, groups, organizations or host systems to learn, develop, and change behaviour for the purpose of improving or enhancing their competence.*

Reflecting upon 'what HRD is' and 'where its boundaries lie', I offered in my Keynote Address (Hamlin, 2017) at the 2017 UFHRD International Conference on HRD Research and Practice Across Europe a definition of HRD which embraces all forms of activity concerned with identifying the learning and development needs of individuals, groups,

organizations, and other types of organizational entities, and the core activities involved in meeting those identified needs, as follows:

["HRD" is:] *the study or practice concerned with the diagnosis of performance-related behaviour change requirements at the individual, group, and organizational level within any host entity, and the design, delivery, and evaluation of formal and/or informal learning activities to meet the identified needs.*

However, in this definition you will note that I have placed the term HRD within double quotation marks. This is to make explicit that HRD embraces all the activities set out in Figure 3 which reflects my understanding of this field of study and practice based on my 60 plus years of professional engagement as a trainer, developer, manager, and researcher.

### Maximizing the contribution of HRD in organizational contexts

Reflecting on the second need to maximize the contribution of the HRD function in organizational contexts, HRD practitioners have largely been successful in the "HRD" related areas of T&D, CD, WBL, VET, and C&M which focus predominantly on individual learning and development needs. But they have been much less successful in maximising



Figure 3. Defining Human Resource Development: HRD related Core Components/learning and Development Activities.

HRD's contribution to organizational effectiveness and the creation of high performing organizations through the MLD, OCD, OD, OL, and AL components of the HRD field of practice. For example, in the UK, many if not most MLD programmes have historically failed to bring about significant managerial behaviour change and concomitant improved performance. As noted by Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2003), despite massive investment by UK private and public organizations in leadership development initiatives, these often fail. A similar situation has existed historically in the USA where the majority of MLD programmes fail or have had only limited effect (see Collins & Holton, 2004). More recent writers suggest little has changed over the past 20 years or so (see Ardichvili et al., 2016; Bregman, 2013; Pfeffer, 2016), and despite the huge annual investment in MLD-related provision in many countries - with 'leadership training' alone having become a \$366 billion global industry (Westfall, 2019) - it appears that most programmes fail to achieve their goals of bringing about the desired changes in managerial behaviour and performance (see also Hamlin & Patel, 2024). And according to Gurdjian et al. (2014), the reasons why so many MLD programmes fail is because the providers:

- i) Overlook the organizational context and assume the same group of skills or style fits all situations.
- ii) Decouple reflection from real work, and struggle to transfer learning into changed front-line behaviour.
- iii) Shirk from identifying *below the surface* thinking, feelings, assumptions, beliefs and mindsets.
- iv) Pay lip service to the importance of leadership development, and omit to measure the value of the investments.

This is a huge failing on the part of HRD practitioners who engage in MLD activities.

There is an even more dismal situation regarding OCD activities. Recent literature reveals 70% or more of OCD initiatives fail to achieve their stated aims regardless as to whether they relate to 'downsizing', 'delaying', 'right sizing', 'business process re-engineering-(BPR)', total quality management (TQM)', IT-related changes, mergers and acquisitions, or culture change programmes (see Hamlin, 2019 for further details). Furthermore, based on a previous comprehensive review of literature, I have identified six root failings of OCD change agency on the part of managers, trainers, and developers (Hamlin, 2001), as follows:

Failing 1: Managers not knowing the fundamental principles of change management.

Failing 2: Managers succumbing to the temptation of the 'quick-fix' or 'simple solution'.

Failing 3: Managers not fully appreciating the significance of the leadership and cultural aspects of change.

Failing 4: Managers not sufficiently appreciating the significance of the people issue.

Failing 5: Managers not knowing the critical contribution that the HRD function can make to the management of change.

Failing 6: Trainers and developers lacking *credibility* in the eyes of line managers.

As previously mentioned, too many managers have 'blind spots' regarding HRD, seeing it only in terms of formal off-the-job training and qualification programmes. And most are unaware of the modern-day conceptualization of HRD, let alone of *strategic* HRD and of those HRD practitioners who for decades in some organizations have taken on the role of the *organizational change consultant*. What so many line managers ignore is that in most change initiatives, whether imposed from outside or instigated from within, 'new' knowledge, attitudes, skills, and habits (KASH) must be acquired, and 'existing' KASH must be either unlearned or re-distributed to others in the organization. Unless OCD related KASH gaps are addressed efficiently and effectively, whether identified or not, individuals, teams, and whole organizations will risk failure or only partial success in facilitating required changes and performance improvements. OCD can either be brought about effectively and beneficially to reach a desired future state, or detrimentally with the organization and its people suffering unintended damaging consequences and ending up in an unwanted state. For managers to be in control of change they need to be in control of the KASH issues associated with change itself. This realization on the part of managers should afford HRD practitioners with opportunities to provide advice and support, whether relating to large episodic 'strategic' transformational change programmes or to small, mundane, and continuous incremental 'operational' change initiatives. In this way, they could and should make a greater contribution than has been the case for so many in the past. Further details of these failings of managers and HRD practitioners can be found in Hamlin (2016) and Hamlin (2019).

### Embedding HRD into managerial practice

To achieve the third need of proactively embedding HRD into the '*fabric of management*' and the '*bloodstream of the organization*', HRD practitioners could and should amongst other initiatives: i) identify those productivity/performance-related operational or functional problems of greatest concern to first line managers/supervisors that are caused or partially caused by KASH deficiencies at the individual, group, or organizational level; ii) strive to align HRD practice

to the *strategic thrust* of the organization by focusing on those departmental or business unit performance-related problems or opportunities that are of greatest concern or interest to middle and senior managers, and identify the associated KASH issues of critical importance; iii) persuade managers at all levels of the organization more convincingly about the contribution that HRD can make towards the creation of *high performance organizations* and the achievement of optimum *organizational effectiveness* and long term *sustainable business success*.

Regarding the latter initiative, the conceptualised 'High Performance Equation-HPE' model offered by Hamlin (2007) (see Figure 4) could be of help to HRD practitioners for persuading managers as to why they need to become more 'learning focused', particularly bearing in mind the managerial need to be in control of change and the associated KASH issues. Although it is a truism that all high performing organizations are made up of high performing groups, teams, and individuals, high performance does not happen on its own but must be made to happen. And in organizations the primary responsibility to make it happen lies with individual managers from the top to the bottom of the managerial hierarchy. But delivering consistent and sustainable high performance is easier said than done. Mullins (1993) suggests the achievement of high-performance results from the functioning of two interacting factors: 'Ability' x 'Motivation'. Building on from this notion, and drawing upon Campbell et al. (1993) who claimed individual differences are a function of three interacting determinants: 'Declarative Knowledge-DK', 'Procedural Knowledge/Skill-PKS', and 'Motivation-M' [where the combination of 'DK' and 'PKS' constitutes 'Ability'], I have argued the outcome of this interaction is moderated by the positive or negative effects of a third factor: 'Environment' (Hamlin, 2007). I have also argued that each of the three factors consist of several underpinning components, as depicted in the HPE model; and these need to be kept up-to-date and in balance and thus constantly 'in-fit' for the ever-changing demands and requirements impacting on

organizations. And this calls for a high order of managerial 'change agency' capability, cognition, and competence. An explanation of each of the HPE components can be found in Appendix 1.

To sustain real and lasting change within organizations, people at all levels may need to change their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. This requires managers at all levels, acting in their respective roles as 'change agents', to create the conditions whereby their staff are convincingly persuaded, encouraged, supported, and motivated in making the necessary behavioural changes. This means developing a working environment in which the culture and climate are conducive to learning, continuous improvement, creativity, and change. However, the previously mentioned dismal record of failed OCD and MLD initiatives of all kinds suggests that many if not most managers in most organizations give insufficient attention to these important managerial requirements. If HRD practitioners can be successful in getting their colleague managers to fully recognize the significance of keeping the interacting HPE factors and components 'in-fit' through 'learning focused' approaches to change, then the opportunities to maximize their contribution to organizational effectiveness, performance and sustainable business success are likely to be much enhanced. However, to do so they need to become fully skilled as a 'change agent' themselves, capable of analysing and making sense of the interacting relationships between an organization's structure, function, and culture, and of the complexities, contradictions, and paradoxes of organizational life (see Hamlin & Russ-Eft, 2019). The HPE model is a tool that could be useful to HRD practitioners for conducting organizational analyses to identify specific performance-related problems relating to any of the ten components of the HPE model that are or should be of concern and/or importance to managers, and which require some form of HRD intervention/contribution if they are to be effectively addressed.

$$\begin{array}{l}
 \text{HP} = \int (\text{Ability} \times \text{Motivation}) \text{Environment} \\
 \begin{array}{l}
 \text{Organization} \\
 \text{Group} \\
 \text{Individual}
 \end{array}
 \end{array}
 \begin{array}{l}
 \text{Capability} \quad \text{Confidence} \quad \text{Communication} \\
 \text{Cognition} \quad \text{Commitment} \quad \text{Climate} \\
 \text{Competence} \quad \text{Collaboration} \quad \text{Culture} \\
 \text{Credibility}
 \end{array}$$

© Hamlin (2004)

Figure 4. Embedding Human Resource Development into Organizations: The High performance equation (HPE).

## Becoming an 'evidence-based' HRD practitioner

Regarding the fourth need, HRD practitioners should be mindful that functional specialists in various professional fields such as medicine, healthcare, education, engineering, public management, and management in general, are increasingly becoming 'evidence-based' in the way they practice. The implication for HRD practitioners is that they need also to become 'evidence based' in their own practice, which means for example: i) using 'best evidence' derived from good research to inform, shape, and critically evaluate practice; ii) engaging in collaborative 'partnership research' with HRD scholars to better understand specific work-based issues/problems; and/or iii) becoming a 'scholar-practitioner' skilled in facilitating internal research and/or 'action research' to help managers bring about required individual, group, and/or organizational level behaviour change. Further details of these implications can be found in a previous issue of this journal (Hamlin, 2016) and elsewhere (Hamlin, 2019). However, regarding the first example, there are limitations to the application of evidence-based HRD, OCD, and management, due to the lack of sound and sufficient bodies of relevant 'best evidence', especially those comprised of Mode 1 research that generates '*conceptual knowledge*' to advance understanding. According to McClean and Kim (2019), these limitations with respect to evidence-based OCD include for example: i) the need for practitioners to be capable of understanding scientific literature, which means at least being able to read the literature critically to determine the quality of the evidence; ii) the difficulty to generate knowledge that is accepted by practitioners as evidence which can be applied broadly across many organizations; iii) the quality of much published research in terms of deficiencies in either its design, theoretical framework, problem statement, literature review, data analysis, or findings and conclusions, etc.; and iv) the lack of sufficient detailed background information on the explored research problems, collaborating organizations, participants, procedures, and processes, that is required to enable practitioners to decide whether the generated evidence is best suitable for current use; and to determine how closely the organizations that collaborated in the research compare with the respective practitioners' organizations or host (client) organizations in which the 'best evidence' is to be implemented.

These limitations, and the consequential dearth of 'best evidence', literature pose a huge challenge for HRD scholars who need urgently to address the *research-practice gap in HRD*. This is a serious issue that has been articulated and explored in the book: *Bridging the scholar-practitioner gap in human resources development* co-edited by Hughes and Gosney (2016), and most recently by Moore and Cho (2024) in their article *How can we bridge the research-practice gap?*

*Lets hear from HR practitioners!* According to these latter writers, HR (HRD/HRM) practitioners face various challenges in engaging with and using academic research; these include for example the lack of awareness of HRD journals, language and communication barriers in reading academic articles, time constraints in digesting long and heavy research articles, a lack of trust in the relevance of research topics explored by researchers who have no real-life experience in the world of practice, and the impracticality of so much published research. Hence, as well as management scholars, HRD scholars need to consider how best to maximize the *relevance* and *utility* of their respective research and scholarly output. They could, for example: i) increasingly focus their studies on exploring real-life generic problems or 'hot topics' considered to be of interest, concern, and/or importance to both HRD practitioners and managers alike; (ii) be open to engaging in collaborative *partnership research* with HRD practitioners to explore and better understand specific work-based problems that truly matter to managers within specific organizational contexts; (iii) embrace the concept of *design science* by advocating the identification of HRD and management related *field problems* manifested in multiple organizations within or across sectoral and even national boundaries, that call for Mode 2 research studies to generate *instrumental knowledge* for use as 'best evidence' in support of evidence-based practice; and (iv) engage in *mid-range theory* development through *derived-etic studies* based on *replication logic* and *multiple cross-case comparative analysis*.

## Conclusion

Based on the current trends and trajectory of travel the long-term future of HRD as a distinct field of study and practice appears to be somewhat questionable. Hence, something needs to be done differently, or at least to a greater extent, by professional HRD practitioners and HRD scholars alike if the risk of potential decline is to be arrested. In my view, this will require many more HRD professionals being '*business and management*' orientated as well as '*human resource development*' orientated. Additionally, they will need to develop the skills and capabilities required to operate effectively as internal *organizational change consultants* and *learning consultants*, and not just as *training and development consultants*. This is necessary if they are to gain sufficient credibility to partner with managers and/or business leaders in helping them facilitate either small-scale and/or large-scale change at the operational and/or strategic level to improve individual, group, and organizational effectiveness and performance, and thereby develop high performance organizations characterised by 'dynamic stability' and 'sustainable success' (Holbeche, 2012).

But even such action may not be enough to ensure the survival of HRD as a distinct field of practice as opposed to a field of study, and the 'unthinkable' notion of a label change may need to be considered. As Hamlin and Stewart (2011) deduced from their definitional review and synthesis of the HRD domain, there is so much that is held in common between the respective 'core purposes' and 'processes' of the respective occupational fields of HRD, OD, and C&M. Hence, if it so happens that those HRD scholars who engage in 'theorising and theory building', and/or have recently called for the 'transformation of HRD', are clear that OD and C&M fall within the focus of the particular HRD identity lens they use, then I suggest they give serious consideration to the notion of calling for an integrated occupational field of practice (profession) that embraces all aspects of 'people and organizational development'. If this integration is not feasible in practice, I suggest they should consider adopting a different descriptive label for HRD which is an all-embracing applied field of study (discipline), in the same way as the fields of medicine, engineering, and psychology. In so doing, it is likely all practitioners who presently self-identify as either a professional T&D/L&D practitioner, or MLD/OD/OE specialist, or professional coach/mentor, could and would recognize and accept this label as an overarching identifier for their specific variant of 'people and organizational development' practice. In conclusion, I hope the 'food for thought' offered via this 'invited perspective article' will provoke some form of action that will help place the HRD field of study and practice onto a viable trajectory of travel that will ensure its survival and long-term sustainability.

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## Appendix 1

### The High Performance Equation-HPE

Explanation of each HPE component

#### The 'Ability' Factor

*Capability:* This is about an organization or business unit having the right quantity and quality of investment in physical and human assets to enable it to respond effectively to present and future events, and to turn its 'technical' know-how into results. The investment includes all types of *capital*, both financial, technical, human, intellectual, and social - and of course the right *strategy*, *structure*, and *systems* in place to ensure best use of these assets. This calls for '*innovation*' and '*speed*' which are critical organizational capabilities. In an age of increasing environmental change and turbulence, an organization's capacity to change, adapt, and transform its *capital* infrastructure quickly to maintain its competitive edge and cope effectively with all contingency events is an important core capability.

*Cognition:* Within complex, ambiguous, and continuously changing environments, managers and other organizational actors including HRD practitioners need to absorb, process, make sense of, and then disseminate a bewildering flow of information to make decisions and solve problems. The way they construct aspects of their life at work, develop theories of knowledge, and represent knowledge in terms of schemata, cognitive maps, and mental models to simplify their understanding of reality is a critical factor determining their ability to deliver high performance. Once formulated and encoded within the mind, these 'mental representations' act as filters through which incoming information is subsequently processed, which can lead to biased and inappropriate decisions. If managers and/or others are using out-of-date, invalid, and inappropriate 'cognitive constructs' with which to process information there are bound to be problems in achieving high performance, both at the individual, group, and organizational level. They need to be open to challenge and *continual improvement* to ensure they adopt and utilize valid and appropriate cognitive constructs.

*Competence:* At the individual and group level in organizations, competence is about every person in all parts of the organization possessing the right knowledge, attitudes, skills, and habits (KASH) to perform competently at and above a good healthy minimum standard in their respective present jobs and team roles, and to continuously acquire new KASH relevant to and/or in preparation for future jobs and roles. At the organizational level, competence is about 'strategic competence' and 'managerial and organizational cognitive competence'. The interrelated notions of the 'learning organization', 'organizational learning', 'knowledge

productivity', and 'knowledge management' are crucial to the development of these organizational level competencies. This calls for everyone in the organization, from the CEO/managing director to the least skilled person to be open to continual improvement and change, and where necessary to exhibit creativity and innovation.

#### The 'Motivation' Factor

*Confidence:* Confidence is a key ingredient for success in any high performing organization. For managers, it requires confidence building in themselves and being able to have confidence in their respective manager and colleague managers, their staff, suppliers, and sub-contractors, and even the customers, clients, and users of their respective organization's products and/or services. Confidence must be created throughout the organization if everyone is to be fully motivated. This greatly depends upon the quality, competence, and effectiveness of individual managers and their ability to perform well in this key function of the management task.

*Commitment:* This is at the heart of motivation and is about individuals and teams being committed to the common purpose, and being dedicated to the task of achieving individually and collectively the output requirements of their respective roles. Organizational commitment has been defined as an individual's dedication and loyalty to an organization. Research tells us that commitment positively influences various organizational outcomes such as employee motivation, reduced turnover and absenteeism, and the achievement of organizational goals. Poor management and leadership at any level leads to low commitment, low morale, and low motivation which inhibits creative thinking, continual improvement, and performance enhancement.

*Collaboration:* In a world of downsizing, de-layering, outsourcing, and networking which call for much greater degrees of interdependence, co-operation, and healthy competition between individuals, teams, functions, business units, and companies, it is essential for organizations to discard any 'silo' and/or 'conflict' management habits of the past. Instead, they need to be willing to develop and be skilled in creating collaborative working relationships as opposed to unhealthy competitive rivalry. This means more collaboration needs to occur not only throughout the organization, including intra- and inter-departmental collaboration, team collaboration plus management and union collaboration, but increasingly collaboration with other organizations including competitors.

#### The 'Environment' Factor

*Communication:* It is self-evident that good communication is fundamental to and a pre-requisite for effective management in the pursuit of high performance and excellence within organizations. This calls for the organization's *structure* to be constantly improved and refined to keep it 'in fit' with

significant changes in the corporate *strategy*, and for the organization's communications systems to be appropriate. If managers and their people are to be optimally effective and successful in achieving the organization's goals, then 'good quality' vertical and lateral communication must be present. Furthermore, increasing recognition that for modern organizations to compete effectively they need to tap into the *creativity, expertise, and know-how* of all their employees, and place a premium on effective interpersonal communication.

*Climate*: Organizational climate has been defined as members' collective perceptions about the organization with respect to such dimensions as autonomy, trust, cohesiveness, support, recognition, innovation, and fairness. Research tells us that organizational climate is: i) a psychological, multidimensional, complex phenomenon that impacts positively or negatively on learning, performance, turnover, and absenteeism; ii) a key driver of organizational performance; iii) significantly and positively related to organizational commitment; and iv) that managers and leaders who use management styles which positively affect the organizational climate achieve decidedly better results than those who do not.

*Culture*: The organizational culture, management culture, and sub-cultures existing at any level in the organization can be critical factors in determining whether the *strategic* plans of top and senior management, or the *operational* plans of middle and first-line managers, are implemented efficiently, effectively, and successfully. Inappropriate, out-of-fit, and non-conducive cultures can inhibit or prevent learning and behavioural change from happening, and can stifle continual improvement and creativity.

*Credibility*: Credibility is a critical component in the 'High Performance Equation' because without 'source credibility' the communications of individuals, teams, or whole organizations are not believed. Research tells us that being honest, forward-looking, inspiring, and competent are the four most essential leadership qualities upon which credibility is earned. Credibility has been defined as 'a kind of currency' based on other's beliefs or perceptions that a manager/leader can perform and deliver. It can be 'increased, lost, spent, loaned, and stolen', and is an attribute considered by top organizational leaders to be of greatest value and importance.

## About the Author



### **Professor Robert (Bob) G. Hamlin**

Bob is Emeritus Professor of Human Resource Development at the University of Wolverhampton in the United Kingdom (UK) and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. His main research interest focuses on perceived managerial and leadership

effectiveness within public and private sector organizations in the UK and more than 20 other countries across five continents. Bob has authored/co-authored over 60 peer-reviewed journal articles and contributed 34 chapters to various HRD-related books. He is author of *Universalistic Models of Managerial and Leadership Effectiveness* (VDM Verlag Dr Muller, 2009); and is the lead co-editor of *Organizational Change and Development: A reflective guide for managers, trainers, and developers* (FT Prentice Hall, 2001), and of *Evidence-Based Initiatives for Organizational Change and Development* (IGI Global, 2019) which won the 2020 Academy of Human Resource Development R. Wayne Pace HRD Book of the Year Award. Bob is the first recipient of the Distinguished Contribution Award from the University Forum for Human Resource Development (UFHRD) having been its Honorary Treasurer for over 30 years. He is now an Emeritus Honorary Treasurer of the UFHRD and in that capacity he sits as a member of the Board of Directors of the *International Journal of HRD Practice Policy and Research*. Bob also sits on the Editorial Boards of HRDQ, HRDI, HRDR and EJTD.