1 Foundations of Human Resource Development

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Chapter objectives

The objectives of this chapter are to:

- investigate the historical origins of human resource development and its interdisciplinary roots;
- explore the various ways in which HRD has been defined;
- review the criticisms levelled at the theory and practice of HRD;
- examine the emergence of critical HRD.

Introduction

Human Resource Development (HRD) is in a state of becoming. With these words, Lee (2001) describes the emerging field of HRD. From its origins (Harbison and Myers, 1964; Nadler, 1970), HRD has evolved as a field of theory and practice with a distinctive tripartite agenda of human betterment, organisational enhancement and societal development. The transformative power of HRD lies in its capacity to empower the creation of innovative and radical solutions to real world problems.

HRD has evolved to meet the changing individual, organisational and societal environment it inhabits. Its historical development has mirrored changes in the nature of work and reflects the diverse cultures and values it occupies (Alagaraja and Dooley, 2003). They trace the development of HRD to the work of the toolmaker in constructing human axes leading to the development of agriculture and animal husbandry in the era 5 million to 3000BC. Swanson and Holton (2001) trace the roots of HRD back to the legacy of the Greeks and Romans (100BC–AD300), while Ruona (2001) identifies the Training Within Industry (TWI) agency in the 1940s as being pivotal to the emergence of contemporary HRD. McGuire and Cseh (2006) highlight some of the more recent key milestones in the development of the field as the publication of Malcolm Knowles' *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy*; the publication of Nadlers' *Developing Human Resources* and the foundation of the Academy of Human Resource Development.

Founded upon the long-established fields of training, education and development, HRD has grown to encompass new emerging field of knowledge including social capital; knowledge management and the learning organisation (McGoldrick et al., 2002a). By embracing new thinking and focusing on activities and processes intended to improve individual and organisational learning, HRD will inform, shape and remain relevant to professional practice. Notwithstanding these benefits, HRD currently suffers from a limited empirical base and much HRD research has focused on particular organisational contexts (Hamlin, 2002).

This opening chapter explores how HRD is defined and how the shape and nature of HRD has changed over time. It examines its disciplinary origins of the field and explores briefly the role played by HRD practitioners. An examination of criticisms levelled at the field is undertaken and this is followed by an exploration of critical approaches to HRD. The chapter concludes by summarising the key points and assessing the overall potential of the field to add value to individuals and organisations.

Defining HRD

Despite numerous attempts to define the field of HRD, consensus does not yet exist on a specific definition for what HRD is and includes. Attempts to define HRD have preoccupied HRD academics for many years and have led to much debate in journal writings (McGuire and Cseh, 2006; McLean and McLean, 2001; Ruona, 2000; Weinberger, 1998). This led Ruona (2000) to suggest that a major barrier to HRD is that the work of HRD academics and professionals and what HRD stands for is not yet well understood by others. She maintains that the HRD community have not done a good job of working to identify who we are, what we stand for and what we can do for those we serve. It is arguable that the lack of clarity regarding definitional boundaries and conceptual underpinnings may be due to the multidisciplinary and omnivorous nature of the field. In support of this view, Lincoln and Lynham (2007) maintain that HRD calls upon and integrates existing theories to create its unique disciplinary theory and that good theory is imperative to sound, informed practice and the continued development and maturity of a discipline.

The multidisciplinary nature of the field of HRD has been long established. Chalofsky (2004) argues that HRD has been long considered to have an interdisciplinary foundation and maintains that human and organisation studies may describe more accurately the content and substance of HRD. Similarly, Hatcher (2006) maintains that we cannot become complacent about defining such a complex, multidisciplinary field such as HRD. He argues that the strength of the field of HRD lies in its multi-dimensional nature and that while one-dimensional approaches may solve immediate problems, they exacerbate long-term needs. Meanwhile, Swanson and Holton articulate what they see as the core foundational tenets of HRD, namely 'a strong belief in learning and development as avenues to individual growth; a belief that organisations can be improved through learning and development activities; a commitment to people and human potential; a deep desire to see people grow as individuals and a passion for learning' (2001: 145–146).

Several authors have refused to define HRD. Blake (1995) argued that the field of HRD defies definition and boundaries. He argues that it has become difficult to put in a box and has become so large, extensive and inclusive that it is now greater than

all outdoors. Lee (2001) refuses to define HRD as she argues that to proffer definitions of HRD is to misrepresent it as a thing of *being* rather than a process of *becoming*. She also argues that defining the field runs the risk of disengaging from the moral dimension of HRD. McGoldrick et al. (2002b) posit that attempts to define HRD have proved frustrating, confusing and elusive. Specifically, they state that the process of defining HRD is frustrated by the apparent lack of boundaries and parameters, elusiveness is created through the lack of depth of empirical evidence of some conceptual aspect of HRD and confusion arises over the philosophy, purpose, location, and language of HRD. An earlier contribution by Stewart and McGoldrick (1996) maintain that while no definitive consensus has been reached on the composition of HRD, it comprises of strategic and practical components. In addition, they propose that HRD is implicit in organising and managing and concerns itself with leadership, culture, organisational learning and development and change. Moreover, McLean and Wang (2007) suggest that for some commentators, HRD appears to be inwardly directed and without substantial impact. They question whether the lack of definitional consensus is harmful to the field and could potentially lead to the collapse of the field itself.

An examination of the literature also reveals that HRD has been developed from different traditions in Europe and the US. Woodall (2003) argues that in a UK context, there tends to be a close alignment of HRD with HRM programmes which contrasts strongly with the close association of HRD with adult education within the US. Such differences invariably lead to variation in the focus, direction and overall purpose and goals for HRD. Similarly Hilton and McLean (1997) maintain that the definition of HRD varies from one country to another and national differences are a crucial factor in determining the way in which HRD professionals work.

Table 1.1 presents a collection of definitions of HRD found in the literature. Examining these definitions provides an insight into the development of the field over time and the interests served by HRD. The earliest definition by Harbison and Myers (1964) acknowledges the role HRD plays at an economic and societal level. It views HRD as a vehicle for the modernisation and advancement of society as a whole. This definition contrasts with the emphasis placed by later definitions which tend to focus upon the interests of individuals or organisations. There is some evidence of recent expansion of the boundaries of HRD (McLean and Wang, 2007). For their part, Donovan and Marsick (2000) maintain that HRD now includes organisational leadership, organisational values, workforce development and labour economics. Dilworth (2003) includes strategic change management, knowledge management, insourcing and outsourcing of training, team-building and leadership development within the boundaries of HRD.

Several criticisms have been directed at the manner in which HRD has been defined. Nair et al. (2007) argue that current definitions of HRD are limited in scope solely focused on organisations to the exclusion of individuals and society. Swanson and Arnold (1997) highlight the overemphasis placed on the organisational perspective and suggest that it is difficult to find an article on HRD that does not make some reference to the relationship between HRD and organisational strategy. A second criticism levelled at how HRD is defined is the predominance of UK and US definitions of HRD. McLean and McLean (2001) argue that this trend is unsurprising simply because many students of HRD receive their education in the US. They maintain that there is a need to broaden the debate about HRD to consider how HRD is viewed in other countries, specifically in Asia and Continental Europe.

Table 1.1 Definitions of human resource development found in literature

Author	Definition
Harbison and Myers (1964)	HRD is the process of increasing the knowledge, the skills, and the capacities of all the people in a society. In economic and terms, it could be described as the accumulation of human capital and its effective investment in the development of an economy. In political terms, human resource development prepares people for adult participation in political processes, particularly as citizens in a democracy. From the social and cultural points of view, the development of human resources helps people to lead fuller and richer lives, less bound by tradition. In short, the processes of human resource development unlock the door to modernisation.
Nadler (1970)	HRD is a series of organised activities conducted within a specific time and designed to produce behavioural change.
Craig (1976)	HRD focuses on the central goal of developing human potential in every aspect of life-long learning.
Jones (1981)	HRD is a systematic expansion of people's work-related abilities, focused on the attainment of both organisation and personal goals.
Chalofsky and Lincoln (1983)	The discipline of HRD is the study of how individuals and groups in organisations change through learning.
Smith (1988)	HRD consists of programmes and activities, direct and indirect, instructional and/or individual that possibly affect the development of the individual and the productivity and profit of the organisation.
Gilley and Eggland (1989)	HRD is organised learning activities arranged within an organisation to improve performance and/or personal growth for the purpose of improving the job, the individual and/or the organisation.
McLagan (1989)	HRD is the integrated use of training and development, career development and organisational development to improve individual and organisational effectiveness.
Bergenhenegouwen (1990)	HRD can be described as training members of an organisation in such a way that they have the knowledge and skills needed within the context of the (changing) objectives of the organisation.
Garavan (1991)	HRD is the strategic management of training, development and management/professional education intervention, so as to achieve the objectives of the organisation while at the same time ensuring that the full utilisation of the knowledge in detail and skills of the individual employees.
Chalofsky (1992)	HRD is the study and practice of increasing the learning capacity of (1992) individuals, groups, collectives and organisations through the development and application of learning-based interventions of the purpose of optimising human and organisational growth and effectiveness.
ITD (1992)	HRD is the process whereby people develop their full potential in life and work.
Megginson et al. (1993)	HRD is an integrated and holistic approach to changing work-related behaviour using a range of learning techniques.
Horwitz et al. (1996)	HRD is concerned with the processes whereby the citizens of a nation acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to perform both specific occupational tasks and other social, cultural, intellectual and political roles in a society.
Stead and Lee (1996)	HRD is a holistic societal process of learning drawing upon a range of disciplines.

Table 1.1 (Continued)

Author	Definition
Stewart and McGoldrick (1996)	HRD encompasses activities and processes, which are intended to have impact on organisational and individual learning. It assumes that organisations can be constructively conceived of as learning entities and that the learning processes of both organisations and individuals are capable of influence and direction through deliberate and planned interventions.
Watkins and Marsick (1997)	HRD is the field of study and practice responsible for the fostering of a long-term, work-related learning capacity at the individual, group and organisational levels. As such, it includes – but is not limited to – training, career development and organisational development.
Armstrong (1999)	HRD is concerned with the provision of learning, development and training opportunities in order to improve individual, team and organisational performance. It is essentially a business-led approach to developing people with a strategic framework.
Gourlay (2000)	HRD focuses on theory and practice related to training, development and learning within organisations, both for individual and in the context of business strategy and organisational competence formation.
McCracken and Wallace (2000)	HRD is the creation of a learning culture, within which a range of training, development and learning strategies both respond to corporate strategy and also help to shape and influence it.
McLean and McLean (2001)	HRD is any process or activity that, either initially or over the long term, has the potential to develop adults' work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity, and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organisational community, nation, or ultimately, the whole of humanity.
Nyhan (2002)	HRD refers to educational training and development activities related to working life. It relates to development and learning activities for those who are at work and have completed their basic professional or vocational education and training.
ESC Toulouse (2002)	HRD encompasses adult learning at the workplace, training and development, organisational development and change, organisational learning, knowledge management, management development, coaching, performance improvement, competence development and strategic human resource development. Instead of being a sub-discipline of HRD, HRD is becoming a 'multi-disciplinary' or 'trans-disciplinary' field in its own right.
Vince (2003)	HRD should be conceptualised as an approach that supports the impact that people can have on organising. The focus of HRD is on action, on developing the capacity to act, on generating credibility through action and on influencing and working with others in situations loaded with emotion and politics. The HRD function should be about discovering how an organisation has managed to become set in its ways, how to organise opportunities for change that can challenge a tendency to resist change and how to imagine and deliver processes that can underpin organisational development and transformation.
Slotte et al. (2004)	HRD covers functions related primarily to training, career development, organisational development and research and development in addition to other organisational HR functions where these are intended to foster learning capacity at all levels of the organisation, to integrate learning culture into its overall business strategy and to promote the organisation's efforts to achieve high quality performance.

Source: Adapted from Weinberger (1998)

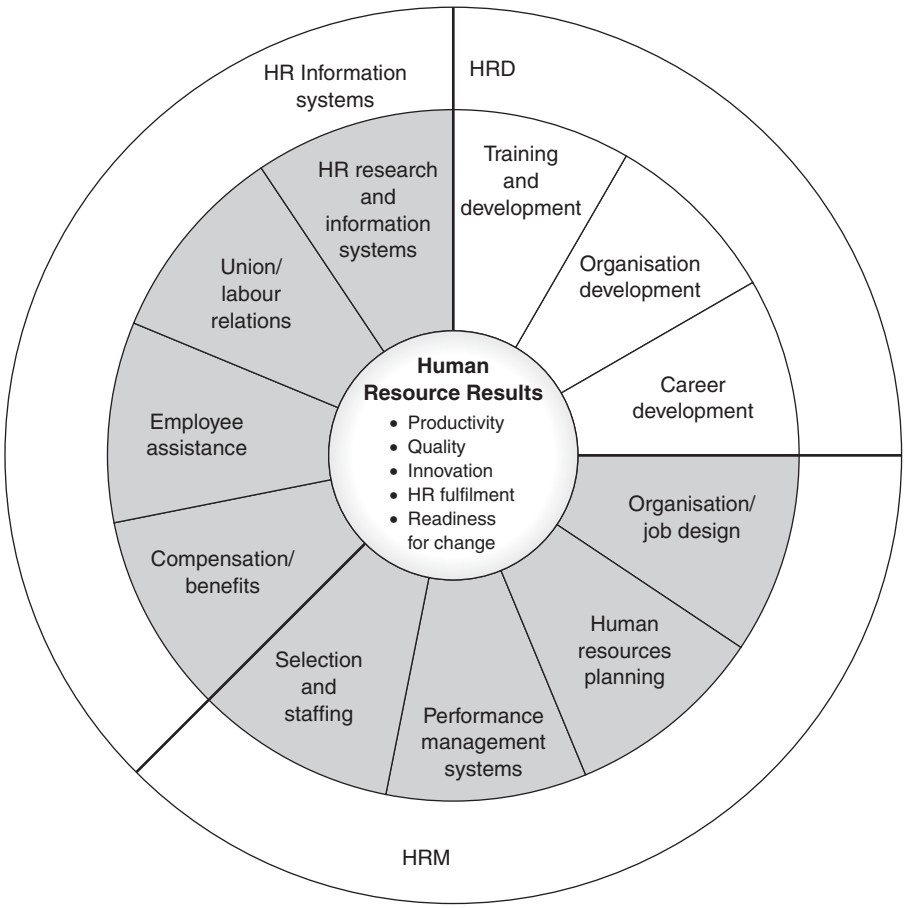

Figure 1.1 Human Resource Wheel

Disciplinary origins of HRD

As a discipline, HRD has been shaped by a wide number of disparate forces. In the 1970s and 1980s, Gilley and Eggland (1989) argue that management began to realise the importance of human resources in face of increased competition. Their work coincided with the publication of the McLagan HR wheel. McLagan (1989) maintains that HRD is comprised of training and development, organisation development and career development. Consequently, HRD is focused on the three elements that contribute to individual performance improvement. For their part, Woodall et al. (2002) see the key contribution of McLagan's HR wheel as distinguishing HRD from other HR functions.

The publication of Hamel and Prahalad's (1994) *Competing for the Future* brought with it the realisation that the competitiveness of firms is closely linked to the possession of core competencies. They postulated that organisations can possess unique clusters of factors that allow the firm to be competitive and the skills possessed by employees is one of those factors. Likewise, Cappelli and Singh (1992) maintain that

employees can potentially create competitive advantage, where competencies attained are firm specific and difficult to imitate. This led to greater emphasis on the resource-based view where an organisation is identified as a collection of competencies and issues such as learning, knowledge management and experience take priority.

For his part, Van der Veen (2006) identifies two distinct stages in the development of HRD. Firstly, he views the emphasis on facilitation and learning of communication as being critical to the increasing level of specialisation of employees within organisations and the need to engender greater levels of collaboration among such specialists. Aligned with the development of expertise has been a focus on reflection and transformative learning. The fostering of reflection involved attempts to engage employees in learning the mistakes of the past and moving beyond purely task achievement to systems improvement and enhancement. In this environment, increasing organisational effectiveness became a priority enabling organisations to compete effectively and on a global scale. Secondly, he highlights the greater autonomy of employees and development of creative thinking skills as furthering the growth of the field of HRD. Through this avenue, HRD embraces elements associated with adult learning such as mentoring and coaching and widens its scope in making use of new technologies and techniques for learning.

Practical aspects

The relationship between theory and practice is of particular relevance to the field of HRD. At its heart, HRD is an applied discipline and seeks to solve real world problems through adopting a multidisciplinary approach. Owing to its origins and the fact that its development has primarily been driven by the Academy of Human Resource Development (US) and the University Forum for Human Resource Development (Europe), bodies populated primarily by academics, much work remains in bridging the gap between academics and practitioners. Kuchinke (2004) acknowledges this fact and argues that HRD seeks particular proximity between theory and practice, but recognises that much remains to be done to achieve this proximity. Sambrook and Stewart (2002) describe the reality in organisations that the term HRD is rarely encountered in the workplace and even when the term is used, the function described corresponds to little more than training activity. In agreement, Harrison and Kessels (2004) assert that in real life, stakeholders have little patience with HRD professionals who are confused about the function, yet claim it to be crucial to their organisation's success. They posit that there needs to be greater clarity regarding the field's organisational purpose and that this clarity matters more than agreement about whether the field should be called 'human resource development' or 'learning and development' or any number of other associated terms.

The value-added role of HRD has attracted much attention in the literature. Ruona et al. (2002) argue that one of the core challenges facing HRD has been and continues to be that HRD professions must better demonstrate strategic and bottom-line impact. In a survey of CEOs and senior management at a future of HRD conference, Bing et al. (2003) report that those assembled agreed that the most effective way for HRD practitioners to establish themselves as key players in the development of organisational strategy is to demonstrate how what they do correlates with the productivity and welfare of the company. However, the challenge of demonstrating

the utility and value-added nature of HRD is a significant one. Ty (2007) argues that in many organisations, HRD is practised indirectly, unintentionally and intuitively. He maintains that there is a lack of systematic application of strategic planning and decision-making throughout the organisation, resulting in organisational learning for lower echelon employees becoming incidental and anecdotal.

There exists some evidence to suggest that the role of the HRD practitioner is becoming more clearly defined. Mavin et al. (2007) ascribes three critical roles to HRD practitioners: firstly, they act as problem makers who identify and name the development challenges facing an organisation; second, they may be agents of organisational change, internal consultants or experts in uncertainty and finally, they work in partnership with managers to support business operations. Likewise, Swart et al. (2005) argue that the role of HRD practitioners in the twenty-first century is shifting from training to learning and must be more heavily involved in managing and disseminating knowledge across the organisation more effectively.

Criticisms levelled at the field of HRD

It is clear that for a young field there is significant discussion regarding the direction and ambitions of the field. Some of this discourse can be labelled is criticisms – however, it can be argued that it is through valid critique and constructive argument that the foundations of the field become solidified and more widely accepted. Indeed, HRD stakeholders are more likely to take ownership of the field if they are involved and participate in such debates. A moderate position in line with this view is taken by Kuchinke (2007) when he states that the apparent dilemma between maximal inclusiveness (Lee, 2001) and the need for definition (McLean and McLean, 2001) may be better understood as a creative tension where the two positions are not mutually exclusive, but are constitutive of each other.

In terms of criticisms related to the very nature of the field, these have focused on the under-developed empirical and theoretical base and its relationship to HRM. The under-developed empirical and theoretical base of HRD has been acknowledged by several commentators. Stewart (2007) argues that one of the key weaknesses inhibiting the growth of HRD as a field of research and practice is the willingness to engage in esotheric argument and debate over theoretical concepts. He also identifies a high degree of insularity, both geographic and conceptual that exists in the HRD research community. An older study by Lowyck (1995, cited in Kessels, 2007) argues that HRD research suffers from two major weaknesses: firstly, he suggests that a lack of rigour is exhibited in carefully building a coherent cycle of empirical research in HRD and secondly, he argues that HRD research jumps clumsily from descriptive studies to prescription. A broader criticism of HRD which appraises the poor development of the field is forwarded by Vince who states:

> **HRD is based on people development and rational planning; it is rooted in standardised products and services; driven by competencies, defined by professional bodies and focused on predictability and consistency. There are too many organisations whose approaches require staff members to learn mechanistically, and only a very small number of models of development that are used (the top three are the training cycle; Kirkpatrick's evaluation ladder and**

Kolb's learning cycle). HRD has been weak strategically, placing the emphasis on individuals to learn and change, and largely ignoring the wider politics of organising in which HRD exists and can have an impact. (Vince, 2003: 560)

The relationship of HRD with HRM has attracted some comment – although a consensus is emerging regarding the separate and distinct identity of HRD. Traditionally, both fields concentrated on the 'human resource' component and organisations often did not appreciate the need for separate departments. As Mankin (2001) argued, HRD roles were often subsumed within the HRM or personnel department where the individuals involved often had very little background or training in HRD. He maintained that this situation resulted from the ambiguous and problematic nature of the concept of HRD, where the relationship between HRM and HRD was not clearly defined. However, he argued that while both concepts have their own identities, they depend upon each other for mutual success and the maximisation of human resource potential within organisations.

It would be foolish to deny that there are not links between HRM and HRD. However, current trends in globalisation and the importance placed on technological advances, knowledge management and value-added creativity have established the critical need for HRD interventions. For his part, Friedman (2005) argues that organisations are emphasising individual customer relationships and product customisation in order to differentiate themselves from their competitors. As he so eloquently puts it, 'There is no money in vanilla' – meaning that standardised products are so easy to replicate that they will no longer form a viable business model. The challenge for HRD then is to find ways to promote creativity thinking and risk-taking amongst employees as well as fostering individual autonomy and self-management and development.

Arriving at a critical understanding of HRD

Critical approaches to HRD render as problematic the 'resource' aspect of HRD as suppressing employee voice. Only in recent years have critical approaches begun to be applied to HRD. Callahan (2007) argues that HRD contains very little critique of the workplace and even less critique of society. She maintains that the non-critical orientation of the field emphasises performativity which serves to subordinate knowledge and truth to the production of efficiency. She posits that those who would work in the interests of workers must make a Faustian bargain when they try to appeal to both worker and employer as the very structures within which they work are controlled by those in power and historically, those in power are wont to share it. Likewise, Fournier and Grey (2000: 17) argue that a non-critical orientation focuses primarily on 'the principle of performativity which serves to subordinate knowledge and truth to the production of efficiency'. They maintain that critical and non-critical works may be differentiated along three dimensions: performativity, deneutralisation and reflexivity. For her part, Fenwick (2004) shares some of the aforementioned concerns and is critical of the prevailing performance paradigm within HRD as it focuses little on social justice.

Sambrook (2004) views the emergence of critical HRD as a means of challenging traditional approaches to HRD. She argues that the shortcomings of traditional HRD approaches include a neglect of political factors, a reluctance to explore the views of

those marginalised or oppressed and an unwavering adhering to conventional research methodologies. Critical HRD is therefore viewed as embracing a broad agenda taken to include examinations of power, politics, ideology, and status (Githens, 2007; Fenwick, 2004; Trehan, 2004). Ty (2007) argues that critical HRD, explores the foundation and structure of power relations within an institution and examines questions of social justice and equality. He suggests that critical HRD does not look towards maintaining power relations, but seeks to build power from the bottom and empower workers. Consequently, he provides the following definition of HRD from a critical theory perspective:

> **As a product of clashing social forces and ideologies, human resource development (HRD) is a pro-active, forward-looking process that responds to social forces as well as overhauls organisational and social structures. It taps inter-individual human potentials and talents as well as takes into consideration gender, ethnicity, class, environment and other critical issues, thereby paving the way for a new transformed organisational and social order that promotes social justice and lasting peace. Critical HRD takes into account social justice, where all persons in an organisation are engaged in participatory collaboration, are treated fairly, receive just share in the benefits of the organisation, and are equally recognised for all their contributions to the development of the organisation. (Ty, 2007: 132)**

Critical approaches to HRD need to be conscious of the need to provide practical workable solutions to identified problems. As Valentin (2006) points out, critical theory seeks to 'problematise' rather than solve problems and can therefore be justifiably censured for its lack of practical application. Similarly, Fenwick (2004) argues that without due attention to the practical application of critical theory, the movement may become isolated, lack impact and may become considered as elitist. Therefore, in recognising the relativity of employees in relation to their level of economic wealth, political power, and cultural dominance, critical approaches should identify clear pathways for guiding employees towards emancipation.

In summary, critical approaches to HRD offer an important vehicle for questioning taken-for-granted assumptions and prevailing methodologies for generating and disseminating knowledge. As Ty (2007) argues, critical HRD does not accept the universality of virtues and ethics but realises the subjectivity and constantly shifting nature of employees' relationship with the organisation. Certainly HRD professionals need to face the reality that they serve two masters and must in some way reconcile the inherent duality and conflict that may exist within their positions (Callahan and Dunne de Davila, 2004). Indeed as Short et al. (2003) point out, organisations in general need to demonstrate greater corporate accountability beyond shareholders to communities and societies.

Conclusions

The development of the field of HRD charts an interesting and exciting course. As a discipline, HRD has evolved and changed over time to maintain its relevance to individuals and organisations. From its earliest inception by Harbison and Myers, HRD has been connected to the concepts of skill acquisition, self-actualisation and

modernisation. Though the emphasis of various definitions have differed, the core of HRD has centred upon improving individuals, organisations and society through a developmental process seeking to maximise individual potential.

From a disciplinary perspective, there remains broad support for McLagan's conceptualisation of HRD as encompassing three separate foci, namely training and development, career development and organisational development. HRD can be viewed as the synergetic combination of all three foci, bringing about greater organisational efficiencies and effectiveness through more fully engaged and skilled employees whose performance and work outputs are congruently linked to the goals of the organisation. In so doing, commitment to learning and development becomes the vehicle through which the dual ambitions of the individual and organisation become realised.

Several criticisms have been levelled at the HRD concept. For starters, the relationship of HRD to HRM has come under much scrutiny. While both concepts acknowledge the importance of human resources, it is clear that a strong case can be made for the contribution of HRD to individuals and institutions. Current trends in globalisation, technological advances and the need for creative innovative employees who can add value to organisations underscores the need for developing employee knowledge and skills. Indeed, there is a clear need to develop the underlying theoretical and empirical foundations of the field to demonstrate the real contribution HRD can make to individuals and organisations.

The emergence of critical approaches to HRD has focused attention on the perceived shortcomings of HRD. It is argued that HRD has uncritically accepted the performance agenda without questioning the consequences for employee subordination and oppression. The lack of attention in traditional HRD discourse to political and power dimensions and an unwillingness to engage with minority or suppressed viewpoints has led to suggestions that HRD has aligned itself closely with capitalist imperatives. Indeed, critical HRD questions how HRD practitioners may be simultaneously agents for both employees and management and posits that employees should be involved more fairly and equitably in the organisational system. However, to date, critical HRD has been criticised for its lack of practical application with the associated implicated that it is 'all talk and no action'.

Discussion questions

- From the 25 definitions of HRD listed in Table 1.1, what do you consider to be the key components of HRD?
- How does HRD balance the needs of employees, organisations and society?
- Discuss how HRD fulfils an important function in the workplace.
- What are the challenges facing the field of HRD?