

# Brief on the Foundations of Human Resource Development

Richard A. Swanson, Professor  
University of Minnesota  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
2003

## Definition of Human Resource Development (HRD)

HRD is a process of developing and unleashing human expertise through organization development (OD) and training and development (T&D) for the purpose of improving performance.

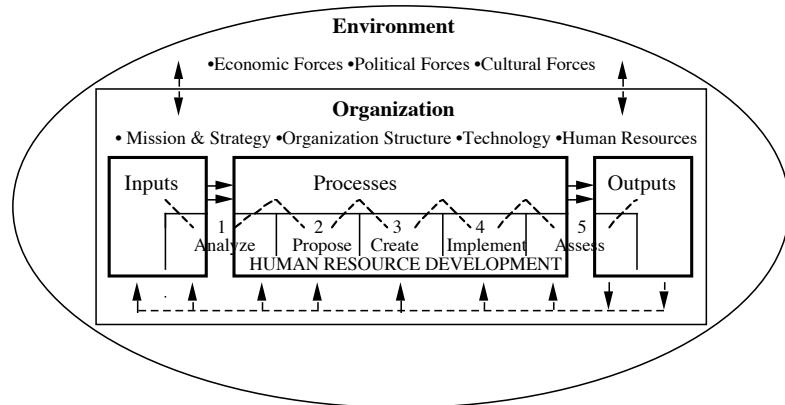
- *The domains of performance include the organization, work process, and group/individual levels.*
- *OD is a the process of systematically implementing organizational change for the purpose of improving performance.*
- *T&D is the process of systematically developing expertise in individuals for the purpose of improving performance.*
- *The three critical application areas of HRD include human resource management, career development, and quality improvement.*

## Core HRD Beliefs

1. Organizations are human-made entities that rely on human expertise in order to establish and achieve their goals.
2. Human expertise developed and maximized through HRD processes and should be done for the mutual long-term and/or short-term benefits of the sponsoring organization and the individuals involved.
3. HRD professionals are advocates of individual/group, work process, and organizational integrity.

## The HRD Process Within the Larger System

HRD is a process or system within the larger organizational and environmental system. As such, it has the potential of harmonizing, supporting and/or shaping the larger systems.



Systems World-View Model of Human Resource Development

Swanson, 1996

## Theoretical Foundation of HRD

The discipline of HRD-- in order to understand, explain, and carry out its process and roles-- relies on three core theories. They include: (1) psychological theory, (2) economic theory, and (3) systems theory.

- *Psychological theory captures the core human aspects of developing human resources as well as the socio-technical interplay of humans and systems.*
- *Economic theory captures the core issues of the efficient and effective utilization of resources to meet productive goals in a competitive environment.*
- *Systems theory captures the complex and dynamic interactions of environments, organizations, work process, and group/individual variables operating at any point in time and over time.*

The three component HRD theories and their integration are visually portrayed as a 3-legged stool. The legs represent the component theories and the stool's platform represents the full integration of the three theories into the unique theory of HRD. While the stool rests firmly on the floor or the host organization, an ethical rug serves as a filter through which the integrity of both HRD and the host organization can be maintained.

Figure 2. The Theoretical Foundations of Human Resource Development

