

# Human Resource Development: Performance Is the Key

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The purpose of this position paper is to stimulate discussion by presenting a range of options for viewing HRD. The major sections are (1) "Views of Human Resource Development," (2) "Definitions," (3) "Performance With or Without Instruction," (4) "Performance—A Closer Look," and (5) "Conclusions."

## **Views of Human Resource Development**

First, I propose that scholars and professionals have the opportunity to view and position HRD at one of the following levels:

- As a major business process, something an organization must do to succeed.
- As a value-added activity, something that is potentially worth doing.
- As an optional activity, something that is nice to do.
- As a waste of business resources, something that has costs exceeding the benefits.

Furthermore, I believe that the specific view selected by the HRD leader is the one that will most likely become reality—a self-fulfilling prophecy. And, in the absence of a commitment from HRD leaders, management and/or government will most likely impose a view that is based on misinformation or partial information.

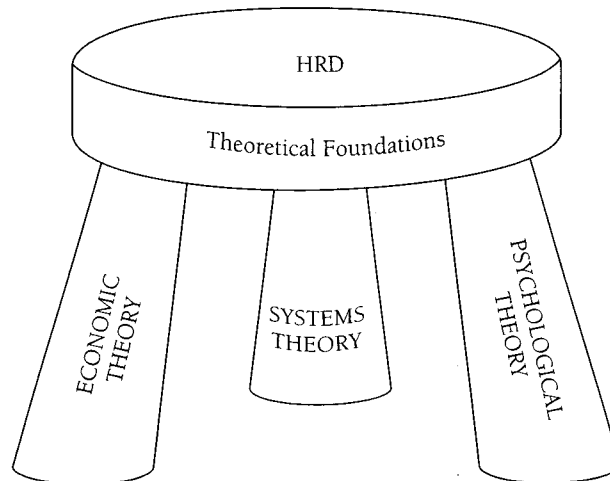
Second, I propose that the theoretical foundations of HRD are drawn from psychological theory, systems theory, and economic theory (Swanson, 1982, 1992). The visual image I use is a three-legged stool having the ability to stand secure on both smooth and irregular surfaces (Figure 1). Furthermore, I believe that all three are required ingredients for HRD to be considered a major business process.

*Note:* This article is based on a conference keynote address to the International Research Network for Training and Development, June 23, 1994, Milan, Italy.

*FORUM is a nonrefereed section inviting readers' reactions and opinions.*

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**Figure 1. Theoretical Foundations of HRD**



### Definitions

*Human resource development:* Human resource development is a process of developing and/or unleashing human expertise through organization development and personnel training and development for the purpose of improving performance.

*Components of human resource development:* The two major components of HRD are (1) training and development and (2) organization development. In addition, HRD has three critical application areas: human resource management, career development, and quality improvement.

*Organization development:* Organization development is the process of systematically implementing organizational change for the purpose of improving performance.

*Training and development:* Training and development is the process of systematically developing expertise in individuals for the purpose of improving performance.

*Performance:* There are three levels of performance: organizational, process, and individual.

*HRD values:* HRD practices should be theoretically and ethically sound. HRD calls upon theories from multiple disciplines. Thus, the problem of connecting sound theory and sound practice within a theoretically sound and ethical framework is an important part of HRD theory and practice.

### Performance—With or Without Instruction

The historic root of the HRD profession is the training and learning component (Swanson and Torraco, 1995). In order to understand the contemporary role of HRD, it is important to revisit the role of learning in the profession (see Dooley, 1945; Campbell, Campbell, and Associates, 1988; Gagne, 1962; Jacobs, 1992; Jacobs and Jones, 1995; Senge, 1990; Watkins and Marsick, 1993). I love *learning*. I love the process of learning and the results of having new knowledge. More than learning, I love *expertise*. I love the personal sense of self that results from being efficient and effective. Learning is only one component of expertise (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1992; Stolovitch and Keeps, 1992). More than expertise, I love *performance*. Expertise is only one component of performance (Figure 2). Worthy performance from the perspective of business and industry can be viewed at the organizational, process, and individual levels (Rummler and Brache, 1990; Swanson, 1994).

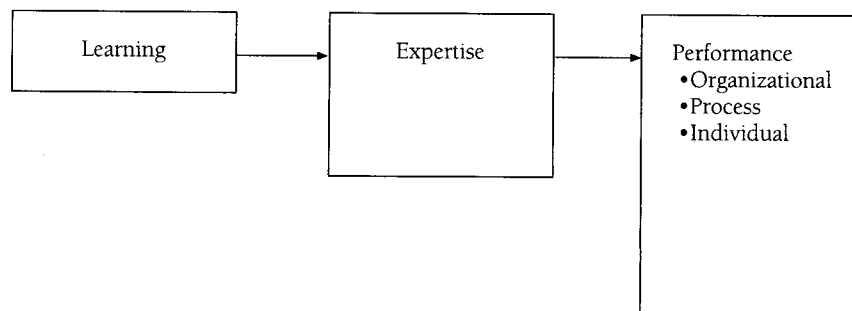
### Performance—A Closer Look

For HRD to become a core business process, performance is the key. The performance perspectives of levels, variables, and measures help to clarify the concept of performance.

**Performance Levels and Variables.** The three levels of performance—organizational, process, and individual—remind us that organizations view and value performance in a hierarchy (Davenport, 1993; Rummler and Brache, 1990; and Wimbiscus, 1994) and that multiple variables influence performance. The matrix of enabling questions in Figure 3 helps to diagnose performance issues. When it is taken seriously, the seemingly simple matrix of questions leads the analyst to the HRD disconnects from performance.

**Measures of Performance.** If HRD is aimed at specific performance requirements and is an appropriate intervention, units of worthy performance are identifiable. Critical measures of performance in business and industry

**Figure 2. Relationship Between Learning, Expertise, and Performance**



**Figure 3. Performance Diagnosis Matrix of Enabling Questions**

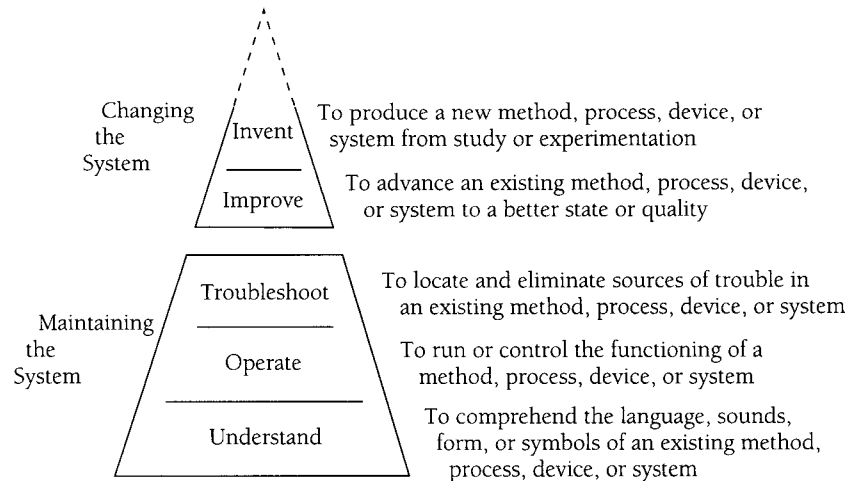
PERFORMANCE VARIABLES ↓	PERFORMANCE LEVELS ↓		
	Organizational Level	Process Level	Individual Level
Mission/ Goal	Does the organizational mission/goal fit the reality of the economic, political, and cultural forces?	Do the process goals enable the organization to meet organizational and individual missions/goals?	Are the professional and personal mission/goals of individuals congruent with the organization's?
Systems Design	Does the organizational system provide structure and policies supporting the desired performance?	Are processes designed in such a way as to work as a system?	Does the individual face obstacles that impede job performance?
Capacity	Does the organization have the leadership, capital, and infrastructure to achieve its mission/goals?	Does the process have the capacity to perform (quantity, quality, and timeliness)?	Does the individual have the mental, physical, and emotional capacity to perform?
Motivation	Do the policies, culture, and reward systems support the desired performance?	Does the process provide the information and human factors required to maintain it?	Does the individual want to perform no matter what?
Expertise	Does the organization establish and maintain selection and training policies and resources?	Does the process of developing expertise meet the changing demands of changing processes?	Does the individual have the knowledge, skills, and experience to perform?

Source: Swanson, 1994, p. 52.

(1) are tied to the core goods and services of the organization and (2) are generally measured in terms of quantity, time, and/or quality features that can be easily converted into monetary worth (Hronec, 1993; Swanson and Gradous, 1988; Swanson, 1990). Core goods and services might include such things as microchips produced, computers assembled, windshields made, wiring harnesses produced, subscriptions ordered, meals served, or clients added. HRD viewed as an optional activity (something nice to do) or even a value-added activity (something that is potentially worth doing) is almost never directly connected to core business outputs. Thus, attempts to evaluate workplace performance outcomes from HRD programs' positions from these views are generally futile.

**Taxonomy of Performance.** Organizations experience a concurrent need for control and innovation. Thus, the performance requirements in today's workplace can often be separated into two categories. One category is concerned about maintaining the existing system. The second has to do with improving the system. The Taxonomy of Performance and its five tiers (Figure 4)

Figure 4. Taxonomy of Performance



Source: Swanson, 1994, p. 57.

provides additional insight into performance requirements for these two disparate categories and the role HRD can play in improving performance.

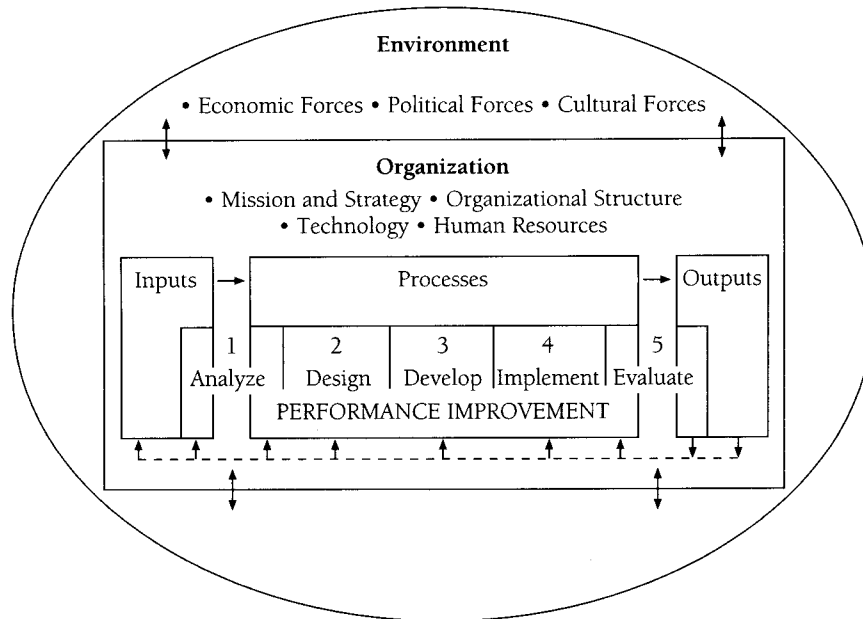
**HRD as a Major Business Process.** The standard system model (input > process > output) helps to illustrate the business organization as a system and HRD as a subsystem. Most organization charts with their hierarchies show the chain of command of the organization, not a mission- and goal-driven system.

*HRD as a Major Business Process.* The standard system model (input > process > output) has external customer requirements on the input side and external customer satisfaction as the output. As a major business process, HRD's contribution is directly connected to the external customer and most likely serves internal customers and parallel processes to achieve core performance outputs of the organization.

*HRD as a Value-Added or Optional Activity.* HRD that connects to the internal customer (not the external customer) is not systemically positioned to be a major business process. Under this condition—as a supporting subsystem—HRD has the *potential* of being aligned with the strategic goals and thus adding value to the organization. Without this alignment, however, HRD is viewed as an optional activity that is totally dependent on the integrity of the internal customer it serves.

*HRD as a Waste of Business Resources.* Finally, and tragically, HRD commissioned by an internal customer without systemic, psychological, and/or economic integrity can cause losses to an organization. While I know of no research as to the extent of losses caused by HRD, I believe that the negative impact of low-quality HRD efforts is large.

**Figure 5. Systems Model of Performance Improvement:  
Performance Improvement Phases**



Source: Swanson, 1994, p. 20.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, I offer the following general model of HRD as a performance improvement and major business process, one that connects HRD to other major business processes that are influenced by and influence the total organization and the environment in which it functions (Figure 5). Furthermore, the model displays an orderly process in which HRD acknowledges performance as the key in the struggle to retain the integrity of the individual, process, and organization.

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