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Review Article

From Human Resource Development to National Human Resource Development: Resolving Contemporary HRD Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Faced by past and present challenges, efforts have been made to extend the scope of Human Resource Development (HRD) to cover national level HRD issues with an emerging new paradigm of HRD research agenda, the National Human Resource Development (NHRD) as proposed by McLean and others in 2004. This paper provides a review of the literature related to HRD and NHRD, with the main purpose to critically debate the adequacy of HRD and the plausibility of NHRD in resolving contemporary HRD challenges. Through the review of related literature, a set of contemporary challenges were identified from the environment, as well as at the entry, task, validation and exit levels of HRD processes. The capability of HRD in resolving these challenges was critiqued, and it illuminated a distinction between traditional HRD (THRD) and modern HRD (MHRD). Based on the discussion, an emerging theoretical base of HRD was modelled, and the NHRD was proposed and highlighted to resolve contemporary challenges.

Keywords: **Human resources development challenges, national human resources development, emerging HRD research**

INTRODUCTION

The flux of the ongoing debate in defining Human Resources Development (HRD), identifying its scope and roles, and its theoretical base has brought different perspectives to the HRD field. From the work of Nadler, who was earlier

believed to have coined the term HRD in 1969 (Swanson, 2001) to recent well known scholarly work until 2001, HRD has been defined in the contexts of individuals, work teams, organizations and work processes. This is evidenced when examining Weinberger's (1998) collection of HRD definitions from 1970 to 1995. Swanson (2008) recognized a set of HRD roles as "training and development, organization development, performance improvement, organizational learning, career development and management and leadership development" (p. 264). This seems to be a summary of the major HRD roles indicated by the definitions compiled by Weinberger (1998). In addition, Swanson (2001) also proposed a theoretical basis of three theories — economic, system, and psychological — that seemed to be accepted by the dominant HRD experts, except for a few criticisms, especially by Mclean (1998). The HRD outcomes to be generated in the organizational context have been identified as 'improving performance and learning' (Swanson, 2001), as underlined by the two main paradigms of HRD, namely, learning and performance. This review mainly covered the HRD literature on 'Human Resource Development (HRD) challenges' and 'National Human Resource Development (NHRD)' to answer the following questions: (1) What are the contemporary challenges confronted by HRD?; (2) Is HRD capable of resolving these challenges?; (3) What are the emerging research inquiries to resolve such challenges?; and (4) Can NHRD resolve the identified challenges?

DYNAMICS IN HRD

The complex and dynamic world scenarios have brought unprecedented challenges for HRD. According to a definition by Oxford Advanced Lerner's Dictionary (2005), challenges are difficult tasks that test somebody's abilities and skills. The forces that affect the new roles expected from and the new needs to be achieved by HRD test the abilities of the HRD field and its profession; hence, they all act as challenges to HRD. On this basis, some forces, roles and needs of HRD have been considered as challenges to HRD, with the directly highlighted HRD challenges in the literature.

Challenging Forces, Roles and Needs of HRD

Some major forces such as globalization, changing organizations and workforce, impact of technology, and HRD's receptiveness and flexibility (Ruona *et al.*, 2003) have impacted the academia and practice of HRD. Hertenstein (1999) showed the challenge of globalisation confronted by HRD as to recognise, address and support the evolving global culture and humanize it to enable people to operate in it.

Ruona *et al.* (2003) suggested new roles of HRD which include learning and human development for people to overcome resistance to changes and building systems to face uncertainties, change and system development for organizational renewal, as well as knowledge management to knowledge creation and managing organizations.

In addition, the emerging new HRD needs also stand as challenges to HRD. Marsick (2007) identified a need of 'T shape' skills for the professionals that combine a deep knowledge of a discipline (vertically) with an understanding of how their discipline interacts with other disciplines (horizontally). Bringing a new perspective to the HRD field, Garavan *et al.* (2004) pointed out a need to apply different levels of analysis in HRD theory development research. On the other hand, Torraco (2002), explaining the alternative theory building research methods, emphasised on the use of innovative methodologies in HRD research and theory building (Torraco, 2004).

Direct Challenges to HRD

The HRD literature provides some challenges that are confronted by the field of HRD and its profession. Ruona *et al.* (2003) identified five major challenges of HRD as Organizational presence and recognition (presence in the "boardroom" and in organizational leadership), evaluation and return on investment (being market driven and demonstrate return on investment), HRD's identity (identifying HRD's core competencies and competitive advantages), identifying HRD's stakeholders (deciding to whom the profession serves - whether only to large organizations or working with the community, schools and educational institutions, nations and society as a whole), and standards and professionalization (differentiating between good and bad practice, practitioners, and theory/research).

Gold *et al.* (2003) also highlighted some HRD challenges that include gaining recognition for the services that HRD provides, taking learning seriously and strategically, having an inclusive approach to HRD using technology as a vehicle to achieve learning, making HRD a strategic consideration at work, and showing links between HRD and measurable outcomes and outputs.

Bing *et al.* (2003) reported some challenging trends in HRD such as "balancing the demand for increased shareholder values against values as perceived by other stakeholders, making better use of technology to deliver just in time solutions, an increasingly global economy, and demand for more ethical and socially responsible organizations" (p. 342). They further identified five challenges to HRD professionals, namely, responding to multiple stakeholders (not only shareholders), measuring HRD's impact and utility (while doing professional and ethically important services), orienting towards the future (not only the current and past orientation), focusing on problems and outcomes (rather only the processes), and achieving a status as a profession (enabling to perceive HRD as a legitimate profession by others). Marsick (2007) highlighted a challenging threat to HRD, that is, the inability of HRD to take on a driving and a strategic role in organisation.

Chermark *et al.* (2003) highlighted some challenges posed by some critical uncertainties, such as competing for competent and expert workers (expertise

elite), facing globalization by balancing the boundaries of time, space, geography and culture and continuous expertise development, striking a "balance between ever demanding organization and individuals" (p. 265) (locus of control between organizations and individuals), contributing to organizational knowledge management to increase marketability of HRD's knowledge, being "flexible enough to respond variety of ages (knowledge, information, and participation ages) and the priorities they will bring" (p. 265), and exploiting the technology to shift in the highly automated and technologically demanding workplace.

As for the critical knowledge claim of HRD, some sets of present HRD challenges need to be addressed. Bierema and Cseh (2003) identified challenges that include creating social justice in the work place, paying attention towards women's experiences, addressing organizational 'undiscussables' (such as sexism, racism, patriarchy, violence), creating organizational democracy, doing feminists' workplace studies, and advocating change.

Initiating a new research agenda, McLean (2004) pointed to the HRD development needs and development priorities in some countries, especially in developing countries and transitioning societies as major challenges for the National HRD policy planning and implementation.

Based on the above discussion, the contemporary HRD challenges can be synthesized using the ETVX (Entry-Task-Validation-Exit) model, which was introduced by IBM for documenting their processes (Radice, 2002). This has been widely used in explaining the process and managing the quality of processes. Human Resource Development, as a process (Swanson, 2001; McLean & McLean, 2001), also has these phases of "Entry, Task, Validation and Exit". Human Resource Development requires tangible and intangible inputs at the entry level to be processed by the tasks that are validated so as to generate the expected outputs at the exit level. This process operates in an environment. The HRD challenges can be identified at these levels. The challenges at the entry level are related to what is required as the input into the HRD process, whether tangible or intangible. Challenges at the task level are related to main activities to be carried out and at the validation level, they are related to what is needed to ensure a proper performing of the main task, while at the exit level they affect what is expected from the HRD process. Finally, challenges from the environment affect the whole process. The model is illustrated in Fig.1.

Is HRD Capable of Resolving the Contemporary Challenges?

Here, the question is whether the dominant domain of HRD is in a position to resolve these contemporary challenges. The debate on defining HRD is still on and there is no consensus over an agreed upon definition (McLean, 2001). As HRD is "emergent, dynamic, and moulded by the contexts, circumstances, and cultures in which it occurs" (Dilworth, 2003), the focus of the

Environmental Challenges Globalisation and global economy, changing organisation, demand for more ethical and socially responsible organisations, and impact of technology		

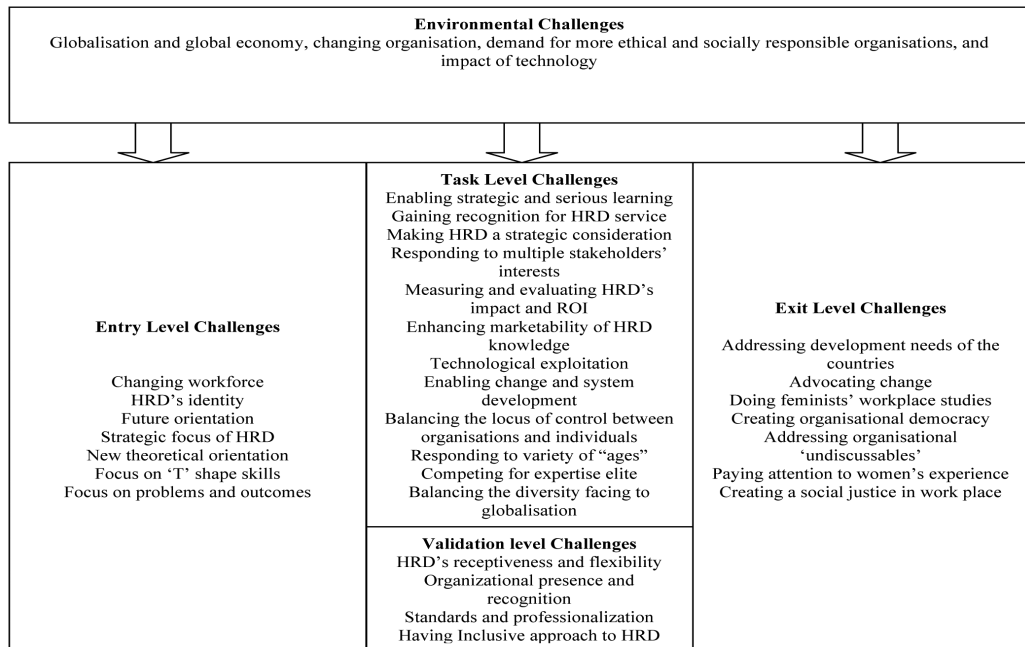|		
Entry Level Challenges Changing workforce HRD's identity Future orientation Strategic focus of HRD New theoretical orientation Focus on 'T' shape skills Focus on problems and outcomes	**Task Level Challenges** Enabling strategic and serious learning Gaining recognition for HRD service Making HRD a strategic consideration Responding to multiple stakeholders' interests Measuring and evaluating HRD's impact and ROI Enhancing marketability of HRD knowledge Technological exploitation Enabling change and system development Balancing the locus of control between organisations and individuals Responding to variety of "ages" Competing for expertise elite Balancing the diversity facing to globalisation	**Exit Level Challenges** Addressing development needs of the countries Advocating change Doing feminists' workplace studies Creating organisational democracy Addressing organisational 'undiscussables' Paying attention to women's experience Creating a social justice in work place
	Validation level Challenges HRD's receptiveness and flexibility Organizational presence and recognition Standards and professionalization Having Inclusive approach to HRD	

Fig.1: Contemporary Challenges of HRD

major domains of HRD has been argued to extend beyond organisations (McLean, 2004). Its roles and outcomes have been criticised for the insufficiency to address the challenges pointed out, especially by the critical HRD perspective and the recent NHRD research. HRD's foundational theoretical basis has been critiqued for its insufficiency (McLean, 1998), and the need of using innovative theory building methodologies in HRD has also been emphasised (Torraco, 2004). Many scholars have shown the paradigmatic limitations of the dominant domains of HRD. For instance, Valentin (2009) claimed that HRD was dominated by the positivist paradigm. Turnbull (2002) worked to challenge the dominance of the positivistic approach in HRD theory building by raising the

credibility of using the qualitative research. McLean *et al*. (2008) labelled the major paradigm of HRD as positivism or post-positivism. For all these limitations, it is clear that the dominant domain of HRD developed from 1970 to late 90s is not enough to resolve the already identified HRD contemporary challenges and thus, the authors wish to label it as 'Traditional HRD' (THRD). The rest of the inquiries that seek their identities and are different from THRD are then termed as 'Modern HRD' (MHRD). McLean *et al*. (2008) supported the constructivist paradigm for their research inquiry. Critical theory is the main paradigm in the critical HRD. Some critical theorists support post-modernism, as well (Velantin, 2009; O'Donnell *et al.*, 2006). Although alternative inquiry may take post-positivistic

approach, it is more supportive to the critical and constructivist paradigm as it is supposed to be more innovative in its efforts. Based on the above evidence, these paradigmatic differences between THRD and MHRD can be presented as in Fig.2. The established relationships among the ontology, epistemology and methodology shown in the figure are based on the work of Ruona and Lunham (2004). The work by Guba and Lincoln (1990) guided for the identification of ontological, epistemological, and methodological characteristics mentioned in the model.

EMERGING HRD RESEARCH INQUIRIES

Under the new developments that are taking place in HRD, some key research inquires are noteworthy. Swanson (2008) categorized these new research inquiries into three groups; First, placing HRD on the three core theory domains of economics, psychology and system theories; second, viewing HRD without core theories but contingently seeking the usefulness of all theories in HRD work (multiple theory approach); and third, viewing HRD as having a narrowly focused theoretical foundation in order to fit with a particular ideology or research programme. However, the authors wish to categorise them into four important HRD research inquiries, namely; traditional HRD inquiry, multi-disciplinary HRD theoretical inquiry, critical HRD inquiry, and alternative HRD inquiry. All these inquiries are needed to address the emerging challenges in contemporary HRD.
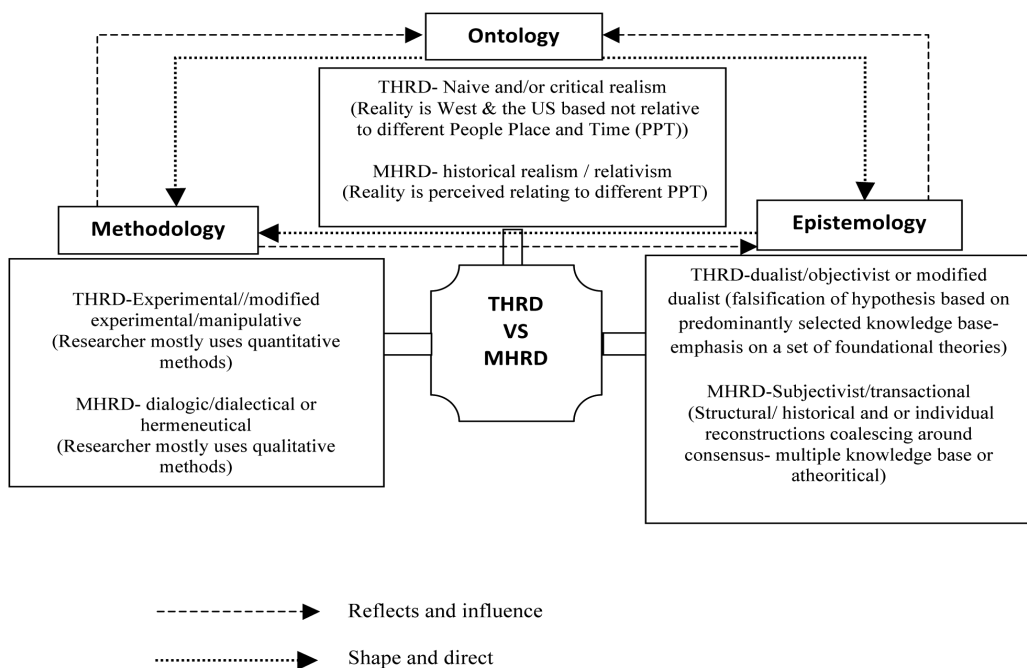
Fig.2: Traditional vs. Modern HRD

Traditional HRD inquiry dominantly explains and builds the core knowledge of HRD based on a selected set of knowledge/theories, limiting its discussion to organisational context. Multi-disciplinary HRD theoretical inquiry still explains and builds the core knowledge of HRD, not based on selected knowledge/theories, but seeking for the use of any knowledge/theories contingently, extending their scope beyond organizations. Critical HRD inquiry pays its attention on the "hidden sides" of day to day HRD, purely aligning their arguments to critical theory. They mainly critique the dominant ontology of HRD whatever it is for the benefit of the minority, woman, or any other suffered categories rising against the power and political imbalances. Alternative HRD inquiry, however, may not explain the core knowledge of HRD. Instead, it performs as a 'linking pin' to link HRD with other fields/ theories/ knowledge by discovering the possibilities of applying or relating such 'foreign knowledge' into HRD that could be later considered in explaining or building the core HRD knowledge. This inquiry can support three other inquiries to build their specific knowledge content by relating or applying the other foreign fields' knowledge/theories or models.

The first research inquiry has been the dominant domain of HRD for decades, and new contributions have been made to it. Scholars have shown the applicability of development economic theories (Wang & Swanson, 2008; Swanson, 2008; Greg *et al*., 2008), social capital theories (Storberg-

Walker, 2009; Swanson, 2008), and modern labour economic theories to the HRD foundational theories. Wang and Swanson (2008b) brought the attention to 'messy' issues in HRD at small-, middle- and large-scale development efforts and suggested a framework for comparative studies in HRD, not only at the micro-level but also at the macro-level (nation, national and region). This initiative shows a slight alignment with McLean's (2004) initiatives in extending HRD boundaries beyond organisational context. Wang and Sung (2009) have tried to clarify the boundaries of HRD again by emphasising on workforce development and workplace learning.

In line with the second HRD research inquiry, MacLean (2004) extended the scope of HRD beyond organizational contexts to include community, nation, region and global level with a consideration of cultural, political and economic variants of such contexts. McLean (1998) first saw Swanson's (2001) three-legged stool as too simplistic and inadequate. Instead, McLean (2007) presented the image of an 'octopus' that may incorporate more advanced theories flexibly into HRD research. According to Mclean (2007), theories may come even from anthropology, sociology and speech communications, as well as the other disciplines, such as music, philosophy and so on. Torraco (2004), accepting the need of going beyond the HRD three-legged stool, elaborated on the role of theories such as organisational behaviour, psychology, sociology, communication, education and other social and behavioural sciences in

explaining HRD. He further highlighted the applied nature of HRD that seeks for large territories of knowledge. According to Weick (1995), a good theory cannot be recognised by examining the product alone, and the context in which the product lives is also more important. Studying the interplay between the object and the context requires innovative research approaches.

In support of the third HRD research inquiry, Bierema (2009) challenged the HRD's dominant theoretical framework and attempted to unsettle our understandings of HRD through a woman's perspective claiming that, "…HRD is increasingly thinking 'inside the box' of capitalism and masculine rationality making it ever difficult for the profession to behave ethically, sustainably, or creatively" (p. 69). She further argued that, "ironically, HRD has become feminized, yet perpetuates masculine rational professionals and HRD recipients" (p. 91). She further critiqued HRD saying that it is 'performative philosophically' (emphasis on efficiency and performance); commodificates employees (labour is exchanged for something else making work relationships into a product to make profits and generate performance), is alleged to shareholders (ignoring all its stakeholders), ignores power relations (failure to recognise the marginalisation of some members of the organisation), and lacks alternative models and theories for HRD practice. Bierema and Cseh (2003) claimed that HRD paid little attention to social justice at work, women's experiences, gender and other diverse groups, organisational 'undiscussables', and the need of advocating

change. Fenwick (2005) showed the need of focussing on fundamental inequalities, oppression and violence in organisations. Turnbull (2002) argued for a liberal and pragmatic approach to HRD theory building which retains academic rigor, celebrates differences and allows learning from more than one ontological paradigm. Valantin (2006), Sumrook (2004, 2009), O'Donald *et al.* (2006) and Carole and Turnbull (2002) also delineated the need for critical HRD.

Under the fourth research inquiry, initiatives have been taken in search of the knowledge from other fields to incorporate them with the rest of the research inquiries. The work on the implication of different philosophies in HRD (Ruona & Lynham, 2004), and the implications of different world views in adult learning (Johansen & McLean, 2006) support this research inquiry. Short (2000) discussed how to use metaphors to view HRD to our advantage and also how it can be dangerous for the field. Russ-eft and Preskill (2005) searched for the involvement of Return on Investments (ROI) in the evaluation of HRD. Meanwhile, Turnbull (2002) argued the use of bricolage as an alternative for HRD theory building, challenging dominance of post-positivist approach on HRD. Similarly, Garavan *et al.* (2004) also discussed HRD as a multi-level phenomenon emphasising the need to address the level of analysis. The recent emphasis on generational differences on HRD studies (Li & Nimon, 2008) and HRD's role in crisis management (Wooten & James, 2008) can also be highlighted under this research inquiry.
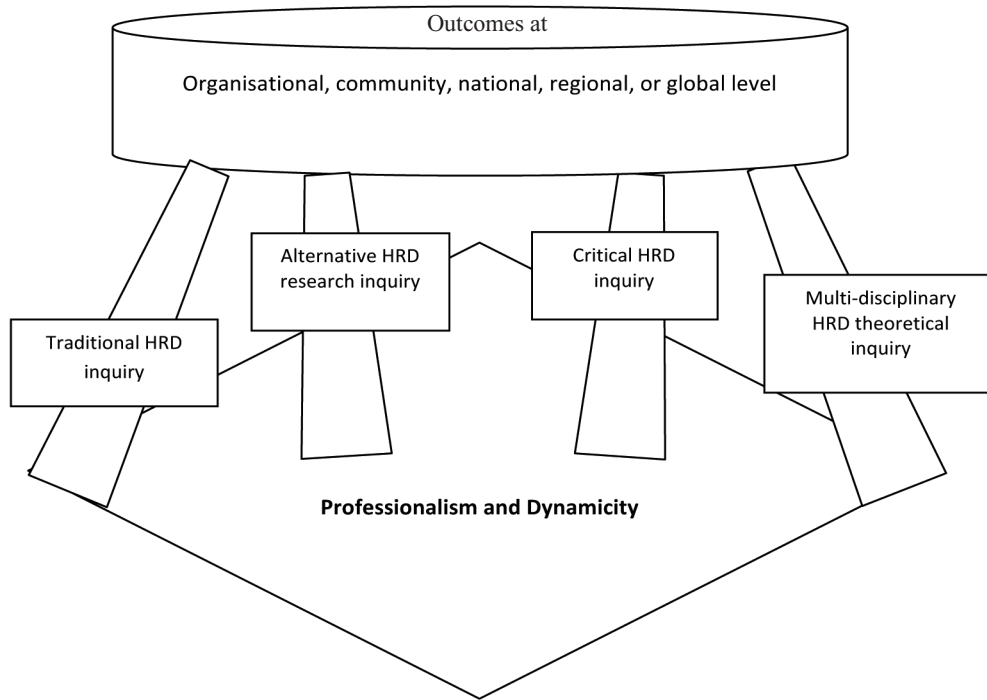
Fig.3: Contemporary HRD Theoretical Base

Summarising the above discussion, a four-legged stool of HRD theoretical direction can be presented (Fig.3). This stool depicts the contemporary research inquiries that have so far been evolved contemporarily. It does not mean that HRD should and will have only these inquiries, and that this stool will not last forever and is opened to continuous improvement as time goes by.

NHRD AS A MODERN RESEARCH AGENDA

National Human Resource Development, under the multi-disciplinary HRD theoretical inquiry, has been taking a paradigm shift. The emerging HRD literature on NHRD has attempted to expand the boundaries of HRD to national socio-cultural contexts, based on broad issues such as national economic performance and national health issues (McLean *et al*., 2004). Most theoretical perspectives in HRD have been limited to the U.S. context (Weinberger, 1998). However, the contemporary world demands more geocentric rather than ethnocentric, more flexible rather than static, more situational rather than absolute, more meso and macro rather than micro and more general rather than specific approaches to HRD research (McLean, 2007). As pointed out earlier, NHRD seeks its base on multiple theories and perhaps, on more advanced theories to cater to the emerging HRD requirements posed by the contemporary challenges (Fig.1), especially the challenges

at output and validation levels and from HRD's environment. Authors view NHRD to come under the category of MHRD. This is because its extended scope enables it to respond to contemporary challenges that may be irresolvable with narrowly defined scope within organizational context; its orientation enables it to encompass ambiguity (McLean, 2007) and multiple theories/knowledge that encourage the construct of the NHRD's core knowledge base contingently that paves the way for more effective responses to context specific issues and challenges. NHRD also has a room for critical HRD and alternative HRD inquiries because NHRD rejects positivism or post-positivism. Besides, NHRD's applied nature in contributing to resolve people related problems that are unseen by traditional HRD and need to be more coordinated, macro-level, holistic, whereas integrated approaches merits it to be viewed under MHRD. In practice, NHRD has contributed a great deal to the development of many countries, such as Singapore, South Africa, St, Lucia, Brazil, Jamaica, Pacific Island, Mexico, China, Thailand, Korea, Kenya, the Philippines, Poland, and the developed countries of Canada and the UK. In 2004 and 2006 in particular, the issues of AHRD came up with five certain models of NHRD, the challenges and attributes of NHRD and other matters related to it (Cho & Mclean, 2004; Lynham & Cunningham, 2006). These issues of AHRD have further shown how NHRD has contributed to these countries' development to achieve improved productivity, eliminating racial imbalance,

local and global competition, training, education, employment, social stability and development, national health, national and international development, and local and global collaboration (Osman-Gani, 2004; Lynham & Cunningham, 2004; Scotland, 2004; Bartlett & Rodgers, 2004; Cooper, 2004; Yang *et al.*, 2004; Lutta-Mukhebi, 2004; Szalkowiski & Jankowicz, 2004; Lee, 2004, and several others). Further, it has been shown how NHRD can contribute to the achievement of the millennium development goals and other dimensions related to human development (Mc Lean, 2006; Lynham & Cunningham, 2006).

WHAT'S THE FUTURE — HRD OR NHRD?

The NHRD has been critically challenged for its theory development approach and its definitional process (Wang & Swanson, 2008a; Wang, 2008). However, McLean *et al.* (2008) have reflected their views on the criticisms. They argued that their methodology has been used in more than twenty countries by more than fifty authors. Moreover, they accept the existence of confusion in the definition of NHRD, just like in the HRD definitions. McLean *et al.* (2008) firmly defended their methodology, pointing to the differences between the HRD and NHRD paradigms. These core differences apply uniquely distinguishable methodologies in their research that cannot be evaluated on a same set of criteria.

Compared to traditional HRD, NHRD as a modern view of HRD is broader in scope. Wang and Sun (2009) attempted

to rationalise that HRD's focus should be limited to workforce development and/or workplace learning. This is clearly an acceptance of the limit of THRD, focusing on the organizational context. This will definitely ease to clarify the NHRD scope in the future, in line with its future research on MHRD. Wang (2008) pointed to NHRD as a sub-field of HRD, but the traditional HRD definitions and its scope is too narrow to encompass NHRD, which goes beyond the boundaries of THRD. If NHRD is to be a sub-field of HRD, traditional HRD should be renamed as organisational HRD or micro-HRD. At the same time, it needs more efforts to find out a proper definition for HRD to encompass both organisational HRD and NHRD. One may see that the global definition of HRD, put forward by McLean and McLean (2001, p. 322), may be suitable to encompass both the definitions of organisational HRD and NHRD. Unfortunately, NHRD definition (McLean, 2004, p. 271) seems to be broader than the McLean and McLean's (2001) global definition of HRD. As the word "adult" has been replaced by ellipsis in the NHRD definition that has broaden the focus of the field even beyond adults, while the rest of the definition is similar both in the NHRD definition and in the global definition of HRD. Therefore, the authors infer that HRD has not yet been properly defined and there is no proper alignment between HRD and NHRD.

This study will encourage scholars to raise more critiques on this work and come up with major concerns of this paper, such as 'contemporary challenges of HRD',

'emerging research inquiries', and 'NHRD's ability to address such challenges'. The discussion on HRD paradigm can be studied to reach its complex roots raising critiques on our model. It is essential to find appropriate links and compatibilities between HRD and evolving NHRD. Significantly, this study will provide a summary of the contemporary HRD research inquiries in its four-legged stool that can be used in the future research and review purposes. However, further efforts are still needed to enrich each research inquiry by subsequent studies, with more specific characteristics and relevant scholarly work since this study took only an initiative to outline each research inquiry.

CONCLUSION

Our study on the contemporary HRD challenges, emerging HRD research inquiries, and the THRD and MHRD has led to some conclusions over the debate on the adequacy of HRD and the plausibility of NHRD in resolving the contemporary HRD challenges. First, the dominant domain of HRD is limited in its scope to adequately respond to the contemporary HRD challenges, and thus it remains under THRD. In contrast, NHRD is capable of responding to these challenges as it represents the attributes of MHRD. In specific, the HR related issues to be addressed beyond the organisational level can best be covered by NHRD. However, the scope, roles, and definition of NHRD need to be properly clarified, and their links to HRD should be established in directing future research.

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