A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF INTEGRATIVE INQUIRY

Transforming Organization’s Effectiveness, Leadership, and Culture.

Katherine Stitham, June 2019

ABSTRACT

This paper examines traditional and critical theories of human resource development and creates a conceptual framework that applies foundational principles of CHRD (Critical Human Resources Development) to traditional HRD (Human Resources Development) models of training and assessment. The resulting framework introduces 5 core competencies that address both corporate interests and the critical values and ethics of human development to create a practical path for building an optimal work culture.

TRANSFORMING HR DEVELOPMENT

Human resource development (HRD) is a broad and relatively new branch of the much broader field of human resource studies. As early as the mid 20th century, researchers began to expand the concept of human resources beyond employee policies and management to explore best practices for cultivating effective organizational culture and for developing employee’s work-related abilities (Swanson and Holton, 2001). The most widely-known framework of human resource development today comes from McLagen (1989) who maintained that HRD was comprised of three domains: training and development, organization development, and career development.

The theory of critical human resource development (CHRD) added two important concepts to the discussion around human resource development in response to traditional HRD: the impact of power and power dynamics in development work, and the need to be inclusive and iterative in shaping and informing organizational culture, benefiting people in practice not just in theory (Fenwick, 2014). This approach emerged from applying critical pedagogy and theory to professional development models (Bierema and Callahan, 2014).

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1 There is contention as to whether or not Organization Development (OD) is its own field or a subset of HRD (Egan, 2002). This paper aligns with scholarship that frames OD as a domain within HRD.
The primary distinction between the two theories is that HRD focuses on company outcomes and benefits whereas CHRD focuses on individual human outcomes. This paper aims to create a framework that applies foundational principles of CHRD to traditional HRD models of training and assessment. The framework articulates a three-pronged strategy to implement change around 5 domains of organizational culture and defines corresponding core competencies that address both corporate interests and the critical values to create a practical path to implementation for organizations.

DEFINING THE WORK

Critical Human Resource Development (CHRD) is defined in this paper as the process of facilitating change at individual, group, and system levels in ways that optimize human interest, organization advancement, and social impact. (Bierema and Callahan, 2014).

In this framework, CHRD is viewed as a comprehensive educational strategy intended to change the culture and structure of organizations so that they can better:

- Ensure engagement, satisfaction, health and well-being of employees
- Facilitate learning, growth, and development for organization and employees
- Align company mission, values, and policies in socially responsible ways
- Strengthen and address system and process improvement
- Initiate and manage change

(Bennis, 1969; Egan, 2002).

Whether critical or traditional, HRD is a process that is complex, iterative, and longitudinal; since there are always new ways to improve, learning becomes cyclical rather than linear. Results are achieved as a part of an evolving project instead of in a series of one-hour trainings over employee lunch breaks. HRD is more of a lens or approach, a theoretical model of looking at an organization and addressing needs that arise through specific, targeted efforts instead of a distinct project that can be “completed”. The lens allows companies to customize and evolve the work as it arises, from training and coaching individuals to the creation or redesign of new policies and procedures, to long-term mindset and behavioral shifts at all levels of the organization.

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2 Organizational culture: The values, beliefs, and behaviors that create the social and psychological environment of an organization.

3 Organizational Structure: The typically hierarchical arrangement of lines of authority, communications, rights and duties of an organization. Organizational structure determines how the roles, power and responsibilities are assigned, controlled, and coordinated, and how information flows between the different levels of management.

4 Bruner (1960) described all learning as a spiral, a process by which as we learn and develop particular skills in one area, we open new opportunities to explore subjects in more depth. We are essentially never done learning. (Harden and Stamper, 1999).
CORPORATE BENEFITS & IMPACT

Traditional HRD models frequently frame human development as a company commodity and a means to maximize profit, adopting the language of human capital theory (Nafuko, 2004). This results in strategies for improvement being structured primarily for cost-benefit analysis. CHRD theorists argue that the value of education, learning and development are not limited to commodification and financial gains and rightfully point out that there is value in human growth and satisfaction that is immeasurable by those indicators. That said, there are clear financial and pragmatic advantages for businesses that invest in HRD and it is important to acknowledge the ways in which HRD directly benefits the bottom line for businesses.

In our framework, we believe all forms of HRD can and should:

Increase Employee Interest, Engagement, & Retention. Optimizing work culture not only attracts employees to your business\(^5\), it keeps employees engaged, committed and passionate about their work, which in turn decreases turnover.\(^6\) Engaged employees are dedicated to the company mission, work harder and longer to help it succeed, and are the foundation of healthy thriving company cultures (Habib et al, 2014).

Impact Profitability, Productivity and Sustainability. Research has shown that effective HR development enhances a business’ profitability\(^7\), sustainability and market competitiveness and overall increases team effectiveness, productivity, and quality (Egan, 2002). Companies that provide comprehensive training and professional development opportunities have 218% higher income per employee and enjoy a 24% higher profit margin than companies without formalized training (ASTD, 2000).

Prepare Companies for the Demands of the Future. HRD helps companies evolve and integrate innovations necessary to ensure a competitive advantage. Organizations that embrace a growth mindset and commitment to change and learning report the most long term success (Habib et al, 2014).

Produce Measurable Data. HRD is systems and process-focused, built upon decades of theory and research in the behavioral sciences (Egan, 2002). Companies that engage in long-term development work have data to better able assess and modify strategies to deepen impact around company wide goals and initiatives.

\(^5\) 78% of Millennials see workplace quality as important when choosing an employer (CBRE). Traits looked for in employers: treat employees fairly (73.1%), corporate social responsibility (46.6%), brand image (39.5%) (NSHSS)

\(^6\) 46% of HR pros say retention is their greatest concern, followed by employee engagement at 36% (SHRM) Highly engaged business units realize a 41% reduction in absenteeism and a 17% increase in productivity. (Gallup)

\(^7\) Disengaged employees cost organizations between $450 and $550 billion annually. (HBR)
CHRD PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE

The ethics-driven, humanistic approach of CHRD better fits the worldview of the 86% of young professionals who value seeing companies they work for behave in a socially responsible way. CHRD believes in the inherent value of improving work environments and opportunities for employees. The framework outlined in this paper assumes the following core values in any human resource work:

Self-Awareness | the continuous commitment to self-learning and growth, observation, and reflection.

Transparency | the belief that people should behave in ways that align with their espoused values, goals, and commitments.

Equity & Inclusion | the commitment to equally value the perspectives and opinions of all employees and to actively pursue fair and equitable treatment and opportunity for everyone.

Agency | the intention to support everyone in an organization to increase their individual level of autonomy to operate at the height of their expertise and skill.

Collaboration | the trust that people will support those things for which they have had a hand in shaping, that humans seek out connection with one another, and that highly effective teams have interdependent roles.

(McLean, 2005)

These values enhance corporate bottom-lines but are not driven by them; work cultures that embrace these values when designing comprehensive HRD plans should see increase in efficiency, productivity, employee engagement and retention, and longterm growth and sustainability.

THREE STRATEGIES OF HR DEVELOPMENT

This framework outlines a three-pronged approach to transforming an organization’s culture (Mickan, 2000), providing training and strategic planning, training, and coaching in:

Leadership Development

The development of leadership qualities, values, and competencies for individuals in formal leadership/management positions. This process provides context and introduces innovations for both emerging leaders new to positions and for established leaders who have held management/executive positions for some time.

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8 86% of young professionals say it’s important that the company they work for behaves in a socially responsible way (Nielsen)

9 54% of employees say a strong sense of community (great coworkers, celebrating milestones, a common mission) kept them at a company longer than was in their best interest (Gusto) Companies with engaged employees, outperform those without by 202%. (Officevibe) 76% of employees don’t trust bosses who fail to share company data (GeckoBoard) 75% of employees would stay longer at an organization that listens to and addresses their concerns (Ultimate Software)
Team Development

The development of collaboration and communication skills for all employees within work groups so that they work more effectively, inclusively, and relationally. This process supports teams who routinely work in contact with one another, regardless of hierarchy within the company, such as departments, branches, committees, or interest groups.

Organizational Development

The development of the systems and processes to improve organizational operation. It includes analysis of the current situation and of future requirements, then suggests recommended policy and procedure best practices based on key learnings from the behavioral sciences in order to enable the organization to support culture changes.

Together, these three strategies target long term organizational change, through four levels of intervention\(^{10}\):

- individual self awareness & knowledge-building
- interpersonal behavior change & skill-building
- organizational structural & process planning
- systemic culture change & sustained outcomes

Whereas many training programs stop at the level of awareness (“I know something new”), this process impacts skills, behavior and processes, and ultimately attitude and beliefs across the organization.

CHARACTERISTICS OF OPTIMAL WORK CULTURES

Researchers over the past decades have studied what makes effective teams and optimal work environments (Mickan and Rodger, 2000; Tarricone and Luca, 2002). In his article on organization culture and effectiveness, Denison (1995) found four culture qualities that showed the highest impact for companies with regards to success: he discovered that high levels of employee involvement and adaptability were strong predictors of company growth and that clear direction and structural consistency were strong predictors of profit\(^{11}\). All four characteristics were found to be important indicators of employee engagement and healthy work cultures.

\(^{10}\) These four levels of intervention are based on Brofenbrenner’s (1979) socio-ecological model of human development which describes the environmental factors and influences that interact and affect individual behavior.

\(^{11}\) The majority of research and statistics cited in this paper are related to US-based companies and employees.
Adapting Denison’s findings with additional research on organizational culture and employee engagement (Bennis, 1969; Maylett, 2014) and infusing contemporary critical theory (Bierema and Callahan, 2014), we identify five key characteristics of optimal work environments:

**INCLUSION & CONNECTION**

The organization values input, perspectives, and contributions from all employees.

Employees report high levels of trust, strong relationships, active involvement, and a sense of community.

**ORDER & PROCESS**

The organization has clear and transparent communication with its team, and aligns procedures and policies with company values.

Employees report strong sense of responsibility, accountability, and role clarity.

**DIRECTION & PURPOSE**

The organization has clear vision, values, and goals that are widely understood and agreed upon by employees.

Employees report being able to see clear purpose and impact of their efforts.

**AUTONOMY & AGENCY**

The organization supports employee independence and creates more opportunities for distributive power.

Employees at all levels report higher levels of agency and leadership.

**GROWTH & CHANGE**

The organization is able to effectively adapt and change and has a fierce commitment to organizational learning and growth.

Employees report opportunities to grow and to give and receive feedback with compassion and candor.

These 5 aspects may have different significance or interpretations depending on an individual’s culture or background as well the corporate country of operation or ownership. These factors are also heavily influenced

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by sector and profession.\textsuperscript{13} For example, this model acknowledges that not every business can or should become a “flat” (non-hierarchical) company; however, any organization is capable and can see benefits from strategically creating more opportunity for shared responsibility within their teams.

\section*{CHARACTERISTICS \& COMPETENCIES}

\subsection*{Inclusion \& Connection}

Organizational cultures which are inclusive are relational in nature. They value the input, perspectives, and contributions of all members of a team, celebrate diversity, and prioritize people over product. Inclusive teams have high levels of trust, collaboration and caring, rooted in a foundation of psychological safety and community.\textsuperscript{14}

This characteristic moves beyond diversity compliance and asks individuals to reflect on diversity in a dynamic way. In work cultures that excel in this domain, individuals feel empowered to speak up and conversations evolve over time as new information or new demographics integrate into the culture.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{Related Competencies:}\textsuperscript{13}
  \begin{itemize}
    \item Identity \& Power \textit{cultivate self awareness around issues of identity, culture, bias and power dynamics to understand how we impact and are impacted by these factors.}
    \item Team Development Theory \textit{understand key concepts in teaming and team development and are committed to building and supporting better teams in their organization.}
    \item Collaborative Decision-Making \textit{utilize tools and techniques to guide teams in making more collaborative decisions, valuing input and perspectives from diverse stakeholders.}
    \item Facilitation \textit{guide conversations in ways that maximize communication and collaboration across the team.}
    \item Team Building \& Dynamics \textit{apply team building techniques to foster cultures of trust, candor, and safety based on a deep understanding of the dynamics at play in each team.}
  \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{13} While not taking a strictly moral relativist standpoint, this paper argues that certain values may have different meaning or application depending on context. That said, this framework acknowledges and creates space for those differences, and is based on the underlying belief that the 5 aspects outlined here enable any community to better realize the goals it sets for itself.

\textsuperscript{14} 59\% of millennial employees who strongly agree that they can talk with their manager about “non-work-related issues” are engaged at work (\textit{Gallup}) 75\% of employees would stay longer at an organization that listens to and addresses their concerns (\textit{Ultimate Software}).
Direction & Purpose

Strong organizational cultures have a shared vision and mission, with values and goals that are widely understood and agreed upon by employees. Employees should feel committed to the purpose of the organization as well as be able to see how their work contributes to it.¹⁵ This requires clear messaging, mentorship and guidance at all levels of the organization.

Work environments that excel in this domain have inspiring messages that ripple throughout the organization and are shaped by the employees that work there. People are mission-driven in their work. There is guidance and support provided for employees at all levels to improve.

Core Competencies

- **Shared visioning** express a common understanding, ownership, and appreciation of organizational goals and vision across the organization.
- **Collaborative Goal Setting** create goals with input from across team using collaborative techniques.
- **Strategic Planning** translate goals into clear actionable steps and process.
- **Coaching & Mentorship** support and guide others in setting their own goals, acknowledging challenges, and innovating new solutions.
- **Orientation & Onboarding** provide comprehensive orienting for new team members to ensure they have solid understanding of the purpose and responsibilities of their role.

Growth & Change

Organization that are able to effectively respond to change are pioneers of innovation and create work cultures that encourage feedback, transparency and engagement. Growth mindsets teach individuals to seek opportunities to improve and acknowledge mistakes which can decrease burnout, stress, and work-related illness.¹⁶

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¹⁵ 77% of employees who strongly agree that they know what their company stands for and what makes it different from competitors strongly agree that they plan to be with the company for at least one year (Gallup) 91% of workers say they feel motivated to do their best when they have leadership support (American Psychological Association) 57% of employees said “meaningful work” contributes most toward a positive workplace sentiment (Namely).

¹⁶ 87% of millennials rate “professional or career growth and development opportunities” as important to them in a job; 69% of non-millennials agree (Gallup) Employees who believe that only obedience, predictability, deference to authority and competition with peers are valued are 32% less likely to be engaged, motivated and committed (Vitalsmarts) 68% of employees who receive accurate and consistent feedback feel fulfilled in their jobs (Clutch).
Being responsive to change is different from engaging change proactively. While many change management strategies teach skills to react to change, this characteristic is about integrating change into the culture itself. Organizations that have high levels of this domain excel at creativity and are often on the cutting edge of their field. Their ability to evolve and change as an organization gives them greater flexibility to adapt with changing times, markets, and employee needs.

**Core Competencies**

- **Giving & Receiving** Articulate challenges and opportunities in ways that engage others in the process of change and growth.
- **Effective Feedback** Understand underlying issues within conflict and communicate effectively and compassionately with others.
- **Conflict Transformation** Support others experiencing conflict through facilitation and guidance.
- **Mediation** Apply learnings from change theorists to practical contexts and build structure and processes that address resistance and create professional development & promotion processes.
- **Change Theory & Management** Create transparent processes for role promotion and opportunities for employees to improve their skills and knowledge.

**Autonomy & Agency**

Higher instances of employee independence and responsibility have been shown to directly increase engagement and productivity. When individuals feel as though they can directly contribute, impact, and address needs within their teams they are more likely to take on leadership roles.¹⁷

This is an integral aspect of highly functioning teams. Though collaboration and interdependence are equally important, autonomy is what allows individuals to take initiative and move work forward at a faster pace. Moving from micro-management to delegation decreases burnout for employees and managers. Work cultures with high levels of autonomy and agency have quick growth in leadership potential from team members and streamlined decision-making processes.

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¹⁷ 70% of employees ranked being empowered to take action at work when a problem or opportunity arose as an important element of their engagement (SHRM)
Core Competencies

- **Distributive power models**: understand and apply distributive power models when appropriate to delegate responsibilities and reduce redundancies.
- **Influencing Decision-makers**: communicate more effectively with decision makers to create more opportunities for leadership and agency.
- **Organizational Advocacy**: engage diverse stakeholders and promote changes in ways that develop shared power and foster leadership.
- **Power Dynamics in teams**: assess current power dynamics in work spaces and adapt policies, processes and behaviors to facilitate more opportunities for shared power.
- **Empowering Emerging Leaders**: create space and opportunities for others to take on leadership roles and support their learning and development.

**Order & Process**

Companies with clear structures, processes and procedures strengthen organizational stability, which increases team efficiency. Time is not wasted trying to determine how things are done in addition to what needs to be done. To build this into the culture of an organization, leadership must be clear, consistent, and transparent about policies, roles & responsibilities, and company-wide expectations, and make sure to align these with company values.\(^\text{18}\)

**Core Competencies**

- **Role clarification**: express and define clear responsibilities and processes for individual roles and projects.
- **Effective & transparent communication**: articulate visions, goals and processes in ways that are clear and widely understood.
- **Project & meeting optimization**: organize and run more efficient and effective projects through communication, facilitation and process development.
- **Evaluation & Assessment**: Assess project or team goals through the lens of outcome-based analysis and set clear goals for evaluating success and areas of opportunity.
- **Equitable Systems**: Understand and apply models for imbedding equity principles into your policies, processes, and procedures at all levels of the organization.

\(^{18}\) 50% of employees say bosses sharing information and data has a significantly positive impact on productivity and motivation ([HubSpot](https://www.hubspot.com))

76% of employees don’t trust bosses who fail to share company data ([GeckoBoard](https://www.geckoboard.com))
CONCLUDING REMARKS

The five aspects of optimal organizational culture provide a framework that can be applied to HRD processes within any organization. Through a three-pronged strategic approach targeting leadership, team and organizational development, these traits can be infused at every level of an organization, impacting individual, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural change.

CITATIONS & REFERENCES


