Book Review
Human Resource Development   theory and practice
David McGuire and Kenneth Molbjerg Jorgensen
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In September 2011 *Human Resource Development Review* editor Thomas J. Reio, Junior, urges anonymous reviewers to approach manuscripts submitted for publication as 'an act of civility towards our colleagues and the field' (p.219). Such advice seems equally appropriate for book reviewers, named persons tasked with helping readers decide the worth of a new publication, but thereby often mainly revealing more about their own prejudices than about the book; the reader will judge whether I succeed or not. As a student of human resource development (HRD) I look for a text to provide me with up-to-date information and new insights and to be written in a reader-friendly accessible way; as teacher of Thais, I hope to find something relevant to my students' situation that models clear, simple English with conventions – punctuation, spelling, indexing and referencing – used appropriately.

This 'text' - each chapter begins with three or four objectives and ends with a similar number of discussion questions - is co-authored by European scholars. McGuire is a lecturer from Ireland/ Scotland who won an Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) Early Career Scholar Award; Jorgensen is an Associate Professor from Denmark. Its blurb promises a 'comprehensive introductory text…as well as an ideal platform for a more in-depth study' of HRD; the Preface promises 'a snapshot' of most important aspects and a useful synthesis of research across 14 disciplinary areas that, though oriented towards research and a critical viewpoint has 'much to satisfy interests of practitioners'. Sage is the leading publisher on international research.

The text comprises 16 chapters and 35 pages of references, the vast majority from 2008 or earlier. Nine chapters are by McGuire, the final being 'Reflections on HRD' - a 'state of the field' review encompassing six 'grand narratives' of HRD – learning, performance, training, identity, international and definitional. McGuire is also co-author of a chapter on 'Creativity and HRD' with the American, Robin S. Grenier. Peter Cleary's chapter on 'Human Resource Accounting' defines a field awaiting productive research. The mainly Aalborg-based Danish team contributes five chapters, two by Jorgensen alone – 'Organisational Learning and HRD', and 'Futures and Strategic Learning – Strategy Narrative', two by Jorgensen and different colleagues – 'Workplace Learning and HRD' and 'Identity and HRD', and one on 'Organisational Development and HRD' by three other Danes.

Before commissioning publishers generally require authors to provide a rationale that is often reflected in a Preface that assists readers to understand the standpoint of contributors. However no such information is provided here. Nor does either author provide a rationale for what or how they write. McGuire does not justify why he has 'carved up' HRD – or 'human resource development', terms he uses interchangeably, raising the question why? - in his idiosyncratic way. The 'grand narratives' refer to 'book chapters', but he seems to have his own chapters in mind rather than those of his co-author. Jorgensen, who situates his critical analysis and discussion of related theory and research in brief case reports leaves it to the reader to make the connections between the Danish chapters and also does not cross-reference to McGuire's chapters. Lack of explicit cross-referencing, and ignoring of each other's sometimes conflicting contributions raises questions about coherence.

At the heart of this book are two unstated questions: is it possible to write intelligibly about HRD in a context-free sense, and what are the preconditions for effective HRD? McGuire provides a desk view of his selected fields; his approach is general and high level, like a literature reviewer. At no point does he contextualize his discussion, even in chapter 15 where he compares different models of international enterprises. Thus this reader's answer to the first of the above unstated questions is emphatically 'No!' The Danish team writes as consultants; they start from practical situations that they confronted and describe how they responded. As a reader I find this approach more engaging.

Three of their chapters include case study reports that provide meaningful context for their subsequent discussion and analysis. Moreover common threads provide the reader with links between chapters. One thread is to conceptualise 'organisations' as settings for 'language games' played by stakeholders, differentiated by power and other factors; a second is understanding 'realities' and how values shape perceptions of facts; a third is human identity formation through learning from interaction between self and institutional contexts and its expression in 'stories' that reflect how individuals understand their situation in relation to others; a fourth is different concepts of learning reflecting functionalist – means-end - and symbolic – belief systems , 'reflective' and 'reflexive' thinking, and the role of HRD in promoting learning and change.

The case studies report ineffective HRD interventions. The authors are at pains to explain why and to establish pre-conditions for effective HRD. Chapter 8 on 'workplace learning' describes a course on communication skills delivered off-the-job in 2004 to workers in a Danish metal factory 'that illustrates the challenge of maintaining and transforming "educational knowledge" in work contexts so that it can support or qualify problem-solving and know-how related to work practices' (p.95). It is a hook on which to hang discussions of different theoretical perspectives on informal/incidental learning, Dewey's pragmatism and Polanyi's theory of tacit knowing – though the concluding discussion disappoints by not relating to case study evidence; chapter 9 on 'organisational learning' (OL) reports a case study in a Danish manufacturing organization in 2001 whose (unfulfilled) purpose was 'to create new norms, standards and routines in the company' (p.99). The author – Jorgensen - reviews models of promoting OL proposed by Argyris and Schon and by Wenger; he rejects the former for being basically about 'error correction' and the latter for lacking 'normative guidelines for designing learning in organisations' (p.112). His conclusion is that HRD for OL is about 'designing dialogues' (p.104) through which individuals, organizations and communities may create and share their identities. Chapter 10 is entitled 'organizational development'. It reports the New Ideas Project - an unsuccessful attempt at organizational culture change in a Danish factory – TAX – following a merger. The chapter proposes an interesting 'theory of reality'. Consultants should dialogue - their 'conceptualizing method' - with participants to elicit contrasting experiential stories to enable understanding of 'the real problems in TAX' (p.127); chapter 11 argues that identities are constructed through the individual's interaction with organizations and communities; identities can be tapped as 'stories' that people tell about their experiences; only when all parties in a situation share stories and understand their different perspectives is it possible to achieve a basis for development. The authors argue that the function of HRD is to achieve such mutual understanding, based on recognition of mutual interests, prior to planning and implementing interventions that reflect different versions of 'reality'. Chapter 12 explores why traditional linear mission and vision 'narratives' are ineffective for strategy formulation. A more inclusive method is proposed, again based on seeking out individual emergent realities expressed as 'stories' elicited from the range of employees. The aim is to promote 'reflexive' practice whereby those involved in strategy formulation are required to examine 'presumptions and prejudice embedded in language' (p. 150) so as to produce critically informed narratives. A Masters in Leadership program designed to develop both reflective and reflexive thinking is described. These chapters provide glimpses of the realities of enterprises in Denmark at the beginning of the decade, prior to the current economic crisis; they also show consultants, from mainly academic backgrounds engaging with problems as they present, theorizing on how to resolve them, negotiating with participants and redefining the purpose of HRD in the process. At the same time the reader is left wondering as to how the move from 'story elicitation' to 'integrated strategy narratives' could be managed.

From his consultancy perspective Jorgensen argues that problem definition and presentation are key factors affecting choice of HRD concepts and methods. He challenges McGuire and colleagues' questioning of whether HRD concepts and methods can be applied in a range of different cultures (p.111). While McGuire does not acknowledge this challenge, he does ask 'which applications (of HRD theories and practices) are universal and which are context specific?' (p.198) His response is:

'there can be no one true HRD, but multiple variants of HRD fitting particular contexts and situations…Effectiveness depends upon best fit and close alignment of HRD solutions with problem characteristics'. This suggests that his position may now be close to that of Jorgensen. However it is somewhat strange for there to be so little connection between the two main contributors. Though McGuire asserts that 'relationships lie at the core of HRD' (p.199) and that HRD assists individuals to become more connected this does not seem to apply to co-editing a text. McGuire's assumption of sole responsibility for Preface and concluding self-referencing chapter flouts convention for co-authored volumes. Major conclusions sometimes differ: for example, McGuire claims (p.194) that HRD 'can deliver real and substantial improvements to organizational systems', whereas Jorgensen (p.114) states unambiguously – on two occasions - that 'there is still no really solid evidence that OL has actually contributed widely to HRD in terms of human betterment, organizational enhancement and societal development'.

McGuire claims his chapters will help readers make choices for the purpose they have in mind. But this reader looked in vain for evidence of effective linking of HRD theory to specific problems of practice. McGuire seems to espouse values that his writing does not reflect. His chapters lack explicit criteria for inclusion and exclusion; they are strong on claims but weak on evidence, except citation evidence. Moreover their level is inconsistent; some terms are explained in detail, promised discussion of others, such as andragogy does not occur, and there is little or no discussion of others, such as coaching and mentoring; some chapters move abruptly from well-known to 'advanced' concepts; alignment is weak in many places with materials, such as tables introduced but not fully explained. Overlap within his chapters – on transfer of training and emotional intelligence – and between his chapters and those of Danish contributors – on identity, competencies, strategy planning, reflectiveness and reflexiveness, narrative – is neither recognized nor acknowledged. Below is a brief summary of his chapters to indicate his scope and approach.

Chapter 1 – 'Foundations of HRD' – reviews the changing 'shape and nature of HRD' (p.2), reproduces but does not discuss McLagan's HR wheel and lists 25 definitions of HRD – up to 2004 – though without highlighting European or Asian perspectives; within the text, definition 26 introduces a critical perspective that challenges assumptions of HRD as a tool of management to improve performance.

Chapter 2 – 'Assessing the Effectiveness of Training Solutions' – claims that 'much research on training effectiveness is both atheoretical and faddish' (p.12). A table lists ten 'commonly used training interventions' including lectures, case study, learning logs and 'outward bound'. There is no discussion of training problems to which these might be the 'solution', in whole or in part. Horizontally are set out six dimensions that are said to reflect purpose and structure of training: learning theories, knowledge/skills mix, training transfer – near or far?, degree of learner interaction, locus of initiation – i.e. degree of structure involved and setting, degree of reflection – 'in' or 'on' action, and cost. Each aspect is discussed but seldom in terms of the training interventions summarized in the table. The section on training transferability reproduces and discusses Baldwin and Ford's (1988) model; there is no reference to much cited work of Holton and others in recently developing a training transfer instrument.

Chapter 3 – 'Evaluating Training Outcomes' – contrasts evaluation purposes and explores organizations' differential levels of commitment to evaluation. The range of information required is discussed in terms of 'ontologies' – realist v constructivist - and related positive and phenomenological 'epistemologies', though this latter term is not explained. Knowledge of these terms will 'provide HRD practitioners with a valuable insight into the relative merits of each paradigm' and enable them 'to identify an evaluation methodology best suited to their needs and the outcomes they wish to achieve' (p.27). Kirkpatrick's evaluation model is discussed at length; passing reference is made to models by Hamblin (1974), Warr Bird and Rackham (1976), Easterby-Smith (1986) and UK's Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2007).

'Benchmarking' – used, it is claimed, by few organizations – and 'Balanced Scorecard' as evaluation strategies is discussed. The conclusion is essentially a restatement and summary of points made in the chapter.

Chapter 4 – 'Performance Management and HRD' – 'examines the role of HRD in performance management...looks at the evolution of strategic HRD and how environmental changes have moved strategic HRD modeling from the prescriptive to the descriptive' (p.36), with consequent enhanced HR and leadership roles for front-line supervisors and managers, necessitating enabling support in the form of coaching, mentoring and counseling. McGuire distinguishes (p.38) between the concept of 'strategic HRD' and 'doing strategic HRD'; the latter involves alignment between 'mission, corporate plans and HRD vision', environmental scanning, formal systematic HRD planning integrated with corporate and HRM planning, appropriate to the problems faced, must add value and reflect shared ownership. Some of these issues, such as the weakness of linear strategic management are discussed in Danish studies but there is no cross-reference. The difference between mentoring and coaching is not explained while the discussion on leadership anticipates chapter 13.

Chapter 6 – 'Creativity and HRD' – by Grenier and McGuire 'examines how creativity is recognized and fostered in the workplace through organizational and cultural strategies that encourage creative risk-taking among employees'. The chapter 'is structured around three facets – perception, perspective and positionality' (p.56). Amabile et al.'s (2005) definition of creativity is presented: 'coming up with fresh ideas for changing products, services and processes so as to better achieve the organisation's goals' (p.56). A Venn diagram shows these three intersecting concepts, but significance of the common area is not discussed. Perception is discussed in terms of research findings on environmental conditions, supervisory support and intrinsic motivation affecting employee perception and creativity' (p.58). Perspective 'emphasises the need for drawing from multiple viewpoints based on tacit knowledge and prior experience' (p.60). Positionality recognizes that 'individuals do not possess fixed identities, but are located within shifting networks of relationships, which can be analysed and changed' (p.60) – echoes again of the Danish contribution. Identity incorporates notions of subjectivity and reflexivity. Organisations can support positionality, it can also be a lens for evaluating creativity. The conclusion reminds us that as 'limited research has been conducted to identify the organizational practices that inhibit creativity…investment in initiatives designed to foster creativity may produce suboptimal results' (p. 62).

Chapter 7 – 'Adult Learning Theories' – has a stated objective of identifying the contributions of cognitivism, behaviourism, social learning and critical learning approaches to understanding how 'employees' learn. But employees are hardly mentioned subsequently, 'individuals' being the favoured term. Two additional theories are introduced - humanist and experiential learning. A table compares objectives, core assumptions, learning perspective, locus of learning, views of development and underpinning theories of the 'four main schools of learning theory' - presented now as cognitivism, behaviourism, humanism and critical theory. Excluding social and experiential learning theory is not discussed. The chapter ends with discussion of roles of individuals, educationists – especially management - and professional bodies in adult learning from a critical theory perspective. A chapter objective refers to examining principles of 'andragogy' and adult learning, but the former term is nowhere discussed, though it appears in Table 7.1 and is indexed to pages where the word is not used.

Chapter 13 - 'Leadership Development' - 'seeks to provide an integrated framework for linking leadership theories with specific developmental interventions' (p.160). It reviews research findings on trait, behavioural, situational and transformational leadership theories. Table 13.1 summarises key features of each theory in relation to underpinning philosophy, key characteristics, key contributors, relationship with followers, developmental rationale, developmental interventions and criticisms of theory. Exactly how this is an 'integrated framework' that provides a 'cross-cutting analysis' (p.160) is not explained. An issue that is acknowledged to complicate discussion of leadership is equating

leaders as managers of employees with leaders whose followers are self-recruited. Much leadership research is from that managerial context. Yet the discussion sometimes moves confusingly between the two settings. The chapter reproduces the Blake and Moulton (1964) managerial grid. McGuire concludes that 'significant progress has been made in relation to various strands of leadership and towards making leaders more effective' (p.171) though there is – as one might expect! - a 'need to draw across all four strands of leadership theory to produce well-rounded and effective interventions' (p.171). The term 'effective' is not discussed, nor are examples provided of how programs have developed leaders.

Chapter 14 – 'Diversity and HRD' – 'explores the need for diversity training in the workplace and looks at the benefits and criticisms that have been leveled at it' (p.173). There is no initial discussion of the scope of 'diversity'; chapter objectives do not mention that it refers to women as well as race and sexual identity. Persons with physical, mental or emotional disabilities are excluded. It is claimed that diversity is a neglected HRD research issue. Mentoring, networking and counseling are recommended as HR strategies for providing assistance, whilst supervisors and managers need awareness training. None of these terms is defined or explained.

Chapter 15 – 'International HRD' – presents a framework, developed from a 1990's typology 'describing four phases of internationalization and outlining the HRD priorities that exist under each phase' (p.182). The framework's purpose is to 'provide a mechanism for discussing and understanding cross-cultural and international HRD approaches by organisations' (p.182).The framework is summarized in a three page table with four phases on the horizontal – multi-domestic, international, multinational and transnational – and 19 variables on the vertical under three sub-headings viz. structural (6), cultural (4) and HRD (9). HRD issues include priorities, competency/skill development, responsibility, team development, cost, key actors, outcomes, career development and status of the individual. Each type of organization is discussed in relation to the three sub-headings. McGuire concludes 'that an organisation's international HRD approach is contingent on the stage that the organization has reached in the internationalisation process'.

Returning to my criteria, how does this text fare in providing new theoretical perspectives on HRD derived from research? The Danish chapters provide most meat, especially reality theory, cultural factors in identity formation, HRD's role in negotiating and structuring dialogues to formulate organizational strategic futures and critical analysis of theories of leading OD researchers. The case studies, though dated are interesting; the authors are brave to go public on documenting ineffective outcomes from HR consultancy; it would have been good to read of even one effective intervention.

Would I recommend this text to my Thai students? Yes, of course it is a further resource on Western HRD – there are no references to Asian HRD. However this text is a difficult read – it exemplifies Jorgensen's point that writing has been captured by academics as well as modern bureaucrats as rational language for communicating with other academics rather than with practitioners. Moreover it is badly written – McGuire's chapters strike me as soulless and they provide numerous examples of clichéd writing, explanations left begging, wrong subject-verb agreements, wordy prose, poor punctuation – the semi-colon is a dying art from this text - and proof-reading is simply slack, and quite disappointing from Sage.

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