

Human Resource Development and the Contemporary Challenges of the World

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Amid the start of the twenty first century, the world has been confronted with a new set of challenges that have greater impact on global development. Since 1990, annual Human Development Reports (HDR) have explored world challenges including poverty, gender, democracy, human rights, cultural liberty, globalization, water scarcity, climate change, and human mobility and development. In the recent HRD literature, many authors have argued that HRD has been unable to face the emerging challenges of the world. This paper reviewed HRD literature to critically discuss about the capability of HRD and its potentials to address the new development challenges.

INTRODUCTION: THE MAJOR DOMAIN OF HRD

Efforts extended defining Human Resource Development (HRD), identifying its scope and roles, and HRD's theoretical base have paved the way for different perspectives in the field to emerge. Initially, the focus of HRD was limited to the organizational or corporate level as shown by the work of Len Nadler to recent well known scholarly work until 2001. This work was pointed out by Weinberger (1998, p.77-79) in his work of summarizing HRD definitions from 1970 to 1995. The major roles of HRD that are popular today have so far been summed up as individual development, organizational development, career management, and performance management (Gilley, Eggland, and Maycunich, 2002). More recent work done by Swanson has included training and development, organizational development, performance improvement, organizational learning, career development, and management and leadership development as HRD's roles (2008, p. 264). The HRD results to be generated through HRD roles in the organizational context have been identified as 'improving performance and learning' (Swanson, 2001) that are underlined by the two main paradigms of HRD—learning and performance. Swanson (2001) has placed the HRD work from Nadler to Swanson on a three-legged stool of HRD theories. These proposed three theories serve to answer the survival and primary drive of organizations (economic theory); to recognize purpose, pieces, and relationships of subsystems and systems of organization (by systems theory); and finally, by acknowledging human beings as brokers of productivity along with their cultural, and behavioral nuances (psychological theory) (Swanson, 2001). The current trend in the HRD literature

focuses on the debate over HRD's feasibility to address the new challenges of HRD for the benefit of its stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY

This study has been designed as a conceptual paper with a focused literature review on 'challenges of Human Resource Development (HRD)' and 'National Human Resource Development (NHRD)' to identify the contemporary challenges confronted by HRD, the emerging research inquiries to resolve such challenges, and finally to discuss about NHRD's plausibility in resolving the identified challenges.

CHALLENGES TO AND NEW NEEDS OF HRD

The uncertain world has stimulated unprecedented challenges, roles, and needs for HRD. Ruana, Lynham, and Chermack (2003) have found four major forces affecting the future of HRD—HRD's receptiveness and flexibility, globalization, changing organizations and workforce, and technology. Marquarit and Berger (2003) identified some key areas impacted by the main force affecting HRD — 'globalization'— and how it can influence HRD roles. Such critical areas include political development, economic development, organizational and work learning, educational and vocational training, global leadership development, technology and knowhow, and environmental sustainability. Hartenstein, (1999) identified how globalization, as one of the major forces shaping HRD, can have both a negative and positive impact on HRD. Ruana, Lynham, and Chermack (2003) further identified five major challenges of HRD: (1) 'organizational pressure and lack of recognition' that leads to ignore HRD in board room discussions and top leadership positions; (2) 'emphasis on evaluation and return on investment' even though HRD has been unable to be market driven and to show return on HRD investment; (3) 'pressure on HRD's identity' in spite of the difficulty to identify its core competencies and competitive advantages; (4) 'need of identifying HRD's stakeholders' that requires one to define to whom the profession should serve; and (5) 'emphasis on standards and professionalism' that demands more professionalization of the HRD field. Gold, Rodgers and Smith (2003) have also highlighted some challenges of HRD: gaining recognition for the service 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, Kehrhahn and Short (2003) also mention the challenging trends facing HRD such as: balancing the demand for increased shareholder values against values as perceived by other stakeholders; making better uses of technology to deliver 'just in time' solutions; a global economy; and demand for more ethical and socially responsible organizations.

As per the critical knowledge claim of HRD, some sets of present challenges need to be addressed. Fenwick (2005) presents such challenges as: creating social justice in the workplace; paying attention to women's experiences; addressing organizational 'undiscussables' such as sexism, racism, patriarchy, and violence; creating organizational democracy; conducting feminist workplace studies; and advocating change.

Initiating a new research agenda, McLean (2004) suggested that HRD also confronts new challenges in the development of countries and transitioning societies that has resulted in a new need to define HRD in the national context, in order to address national level HRD issues pertaining to health, culture, safety and community by being more geocentric rather than ethnocentric. McLean (2004) further highlighted the needs and priorities in developing countries as major challenges to be considered at national HRD policy planning and implementation levels. Torraco, in detail, discussed some notable theoretical challenges with regard to HRD theory building (2004).

Ruana, Lynham and Chermack (2003) suggested a set of new HRD roles to be performed to cater to the new needs of HRD such as: learning and human development for people to overcome resistance to change and building systems to face uncertainties; change and organizational systems; and knowledge management for knowledge creation and managing organizations. Prokopenko (1998) further highlighted

six needs of HRD: cost effective HRD; quality HRD (utility of human capital and development policy); flexible HRD; vocational HRD; enlightened HRD; and developing HRD. Marsick (2007) identified a need of ‘T shape’ skills—deep knowledge of a discipline with an understanding of how that discipline interacts with other disciplines. Garavan, McGuire and Donnell (2004) emphasized the need to apply different levels of analysis in HRD theories. Alternatively, some scholars have made attempt to consider the implications of philosophical differences, (Ruona and Lynham, 2004), crisis management (Wooten, and James, 2008), and different worldviews (Johansen and McLean, 2006) in HRD.

The above summary of literature on the forces and challenges, roles, and needs of HRD, can be synthesized in a broader manner along with the different contextual levels involved (See Figure 1).

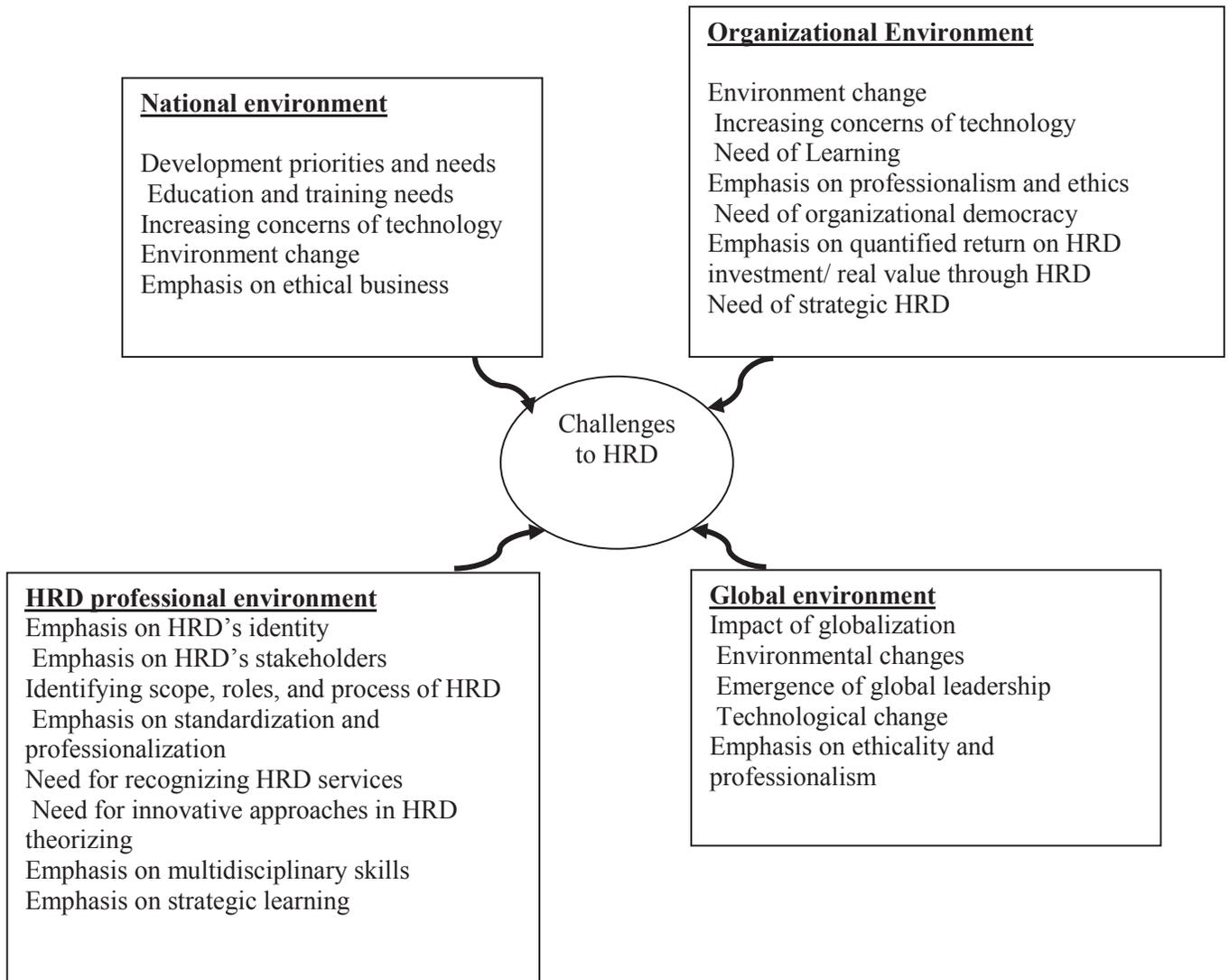
The challenges from global, national, organizational and HRD professional environments as illustrated in Figure 1 will determine the needs and direction of HRD theory and practice. Accordingly, the new HRD requirements posed by these challenges demand new developments in: (1) conducting more research in the new required areas extending the existing HRD theoretical foundation to include more theories beyond the three-legged stool; (2) adopting a critical approach to study phenomena such as organizational ‘undiscussables’ that are not discussed by the former; (3) focusing on the problems that hinder development and healthy transitions in developing countries based on their unique factors; (4) recognizing the applicability and relevance of other fields, research, and theories to HRD in facilitating ongoing academic and professional work that provides new thinking in the building of HRD core contents; (5) bringing larger contexts (meso and macro levels) into HRD research to study their impact on HRD outcomes at different levels; and (6) developing innovative theoretical processes or theorizing on HRD and its methodology. In other words, new thinking in the ontological, epistemological and axiological dimensions of HRD is required.

EMERGING RESEARCH FOR THE NEW NEEDS OF HRD

In response to the new needs of HRD, several researchers have initiated new research agendas. According to Swanson (2008), these new research agendas have been categorized into three: placing HRD on the three-legged stool; embracing multiple theoretical approaches—viewing HRD without core theories but contingently seeking the usefulness of all theories in HRD work; and viewing HRD as having a narrowly focused theoretical foundation in order to fit with a particular ideology or research program. However, the authors wish to categorize the new HRD requirements to be catered through four major research inquiries: HRD foundational theory inquiry; multi-disciplinary theoretical inquiry; critical HRD inquiry; and alternative inquiry.

In terms of the first research inquiry, Wang (2008) stressed the importance of basing any new research in HRD on the already identified three-legged stool of HRD theory. Furthermore, Swanson (2008) advanced the use of economic theories in HRD by adding theories related to institutional economics, human capital theory, screening theory, agency theory, game theory, development economics, social capital theory, and human capital investments theory. Storberg-Walker further showed how “the emerging theories around social capital has much to contribute to the diverse goals of HRD professionals” (2009, p. 111). By extending the economic theories of HRD, Wang (2008) pointed out the implications of development economic theories such as Rostow’s theory of development stages, dual labor market theory, trickle down hypothesis, theories of vicious circles (Demand side vicious circle, supply side vicious circle, environment-population interactions, and big push theory) to HRD research.

FIGURE 1
CONTEMPORARY HRD CHALLENGES



Wang and Swanson (2008b) further stressed the importance of economic theories and recognize the place of development economics theories in HRD, suggesting aspects of human capital and modern labor economics to be included in HRD theories. They also brought the attention to ‘messy’ issues in HRD using alternative views of roles, at small-mid and large scale development efforts and suggested a framework for comparative studies in HRD not only at the micro level but also the macro level (nation, national, regional, etc.). This initiative shows an alignment with the emerging research in HRD by extending its boundaries beyond organizations.

In line with the second HRD research inquiry, in 2001, McLean and McLean took a radical approach by presenting a universal definition of HRD. MacLean (2004) further extended this definition of HRD beyond organizations to include the community, nation, region, and global level while considering different cultures, political systems and economic variants. This was done to respond to the fact that to date, most theoretical perspectives in HRD have been limited to the U.S. context (Weinberger, 1998). The contemporary world, however, 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). Further, McLean (1998) showed the three-legged stool as too simplistic as the three core theories offered by Swanson were inadequate. Instead, McLean (1998) presented the image of an octopus that incorporates anthropology, sociology, speech communications as well room for the consideration of other disciplines such as music, philosophy and, in the future, chaos theory. Torraco, although a contributor to Swanson's three-legged theory, mentioned that "HRD researchers use theories from fields such as organizational behavior, psychology, sociology, communication, education, and other social and behavioral sciences" (2004, p. 174). Moreover, Torraco (2004), in debating over the existing HRD theorizing process, showed that HRD is a discipline that demands a great deal of applied research. He further pointed out that "... since applied research in HRD must sometimes cover large territories of knowledge from basic research, the domain to which this new knowledge is applied, and research of the application itself, a vast body of theory is needed to support the various elements of applied research" (2004, p.176). Further Torraco (2004) explained that "research should go beyond the theories upon which HRD's theoretical foundation was grounded" (2004, p. 177). Thus, the theoretical framework for an HRD researcher may differ from the HRD theoretical foundation. According to Weick (1995), a good theory needs to recognize not only the content and the product but also the context in which the product lives.

Most HRD theory building has been based on grounded theory and Dubin's theory building methodology, resulting in the claim that HRD theorists opt for a limited number of theory building methods even though a variety of approaches are available (Torraco, 2004). Some of these include positivistic theory building, multi-paradigms theory building, and naturalistic theory building. Torraco (2004) further showed the possibility of using quality improvement theory and organizational learning theories that integrate organizational structures, processes, and methods that enable individuals, groups, and the organizations to learn and share knowledge.

In support of the third HRD research inquiry, Fenwick (2005) quoted Bierema and Cseh (2003, p. 23):

"HRD focuses little on issues of social justice in the work place or large social context. Women's experiences as well as those of other diverse groups are ignored, as are asymmetrical power arrangements. Gender/ race/ ethnicity is not used as a category of analysis—even when data is collected by gender. Organizational 'undiscussables' such as sexism, racism, patriarchy, and violence receive little attention in the literature yet have considerable impact on organizational dynamics. Finally, HRD research has only weakly advocated change."

Fenwick (2005) further claimed that HRD practice is still not grounded in research-based theories. Instead, it is still based on "guess work, outdated thinking, or what the client wants" (Fenwick, 2005, p. 225). Critical HRD should work toward reforms aligned with the purposes of justice, equity, and participation focusing on power issues. 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. Fenwick (2005) further highlighted the need of focusing more on fundamental inequalities, oppression and violence in organizations. Authors such as Valantin (2006), Sambrook (2004; 2009) and Carole and Turnbull (2002) also delineated the need for critical HRD.

As evidence for the fourth research inquiry, research efforts focused on knowledge from other fields to incorporate them with the above research inquiries can be highlighted. Work on the implication of different philosophies in HRD (Ruona and Lynham, 2004), and implications of different worldviews in adult learning (Johansen and McLean, 2006) support this research agenda. The philosophical assumptions and worldviews on focus, process, nature, roles, and outcomes of HRD are different in different contexts, yielding substantial diversity in HRD. Darren (2000) s discussed how to use metaphors to view HRD to our advantage and how it can be dangerous for the field. Darlene and Preskill (2005) searched for the involvement of Return on Investments (ROI) in the evaluation of HRD. Garavan, McGuire and Donnell (2004) have discussed HRD as a multilevel phenomenon emphasizing the need to address level of

analysis. HRD's role in crisis management (Wooten, and James, 2008) also comes under this research inquiry.

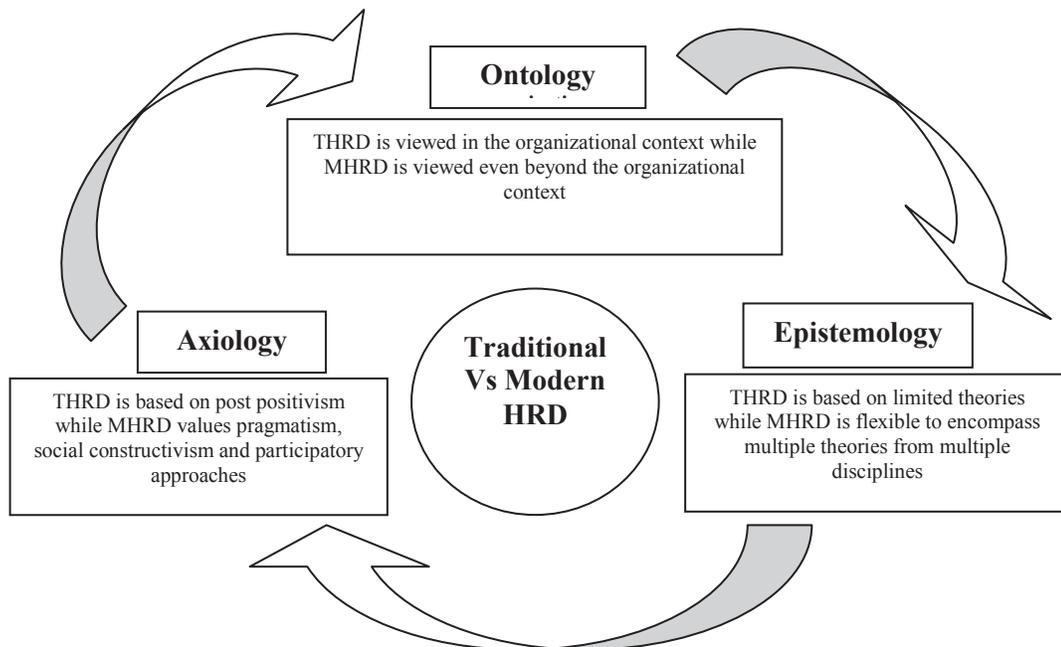
From the above discussion on Swanson's HRD theoretical foundation and other emerging HRD research programs, we can categorize HRD into 'traditional HRD' and 'modern HRD' on the basis of their capability to address contemporary HRD requirements as presented above (See Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2
TRADITIONAL HRD AND MODERN HRD**

Criteria	Traditional HRD	Modern HRD
-Period	-Nedler (1970) to Swanson (2001)	-After 2001
-Definitional focus	-Limited to organizational boundaries	-Extended beyond organizational boundaries
-Theoretical basis	-HRD three-legged theories	-Multiple theories, atheoretical, critical theory
-Knowledge claim	-Positivist and post positivist	-Critical, constructivist, pragmatist
-Theoretical nature	-Static; specific; ethnocentric; absolute; micro	-Geocentric, flexible, situational, meso and macro, more ambiguous
-Theorizing method	-Mainly Dubin's method	-Naturalistic, multi-dimensional

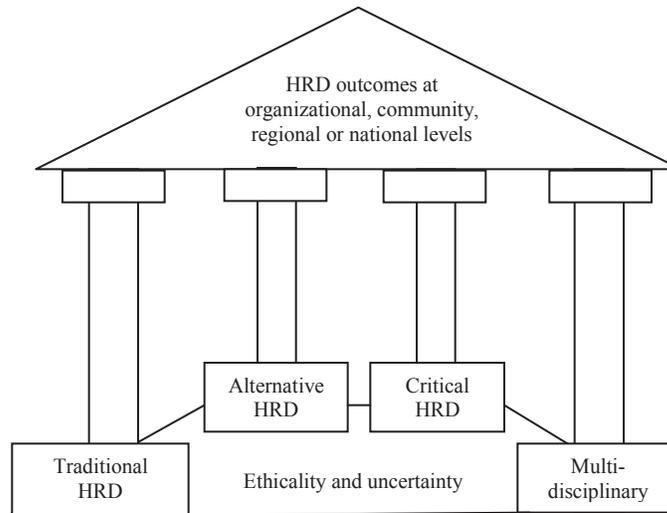
The differences in the ontology, epistemology, and axiology of traditional and modern HRD can also be presented as in Figure 3.

**FIGURE 3
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRADITIONAL HRD AND MODERN HRD**



Bringing HRD out of its traditional theoretical base, the authors believe that the four aforementioned areas of inquiry will more broadly contribute to HRD's future development. Therefore, a *four-pillar-house of HRD theoretical direction* is presented (See Figure 4) based on the ongoing contemporary work in the field. The foundation is laid with 'ethicity and uncertainty' that were repeatedly highlighted in the challenges of the professional, organizational, national, and global environments of HRD as mentioned in Figure 2.

FIGURE 4
CONTEMPORARY HRD THEORETICAL DIRECTION



IS NHRD MODERN?

Out of the four research areas presented above, a paradigm shift has been proposed with the introduction of National Human Resource Development (McLean, 2004) under the multi-disciplinary HRD theoretical inquiry. McLean's (2004) initiative to extend HRD to a larger national context beyond organizations readily encompasses the emphasis of other research agendas. NHRD represents the view that HRD should consider meso levels and macro levels with different philosophical flat forms. It is more critical in defining HRD more broadly in scope beyond the ethical and positive business domains allowing for a discussion of development issues (such as diversity, gender discrimination, poverty, human rights, etc.), and focusing more on the applied nature of HRD research. It is open to encompass more theories, perhaps more advanced theories than those included in the three-legged stool, thus allowing more room for alternative thinking in HRD. It also has all the characteristics of modern HRD mentioned in figure 2. Therefore, the authors support the emerging view of NHRD as it is inherently more capable of allowing for inquiries into HRD issues in a more contingent way by addressing the real contextual issues. Further, we suggest more innovative research to be conducted on HRD roles, beliefs, processes, values, assumptions, and outcomes in a more geocentric, context specific and flexible manner.

According to the pioneering definition of NHRD put forward by McLean (2004), Human Resource Development is 'any process or activity that, either initially or over the long term, has the potential to develop ... work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation or, ultimately, the whole of humanity'. NHRD encourages having country-wide definitions. Some definitions for NHRD can be seen in the contexts of Morocco (Cox, Arkoubi and Estrada, 2006), South Africa (Lynham and Cunningham, 2004), Brazil (Hasler, Thompson, and Schuler, 2006), and Canada (Cooper, 2004).

NHRD'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Countries like Japan and Korea are prime examples of how national development can be achieved through the effective management and development of human resources. Non-availability of natural resources is not a barrier if human resources are properly developed. This can be achieved only through proper national level HRD planning and implementation. In the current NHRD literature it has been shown how NHRD or HRD as national policy is used countrywide in Singapore, South Africa, St. Lucia, Brazil, Jamaica, Pacific Island, Mexico, Canada, China, Thailand, Korea, Kenya, Poland and the UK. The NHRD literature also shows how NHRD has contributed to these countries' development to achieve improved productivity, racial balance, 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 and Cunningham, 2004; Scotland, 2004; Bartlett and Rodgers, 2004; Cooper, 2004; Yang, Zhan and Zhang, 2004; Lutta-Mukhebi, 2004; Szalkowski and Jankowicz, 2004; Lee, 2004). Furthermore, it has been shown how NHRD can contribute to the achievement of the millennium development goals and other dimensions related to human development (McLean, 2006; Lynham and Cunningham, 2006).

CHALLENGES TO NHRD IN ACHIEVING DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Having recognized the contribution of NHRD, it is worthwhile to put forward some of the challenges of NHRD, highlighted in NHRD literature synthesized in figure 5 (Cho and McLean, 2004; Rao, 2004; Bartlett and Rodgers, 2004; Lynham and Cunningham, 2004; Cooper, 2004; Lutta-Mukhebi, 2004; Lee, 2004; Rangel, 2004; Szalkowski and Jankowicz, 2004).

THE FUTURE OF HRD AND NHRD

The emerging 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, Osman-Gani, and Cho, 2004). Wang and Swanson (2008a) critically challenged the NHRD's theory development approach and its definitional process. Addressing the same issue, Wang concluded that the current NHRD literature has been unable to advance our knowledge in economic development, human development and human resource development expressing that:

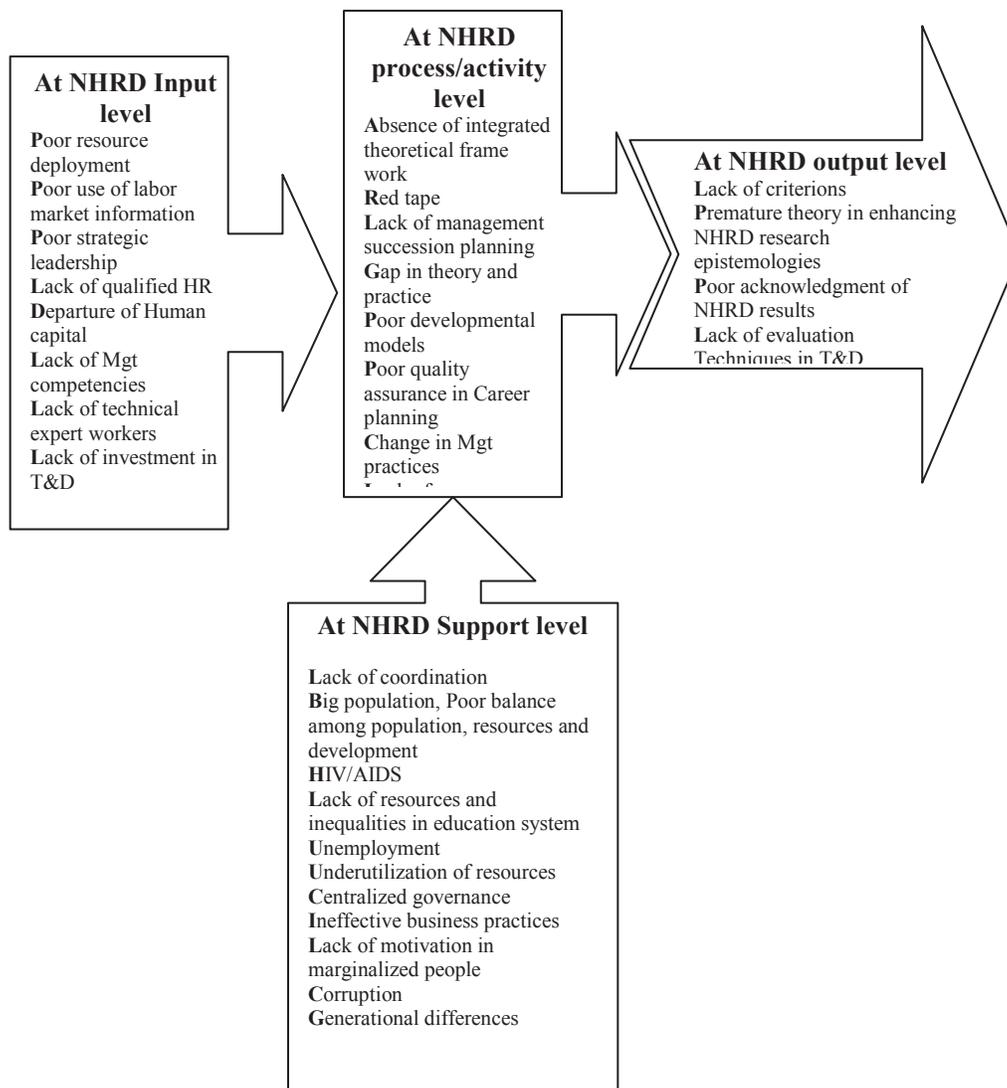
‘The domain of HRD should not be extended to Human Development (HD), and NHRD should be renamed as HRD national policy studies, and should be firmly based on an economic foundation and incorporating accumulated knowledge in international development’ (2008, p. 303).

Wang (2008) further viewed NHRD as a subfield of HRD. Wang and Swanson claimed that “NHRD literature has attempted to redefine HRD into HD with an earlier use of the term ‘human resource development’ by economists” (2008a, p. 80). According to Wang and Swanson (2008a), Harbison and Myers used the expression of HRD referring to HD long before HRD became a definite field of study. Secondly, providing a critique on the theory development methodology of NHRD, Wang and Swanson (2008a) pointed out that McLean's initiatives towards having country specific definitions of NHRD (McLean 2004) are not adequate and have not been based on adequate research methods leading to see ‘individual trees while losing the sight of the forest’. Thirdly, Wang and Swanson (2008a) criticized the existing NHRD literature as a ‘tendency to draw conclusions without evidence-based research’.

In response to Wang and Swanson's (2008a) criticisms, McLean, Lynham, Azvedo, Lawrence, and Nafukho (2008) reflected their views on the criticisms, made only by Wang and Swanson (2008a) on NHRD theory development to safeguard their methodology of ‘case study’. They argued that their

methodology has been used in more than twenty countries by more than fifty authors, accepting the existence of confusion in the definition of NHRD like in HRD definitions.

**FIGURE 5
NHRD CHALLENGES**



However, the current literature on NHRD seems to cover a broad area including social, economical, political, and humanitarian, creating the need for clearly identified boundaries of NHRD study (Wang and Wang, 2006).

Compared to traditional HRD, NHRD as a modern view of HRD is broader. Traditional HRD adopts more unitarist approaches and attempts to create a ‘common knowledge base’ to be applied in all contexts, while NHRD claims a pluralistic view of developing and applying knowledge that is more sensitive and contingent to the particular context concerned. Wang (2008) classified NHRD as a subfield of HRD. However, the traditional HRD definition and its scope are too narrow to encompass NHRD, as it goes beyond traditional HRD’s boundaries. To see NHRD as a subfield of HRD, it requires renaming traditional HRD as organizational HRD or micro-HRD. Further, a proper definition is needed to encompass both HRD and NHRD. McLean and McLean (2001)’s efforts to provide such a broad

definition is noteworthy. However, their definition could not sufficiently identify the scope and the roles of HRD. Besides, the NHRD definition seems to be broader than McLean and McLean's (2001) universal definition of HRD. For these reasons, HRD and NHRD have yet to be defined with a proper alignment between them.

This discussion raises several questions with regard to the relationship between NHRD and HRD, and their theory advancement. First, it is questionable that the focus of NHRD is to encompass HRD at the national level only, or to include all levels of HRD with consideration of national level differences. The case studies used to develop the current NHRD literature described HRD policies and practices as national policy levels only. Therefore, the NHRD definition seems to be broader than its current research focus (at the national level only). Furthermore, it is unclear whether NHRD accepts traditional HRD content as organizational level HRD operating below the national level HRD, or whether it suggests new research in the organizational contexts with NHRD's new emphasis on national level differences and their influences. Furthermore, it is also unclear whether NHRD seeks to become a subfield of HRD (that needs to be clearly defined and identified further) or it is merely replacing the term HRD with NHRD.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the authors attempted to discuss the scope of today's HRD by summarizing the literature on HRD's challenges, its forces, its new roles and needs in order to provide a broader synthesis of contemporary HRD challenges. Based on the identified contemporary challenges, new HRD requirements were identified that need to be addressed by future HRD research. A review was then conducted to categorize the major research initiatives that have attempted to address the HRD requirements, under the four main HRD research inquiries proposed by this study. A differentiation between traditional HRD (THRD) and modern HRD (MHRD) was then presented highlighting their ontological, epistemological and axiological differences. The authors then discussed NHRD as a modern HRD research agenda summarizing its importance and challenges. This discussion was followed by a critique of both HRD and NHRD that raised questions with regard to the position and focus of NHRD, definitions of HRD, and compatibility between HRD and NHRD.

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