

# A Caution Signal for HRD

BY ROB JONES

Whoa! The green light indicating optimism, growth, spectacular career opportunity for you and me in human resource development turns to orange — to caution — according to practitioners across the land in a May 1980 survey.

In the third year of asking on-line HRD folks how they view our activities, I found reins of caution pulling back to match economic trends . . . inflation, Ayatollah hostages, OPEC, productivity sludge, roller-coaster interest rates, and all the other perplexing factors that we read about, experience, and expect.

But in the past, that's been for those other people — not us hard HRD types. Oh? Take a look at what respondents say . . . how they've changed their outlook from two years ago . . . and see where you, your organization's programs (and perhaps your future) sit.

According to American Society for Training and Development research, one of the most frequent activities of T&D professionals is "Keeping abreast of training and development activities in other organizations" (*Training and Development Journal*, May 1979, page 11).

This article reviews the findings of a national survey of ASTD practitioners which screened out academicians, consultants, students,

and vendors so that only "on-line" practitioners remained.

In 1978, '79, and '80, we asked HRD professionals:

- What programs have you initiated in the last 12 months that you haven't offered in the past?

- What new programs do you plan to begin in the next six months that you haven't tried before?

- In which of these programs do you predict more interest, less interest, or about the same interest in the next three to five years?

- What programs have you eliminated from your HRD repertoire in the last 12 months that you have previously presented on a regular basis?

- Would you predict, in the next three to five years, more . . . less . . . or the same interest in:

- HRD activity
- HRD job openings across the nation
- emphasis on the individual in HRD programs
- emphasis on organization/teams

- What programs have you experimented with (last 12 months) and eliminated because they were less successful than the standards you had set?

The results are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 reflects the 40 types of programs included on the 1980 survey. Figures to the left of program

type show percentage of respondents who initiated that type of program for the *first time in the last 12 months*. (All program types had some activity.) Figures to the right indicate numbers of respondents predicting that interest level (more-same-less) in the next three to five years.

Here's where the yellow light flashed. In the 1978 and '79 surveys, practitioners were bullish. In 1979, for example, only one type of program (Transactional Analysis) was predicted to have less activity. Eleven types were voted to stay the same, and a whopping 25 (69 percent of the '79 list) were on the upswing.

But look at this year:

- More versus less activity? Practically a tie — 19 to 18.

- Only three types crystal balled to remain static.

What about specifics? Let's look at the top 10 — the program types which most organizations started in the last 12 months that they hadn't had before (see Figure 2).

You can analyze the data to fit your own situation, your own needs, but as starters, consider:

1. The top three have led for the last two years.

2. A lower percentage started management development (mid-level) programs this year than last (maybe because more had started last year?) and more activity predicted in three to five years (see

forcing; moved from '79 "same activity" column to '80 more activity by 49 percent of respondents.

- **Body Language:** Holding its own. "Same" '79 (48 percent); '80 (46 percent).

- **Burn Out Syndrome:** On shaky grounds. This year 39 percent say more, but 37 percent say less. In '79 it was 43 percent more to 19 percent less.

- **Business Ethics:** A newcomer this year, but a poor show. A smattering of interest in new programs, and already less activity coming (say 49 percent).

- **Career Development:** In '79 the leader (85 percent) in more activity coming; still strong (74 percent) this year, tied with quality of work life.

- **Change Management:** Number two spot in more activity last year; still good with 59 percent this year, slipped to fourth place behind QWL and productivity.

- **Coaching/Counseling:** Nominée for champion downhill bear. In '79 no one predicted less activity for this type program; in '80, 48 percent see less of it (but 42 percent see more).??

- **Correspondence/HS:** Watch the banana peel. In '79 it was almost even between more and same activity; in '80, 48 percent say less (only 14 percent holding on to more).

- **Disadvantaged/Minorities:** A small gain. Last year, a split between more and same activity; this year, 37 percent see more, others split between same and less. Data at a disadvantage in helping you here.

- **Dual Career:** Strong uphill activity candidate (up from 42 to 50 percent), but paltry few trying it. Lip service?

- **Executive Development:** Even stronger uphill (52 percent say), but slightly less programs started in '80 than '79 (13 percent vs. 15 percent). "The boss needs it, but is too busy."

- **Handicapped:** That's the word for it. Fifty-seven percent saw the opportunity for more activity in '79; this year, 50 percent say less coming.

- **Management Development:** A place to hitch your star. Top 10

leader for three years in more programs added and more ahead (67 percent in '79; 54 percent in '80).

- **Meeting Effectiveness:** Training must have been good (or completely ineffective) — 55 percent say we'll meet less on this one.

- **Organization Development:** Humanists slipping but still waving big flag. Fourteen percent tried new OD in '79, 11 percent in '80. More activity coming? Yes: 59 percent in '79, 46 percent in '80 predicted.

- **Personal Growth:** Still growing. Forty-nine percent say so in '80.

- **Power:** Impotence approaching. Forty-nine percent said "same" in '79, now 55 percent say less from '80. Jack LaLanne needs to add muscle to this.

- **Problem Solving:** Puzzling. Number six spot in Top 10 of new programs started in '79, slipped to 9/10 spot this year and 53 percent say less activity ahead.

- **Productivity:** Much ado with little advance. In '79, 70 percent say more; in '80 we raise the ante to 73 percent crying more. In practice, '79's 10 percent of new programs bubbled to 11 percent in '80. Humph.

- **Professional Updating.** Zapped by economy? From 47 percent more to 56 percent less!

- **Programmed Instruction:** Plateau. '79 equals same; '80 equals \_\_\_\_\_ (same).

- **Quality of Work Life:** Hop on the new handwagon. From three percent to seven percent in new programs (still kinda weak), but from 52 to 74 percent in more predicted activity. Meet the champ.

- **Retirement/Pre-retirement:** No tired fuddy-duddy at all, but a youthful spurt from 12 percent to 19 percent of new programs started, and with more activity predicted by 62 percent in '79, by 59 percent in '80. And with an older workforce coming. . . .

- **Safety Training:** With OSHA de-fanged, safety programs drew first booby prize in anticipated activity in next three to five years. In '80 71 percent saw a decline coming; in '79, 62 percent were predicting level activity.

- **Sales:** Needs hard sell to keep

alive, with 60 percent in '80 predicting less activity in near future. In '79, 47 percent thought level would remain the same. New programs? Steady drop since '78, 21 percent ('78), 17 percent ('79), 11 percent ('80).

- **Skills Training:** Practice contradicting '80 predictions. This year 66 percent thought there would be less activity, but new program starts show this record: 19 percent ('78), 22 percent ('79), 23 percent ('80).

- **Stress Management:** Ties with skills training in predicted loss of activity (66 percent) and with increasing new programs on record, 22 percent ('79), 24 percent in '80. (No record for '78.)

- **Supervisory Development:** As mentioned earlier, among the tops in new programs started for the last two years. Perhaps economy has put salt on this bird's tail; '79 predictors forecast 72 percent strong for increased activity, in '80 enthusiasm dampened to 50 percent.

- **Team Building:** Enthusiasm still building from 50 percent prediction in '79 to 53 percent in '80.

#### HOW TO ESTABLISH AND MANAGE YOUR OWN OUT-PLACEMENT PROGRAM FOR WHITE-COLLAR AND BLUE-COLLAR EMPLOYEES

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Chicago, March 16; Pittsburgh, March 18; New York City, March 20; Washington, D.C., March 26; Cleveland, April 27; Detroit, May 1; Columbus, May 22; Philadelphia, May 29.

**FEE:** \$225 per participant. **SEMINAR LEADER:** Dr. Cecil G. Howard, Personal and Career Development Consultant, Educator, and Author.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND/OR REGISTRATION CONTACT**

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Figure 2.

NEW PROGRAM TYPES ON ORGANIZATION AGENDAS

| Position | 1980 Program              | %  | 1979 Position | %  |
|----------|---------------------------|----|---------------|----|
| 1.       | Management Development    | 37 | 1             | 39 |
| 2.       | Supervisory Development   | 33 | 2/3           | 30 |
| 3.       | Time Management           | 30 | 2/3           | 30 |
| 4.       | Stress Management         | 24 | 8/9           | 22 |
| 5.       | Skills Training           | 23 | 8/9           | 22 |
| 6.       | Personal Growth           | 20 | —             | —  |
| 7/8      | Career Development        | 19 | 7             | 23 |
| 7/8      | Retirement/Pre-Retirement | 19 | —             | —  |
| 9/10     | Problem-Solving           | 18 | 6             | 24 |
| 9/10     | Coaching/Counseling       | 18 | 5             | 26 |

Practice? Seventeen percent new program starts in '79, 14 percent in this year's group.

- *Technical/Scientific*: Needs a new Sputnik (or more knowledgeable respondents). New programs started six percent in '79, doubled to 13 percent in '80, yet predictions for next three to five years soured (less, say 51 percent).

- *Time Management*: Clock this one carefully. From four percent new programs in '78, both '79 and '80 clicked off 30 percent new starts. Next three to five years? Sundial and hourglass speed, with 63 percent saying this type program's time is up — and less activity expected.

- *Train the Trainer*: Trainers trained, apparently. New program starts show 23 percent new programs in '78, up to 28 percent in '79, then budget slice to 15 percent in '80. Ahead? Sixty-one percent say less activity.

- *Transactional Analysis*: Can your adult take this? (Berne's me up to tell you.) In '79, 13 percent new TA programs topped 11 percent in '78 and 10 percent in '80. Last year TA was the *only* program type expected to have less activity; this year, it was one of three program types expected to remain at about the *same* level for three to five years (according to 43 percent).

- *Upgrading Skills*: In spite of

unemployment and obsolescent skills, only 12 percent had new program starts in '79 and '80; prediction is less activity by 48 percent.

- *Values Programs*: Not a big splash in '79 or '80 (six and seven percent respectively), and maybe even less in the near future (say 39 percent).

- *Women Programs*: ERA may stand for eventually rapid advancement, and women programs have an optimistic outlook with 50 percent predicting more activity in the near future. The record, however, hints that experience hides behind the skirt of good intentions, as we see 13 percent with new programs in '78, down to seven percent in '79 and (blush) five percent in '80. Carrie Nation, where are you?

- *Work Redesign*: Perhaps in the quality of work life camp, these programs (new to the '80 survey with four percent new program starts), have an optimistic tinge with 48 percent respondents saying more activity ahead.

- *Writing Skills*: Keep sentences short. This one is. Looks bad. Forty-nine percent expect less activity in three to five years. Back to gobbledy-gook.

What *new* programs do respondents plan to begin (which they haven't tried before?) Scattered results shown on this question,

with 76 different responses. Only agreement appeared on these:

|                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| Time Management.....          | (7) |
| Train the Trainer.....        | (7) |
| Performance Appraisal.....    | (5) |
| Writing Skills.....           | (4) |
| Problem Solving.....          | (3) |
| Quality Circles.....          | (3) |
| Supervisory Interview.....    | (2) |
| Safety.....                   | (3) |
| Stress Management.....        | (3) |
| Career Development.....       | (3) |
| Conflict Management.....      | (3) |
| Counseling Skills.....        | (3) |
| Customer Relations.....       | (2) |
| Presentation Skills.....      | (2) |
| Pre-Supervisory Training..... | (2) |

Little agreement on programs *cancelled* that had formerly been presented on a regular basis: Transactional Analysis (3), Programmed Instruction (2), and 11 other candidates.

Nineteen candidates nominated for "programs experimented with and eliminated": Transactional Analysis (2), MBO (2), Customer Relations (2), and 16 others.

In spite of the orange caution light flashing, practitioners still give "thumbs up" to the profession of HRD and its future, shown in the tabulation in Figure 3. Numbers represent the *percentages* of those responding who believe there will be more interest, the same interest, or less interest in the future in the four areas listed.

This article reviewed findings of a national survey of HRD "on-line" practitioners for the last three years. Usable responses (18 to 42 percent in the three years) from a randomly selected mailing list of 300 provide more interest than overwhelming evidence, perhaps, but at least gives you some indications that may be helpful in your planning. For further details, or a copy of the 1980 survey summary, write: Dr. Rob Jones, Grand Canyon College, Director/Center for Bus. Studies, P.O. Box 11097, Phoenix, AZ 85017.

Let's watch the orange light turn back to green as HRD continues its leadership position among professions critical to the nation's prosperity. And ours.

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Figure 3.

FUTURE INTEREST LEVEL PREDICTIONS

|   | More | Same | Less |
|---|------|------|------|
| 1. HRD activity in your organization          | 83   | 2    | 15   |
| 2. HRD job openings across the nation         | 61   | 13   | 26   |
| 3. Emphasis on the individual in HRD Programs | 60   | 8    | 32   |
| 4. Emphasis on the Organization/Teams         | 78   | 4    | 18   |