

Remodeling HRD

BY THOMAS MACKLIN

Models are practical,
simple and broadly
applicable if we apply
them appropriately.





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Models are useful because they help people understand the relationship between ideas. Unfortunately, some models don't promote understanding and insight because they are either too general to explain ideas fully or too detailed to present ideas clearly. They suffer from either oversimplification or from premature closure. If certain models actually are useless, then we should not employ them. A number of models, however, are valuable if applied appropriately.

We should view models more realistically. We cannot expect models to serve as paragons of organizational training. We also must guard our thinking against common fallacies, such as:

- Models are inherently impractical—they are too theoretical;
- Models cannot explain complex events—business life is not that simple;
- Our industry is unique—the

model may apply to *your* organization but not to mine.

Models are practical, simple and broadly applicable. The purpose of this article is three-fold: to explain models in general, to examine the role of models in HRD and to offer a select, sample model for universal application.

Paradigms

A paradigm is a model, or an example. The word model is a synonym for a paradigm, but paradigm evades the value connotation of "model." Diagrams, graphs and verbal outlines are paradigms. I will use "paradigm" instead of "model" to minimize connotations and to keep terminology congruent with research literature. The word is used here as a structure and guiding example, particularly for human resource systems.

A paradigm, then, is an accepted model or pattern for a

field of study (Kuhn, 1969). It contains concepts that contain variables that should be studied, measured and applied for the professional field to determine how the specific variables relate to one another. Before professionals can examine the relationships among these specific variables, they must accept a model that states which variables are important to initially examine and to finally apply.

A profession typically progresses most rapidly when a single model exists that all people in the field generally accept. Of course, general acceptance is usually not common. Paradigms do change, for example, when workers find that some aspects of the model are incorrect, or when they discover phenomena which the model cannot explain. Consequently, many professional fields are in a pre-paradigm

stage. Human resources development is at this stage.

HRD: Pre-paradigm stage

The pre-paradigm stage entails a number of schools of thought, each typically in subtle competition with others. Each has its own model and contains its own concepts and methods as those important to study and to practice. Naturally, if the people interested in a particular phenomenon all employ identical ideas in different forms, there is overlap among the methods they use. In fact, competing schools of thought often display considerable similarity among techniques, methods and issues.

Fields-of-experience for HRD people are more similar than dissimilar. Training in leadership, supervision and management, for example, share common elements. Quality circles, team-

building and participative management are pragmatically similar. Interaction management, supervisory awareness, human relations and business communication skills also share training modules. Finally, problem-solving and decision making no doubt are cousins, if not siblings. Whatever people call their work in training and development, common traits exist.

I believe HRD is in the pre-paradigm stage for two reasons. First, in what McNamara (1981) and the ASTD Research Committee label "Success and Failure Factors in HRD Interventions," conflict abounds. McNamara points out that every year a new program or technology is popular, such as transactional analysis, stress management, quality circles and the videodisc. Rather than serving as an integrative factor in HRD, ap-

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proaches and methods compete with each other for prominence and acceptance. Intervention factors provide particularly good examples of the competition and conflict that characterize the pre-paradigm stages of development in a field.

A second element evident in HRD that often appears in the pre-paradigm stage is a lack of clarification or focus in recognizing important issues. Ignorance, not conflict, prevails. Perhaps the best definition of ignorance is not a true lack of knowledge but a cursory acknowledgement of core elements of a foundation for HRD.

HRD practitioners have several elemental concerns. Examples of often-overlooked elements include: preliminary resource evaluation, needs analysis, personal dimension evaluation, job-profile analysis and selection/recruitment to some degree. People ignore these components for various reasons: lack of appropriate funding, inadequate personnel or facilities, lack of top-level management support, or in the case of analyzing needs, artificial empathy—the “we know what they think” syndrome.

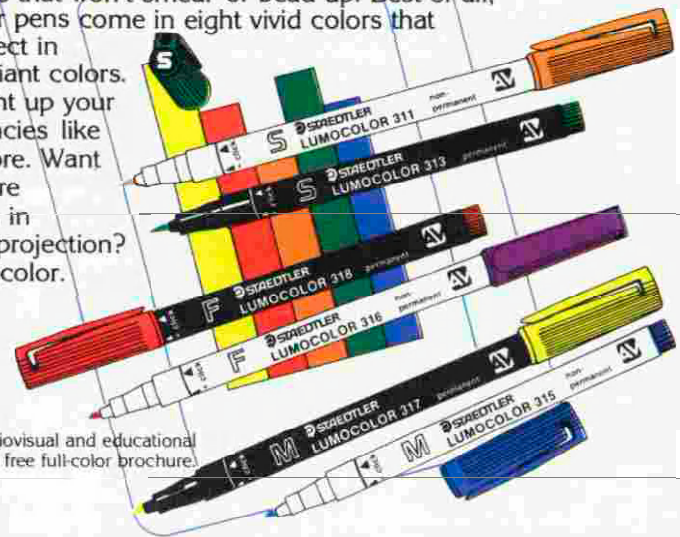
Whatever the reasons for such concern, failure to construct and to implement appropriate underlying systems allows the pre-paradigm stage to continue. The result is a lack of overall focus in HRD, with results not always relating to organizational needs.

How does a field move beyond this pre-paradigm stage of development? Kuhn (1969) describes a process in which one of the pre-paradigm schools gradually overwhelms other schools and becomes the accepted basic paradigm by most of the people working in the field. To be accepted as a paradigm, a model must appear better than its competitors, but it need not, and in fact never does, explain all the facts which confront it.

The maturation of HRD into the paradigm stage is still a long way off. Compared to other more established disciplines, such as psychology or mathematics, HRD as a distinct field of endeavor is

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not yet mature. We can help foster growth into the paradigm stage, however, in two primary ways: we can minimize conflict between different schools of thought and can recognize essentials—thereby providing needed clarification and focus.

Minimizing conflict

One of our primary goals is to minimize unnecessary competition and destructive conflict that often occurs when proponents of different schools of thought pit themselves against one another. Additional research would help to eliminate less valuable variables in our paradigm construction, while highlighting those constructs most appropriate for meeting our needs. I encourage research along the lines suggested by the ASTD National Research Committee. A particularly promising area is the

HRD intervention factors (McNamara 1981).

Education is another factor that contributes to minimizing unwarranted conflict between competing schools of thought. The influence of education occurs naturally, with or without guidance from HRD professionals. Kuhn (1969) claims a paradigm achieves acceptance by appearing as the most attractive alternative to young people entering the field. Thus, if we are to determine the intervention strategies most likely to emerge as *the* paradigm for the field, we must judge which strategy is likely to appeal to most people entering the field.

Using this criterion, what appeals to newcomers to the HRD field? With a host of techniques and approaches from which to choose, what alternatives offer aesthetic and practical appeal? To a large degree, these questions

are unanswerable, since academic training specifically leading to careers in HRD is not well-established. Two explanations exist.

First, academic training distinctly designed for HRD is not widespread through universities and colleges. Many schools use personnel tracts like umbrellas, covering all areas of human resources including: compensation and benefits; employee and labor relations; employment, placement and planning; health, safety and security; education and training; and EEO, AA and development. Although there is a need for a generalist background (particularly in small companies), I frequently hear requests from business people such as, "I wish we had someone who knew more about training and management development." More universities need to develop specialty or emphasis tracts with a distinct HRD focus, including training.

A second explanation for the prematurity of our two questions offers more control of matters. Even when universal, specialized training is available, uniformity across academic programs is required. Currently, we can't speculate about what people like about the available alternatives, since we don't have a uniform base for judgment. The opportunity to influence newcomers is evident at this point.

What is taught to people studying HRD is a function of university committees. How a particular subject or course is taught is a function of the instructor. An effective way to influence newcomers in HRD is to have practitioners teach courses at local colleges and universities. Perhaps experienced professionals teaching such courses would provide stability and uniformity of content. At minimum, the practitioner's involvement would encourage academicians to develop practical programs and would urge practitioners to keep abreast of contemporary issues and methods.

Although these recommendations do not reap immediate results even if we undertake

them quickly and seriously, promising and lasting effects are possible. Regardless of our personal decisions about previously discussed suggestions, the second major avenue for fostering growth into the paradigm stage is imminent: We must recognize essentials.

Start with essentials

The second of our two primary goals is to use our time wisely by recognizing essentials and by setting priorities. Meeting basic organizational needs is paramount. Goals precede methods in importance and relevance. Unfortunately, many times we reverse this procedure.

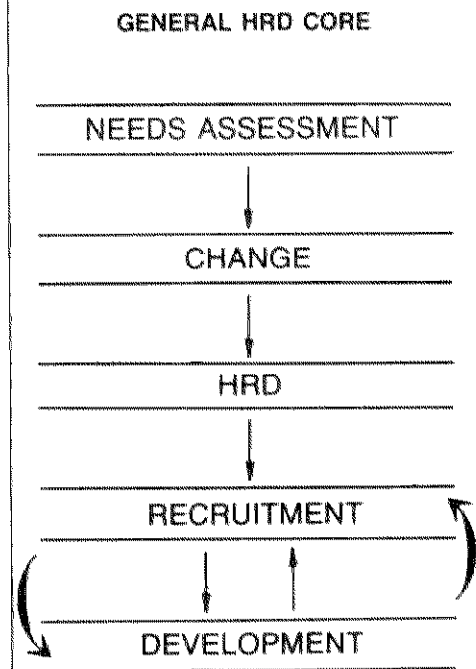
When HRD people discuss basic needs, they typically talk about identical concerns. Specific items that practitioners discuss vary, but the elements of HRD they consider are related. In fact, two elements central to the core of most human resource systems are selection and development. Most planners can construct a sound human resource system or paradigm simply by using these two elements for the core.

Figure 1 illustrates a general HRD system that employs selection development and several additional elements. The paradigm contains five levels, including needs analysis, change and HRD, which entails recruitment and development. The levels are hierarchically ordered so that Level I precedes II, II precedes III, and so on.

People can adapt this paradigm to meet the special needs of their organization, perhaps by accounting for certain confounding and intervening variables. Directors and managers, nonetheless, are accountable for the components portrayed in the system paradigm. People can share or delegate responsibility for the components, or may slightly alter the system, provided basic needs are met.

An established organization can enter the system at any level. For optimal functioning, however, practitioners must account for the reasonable operation of matters at previous

Figure 1.



levels. If the recruitment process, for example, works well in an organization and an evaluation of human resources is complete, then managers proceed with the development of their people.

One noteworthy feature is that the model represents a process: a continuous event with a series of related but changing pieces. Although the overall process continues, individuals in the process change. Similarly, although the primary goals of human resources in an organization don't change, the methods involved in achieving the goals vary.

A word of caution is necessary here. Since the system entails a process at different times in an organization's history, different levels become important. In fact, no level is ever finished; remodeling is inevitable. The HRD elementary core, however, remains comparable in design.

As a core for an HRD system, the model is useful. Scientific research and educated HRD people will eventually determine particular parameters of the paradigm. The system is open since external forces influence

the functioning of the system. Unplanned events and variables intervene. People can handle them, however, within the broad framework of the system, because once the whole is founded, the function of particular parts becomes more apparent.

My purpose in the subsequent section is to present and discuss one possible paradigm for HRD. The system includes necessary corresponding elements. The paradigm is not exhaustive since it does not account for every particular concern. The elements included, however, are integral parts of the system and are requisite to meeting organizational needs. Figure 2 illustrates the details of the paradigm.

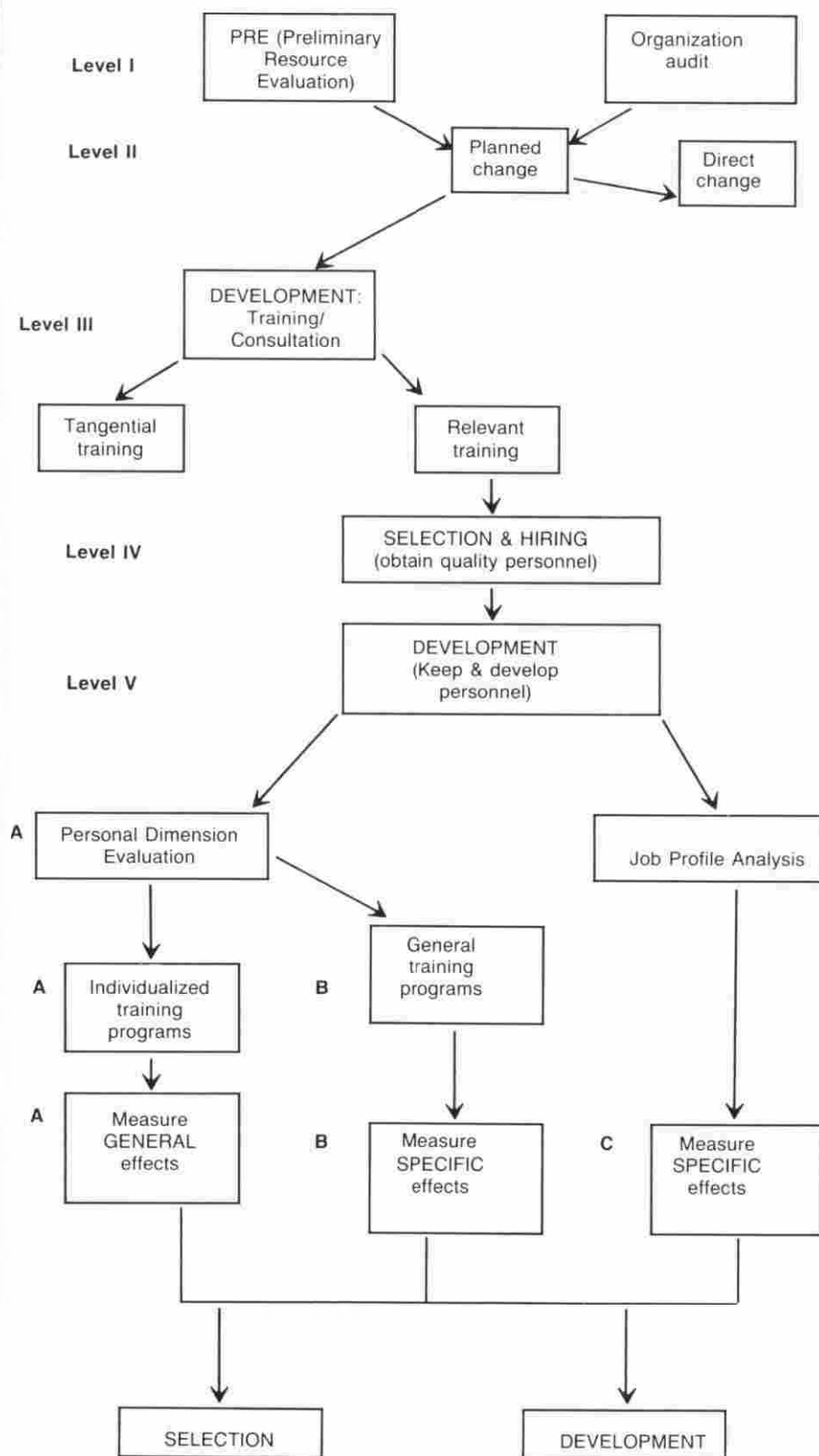
Description of a paradigm

Level I is a needs assessment. A business typically has two options: an organization audit or a preliminary resource evaluation (PRE). An audit usually investigates all facets of communication networks and information flow in an entire organization, or a select part of the business. Specifically, HRD auditors examine attitudes of both staff and management personnel regarding factors, such as information flow, productivity and morale levels. Examples of particular procedures include personnel interviews, survey questionnaires and general observation.

A related facet of research is PRE. Loosely defined, PRE is an intense, quick, but cursory application of audit procedures. Whatever option one selects, some system for determining and assessing human resource needs is mandatory. Failure to determine needs could result in training, development and hiring to which legitimate organizational needs have little relation.

Level II involves change, either planned or direct. Direct change is immediate, straightforward and simple, and is based closely on the quick application of suggestions derived from the needs assessment. Planned change is premeditated, comprehensive and complex and is based closely on

Figure 2.
HRD SYSTEM PARADIGM



At this point, systems to maintain training-and-development programs are established.

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future application of recommendations derived from the needs determination. An example of direct change is to begin offering continuing education units (CEU) for training courses. Examples of planned change are developing a training program for upper-level management or opening a behavior assessment center. Planned change is the major emphasis in HRD.

Level III sets the stage for training and development, whether it entails training programs, consultation with individuals and groups or problem-solving in general. Level III decides whether HRD is "tangential" or "relevant." Tangential development is not related to organizational needs. In fact, it is often the whim of a few individuals, heading in many directions. Conversely, relevant HRD stems from specific and meaningful concerns in the organization.

Notice in Figure 1 that if we follow the flow chart through "tangential development," we reach a dead end. Tangential training might be useful for individual, personal growth, but it is not overly useful for professional or organizational growth. (I do not wish to imply a lack of relation between personal development and organizational development. Personal development without regard to organizational needs is not usually organizationally pragmatic.) Unfortunately, a substantial amount of HRD in contemporary business is tangential in design, often because organizations fail to conduct adequate needs assessments.

Level IV is recruitment, selection and hiring. Any business wants to obtain quality personnel. The goal is to match individual needs and skills with organizational needs and skill re-

quirements. Tools relevant to Level IV include job description, job profile analysis and personal dimension evaluation. Where to include selection/hiring in the paradigm is somewhat arbitrary. Regardless of the degree to which an organization conducts HRD, selection/hiring is necessary and often continuous. As such, the selection module pervades the paradigm at a number of levels since it is complementary to most development.

A point to remember about selection/hiring in a paradigm is that when hiring qualified personnel, their development is already at higher planes of quality and productivity. Poor selection and hiring practices, however, destine development to meeting lower-level needs, often as compensation for significant deficiencies. Effective selection is integral to HRD.

Level V and its sub-levels are specific programs in HRD. The diagram illustrates three separate tracts to follow. Tract A emphasizes the professional development of individuals. Individuality and personal attention are key concepts. Tract B emphasizes professional development. Small groups and mass attention are key concepts. Tract C focuses on the job. Compatibility of people with positions is the key idea. HRD practitioners may implement the tracts simultaneously or separately. Clearly, the ideal is the concurrent application of all three tracts. (Refer to Figure 2.) Tract A contains three sub-levels with a total of four components. Level one is *Personal Dimension Evaluation* (PDE) and typically involves aptitude and attitude evaluation through actual behavior assessment. The goal of PDE is to determine an individual's strengths and weaknesses that relate to job performance. HRD practitioners then direct individuals to training designed to develop their strengths or to minimize their weaknesses. The final level in Tract A is performance appraisal, measuring the general improvement of each individual.

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An alternate route on Tract A entails personal consultation, rather than individualized training. PDE, here, is often an intuitive estimate of strengths or weaknesses confronted more directly through counseling, coaching and personal problem-solving. Other components of Tract A remain the same.

Tract B highlights groups rather than individuals. HRD managers examine strengths and weaknesses common to a group of people, conduct general training programs and measure specific effects. Performance appraisal in Tract B emphasizes general group improvement on a specific behavior. After training, for example, does a group as a whole appear to handle change more effectively?

Tract C is *Job Profile Analysis* (JPA). JPA highlights the job. The development of JPA for specific jobs or positions follows several steps. First, members of an organization try to determine what qualities people successful in certain positions usually possess. Second, professionals trained in behavioral research develop and administer questionnaires or behavior assessments which measure the degree to which candidates possess those qualities. People who meet the desired qualities are recognized and selected quickly.

Managers often employ JPA, sometimes in conjunction with PDE, in initial selection-and-hiring or in promotion-and-development. Periodically, managers conduct individual and group performance appraisals to determine how closely those selected meet organizational needs and specific job requirements. In short, they question whether JPA was effective in selecting qualified people for designated positions.

At this point, systems to maintain training and development programs are operational, provided we remember the words of caution previously mentioned. First, the system is a process. No level is ever totally finished. At different times, different levels surface as important.

Remodeling is inevitable. Second, practitioners must account for the reasonable operation of matters at all preceding levels. Otherwise, an established organization can enter the system at any level. Finally, as an organization continues to periodically address matters at all levels, quality and productivity progress to higher plateaus of achievement.

Summary

Models can be practical, simple and broadly applicable if we develop, understand and apply them appropriately. HRD is in the pre-paradigm stage of development because conflict and lack of information prevail.

Several means for promoting the growth of our profession are available. We need practical research, with information based on sound research methodology. We need to participate in or to influence the programs of educational institutions. We must recognize basic system paradigms and must follow their design. I have offered one example to illustrate certain elemental HRD concerns. Revise this paradigm, develop your own or employ another model. Remember: Success is good management in action!

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