

IN THIS ARTICLE

Organization Development, HRD Field,  
History of HRD

A RESPECTED LEADER IN HRD

# Memories

REMINISCES ABOUT THE PEOPLE, PLACES, AND PROGRAMS

of

THAT MADE THE FIELD WHAT IT IS TODAY.

# HRD

The field of human resource development defies definition and boundaries. It's difficult to put in a box. It has become so large, extensive, and inclusive that it's now greater than all outdoors.

And the field keeps growing. It continues to spread beyond where it was yesterday, not just domestically but worldwide. One of the few comparable examples, and even then on the physical side of things, is the microchip, which has spread in a few short years across borders and into every nook and cranny of human activity.

What are the objectives of HRD? Sensitivity, sharing, tolerance, courage, competence, character development, achieve-



Robert Blake on the history of HRD: "Chaos, pot luck, and intuition can only last so long."

ment, leadership, teamwork, organization transformation and development, conflict resolution, sports psychology, wellness training, human potential, new age, wilderness training, and spirituality training for business?

Yes, it is all of those, but always more. Whatever the specifics, the general category and focus of HRD seems to center on human betterment, wherever and in whatever domain of life HRD is interested. The goal? As it may be judged in years ahead, at least in my 1995 view, the HRD field will be seen as crossing a great frontier, with the goal of bringing applications of the behavioral sciences into

BY ROBERT R. BLAKE





SUPERSTOCK/Hand coloring by Tina Williams

everyday use to better human activities in all of their shapes and forms.

When or where will its explanation ever stop? No one knows.

But some questions can be answered with some accuracy: "Where did it all start?" "Where did it come from?" and "Where may it be going?"

We can make a case for two different dates for the origin of the HRD field. One is 1934; the other is 1946. The same players are involved

in either case. I was an on-site participant in some of the events recounted here, but by no means in all of them.

### **Mrs. Brown goes to Connecticut**

Most likely, the HRD field's origin was in 1946. It occurred as a matter of serendipity, not as a conscious, determined effort to create something new.

In 1946 the American Council on Christians and Jews held a two-week conference in Connecticut, known as the Connecticut Experiment, to discuss substantive issues across this cleavage (Christians and Jews), and to consider ways to launch programs to reduce the gulf.

Kurt Lewin was at the conference. He had come to the United States as a German professor who saw Hitler for what he was, even in the early

1930s. As a professor at the University of Iowa, he had supervised a dissertation that compared two leadership cultures—autocratic and democratic—in a school setting. A third style, *laissez-faire*, was added. This experimental strategy was added because some of the graduate students who were acting in teacher roles were having trouble providing the students with a viable democratic model, and instead were tending toward passivity.

I believe that Leland Bradford, from the National Education Association, and Benne, a professor of philosophy at Boston University, were also there. Several graduate stu-

dents from MIT attended as recorders and observers.

One participant—her name was Mrs. Brown—was driven by a slightly suspicious streak. After a few days, she felt uneasy about what the staff and graduate students were discussing into the night, every night. She demanded to be allowed to sit in on one of their nightly faculty discussions. They allowed her to.

By that point, the faculty discussions were bogged down. Participants had intended to use the sessions to summarize content issues of the day. Instead, they had turned to discussions of hang-ups: What was blocking effective discussion? Was it tensions, frustrations, bad attitudes, accusations of prejudice, or all of the above? The participants had to acknowledge that a shift had taken place in what they were addressing.

The discovery of HRD happened. The clinically centered group-dynamics process level gave rich meaning to the difficulties being encountered in discussing the content. The discovery offered promise of unlocking the content discussion, but no one knew at the time how to take advantage of the promise, particularly with adults.

Had HRD been discovered by Mrs. Brown? Or was it discovered by Lewin, Bradford, and the others? Or was it by chance? Whoever was responsible, I believe the insight opened up the new field; it was the inaugural event of human resource development.

The faculty had become keenly aware—conscious of what was occurring to block effectiveness implicitly. This had little to do with the intended goal of the conference. It had everything to do with the human dynamics underlying the content issues with which people were dealing (but in a frustrated manner).

Lewin and Bradford stand out as the faculty members who “got” the point. Lewin died the next year, 1947. Bradford became the Applied Group Dynamics leader, and stayed that way for the next 20 years.

Bradford, a psychologist, was employed by the National Education Association. At the time, NEA had 12 divisions. Bradford became the head of a 13th division, referred to as the

Division of Adult Leadership. Thus, the two disciplines involved in the Connecticut Experiment were social psychology (through Lewin) and education (through Bradford).

Bradford was an unusual person; he could see and hear much of what others didn't even pay attention to. He was a direct descendant of Governor Bradford of the Plymouth Colony (the 1620 one). Lee said, “If you look at the governor's multivolume history of the Plymouth colony, each section begins with, ‘The group met, and it was decided that....’ The governor had omitted the keys to the process history of the Plymouth colony, only referring to content, but ignoring arguments, tensions, animosities, polarities, etc. that resulted in things evolving as they did.”

### **T-groups are the Maine event**

The year 1947 marked another real beginning, the start of the National Training Laboratory in Group Development. It was conceived at Bethel, Maine, and its core activity was the T-Group. I can affirm that “T” meant nothing, although its most frequently ascribed meaning is training—not technique and not therapy.

Why Bethel? Three reasons:

- Bradford and Benne had been to a meeting in Canada. One thing they saw on their drive back was Bethel Academy, a resident high school in a sleepy little town, which students came to from small villages in the Maine countryside.

- It was an out-of-the-way place where a “learning culture” could be created in the summer when high school was out, and without much interruption or involvement from the community. This caused it later to be called a “cultural island.”

- A third matter may have been of equal or greater importance. Just one block away was the Bethel Inn, which had a beautiful golf course. And Lee Bradford was an inveterate golfer.

Where better to bring three different influences together into unity? But some thought the golf course to be of overriding influence on this wonderful decision.

T-groups met each morning for two hours. They were made up of 15 or 20 members. A T-group had no agenda, but it did have an assigned

### **From the Mouths of HRDians**

The language of human resource development is a source of insight into the evolution of the field—and serves as a measure of HRD's spread. Many words have begun with HRD specialists and have crept into everyday language.

Within the last couple of years, officials in the U.S. White House have used “hip-pocket solution,” “change agent,” and “hidden agenda.” Those phrases started at Tavistock Clinic in London, but quickly transferred to the National Training Laboratory in Bethel, Maine. “Win/win” is another, originating at the University of Texas, Austin, in the early 1960s.

But where did the phrase “HRD” come from? Originally, I think it began during World War 2, where it was used in connection with public (military) opinion polling. Around the 1970s, the phrase “human resource” became the umbrella term used for everything now known as human resource issues, including selection, classification, development, and so forth.

I think it was Leonard Nadler, a professor at George Washington University, who brought the term human resource into being. But don't hold me to that.

group leader. The members were from business, especially ESSO (now Exxon), and from education, government, and religion, especially the Episcopal Church. Most T-group leaders were professors with academic credentials, like myself, but many were administrators or other academicians.

The group members had to find a topic to discuss. Then, usually toward the end, they would stop the discussion and talk about how they did it. "It" means they got into a topic and began discussing how they dealt with the loudmouth or the silent member, how they made decisions, how they dealt with conflict, or how they recaptured the disgruntled.

This, in my view, was the first conscious introduction to the use of feedback and critique for social learning in modern times—though these techniques trace back, in a discontinuous way, to the golden era of Greece. (See the box, "HRD in Antiquity," for a discussion of ancient origins of HRD.)

Critique had been a deliberate activity for learning in ancient Greece, particularly in composing the great dramas of the day. But critique in Athens in 300 B.C.—as in the Plymouth Colony in 1620—had been lost in the dust of antiquity. Bethel, or NTL, in 1947 provided critique a rich new beginning.

The National Training Laboratory offered another critical distinction as to the conditions prevailing at the time of HRD's origin. Participants were normal people, within the normal range and scope of human effectiveness. They did not come, at least not deliberately, for therapy. This factor was very important, for the general phenomenon subject to change was process. The point wasn't to treat the mentally disturbed and ill by removing difficulties. The goal was to add skill, not to remove defects.

It was that way for several years. Then conflict began for Bethel and for NTL.

### **Twenty Frenchmen spell change**

It happened in 1957, during the Eisenhower "people-to-people" fellowship era.

### **HRD in Antiquity**

There is practical wisdom in tracking backward to the ancients for the origins for HRD. They, too, were concerned with human betterment.

Confucius saw it in strengthening the family unit, centered on the power/authority dimension based on aged wisdom, the norms/standards of family loyalties, and the cohesion/morale of family unity. (See the box on page 27 for descriptions of the seven dimensions.)

Socrates saw power/authority solutions residing in democracy and believed that norms/standards served as the basis of truth and justice.

Buddha told how detachment (differentiation/structure) could strengthen fulfillment and happiness (cohesion/morale).

Jesus saw the strengthening act in love and forgiveness (cohesion/morale).

Mohammed centered on norms/standards of equality and the strengthening of the brotherhood among Muslims, under power/authority from the absolute power/authority figure of Allah.

Twenty or so Frenchmen came to Bethel, en masse, to learn about process. They included professors from the Sorbonne and elsewhere, and a few businesspeople. The staff had to plan what to do.

That was the beginning of trouble for the National Training Laboratory, for it brought out some fundamental disagreements and sharp cleavages among the NTL staff. Lee's paternalism could no longer keep the faculty together as "one happy group of argumentative children."

NTL trainers were not all alike. Some saw the key problem preventing society from getting better as bad uses of power/authority, which they saw as the source of fundamental blockages to human betterment. These people said, "Solve the power/authority problems, and cohesion will result."

Other trainers at NTL didn't see it the same way. They saw cohesion/morale blockages to be at the center of social obstructions that prevented betterment. The cohesion/morale experts said, "Create good morale, and problems of power/authority do not arise."

The division became permanent, but a great contribution to social psychology already had been made. These terms—cohesion/morale and power/authority—turn out to identify what we now know to be two of seven basic dimensions of culture in society. (For more information on the seven dimensions, see the chart on page 27.)

This was all so new to the

Frenchmen that they also felt progress, and appreciated knowing that the experts did not agree among themselves.

But, to NTL, it was the end of Part One, 1947-1957. Part Two contained much more cohesion/morale emphasis and less concentration on power/authority. The drugs and love-ins of the 1960s found an early home in Bethel's cohesion environment, much to the disgust of the natives.

Another, but minor, accomplishment of the era was the participants' discovery of precursors to flipcharts, green boards, white boards, and other varieties of boards. How did that happen?

The T-groups found that they needed to record things on blackboards. No blackboard? What to do? Someone went to a nearby market and bought some butcher paper, the kind the corner store used in the 1950s to wrap meat. It was an excellent alternative to the blackboard, except that chalk wouldn't work on the slippery butcher paper. And, of course, there were no magic markers; those came much later, as did newsprint.

By the 1970s, a great many corporations were using such means of recording, from the executive suite on down. Now, display boards that emerge from mahogany wall panels are the solution in many firms. Lighting is embedded in the ceiling. The only aspect that has not changed much is the quality of what's written on the boards.

## **Beyond Bethel: swimming pools, movie stars**

Groups in the Southwest United States and on the west coast of the country were duplicating NTL. Power/authority had been the central emphasis in Bethel, although morale/cohesion had become a new emphasis.

Morale/cohesion was the driving force for the Western Training Laboratory, where the driving forces were Bob Tannenbaum of UCLA and Chuck Ferguson. Without being fully aware of it, WTL focused on still a different dimension of society: norms/standards and how they unintentionally operate to control behavior.

Norms of propriety had already met their match in the Hollywood of the 1930s, and American "uprightness" was being undercut. WTL kept this up, challenging one norm after another in a process way—in order to learn about social control and freedom. Some T-groups became marathon T-groups that ran continuously for something like 36 hours to investigate such

issues as how conventional time norms worked; how people dealt with one another under extreme fatigue; and whether cohesion/morale was gained or lost and why, and if it was lost, how to repair it.

But the more significant experiment in WTL's HRD work came from the nude T-group. Participants stripped and met in the nude at the pool. How did they react to one another? From repugnant to ecstatic (cohesion/morale words).

But WTL also went further, creating the experience of "cradling." How do you re-create an early life experience? Here is one illustration. All of the nude participants form a circle in the water. One member volunteers and is cast afloat within the circle. Then he or she is gently rocked from one side to the other. The cradling experience is said to recapture early life experiences in a redintegrative way. You can appreciate why EST originated on the West Coast, not the East Coast.

The Southwest Training Laboratory went in a still different direction. SWTL was a consortium of SMU, Kansas State, and the University of Colorado, centered at the University of Texas at Austin.

SWTL created groups that were leaderless, at least in the sense of not assigning a leader. The power/authority problem had thus been solved by creating a vacuum; this in turn stimulated cohesion/morale. This was the origin of the self-regulated work teams that have spread far and wide in industry today.

More importantly, this was the beginning of a new method of education. Synergogy (which may eventually replace pedagogy) and andragogy emerged, with a goal of removing the traditional "leader" role and turning the power/authority over to the groups. The new method also turns over the learning achievement to the participants. It measures it quantitatively, on a team basis as well as an individual basis. And it evaluates and

## **In the Spotlight With Psychodrama Theater**

Now, let's turn back to the history of the field. I said an earlier date for the origin of HRD might be set at 1934. How is that?

J.L. Moreno, the father of psychodrama, sociodrama, sociometry, and role playing in society, had a meeting place on a street in New York City. At this time, I was working in the original organization development project undertaken by Exxon in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Occasionally I stayed over the weekend rather than returning to Texas. When possible, I used to go to the Moreno Psychodrama theater on Friday nights.

I had met Moreno in Tavistock Clinic in London. He resented Freud, and in several ways tried to make himself the opposite of Freud in both theory and treatment. By my count, he designed 14 ways to offer therapeutic help to an ill person that were different from or even opposite to the techniques typically used in psychoanalytic treatment.

Here is an illustration of what often took place in the psychodrama theater. One time the psychodrama

needed a person to play the infant of an unhappily married couple. The couple was there, trying to work out their difficulties. I became the infant. We found a sheet, and I invented a diaper to fit the occasion.

As the couple's baby, I enjoyed talking with the baby-sitter while the couple was out. When the husband and wife returned, they headed for the bedroom. There I was, sleeping soundly in the corner crib. The husband was anticipating an intensive cohesion/morale-building experience. But alas, I awakened and made a huge fuss, heard on both sides of the sidewalks of New York. Since I was but six months old, this was an approximate primal scream, itself a wonderful return toward the birth trauma.

(Actually, the wife had come over and pinched me, and my misbehavior put a damper on any cohesion for that evening. But she had been found out.)

These Friday nights were a great experience for everyone, including me.

Moreno soon recognized me as the American he had met at Tavistock Clinic. He knew I was a long-time

"Bethelite." He bestowed resentment on Bethel, but not on me. In his theater, he invited me to join him in his back office, where we then met frequently; in the meantime, he waived the 25-cent admission fee. Zerka, his wife, conducted the psychodramas while we were gabbing backstage.

One Friday night, he said, "I want to play you a record." It had been made, I think, in 1934; it was a recording of a meeting between himself, Lee Bradford, Ken Benne, and possibly Kurt Lewin. The recording dealt with Moreno's contributions, particularly role playing, which became an aspect of Bethel's afternoon programs a decade later. The other participants were there as students of Moreno.

Beginnings of HRD? At the least, the session was a very influential moment. In the final analysis, I think, Moreno saw it as an extrapolation from Freud, rather than something new arising from social psychology.

A strong case can be made for Moreno as the originator or father of HRD, but I think the Connecticut Experiment is the better starting point for the modern history of HRD.

compares learning achievement across teams. All of these are powerful motivations for active learning.

I see synergogy to be a future means to the resurrection and liberation of education. Synergogic methodology provides a clear anchorage to optimal conditions in each of the seven basic dimensions of society, within the miniature learning culture.

Malcolm Knowles invented modern andragogy. He had been at Bethel, and he took the T-group model of a professor/leader, helping people learn subject matter, not just process—except as it became an impediment to content learning.

Ed Schein, creator of process consultation, took the T-group in a different direction via members from study groups, sometimes actual work groups. The issues of their work lives were sometimes the discussion content. Schein introduced them to process issues using andragogy techniques, which tend to draw dependency from the group on the leaders' guidance. Thus, the power/authority problem became exaggerated but muted, rather than being diminished or eliminated.

Mid-1950s again. The late Jane Mouton, UT Psychology professor, joined in these NTL-type activities and became a significant contributor to SWTL. She was the senior author of *Synergogy: An Approach to Education*, which may become the standard approach to education, from high school through college and beyond. She and I wrote 40 books and 200 journal articles from 1955 to 1987, many on human resource development issues. We found writing to be the single best way to clarify our thinking. She was a great author.

### OD emerges from NTL

Now let's shift away from general developments and discuss in more detail one area of specific application: organization development. In this area, we can see some of the outlines for the future of many other human resource areas.

Viewed from one angle, the emergence and spread of HRD was chaotic, random, blind, and serendipitous—pure empiricism. But no.

By around 1960, four of the seven

### Seven Dimensions of Organization Culture

The first word in each column is the psychology term; the second is more aligned to sociology. Thus, the same phenomena is viewed in each case from a double perspective.

Dimension	Interpretation
Power/authority	How direction and control are implemented.
Norms/standards	The traditions, precedents, and past practices; norms and regulations that govern the uniform practices that take place; the uniformities in thought, feeling, and attitude that characterize members of any primary or reference group.
Cohesion/morale	Feelings of identification with or alienation from primary memberships.
Goals/objectives	The aims or purposes that characterize autonomous individuals, groups, and organizations.
Differentiation/structure	The formal arrangements set up to determine the responsibilities of individual groups and organizations.
Feedback/critique	Learning in order to improve or change performance, quality, innovations, and so forth.
Interdependence/exchange	The character of relationships, if any, among autonomous units such as individuals, groups, or organizations.

basic dimensions of organization culture had already been investigated to some extent. Power/authority was understood at the concrete level. Norms/standards of conduct, as seen in real-life terms, had been subjected to inquiry, as had cohesion/morale, which people were beginning to appreciate. Feedback/critique became the new source of learning technology and insight.

Only three dimensions of society that we now recognize as critical were left undefined for describing any organization in systematic terms. Differentiation/structure was dealt with only as the effects from loosening or tightening formal working

arrangements. And interdependence/exchange and goals/objectives remained untapped until the advent of OD.

To the best of my knowledge, goals and objectives received far less attention from NTL than merited, but goals and objectives are difficult to deal with under learning-laboratory conditions.

And the solution to NTL's interdependence/exchange problem—in other words, NTL/town relationship conflicts in sleepy Bethel—was reduced. Lee Bradford reduced it to a management problem, rather than considering it as a process issue. He kept to a minimum the need for

studying connections between NTL and the town of Bethel, because he also kept contacts to a minimum. He dealt with Bethel as a set of administrative problems, not as phenomena from which to reap learning insights.

Organization development, as opposed to individual development, emerged in 1953 and 1954. Two different versions of this emergence are possible.

One case took place at Union Carbide, at the initiative of Richard Beckhard. The effort was centered on the team—any in-house team—as the unit of development. I saw this as an attempt to move toward solving the common challenge of the day: transfer of training. When they dealt with the team as the unit of change, people could take for granted that there would be no transfer-of-training problem, and that the organization would change in due course.

The other OD effort, which I initiated with help from Herb Shephard, took place in Exxon. This effort was organization-wide OD; all organization members took part, from the top to the bottom of the corporation. The effort encompassed the organization as the unit of change, and centered on culture as prerequisite to change at any lesser level (such as the intergroup, team, or individual level).

Lee Bradford and I had a long, contentious conversation about this shift of focus from the individual to the corporation. His fear: "This will be the end of Bethel. Why would people come here if they can transfer training into the organization?" But of course, Bethel has continued over the decades.

Much more could be said about OD history, but this may be sufficient for demonstrating its roots as having grown from NTL.

### Romantic illusions

Chaos, pot luck, and intuition can be valuable. But they can last only so long. Eventually, some degree of conceptual discipline is inevitable. A national body with associated regions is the most viable HRD arrangement in terms of its future structure/differentiation. Functional divisions, like organization development, sensitivity training, and diversity training, will emerge from such a body; some of

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these divisions already exist today.

Membership criteria—professional standards—will be called for. The day of the intuitive will no longer be. But that day is distant. It's beyond the horizon—way beyond. Today, HRD is for all contributors, no qualifying questions asked—more or less.

Writing will also change, and for the better. Dialogue and story-telling will replace the endless monologues that today fill a typical 600 pages per book.

Already, at least four stories or novels reveal HRD initiatives. *The Goal* and *Prelude* are two industrial stories now in print. Then there are two stories about marketing and sales: *The Quadrant Solution* and *Solution Selling*. These are readable, novel-type books that convey concepts in story form, the near-term solution to the reader-friendly demands of today and tomorrow. Readable books may become a standard part of HRD criteria.

Now I want to appeal to your capacity for romantic illusion. Take the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives as a case study. You may agree that they both are in critical need of change. Lecturing from the White House won't cut it. Evangelist Billy Graham is not in a position to do the job. Even the electorate can't—because congressional members are "good guys" when they're at home, where they are not under the norms/standards and

power/authority structures of their respective bodies. They're only "bad guys" when they're in Washington.

Congressional OD? Yes, I think so. What's the alternative? Only OD has the strength, the capacity, and the insight to help bring the urgently needed changes about.

We have pretested this possibility in a senator's office, with the senator, his legislative assistants, and others participating. Grandiose as it may sound, it is a practical approach, and it has no competitors. That's where HRD may be going.

In the meantime, human betterment is definitely in our future! ■

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