Research Abstracts

A survey of Training & Development Journal *readers conducted recently by the Opinion Research Corporation, revealed a strong interest in information on current research in human resource development. This new column—compiled for the Journal by ASTD's Research Committee—is presented in response to that interest.*

The column will appear four times this year. Suggestions for topics, as well as contributions, are welcome. If you have research results to share, please send them to Lenny Ralphs, the research abstracts editor, with your name and address so that readers may contact you if they want more information. Send all submissions to: Lenny Ralphs, Brigham Young University, P.O. Box 2 TNRB, Provo, Utah 84602, (801) 378-3504.

Title: Motivations of Mid-Career Managers

Authors: Douglas W. Bray and Ann Howard, 21 Knoll Road, Tenafly, NJ 07670

Abstract: Continuing analyses of the extensive data base provided by AT&T's thirty-year Management Progress Study have highlighted important motivational changes in managers with age and experience. The participants in this study began their managerial careers in the late 1950's and have been followed since then by repeated assessment center evaluations and numerous interviews. These managers are now distributed from the lowest to the highest levels of management.

The average middle-aged manager has declined sharply in advancement motivations while increasing in desire for challenging work and independence of action. Trainers should not assume motivation to improve job performance for instrumental goals, such as promotion or pay increases, but should instead attempt to tap the desire for challenge. Training for those who supervise other managers should emphasize delegation, encouraging independence, feedback, and other skills to address the motives of mature, and probably plateaued, managers.

Title: The Role of Corporate Culture in Performance Appraisal

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Abstract: The research was conducted with a large retail organization with over 200 retail stores in the United States. Research subjects included nine division managers and 48 district managers.

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between organizational culture and performance review. Each subject completed The Person Inventory to assess work preferences in dimensions such as decision-making style, leadership style, performance feedback, people contact, etc. The Job Perception Inventory was also used to measure the requirements of the managers' job on the same dimensions (i.e. decision-making style, etc.). Operationally, culture was defined as the composite of the managers' preferences; those who are within one standard deviation of the norm in the different subscales are counted as within this cultural norm. The researchers then asked the corporations' personnel managers to rank the subjects in terms of top, moderate, and low performers. At the same time, the subjects were classified into top, moderate, and low performers according to operating profit for 1984.
Results showed that:
■ The subjective ranking of performance *is not correlated* with actual operating profit;
■ Subjects with preferences within the cultural norms are more likely to be rated subjectively as top performers;
■ Subjects with preferences most similar to the job requirement profile, *but which are different than the cultural norm*, are more likely to report higher operating profit.

This study reaffirmed the role of organizational culture on performance appraisal. Human resource development must consider organizational culture as a composite of management preferences in the development of a performance review system.

Title: Perceptions of National Leaders in Three Professional Associations About Aging, Learning and Work

Authors: Michael W. Galbraith, Ed.D., University of Missouri-Columbia, 301 Hill Hall, Columbia, MO 65211.

William R. Venable, Ph.D., Oklahoma State University, 406 Classroom Building, Stillwater, OK 74078.

Abstract: The principal focus of the study was to identify the perceptions of the leaders in three professional associations (American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, American Society for Training and Development, and Gerontological Society for America) about changes in learning and work behaviors related to the aging process. The Aging, Learning and Work Quiz, a 40-item, true-false, self-assessment inventory developed by the authors, was used to collect the data. The response rate was 43 percent. Gerontology leaders scored the greatest number of correct perceptions, followed by adult education, and training and development leaders.

Implications for application in HRD focus on three areas. First, HRD personnel need to reconsider the meaning of the aging process and its effects upon adult learners throughout adulthood. Secondly, the ways in which learning experiences for adults are facilitated need to be reexamined in order to develop alternative mechanisms based upon age-related changes. The third implication is to match these learning mechanisms to the changing needs of all learners in training and development activities.

Title: Critical Elements of an Effective Organizational HRD Function

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Abstract: This study was undertaken because of the growing awareness of the need for increasing organizational performance and productivity through more effective use of human resources, and the lack of emphasis on evaluating and improving the human resource development function itself. The purpose of the study was to identify the elements critical to the successful functioning of effective HRD organizations and the methods used to implement them. This first phase of this model building study involved: a literature search to generate a list of possible criteria for effectiveness; a Delphi study using 100 HRD experts who participated in the ASTD competency study (the experts identified the elements critical to the successful functioning of effective HRD organizations); and a review of successful HRD functions to validate the Delphi findings.

At this point, the critical elements of effective HRD organizations have been identified as follows:

■ The HRD function has the expertise to diagnose problems in order to determine appropriateness of potential solutions.

■ The HRD manager maintains an active network with other key managers in the organization.

■ There is a corporate training and development mission statement and/or corporate HRD policies.

■ The evaluation of training focuses on behavioral change or organizational results.

■ The HRD manager participates routinely in corporate strategy sessions with other key staff persons and senior managers.

■ Training needs associated with major changes in the organization are anticipated.
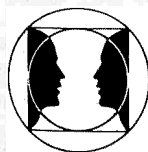
■ Allocations of HRD resources are based partly on the priorities of the organization.

■ The HRD function conducts needs assessments to determine organizational requirements.

■ The roles, responsibilities and priorities of the HRD function are defined clearly.

■ The HRD management and staff meet routinely to discuss problems and progress with current programs.

The critical elements can be used by practitioners and HRD managers to assess the state of their own HRD organizations, diagnosing problems as appropriate. The final phase of the research will be completed in mid 1986. A questionnaire will be sent to a random sample of HRD organizations. A series of case studies which will provide the data for building a planned HRD organizational performance system (the models).