

ACADEMIC PREPARATION OF HRD PRACTITIONERS

BY ELIZABETH OLSON
AND ELLIS J. BERNE

A significant event took place in Washington, DC in December 1979, when an invitational conference on "Academic Preparation of Practitioners in Training and Development/Human Resources Development" was held under the sponsorship of the Professional Development Committee of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD). Thirty-four academicians representing 26 institutions participated.

Why a conference on academic preparation in T&D/HRD and why at this time?

The increasing interest among colleges and universities in initiating or expanding curricula for HRD practitioners and would-be practitioners coincided with ASTD's growing interest in professional development resources. There was no collected data available to either group as to what educational programs were offering or accomplishing in this field. At the same time, schools, employers and practitioners referred

increasingly to the "emerging profession" of human resource development. It seemed highly appropriate to turn to the schools to see what professional foundations were being laid at graduate and undergraduate levels.

For several years, the ASTD Professional Development Committee worked on a study of *professional training and development roles and competencies*. The findings were reported in May of 1978. One of the Committee's objectives for 1979 was to hold a conference to build on the research findings. At the same time a proposal was made to ASTD that an invitational conference be held on HRD to establish ASTD's leadership role in this area. In addition, ASTD staff members had been getting inquiries from various schools concerning college and university programs which prepare HRD practitioners to meet industry and government needs.

The ASTD Executive Committee directed that the proposals be combined into one conference. A work group was formed consisting of: Elizabeth Olson, director of

Personnel Training and Development, American National Red Cross; Ellis Berne, director, Office of Employee Development and Training, General Services Administration; and Richard C. "Mac" McCullough, director of Professional Development, ASTD.

With the establishment of the work group, a series of discussions ensued out of which the following issues evolved:

1. *Who would be the primary audience for the conference?* From the many inquiries received both by ASTD and HRD colleagues there seemed to be a growing interest in identifying programs and centers offering programs in HRD. In July, 1979, a letter was sent to 110 ASTD chapter presidents, asking them to identify colleges and universities in their area with degree programs in T&D/HRD. Through this correspondence, approximately 80 institutions were identified. Further exploration of their interest and extent of current activity in HRD resulted in 40 schools being sent invitations to send representatives to this special conference.

2. *What would be the objectives and purpose of such a conference?* As the first conference in the area of T&D/HRD, we attempted to keep objectives simple and straightforward:

- Analyze and compare existing programs to determine common elements, major strengths of programs, experience of graduates and response of employers.

- Identify the kinds of students in existing academic programs.

- Look to the future and recommend further collaborative actions (e.g., distribution of a conference report, establishment of clearing-house functions, additional conferences for these or other colleges).

Growing out of these objectives, we decided the main thrust of the conference would be to identify and discuss current academic programs that either prepare students for employment in a training and development function in the public, private or voluntary sector, or provide professional development for persons already in the field.

3. *What should be the appropriate nature of involvement of ASTD in the conference?*

After a good deal of discussion, we agreed that ASTD would best serve by acting to facilitate the conference and providing resource personnel. It was agreed that too active involvement by ASTD during the conference would intrude on the discussions of participants.

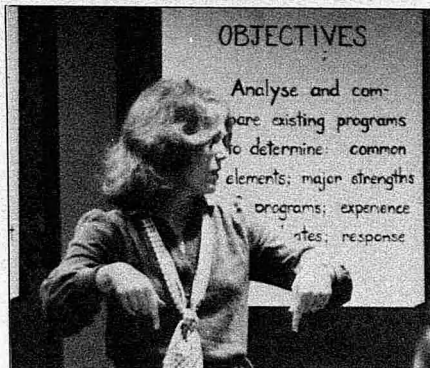
There was further agreement on the importance of involving ASTD chapters. For this reason, all chapter presidents were asked to suggest universities in their areas for attendance and all received copies of the conference report. This process has already stimulated interest in examining the relationships between ASTD chapters and academic resources.

Conference Design

The overriding concern of the conference planners was to provide participants with optimum opportunities to share and exchange information. The agenda sequence was established with that in mind:

First evening:

- Brief introductions; welcome



Jan Margolis, corporate director of Management Education and Organization Development, Bristol-Myers Co., focuses on a view of HRD from the business point of view. — Photo by John Williams

- Issue identification by small groups

- Presentation on "Effects of Future Changes in Business and Industry on HRD"

Second day:

- Presentation on "Expectations of HRD Practitioners by the Federal Government"

- Small group discussions

- Reporting Session

- A working lunch with a presentation on "National Issues Facing HRD"

- Small group discussions

- Reporting session and general discussion

Third morning:

- A summary of where we had gotten in our discussion, with special reference to the objectives

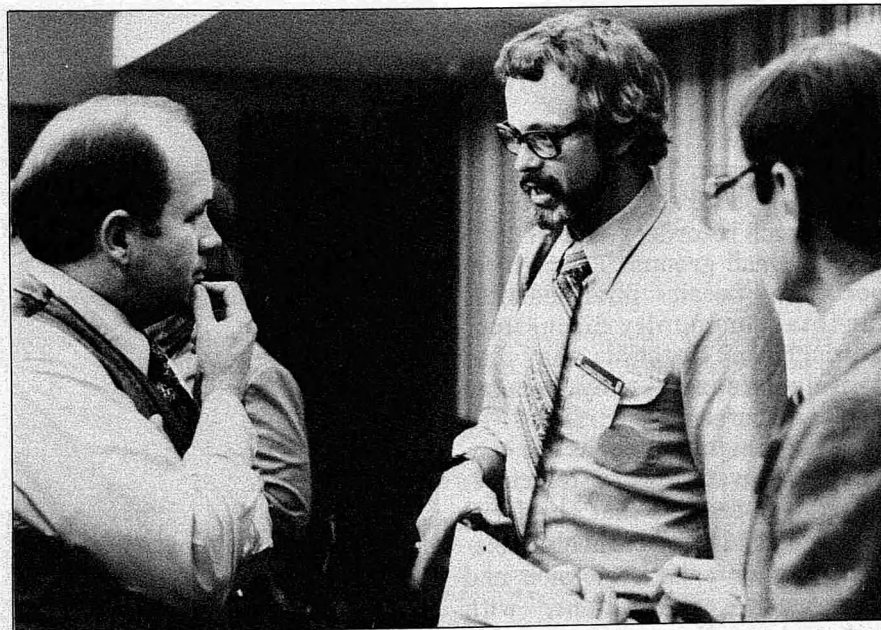
- Small group discussions of possible recommendations

- A general reporting and discussion session

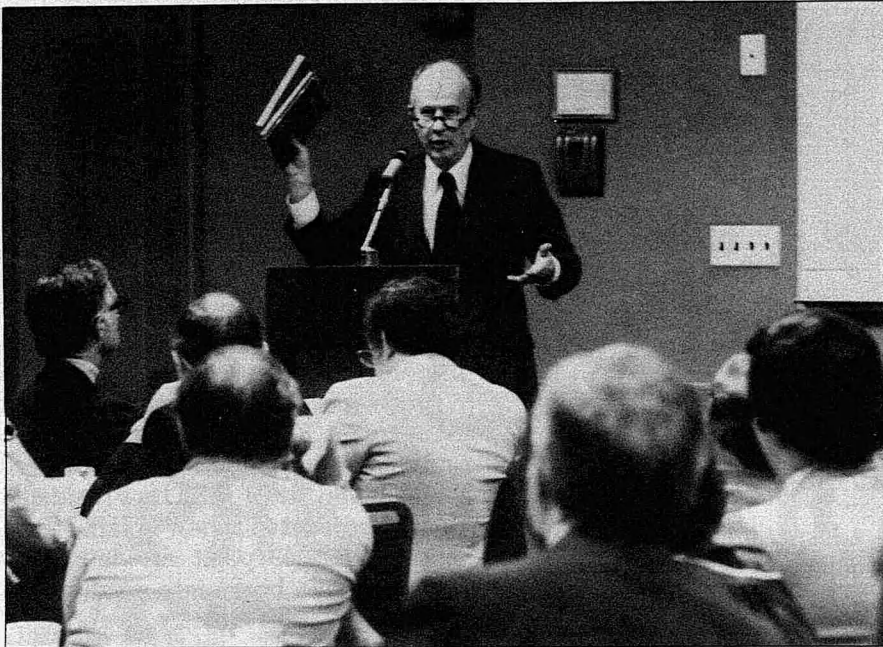
Throughout the conference, with the exception of the first evening, groups selected their own recorders and reporters. Conference staff participated as unobtrusive facilitators and observers.

The first evening began with a few informal "get acquainted" activities, followed by the first of three conference speakers. Jan Margolis, corporate director of Management Education and Organization Development, Bristol-Myers Co., and 1979 ASTD President, who presented a view of HRD from the business point of view. The group then broke into small group discussions to identify issues to be covered during the conference. While some of the issues raised by Jan were discussed, the bulk of the discussion revolved around learning more about participants' programs. It should be noted that throughout the conference, as the composition of the groups changed, there was a continued high degree of interest in learning about each other's programs.

Another topic of continuing concern was that of *definitions*. This was particularly true of "human resource development" as a professional field, as a grouping of concepts, as a key to course development, and as it relates to "organization development."



"The overriding concern of the conference planners was to provide participants with optimum opportunities to share and exchange information." — Photo by John Williams



At a working lunch, participants heard from Bob Craig, ASTD director of Communications on national issues he saw facing the HRD profession. — Photo by John Williams

were guiding the curricula in particular schools; and (3) the examination of specific issues that seemed to be of common concern. From each of these lines of discussion came recommendations, substantive or procedural, addressed to participants, the conference as a whole, ASTD or "the professional community."

Patterns of Curricula

Of 27 colleges and universities submitting information that brought them within the criteria defined for attendance at the conference, 19 had separately defined curricula in human resource development or training and development. Of these, five schools offered a degree at the bachelor's level; one offered a certificate program only; one offered a master's degree in the field; and 12 offered both master's and doctoral degrees. The other eight institutions offered specialities in HRD within other curricula. Only one stopped at the bachelor's level.

As a backdrop of patterns of curricula, it is interesting to note which schools within the universities sponsored HRD programs:

- Education
- Applied Behavioral Sciences
- Business Administration/Organizational Management

It is also worth noting that Human Services Administration/Management Development — one or more of them — are rapidly

The second day offered two speakers. Dr. Alan Campbell of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management opened the day with his views on future HRD needs of government. At a working lunch, participants heard from Bob Craig, ASTD director of Communications on national issues he saw facing the HRD profession. Major portions of both sessions were devoted to intense small group discussions followed by reports back to the entire group.

The final morning turned to a re-examination of the conference objectives with a view toward formulating group recommendations which were reported at a final session prior to conference adjournment.

Conference leadership was a shared process. Thirty-four participants from 26 schools served as convenors, recorders and reporters for small groups. Through reports they became intermediaries for total community discussion. Through the materials they had sent in advance, they became major resources.

Of some significance, as the conference moved toward its close, was the awareness that the focus had remained on the schools. Relationships with the profession and professional organizations, with employers, with practitioners, and with students were discussed pri-

marily with reference to possibilities for strengthening the school programs, delivery systems and planning for the future.

Discussions tended to fit into a similar pattern. First, there was exchange of individual information, with clarifications and illustrations offered or requested. Following a number of presentations, discussion tended to lead into one of three directions: (1) the identification of significant or prevailing patterns of curricula among the schools represented; (2) the offering of one or more models that



For the first time, academicians met who are building curricula to prepare students to work in a wide range of organizational settings. — Photo by John Williams

emerging as separate curricula in a number of schools because of the expanding concern in the world of work.

One way of looking at predominant elements and patterns in HRD curricula is to relate them to the nine categories of activities identified in the ASTD study, "A Study of Professional Development — Training and Development Roles and Competencies."

Figure 1 shows, with somewhat abbreviated and generic titles, courses found in more than one of the 27 schools submitting information concerning HRD programs or specialities within programs. The courses are grouped under headings of Education/Training, Applied Behavioral Sciences, and Business Administration/Organizational Management. Although most of the colleges offered courses from each of the three listings, the identity of the sponsoring school greatly influenced the overall focus of the HRD curriculum as well as the specific requirements for a degree.

Although the lists are not complete, it became apparent as curricula were compared that most schools offered courses related to most, if not all, of the ASTD categories of professional activity, with the highest frequency going to adult education, learning theory and training design, followed closely by organizational behavior, managerial skills, personnel administration and instructional technology.

Developing Models

Discussion of course content by conference participants frequently led to consideration of its relationship to HRD practitioner responsibilities and needs, as well as of the rationale set forth by faculty and school administrators in planning a curriculum appropriate to those needs and to community priorities in employing HRD personnel. Of assistance in interpreting individual points of view were conceptual models known to specific HRD faculty. There was frequent recognition that models not only were a kind of "shorthand," but also provided a valuable visual reference while members of a group were

exploring differences or seeking to reach consensus.

Some of the models that proved most useful in discussion included those shown in Figure 2.

Training relates to learning experiences that facilitate or strengthen job performance. Education relates to learning experiences that prepare people for different or new jobs in the future. Development relates to learning experiences that build on workers' potential to respond to new organizational needs or goals. Figure 3 was developed by Leonard Nadler of The George Washington University. Others have found it very useful.

Figure 1.

HRD Courses Related to the Nine ASTD Categories of Professional Activity

Education/ Training	Applied Behavioral Sciences	Business Admin./Org. Mgmt.
1. Analyzing needs and evaluating results		
Adult Training Theory	Analyzing Performance Problems	
Evaluation of Adult Training	Working With Org. Change	
Training Needs Assessment		
2. Designing and developing training programs and materials		
Designing Training		Designing Tests
Use of Media in Education		
Instructional Technology		
Training Theory		
Voc/Tech Curric. Dvlpmnt.		
3. Delivering training and development programs/services		
Pgm. Planning in Adult Ed.	Facilitating Experiential Learning	Computer-Assisted Instr. Training Line Managers as Instructors
Training Methods		
Training of Trainers		
4. Advising and Counseling		
Supervising OJT Programs	Supervising Self-Directed Learners	Personnel Administration Career Development
	Consulting Skills	
	Working w/External Consultants	
5. Managing training activities		
HRD in Organizations		Adm. Training Activities
Developing HRD Programs		Supervision of Instructors
Planning Educ'l/Training Materials		Financial Management
Dev. Criteria & Selecting HRD Staff		
6. Maintaining organizational relationships		
Staffing Training Function		Bus. Admin./Org. Mgmt.
Preparing Trng. Records & Reports		Org. Behavior/Dynamics
		Mgmt. Info. Systems Programs
		Operating Tuition Assistance
7. Doing research to advance the training field		
Education Research	Conducting Training Operations Research	Presenting & Interpreting Research Plans & Results
Proposal Writing		
8. Developing professional skills and expertise		
Adult Education	Counseling/Helping Skills	Labor Relations
9. Developing basic skills and knowledge		
Behavioral Sci. Approach to Education	Leadership Styles	Organizational Communication
	Psych. of Learning/Tchg.	Organizational Leadership Economics
	Sensitivity Trng./Group Problem Solving	

Although there was recognition that a case might be made for treating any one of these, or other disciplines, as an "umbrella" for the others, and certainly there are interrelationships, there was some agreement that there is need for would-be or practicing professionals in these three areas to have access to a full curriculum focused on the core tasks/roles of each.

There was frequent reference not only to the fact that students were most often adults with practical experience in the field of training before seeking a graduate degree, but also to the fact that continuing professional development was of greater concern to

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Figure 2.

THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

TRAINING	EDUCATION	DEVELOPMENT
job	individual	organization

them than the pursuit of a prescribed curriculum. This encouraged not only flexibility in the curriculum of many schools, but also some interdisciplinary curriculum planning with several schools in a university sponsoring HRD curricula with different work settings and demands in mind.

Issues were encountered and dealt with in varying degrees by conference participants. Because of limited time in small group discussions and because of the movement of people from one group to another and back of the total conference community, discussion of issues was often ended without definitive results or decisions.

Some issues were repeatedly identified in different groups and at different times and were dealt with in various ways. Models were occasionally helpful, and sometimes a summarizing statement led to a degree of agreement or to a recommendation. The lack of consensus on issues was the result of the broad objectives of the confer-

ence and the fact that a number of issues were too broad and vital to curriculum to be handled in the time available. In relation to their impact on group findings and recommendations, some of the most important issues were:

1. Should "human resource development" be defined in relation to a profession or work done in an organization?

2. Should a major thrust be made to identify a core curriculum for preparing all HRD professionals?

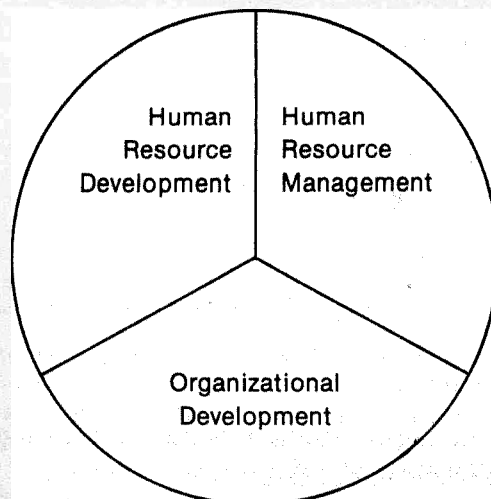
3. Should a network of interested schools be sought to facilitate continuing interaction with ASTD?

4. Should models be sought for effective interrelationships among schools, ASTD and employers of HRD professionals at the local level — and can professional development be defined to produce a common goal?

5. Are university curricula in OD and HRD contributing to healthful relationships between the two, or to their polarization?

Figure 3.

AN APPROACH TO ORGANIZING HUMAN RESOURCES CURRICULA



6. How does the concern for quality of work life fit in with HRD professional preparation and responsibilities?

7. Is it desirable to define parameters to HRD functioning in organizations?

8. Should universities have an identifiable, special group within ASTD?

Perhaps the most significant step toward dealing with these issues is found in the variety of recommendations for follow-up to this conference.

Conference Results

Four major results came from the conference:

1. Much appreciation was expressed by participants for the opportunity to talk with colleagues actively engaged in administering and teaching HRD curricula, to receive copies of their course descriptions, and to have a list of future contacts.

2. Participants looked forward to the publication of a conference summary, both for themselves and their colleagues.

3. Participants recommended that ASTD follow-up this meeting with others on T&D/HRD.

4. Participants recommended that ASTD establish a clearinghouse to exchange bibliographies, curricula, and program descriptions.

We believe this initial conference served a valuable purpose. For the first time, academicians met who are building curricula to prepare students to work in a wide range of organizational settings; but with the common task of increasing the capabilities of personnel to achieve organizational goals and to enhance their own potential.

The academicians represented unique universities and communities, and they themselves had strong orientations to worlds of education, business, or the behavioral sciences. Nevertheless, as they focused their attention on their HRD curricula, they recognized common areas of requisite knowledge about human behavior and administration. They actively sought words, concepts and processes to undergird those common

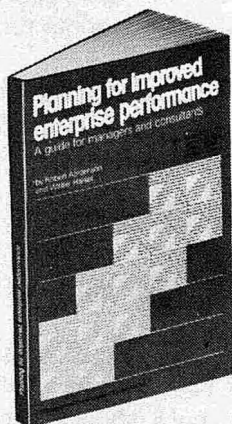
areas of knowledge. They made some headway in testing and accepting for further study some models of approaches HRD curriculum building. Conversations have begun — and will continue — among schools and with our professional society. The dialog needs to expand and proliferate, involving students, employers and ASTD chapters.

Further work will help deal with the issue stated so cogently at the conference. "If you do not know what you are doing, you can do anything." ASTD can help fulfill its professional responsibilities by assisting the T&D/HRD community to bring some clarity and definition to what is meant by the academic preparation of practitioners in training and development/human resource development.

Elizabeth Olson is director of Personnel Training and Development for the American Red Cross, Washington, D.C.

Ellis J. Berne is chief, Career Management Group, Personnel and Training Staff, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.

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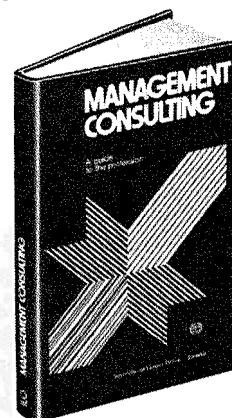
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