

SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE

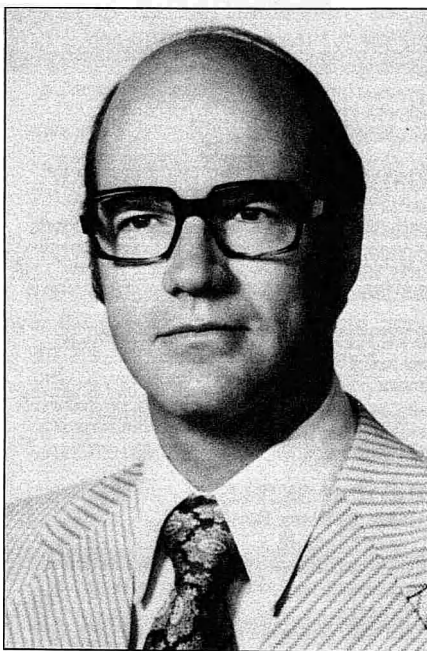
HRD — STEPPING FORWARD TOWARD PROFESSIONALISM

Guest Commentary
BY LLOYD COOPER

Human Resource Development is still an emerging field. Unlike full-blown professions, most of the people working in HRD assignments have been trained in other disciplines, and are in their present assignment largely by matter of circumstance and organizational need.

Professionalism of HRD, however, is rapidly taking place. A few schools are now training practitioners for this specialty. Professional development workshops are being offered to create a bridge between previous training and the demands of an HRD position. ASTD's conferences and institutes, its publications, together with a growing configuration of other journals, workshops and HRD activity indicate a growing condition of professionalism in the field.

It is becoming increasingly clear that HRD is becoming a significant component in organizational structure. Executive management in most organizations recognizes the increasing need for the training and skill development of employees. Federal guidelines mandate career mobility programs for women and minorities. Absenteeism and low employee motivation have predictable effects on production and quality. The time has come where organizations feel a need for the skills that an HRD professional can lend to their development. Recruiters are increasing their search for individuals with appro-



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appropriate background and training to fill those specialized positions. In this atmosphere of change and need, the stage is now set for the further evolution of a profession with practitioners specially trained to recognize the needs of the organization, yet skilled in understanding people who spend their lifetimes working for the organization.

One of the first elements in the development of an HRD professional prototype involves defining what that person is, and what he or she does in the organization. Obviously, different types of organizations will have widely different needs, but whether the

organization is a bank, manufacturing firm, or a government agency, certain common dimensions exist.

Traditional academic and professional specialties provide a foundation of knowledge and skills which are valuable in the HRD environment, yet conventional programs in psychology, education, industrial relations, management and sociology emphasize directions and approaches not directly related to the role and mission of human resource development.

Expanded Training Function

Human resource development as a generic descriptor for employee-related functions has emerged from earlier antecedents essentially limited to employee/education and training. Job enrichment, employee motivation, executive training, testing and screening, career mobility programming, and general concern for the human climate and condition of the organization have been added to the training function only as of recent vintage.

Today's definition, however, recognizes a multiplicity of responsibilities given the HRD professional. To adequately define HRD, a glimpse at a crystal ball for future directions is also needed. Human resource development is a highly dynamic field. Within a short span of 10 years, tremendous changes have occurred within the field, creating a virtual tidal wave of

new positions and far-reaching recognition of HRD in organizational structure. Current definitions are less than adequate for it is readily apparent that the next 10 years will create even greater changes within the field, opening new areas of activity, and rapidly increasing potential for professional growth.

A profession needs more than a definition; it needs the identity of people who work and serve in common interest. ASTD has been largely instrumental for the coalescence of many parts into a vigorous and growing professional constituency with common concerns, working together toward collective ends.

Another ingredient in the movement to professional stature is that of specialized training. As a profession measures itself, and relates the competence of those practicing to the skills required, a need for specialized training becomes apparent. This is particularly true in HRD where there are numerous and broadly defined responsibilities specified for the job. Most persons holding HRD positions have had professional training in some allied discipline, i.e., education, psychology, industrial relations, etc. Yet, each of these disciplines operates in a domain that typically fails to directly relate to HRD services in an organizational setting.

Education carries the knowledge of curriculum development and the management of the teaching-learning process. Psychology assesses learning and provides a basis for structuring concepts and ideas to meet individual needs. Industrial relations responds with knowledge of the work setting and methods of motivating employees. Each of these and other disciplines contribute information and knowledge which is valuable in the operation of HRD functions. Yet, no existing academic discipline or professional training program effectively serves the needs of HRD.

Forthcoming developments, uniqueness of HRD applications, and tremendous growth in the field, will call for specialized training programs. Predictably, there

are going to be many who feel that their psychology or their education degree, together with "seat of the pants" experience is superior to any HRD training program. Some will strongly resist the specialized training of HRD professionals because they were not trained in that fashion. But, for the most part, the demands of changing conditions, and the vast numbers of people needing skills to represent the emerging HRD profession, will develop a stringent need for programs directly aimed at the needs of organizations, and the people who serve HRD functions in those organizations.

On many campuses, the early jockeying for a piece of the action is already under way. Colleges of Business Administration lay claim to knowledge of the corporate environment, and the people who work there. Colleges of Education now turning from a declining school-age population, see the adult audience not only as part of the lifelong process of education, but also bread-and-butter in a declining marketplace. Public administration divisions also are turning their attention to training HRD professionals for the public sector.

HRD — "A Target of Opportunity"

The final disposition is open to speculation, but training institutions are beginning to realize the potential of HRD as an attractive target of opportunity. Whether traditional schools and training programs can properly respond to the developing needs of HRD is yet to be seen. And the question of on whose turf HRD properly belongs will doubtless be open to debate and battle for some time.

As HRD emerges in its own right, some of the most promising approaches, at least from a conceptual viewpoint, promote HRD as a multidisciplinary professional entity, unique in its own being. A few schools have fashioned new departments of behavioral science and human resource development which directly focus on the needs of organizations and the people who work for them. In the long term, some of these programs probably hold greatest promise for the training of HRD professional

specialists.

Whatever the source and direction of HRD training programs, a new generation of professionals is joining the ranks. These new individuals will bring their own definition of HRD practice. Together with an ever broadening role for HRD in organizations, a most discernible profile is becoming apparent. Human resource development is becoming a profession in its own right. Its collective spirit, the common identity of its members, the appearance of specialized training, and ever increasing demand for professionals who can solve the people-related problems that face the contemporary organization creates a statement of fact for all to hear — human resource development is well on the road as a major professional entity! —

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