

TRAINING HUMAN RESOURCE CHAMPIONS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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Although universities have been the primary source of human resource talent for organizations, there is some question whether current university programs will be able to prepare human resource professionals for the expanded role that is needed in the future. These programs include the Masters of Business Administration (MBA), Masters of Human Resources and Industrial Relations (MHRIR), and Masters of Organization Development (MOD). Brigham Young University has also created a unique program called the Masters in Organizational Behavior (MOB). This article explores the differences among these programs and discuss their implications for training HR professionals. © 1999 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Introduction

The scope of the field of human resource management has changed dramatically in recent years. Rather than playing what has historically been a perfunctory administrative role to select, train, evaluate, and reward employees, leaders in the field of human resources have come to realize that the role of the human resource professional must be expanded to truly add value to organizations. Recent work by Ulrich (1997), Kochanski & Ruse (1996), Gorsline (1996), Lawson & Limbrick (1996), as well as efforts by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) to identify core competencies of human resource professionals of the twenty-first century have presented a view of human resources that calls for creating a "new" human resource manager with a widely expanded skill set. While there are varying models for these new human resource managers, the following summarizes their core skills:

1. The ability to *be a business partner* with others in the organization. This requires the human resource manager to have a clear understanding of the organization's mission and strategy as well as an understanding of basic business processes.
2. *Technical competence in the human resource (HR) function* in such areas as employee selection, training, compensation, legal requirements, and so forth.
3. *Competence in organization development (OD) technologies* such as team building, organization design, reengineering, etc.
4. The ability to help an organization *manage change effectively*. This requires the human resource professional to have vision and leadership skills to move organizations in positive directions.

Given this new set of skills to be developed by human resource professionals in the future, one must wonder who will train these future HR professionals. Although universities have been the primary source of human resource talent for organizations, there is some question whether current university programs will be able to prepare human resource professionals for the expanded role that is needed in the future. These programs include the Masters of Business Administration (MBA), Masters of Human Resources and Industrial Relations (MHRIR), and Masters of Organization Development (MOD). At Brigham Young University we have also created a unique program called the Masters in Organizational Behavior (MOB). In this article I explore the differences between these programs and discuss their implications for training HR professionals. Given the unique nature of the MOB program at Brigham Young, I will also describe how the program has evolved into its current form and discuss whether it could be a model for training HR champions of the future.

Profiles of MOB, MBA, MOD, and MHRIR Programs

The impetus for comparing these various programs began as we, the faculty, attempted to benchmark the MOB program at Brigham Young University with other programs in the United States. In its early years, the MOB program was a traditional Masters in Organizational Development program. More recently, as the program has evolved and changed, we have found it much more difficult to bench-

mark our program because it looks quite different from other programs. In an attempt to make some comparison, we identified MBA, MOD, and MHRIR programs that train students in the general field of human resource management.

The MBA programs are a sample selected from the rankings of top MBA programs done by *U.S. News and World Report* in 1998 (Sample: Cornell, Dartmouth, Emory, MIT, Michigan State, Northwestern, UC Irvine, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Southern California); the MOD programs were selected on the basis of rankings of MOD programs done by Bowling Green State University (Varney & Darrow, 1995) (Sample: Bowling Green, Fielding Institute, George Washington, Pepperdine, Sonoma State). Unaware of any rankings of MHRIR programs, we selected schools that were known to have masters programs in human resource management (Sample: Cornell, Loyola, Purdue, Alabama, Minnesota, Utah State). We examined the curriculums of each of these programs by searching their web pages. To be included in our program samples, their web pages needed to list the various programs' required and the elective courses.

Table I compares the relative levels of emphasis in the areas of strategy, organization development, human resources, change, and business fundamentals in the different programs. The MOB program at Brigham Young University has attempted to create professionals who can change organizations effectively; who understand the core areas of strategy, OD, and HR; and who have a basic background in business fundamentals. Other programs have quite different emphases. Masters programs

TABLE I Program Emphases.

Areas of Training Emphasis					
Program	OD	HRM	Strategy	Change	Business Fundamentals
MOB	High	High	High	High	Medium
MBA	Low	Low	High	Medium	High
MHRIR	Low	Very High	Medium	Low	Medium
MOD	Very High	Low	Medium	High	Very Low

Degree of emphasis ranges from very high to very low.

in organization development, such as those at Pepperdine and Bowling Green, typically require several courses in OD technologies and managing change with some emphasis on business strategy; however, they neglect the field of human resource management and rarely require any business courses. Masters programs in human resources and industrial relations, such as those at Minnesota and Cornell, train their students superbly in the technical aspects of HR and industrial relations but neglect the field of organization development. Business strategy, change, and business fundamentals also play a less prominent role in the curriculums of MHRIR programs, with the notable exception of Purdue. MBA programs, on the other hand, focus on business strategy and business fundamentals. After receiving business training, MBA students typically take some elective courses in human resources and organizational behavior during their second year of study. Such courses, however, tend to still be rather general and do not create the kind of in-depth specialization found in the MOB, MOD, or MHRIR programs. To give an idea of the different curriculums in these programs, Table II describes the curriculums of Pepperdine (MOD), Minnesota (MHRIR), and Michigan (MBA). The programs are highly regarded, and their curriculums are similar to their respective counterparts.

As Table II shows, Pepperdine's MOD program focuses on OD, change, and some strategy. No business classes or courses in human resource management are given. Moreover, all the courses are required and there are no electives. Minnesota's masters degree in human resources and industrial relations has five core content areas in human resource management. After taking courses in each of the five areas, the students receive further specialized training in one or more of these areas in elective classes. This program does not require business classes outside of HR and industrial relations, and it lacks an emphasis in organization development and change. Michigan's program is typical of many MBA programs. In their first year, students take one or two general classes related to the field of organizational behavior and human resources. The focus in the first year is devoted to training

the students to be effective general managers. Specialization occurs during their second year, and Michigan has an impressive set of elective classes. MBA faculty, however, typically teach elective courses in their specialties without creating a curriculum that builds on other courses or helps MBA students develop a coherent and integrative view of the field. Thus the MBA student produced from such training has a general knowledge of business but a rather fragmented knowledge of the new role that human resource professionals should play in the future.

At the beginning of this article the attributes of HR champions of the twenty-first century were listed: (1) business partner, (2) human resource expert, (3) organization development expert, and (4) change agent. The descriptions of the various programs suggest that most of the current masters programs are deficient in one or more of these dimensions. MOD programs do not tend to produce effective business partners or students competent in HR. MHRIR programs tend to create technical specialists with little OD and business training. MBA programs produce students who have good business skills but who lack in-depth knowledge and skills in organization development and HR. While I would not suggest that Brigham Young University's MOB program is the ideal program for all students and all universities, I would say that we have made a concerted effort to develop a program that responds to the research on HR professionals of the future. Furthermore, it is a program that continues to be refined as the field changes. To describe how we have attempted to change and adapt our program to the new realities facing human resource managers, I will briefly present a case study of the MOB program at Brigham Young University. Hopefully this case study will prove instructive to others who are contemplating changes in their programs.

Reengineering the MOB Program at Brigham Young University

Historically, the program was designed to train students to be OD practitioners. Thus courses in organization theory, organizational change, interpersonal relations, and

TABLE II Comparison of Three Programs: MOB, MHRIR, and MBA.

	Pepperdine (MOD)	Minnesota (MHRIR)	Michigan (MBA)
Required Classes or Areas of Study	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Foundations of OD 2. Small Systems Diagnosis and Change 3. Strategy and Organization Design 4. Integrative Action Strategies 5. Research and Evaluation Methods 6. Managing Changes in Strategy 7. Large Scale Systems Change 8. Applied Research Project 9. Current Issues and Trends in the Management of Change 10. Applied Research Project 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staffing, Training, and Development 2. Organizational Behavior and Theory 3. Compensation and Benefits 4. Labor Market Analysis 5. Labor Relations and Collective Bargaining 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Financial Accounting 2. Microeconomics 3. Marketing 4. Statistics 5. Corporate Strategy 6. Finance 7. World Economy 8. Managerial Accounting 9. Human Behavior and Organizations 10. Operations Management 11. Principles of Corporate Finance 12. Action Project 13. Business Elective <p>Second Year</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategy II 2. Ethics or Law 3. Managerial Writing
Elective Classes	None	<p><i>Entire HR Course Offerings</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. PC Basics for HRM and ILR 2. Career Development 3. Leadership Seminar 4. Women at Work 5. HR Management Simulation 6. Immigration and AM Labor Force 7. Directed Studies 8. Human Resource Management 9. Organizational Development Methods 10. HR On-Line Research and Report Methods 11. Staffing: Employee Selection 12. Managing Compensation 13. Seminar in Manufacturing 14. Design and Administration of Training 15. Special Topics—Global HRM 16. Special Topics—HRM in Japan 17. HR Research Methods 18. HR for Entrepreneurial Firms 19. Directed Studies 20. Workshop in HR 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bargaining and Influence Behavior 2. Managing Creativity 3. Management-Union Relations 4. Interpersonal Dynamics 5. Reward Systems 6. International HR 7. Organization Change 8. Managing Innovation 9. Workforce Diversity: OD 10. Workforce Diversity: Personal Development 11. Organization Design 12. HR as a Competitive Advantage 13. Women and Change 14. Crisis Management 15. Organization for Quality Excellence 16. Developing and Managing High-Performance Teams 17. Leading a Learning Organization 18. Leadership, Vision, and Change 19. Network Tools for Consulting 20. Organizational Diagnosis and Consulting

consulting dominated the curriculum. Business courses were not required, and only one elective "personnel" course was offered. In general, the students saw themselves as consultants, helping to make the workplace more humane and functioning as a philosophical counterpoint to MBAs and Masters of Accounting students. They also viewed personnel as a field that was rather staid, with little excitement or new ideas. With this orientation, the largest percentage of MOB graduates went on to play organization development roles in large organizations, particularly in the oil and consumer products industries.

The early 1990s brought with it a revolution in the thinking of faculty members about the role of the organizational behavior program. Research by David Ulrich at Michigan (who was a student in the MOB program and who has had a close association with the MOB faculty over the years) highlighted the fact that the human resource role was expanding to include many traditional OD theories and interventions. He found that successful human resource professionals understood the business and business strategy, had technical competence in human resources, and were effective change agents. The faculty in the organizational behavior department were impressed with these new data, and the experience of many of the successful MOB alumni tended to confirm the findings of Ulrich and others. Successful graduates understood business strategy and had developed a broad set of skills to help companies manage change—many of these skills were learned after leaving the program. Fortunately, the MOB program encouraged its students to be active learners. Its graduates had learned how to adapt to the demands of various jobs.

As a result of the research about the new realities facing human resource and organization development professionals, the faculty began a series of intense meetings to reexamine the mission of the MOB program and its curriculum. As a result of these in-depth discussions—as well as input from a newly created alumni advisory board consisting of MOB alumni, faculty, and students—the faculty decided to embark on a new approach to training students. While organizational change would continue to be the focus of the pro-

gram, the fields of strategy, human resource management, and organization development would serve as the pillars supporting the curriculum. In addition to these areas of focus for the program, the curriculum included a background in business fundamentals (e.g., accounting, finance, marketing, operations) and employed a pedagogy that would encourage students to think critically, to integrate across fields, and to have a cross-cultural perspective. As a result of this redesign effort, the curriculum was overhauled to require 35 hours of coursework (out of 53) that covered the various areas of emphasis in the program. New faculty in strategy and HR were also hired to implement this new curriculum.

One dimension of training masters students that was not described in Table I concerns developing students who are able to think critically and generate good theory. As Ulrich (1997) notes, successful HR professionals have skills in organizational diagnosis. To be effective diagnosticians, HR professionals of the future will also need to be able to gather and analyze data, then generate well-grounded theories that will help to explain cause-and-effect relationships. For example, managers want to know why profits are falling, productivity is low, or absenteeism is on the rise. To take action, good theories that explain cause-and-effect relationships are needed to ensure that the managers are solving the right problem. It does little good to try to improve productivity through management training if the cause of lower productivity is outdated equipment. Unfortunately, the field of management has failed to produce general theories that apply in all situations and circumstances. HR professionals must be able to build contextual theories—theories that apply to a specific situation and context—that can be used to diagnose and solve organizational problems.

Theory building has been the cornerstone of the MOB program at Brigham Young University. Students are not only required to be versed in theories of the field, they are also encouraged to develop new theories and models to explain phenomena they encounter as they study and work in organizations. Recently, David Whetten, a well-known organization theorist, has joined our faculty to further hone

the theory-building skills of our MOB students, and courses are designed to motivate students to carefully critique extant theory as well as develop theories of their own. Our approach to training HR champions of the future is to ensure that students have the theoretical and diagnostic skills necessary to develop clear theories and models that can be used to increase organizational effectiveness.

Conclusion

Creating HR champions for the twenty-first century will not be an easy task. The skill set

requires both breadth and depth. To train the kind of student needed by organizations, universities will need faculty with a wide variety of skills who are willing to develop academic programs that will respond to the needs of the twenty-first century. Organizations will also need to be prepared to accept and develop this new type of human resource professional. Our experience with the MOB program at Brigham Young University has been exciting and challenging. Hopefully, our experiment will provide food for thought for directors and faculty of other programs who are seeking to improve the quality of HR professionals in the future.

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