Training Failure as a Consequence of Organizational Culture

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Organizations spend as much as US$200 billion annually on training and development; however, much of this investment appears squandered on ill-conceived or poorly implemented interventions. Scholars have pondered the causes of failed training for decades, focusing on issues such as methods, program design, and trainee characteristics. Recent interest in the role of organizational context rarely extends to organizational culture. The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between training failure and the manifestations of various levels of culture.

Keywords: *HRD profession; organizational culture; training failure*

For decades, writers (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001) have proclaimed the strategic importance of training, a fundamental component of human resource development (HRD). Yet, though organizations spend as much as US$200 billion annually on training and development (Carnevale, Gainer, & Villet, 1990; Facteau, Dobbins, Russell, Ladd, & Kudisch, 1995), much of this investment appears squandered on ill-conceived or poorly implemented interventions (Awoniyi, Griego, & Morgan, 2002; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992). Few organizations attempt to show a positive link between training and positive change. However, the literature is replete with reports of failure, especially in trendy areas such as participation (Wagner, 1994), total quality management (Bennett, Lehman, & Forst, 1999), leadership (Conger, 1993), outdoor training (Badger & Sadler-Smith, 1997), team-building (Staw & Epstein, 2000), reengineering (Jaffe & Scott, 1998), management development (M. Clarke, 1999), and diversity (Schultz, 2003). Along with wasting immeasurable time and billions of dollars, failed interventions promote costly litigation (Eyres, 1998) and growing cynicism about the worth of organizational change efforts (Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 2000), and contribute to the persistent undervaluing of the training profession (Shank, 1998).

The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between training failure and manifestations of the dominant culture and subcultures of organizations,

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TABLE 1: Elements of Model Showing Relationship Between Training Failure and Manifestations of Organizational Culture and Subcultures

Forms of training failure
- Unskilled practitioner provides invalid training
- Skilled practitioner provides invalid training
- Skilled practitioner provides valid training but learning does not transfer
- Skilled practitioner provides valid training; learning transfers but failure perceived

Elements of culture
- Artifacts
- Patterns of behavior
- Behavioral norms
- Values
- Fundamental assumptions

Levels of organizational culture
- Organizational (dominant)
- Function
- Hierarchical level
- Line or staff
- Gender
- Profession

Characteristics of human resource development profession
- Systematic body of knowledge
- Performance standards
- Standardized training and restricted membership
- Formation of occupational associations

described in Table 1. After a brief discussion of training effectiveness, I integrate factors related to ineffective training within an organizational culture framework that provides insight into understanding organizational-level constraints. Next, I consider the sociopolitical context of organizational subcultures and argue that the characteristics of the HRD profession form a weak subculture that must defer to more powerful subcultures. I conclude with a discussion of implications for scholars and practitioners.

HRD encompasses many disciplines; however, I focus on the training function for several reasons. First, although there is relentless debate about the HRD construct, there is little disagreement that training is a core component of HRD (Gold, Rodgers, & Smith, 2003; Nadler, 1984; Swanson, 2001). The argument that HRD has moved beyond simplistic training belies the historical meaning of training as "planned programs of organizational improvement through changes in skill, knowledge, attitude, or social behavior" (Cascio, 1988, p. 348). Cascio moved beyond the narrow view of training as job-related, highly structured, knowledge-based learning to elements of development (Noe, Wilk, Mullen, & Wanek, 1997). Second, the "science of training" (Salas & Kosarzycki, 2003) is more comprehensive and accepted than other fields such as organizational development (Sammut, 2001). HRD scholars frequently cite training literature reflecting a consensus on many concepts

related to design, implementation, and evaluation as well as the growing recognition of contextual factors (Goldstein, 1980; Latham, 1988; McGehee & Thayer, 1961; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992). Third, understanding why training fails offers insight into barriers to the effectiveness of other forms of HRD interventions (Eddy, D'Abate, Tannenbaum, Givens-Skeaton, & Robinson, 2006). The apparent pervasiveness of training failure, despite nearly a century of research, should give pause to HRD professionals. If training interventions rarely succeed, the odds are dismal for more complex programs.

As the extensive list of references demonstrates, I examined literature across several disciplines, in addition to HRD, including psychology, sociology, management, and adult education. This is not a comprehensive review of all literature related to training effectiveness, HRD, and organizational culture but is intended to be representative.

Training Effectiveness

For nearly a century, scholars have studied learning and training (Ford, 1997). Yet doubt about training effectiveness has prompted a surge in research in recent years (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001). Some writers link training and related fields such as adult education and HRD to "faddish," untested interventions (Goldstein, 1991). In 1988, Latham asserted that scholars have conducted excellent research; however, "practitioners and practitioner journals appear to be unaffected by these advancements" (p. 577). Twenty-five years later, Salas and Kosarzycki (2003) claimed practitioners still favored untested fads. For example, in the face of increasing litigation (Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2003) and the unexpectedly slow advancement of women and minorities into higher levels of management (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006), organizations offer poorly designed and theoretically dubious interventions that actually increase the likelihood of litigation or perceptions of inequity (Schultz, 2003).

DeSimone, Werner, and Harris (2006) conceded that training effectiveness is "relative," but only to the extent that there is no single measure of training success such as productivity or job satisfaction. There are numerous qualitative and quantitative evaluation approaches useful in determining training effectiveness. However, any HRD intervention, including training, that fails to meet specific goals is ineffective (Alvarez, Salas, & Garofano, 2004; N. Clarke, 2004). Training effectiveness goes beyond evaluation. It involves identifying what affects learning before, during, and after training (Ford, 1997; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001). Practitioners seldom assess needs, establish specific objectives, or evaluate beyond Kirkpatrick's (1976) reaction level (Arthur, Bennett, Edens, & Bell, 2003; N. Clarke, 2004; Sugrue, 2005; Swanson, 2001). One of the more optimistic estimates suggests no more than 15% of learning transfers to the job (Cromwell & Kolb, 2004). The extent of failure is unknown; however, there are numerous depictions of corporate

and government fiascos in the popular press (Shank, 1998). For example, the editor of *Industry Week* (Panchak, 2000) wrote a scathing column describing corporate training as "ridiculously silly at best and insultingly disrespectful of the workers' intelligence at worst" (para. 4). The author asserted, "Virtually every other area of management expenditures requires an analysis of the return on investment" (para. 5). The irony was irresistible for late night talk show hosts who lampooned Burger King's "teambuilding retreat" where several marketing employees severely burned their feet walking on hot coals ("Burger King Workers," 2001).

Fear of scrutiny has not prevented ineptitude in governmental agencies. Hosenball (1995) derided diversity training at the Federal Aviation Administration that forced male air traffic controllers to run a gauntlet of females directed to make sexual comments and inappropriately touch their male coworkers (*Hartman v. Pena*, 1995). A *New York Daily News* (Feiden, 2003) investigation exposed how the U.S. Postal Service wasted millions of dollars on "bizarre bonding and team-building exercises and playing goofy games" that did "little or nothing to curb postal inefficiencies." Finally, in response to complaints of inaccurate information provided to taxpayers, the Internal Revenue Service provided training to thousands of employees. A General Accounting Office (2005) study concluded that "despite the large investment of resources, significant congressional attention, and Human Capital Office guidance" (p. 18), the IRS failed to develop training goals, could not provide data on time or money spent on training, and relied on unsophisticated forms of evaluation.

Failed interventions can result from incompetent or indifferent trainers (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Salas & Kosarzycki, 2003; Swanson, 2001; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992); however, highly qualified practitioners, ready to assess needs and evaluate results, may be stymied by management's unwillingness to spend time and money on proper design. Practitioners face enormous pressure from organization leaders to embrace the latest training fad or quick fix. Consequently, a vicious cycle ensues as organizations hire the incompetent or ignore the competent whose inevitable failure sustains a "self-perpetuating cycle of powerlessness" (Galang & Ferris, 1997).

At the organizational level, training fails in at least four ways: (a) unskilled practitioners provide flawed interventions; (b) skilled practitioners provide flawed interventions because they do not have the power or influence to design a valid program; (c) skilled practitioners provide valid interventions, but learning does not transfer to the job; (d) skilled practitioners provide valid interventions that produce positive transfer, but effectiveness is not perceived. Much of the effectiveness literature focuses on training design, content, and evaluation. There is considerable understanding of the mechanics of failure resulting from unskilled practitioners. However, there is little recognition of the entrenched values, beliefs, and assumptions that prevent effective training.

Organizational Culture

Clearly, training does not take place in a vacuum. Even with perfect design and enthusiastic trainees, positive change requires organizational support (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-Lamastro, 1990). How often, for example, do practitioners conduct training to foster independent thinking only to send the trainee back to an autocratic manager? Any form of needs assessment is rare, but organizational analysis is almost nonexistent (Arthur et al., 2003; Saari, Johnson, McLaughlin, & Zimmerle, 1988). Writers criticize the practitioner (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992) for ignoring organizational factors; however, only recently have scholars considered the importance of organizational context.

Culture has been described as "one of the most powerful and stable forces operating in organizations" (Schein, 1996, p. 231). Definitions of *culture* vary but typically include concepts such as shared beliefs, values, and assumptions that are reflected in attitudes and behavior (Kopelman, Brief, & Guzzo, 1990). There has been scant scholarly attention to the influence of organization culture on training effectiveness (Palthe & Kossek, 2003). However, there has been considerable interest in the relationship between organizational culture and variables such as productivity (Kopelman et al., 1990), use of technology (Zammuto & O'Connor, 1992), employee retention (Sheridan, 1992), improvement initiatives (Detert, Schroeder, & Mauriel, 2000), discipline (Franklin & Pagan, 2006), and absence (Martocchio, 1994). Others have suggested a link between organizational culture and human resource management (HRM) practices (Aycan, Kanungo, & Sinha, 1999; Ferris et al., 1998; Kopelman et al., 1990; Palthe & Kossek, 2003; Sheridan, 1992), although the general focus is on HRM as a mediator of culture rather than the reverse.

There have been a few attempts to identify a learning culture construct. Several researchers (Egan, Yang, & Bartlett, 2004) have adopted the organizational learning culture survey developed by Watkins and Marsick (1993). However, these descriptions of *culture* seem "virtually indistinguishable" from *climate* (Denison, 1996) and are better identified as manifestations of culture (Rousseau, 1990). *Organizational climate* is described as "individual perceptions of organizational characteristics and attribute" (R. A. Cooke & Rousseau, 1988, p. 249). To be sure, climate is a reflection of culture; however, climate describes the what of an organization whereas culture describes the why (Kopelman et al., 1990).

The pursuit of an "ideal" culture has been disappointing (Karahanna, Evaristo, & Strite, 2005). Specific traits, shared by many cultures, may interact in unique ways depending on cultural beliefs, values, and assumptions as well as specific characteristics of the organization such as history, industry, and economy (Zammuto & O'Connor, 1992). Generalizability is a problem because the same intervention can produce different results within or among organizations. Thus, rather than proposing a universal model of learning or

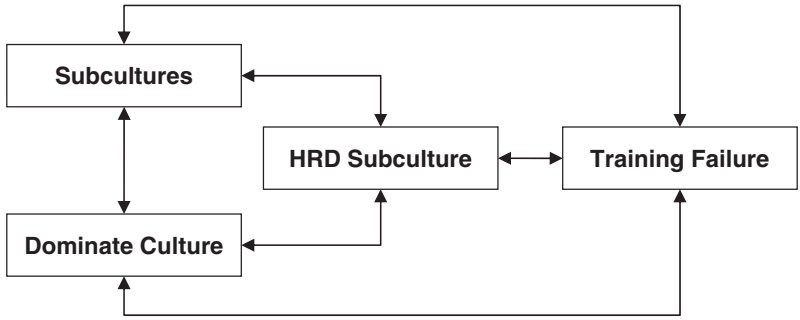

FIGURE 1: A Model Showing the Relationship Between Training Failure and Manifestations of Organizational Culture and Subcultures

training culture, I suggest various ways organizational culture and subcultures facilitate or inhibit training effectiveness (see Figure 1).

Elements of Culture

Several writers have described culture as multilayered. Schein (1990) proposed three levels of culture: artifacts, values, and underlying assumptions. Rousseau (1990) envisioned five layers: artifacts, patterns of behavior, behavioral norms, values, and fundamental assumptions. Artifacts and patterns of behavior are observable manifestations that reflect and perpetuate underlying norms, values, and assumptions. I draw on Rousseau's model to examine the organizational context of training effectiveness from a cultural perspective.

Artifacts

At the surface, artifacts are the "physical manifestations and products of cultural activity" (Rousseau, 1990, p. 157). Artifacts provide the most salient features of a culture (Schein, 1990) and can convey values and assumptions. In fact, Galang and Ferris (1997) found that symbolic actions were linked more strongly to an HR department's power to gain organizational resources than unionization, HR performance, or the attitudes of top management. Artifacts often convey organizational support for training through impressive training facilities, certificates of training success, graduation ceremonies, prominent involvement of important figures in training functions such as top executives, and the high hierarchical position of training leaders.

Symbols can project power and rank (Elsbach, 2004); however, the real meaning of artifacts can be misconstrued. An organization may use its impressive training facilities or large budget to provide training of no value to the organization or the employee. Training may be used to "pacify the masses" (Jermier,

Slocum, Fry, & Gaines, 1991) or improve the organization's image. For example, many organizations frame diversity training as a symbol of management's support for equality when the real purpose is to avoid litigation (Schultz, 2003).

Patterns of Behavior

Patterns of behavior are observable activities such as decision making, communication, and new employee socialization that reflect underlying beliefs, values, and assumptions (Rousseau, 1990). A clear link between training and an organization's career development and reward system signals that training leads to recognition and advancement (Santos & Stuart, 2003). New employees rely on cultural cues to determine the importance of training (Cromwell & Kolb, 2004; Franklin & Pagan, 2006). Even minor events can influence perceptions of training and other HRD practices (Rentsch, 1990). Simply labeling an intervention *voluntary* may imply irrelevance (Baldwin & Magjuka, 1997). On the other hand, supervisory behaviors such as encouraging subordinates before training or praising new behavior after training build positive perceptions of training (Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993; Xiao, 1996). Organizational leaders can trivialize training through symbolic behavior such as hiring unqualified practitioners, excluding HRD leaders from the strategic planning process, or reflexively firing trainers at the first sign of an economic slowdown (Ruona, Lynham, & Chermack, 2003).

Behavioral Norms

Behavioral norms are the beliefs of organizational members that guide actions (Rousseau, 1990) and emerge from previous experience and cultural reinforcement (Church & Waclawski, 2001). Through socialization, individuals develop expectations about the consequences of behaviors (R. A. Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; Martocchio, 1994). For example, individuals may learn through prior events or stories that training is a frivolous endeavor (Bloor & Dawson, 1994). Critics who chastise trainers for offering ad hoc interventions fail to consider the futility of conducting a needs assessment and sophisticated evaluation if "training is perceived as a waste of time and as a way to avoid work" (Clark, Dobbins, & Ladd, 1993, p. 304). Beliefs about the potential benefits of training such as promotion or increases in pay better predict the likelihood for training success than the training budget (Elsbach, 2004).

Even if organizational members support training in general, a specific intervention may fail because its purpose conflicts with cultural norms. Success depends on the beliefs of various groups including organizational leaders, supervisors, trainees, HRD managers, and training facilitators. A clash of behavioral norms among any of these groups will thwart effectiveness. Thus, if first-line supervisors earn bonuses for restraining labor costs through high

turnover, practitioners will find little interest in employee development. To create an affirmative defense against charges of harassment, many organizations provide training that encourages reporting events to management. Yet employees will not report harassment if they fear retaliation (Knapp, Faley, Ekeberg, & Dubois, 1997).

Values

Values are the importance given certain aspects of the organization such as quality versus quantity (Rousseau, 1990) and affect the preference for and effectiveness of HRM practices (Ferris et al., 1998). No intervention will succeed in the face of conflicting values. For example, organizational values shape the overall perception of training as an expense or an investment. Specific interventions such as diversity training (Hemphill & Haines, 1997) or total quality management (Bennett et al., 1999) are doomed to fail when training content collides with organizational values (Ferris, Hochwarter, Buckley, Harrell-Cook, & Frink, 1999). Training designed to encourage creativity will not overcome a culture that rewards mediocrity. Even well-designed customer service training will not transfer if supervisors measure the number of transactions processed per hour rather than customer satisfaction.

Fundamental Assumptions

The most elusive yet powerful layer of culture is subconscious assumptions, the source for all other facets of culture. Schein (1984) explained that assumptions begin as values that are confirmed through experience until they become taken for granted. Consequently, it is difficult to identify assumptions because even individuals holding them are not mindful of their existence (Rousseau, 1990). This explains why managers may espouse great support for training but cut the training budget.

Assumptions determine the structure and content of the cognitive categories individuals use to encode, store, and retrieve information so that contradictory events may be ignored. This may be the greatest impediment to effective training (James, James, & Ashe, 1990). Because assumptions influence how individuals explain success or failure, even if an intervention is effective, improved performance may not be attributed to training (Hatch, 1993).

Subcultures

Saffold (1988) cautioned against presuming a unitary dominant culture or ignoring the impact of subcultures of different levels of power, status, and influence (R. A. Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Subcultures emerge from membership in various groupings based on function, hierarchical level, line or staff, gender, and profession (R. A. Cooke & Rousseau, 1988;

Helms & Stern, 2001; Schein, 1990). The shared values, beliefs, and assumptions of each subculture influence perceptions of and reactions to the dominant organizational culture (Helms & Stern, 2001) and subcultures (Palthe & Kossek, 2003). The influence of relationships within and between subcultures is central to understanding the persistent failure of training. Because of their membership in subcultures of limited power and status, HRD practitioners face a variety of challenges to the profession in general, to the function within the organization, or to the specific intervention. Rentsch (1990) cautioned that subcultural differences might require unique interventions for each "interaction" group. For example, perceptions of and responses to diversity training may vary as a consequence of subculture.

Function

Based on differences in various areas including technology, structure, and external influences, it is logical to assume that functional departments have their own culture that varies in degree of consistency with the dominant organizational culture (R. A. Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Members of these subcultures tend to share values and assumptions that are manifested in behavioral norms and artifacts unique to each department (Dansereau & Alutto, 1990; Trice, 1993). Conflict and power struggles between functions are common because of differences in goals and needs (Galang & Ferris, 1997). Perceived goal congruence between the function and the organization enhances the power and status of the department (Nauta & Sanders, 2001), which in turn influences perceived performance and value to the organization (Welbourne & Trevor, 2000). Relative to other functions, training has little power and prestige (Galang & Ferris, 1997). Too often, the training function is "seen as part of a weak or discredited personnel department" (Hallier & Butts, 2000, p. 376). "HR has not achieved the professional status that many practitioners in the field believe it deserves" (Langbert, 2005, p. 435). Writers have bemoaned HRM's lack of power and authority for more than a half-century when Drucker (1954) noted that HR managers grumble about their low status while focusing on quick-fix "gimmicks." Despite periodic assurances that HRM is ready to take its rightful place, its relevance may be declining. Many HR activities are outsourced (F. L. Cooke, Shen, & McBride, 2005) or transferred to line managers (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998).

Still, the capacity to disregard training does not fully explain why departments discount training. Many factors contribute to resistance. Even if there is general agreement on stated organizational variables such as objectives and strategies, department membership may influence perception (Welbourne & Trevor, 2000). For example, the company motto, "Customers come first," has distinctive meanings for production, accounting, and marketing (Dansereau & Alutto, 1990). Another source of resistance is disagreement about the design and content of training (Mathieu & Martineau, 1997). Members of the

accounting department may support Sarbanes-Oxley Act compliance training but reject input from the training manager in its planning. Santos and Stuart (2003) found that perceptions of training needs vary across departments. For example, top management might support training for sales but not customer service or production.

Attempts to differentiate training from HRM are not likely to improve the status and power of HRD. In his gloomy assessment of the state of the organization development (OD) profession, Sammut (2001) warned that HRM has its own troubles but is much stronger than OD. HRM is more entrenched in organizations, has more academic programs and certification options, and is more politically astute. As their long-established functions are outsourced, HRM practitioners are co-opting OD practices. HRD risks a similar fate (McGuire, Cross, & O'Donnell, 2005).

Hierarchical Level

Organization leaders create and sustain the official organizational culture (Jermier et al., 1991). Yet different hierarchical levels can produce distinct subcultures (Trice & Beyer, 1993). Stevenson and Bartunek (1996) observed that organizational members in similar positions share similar views of the dominant culture, in part based on the power linked to hierarchical levels. Training managers rarely participate in strategic planning, to some extent, because of their hierarchical standing (Rothwell & Kazanas, 1990). Subcultures at lower hierarchical levels are more likely to support "conflict avoidance, competition, and dependence" (R. A. Cooke & Rousseau, 1988). According to Holton (1998), HRD practitioners tend to be preoccupied with "pleasing the customer" instead of doing what is valid, which leads to interventions that are "dumb, ineffective, and sometimes unethical."

In organizational hierarchies, groups in the middle can face irreconcilable demands from the powerful above and the powerless below (Smith, 1983). Many trainers lament their powerlessness to demand sufficient time and resources to design effective training while being held accountable for failed interventions. It is typical for the top hierarchy to reserve decision-making authority for themselves but to assign the implementation of their decisions to others. If the implementation is successful, executives take credit; if the implementation fails, those in the middle get the blame (Palich & Hom, 1992).

On the other hand, practitioners may overestimate top management's sponsorship (McCracken & Wallace, 2000) or confuse "permission with support" (Baldwin & Magjuka, 1997). This is understandable given the penchant for executives to extol the importance of training. Executives report more positive views of HR than do line managers (Wright, McMahan, Snell, & Gerhart, 2001). Yet it is a mistake to assume that espoused attitudes or survey responses denote values and assumptions (Pager & Quillian, 2005; Siehl & Martin, 1990). Managers may support training in the abstract but experience and

organizational constraints, not espoused values, dictate behavior (Schein, 1984). For instance, Santos and Stuart (2003) found that only 34% of managers reported using new skills or knowledge learned in training compared to 61% of nonmanagers. This gives credence to estimates that the success rate of management development training is more dismal than other forms of training (M. Clarke, 1999; Franklin & Pagan, 2006).

Line or Staff

To some extent, conflict between line and staff is a fact of organizational life, especially in circumstances of low profit margin and intense competition (Church & Waclawski, 2001). Management support is crucial to training effectiveness (Clark et al., 1993; Xiao, 1996). Unfortunately, line managers often consider training a luxury they cannot afford because of more pressing needs (Santos & Stewart, 2003). Conversely, line managers may argue that training is too important to be left in the hands of incompetent or unrealistic practitioners. Increasingly, line managers are assuming responsibility for training policy and practice (Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003).

The rift between training and line management goes beyond the inherent line versus staff conflict (Church & Waclawski, 2001; Wright et al., 2001). Tension between HRM and line management has been long standing and often acrimonious. In a 1986 *Fortune* magazine article, Keichel (1986) contended that line managers often describe HR practitioners as "idiots" who harass line managers into implementing new programs while ignoring the bottom line. Nearly 30 years later, Hammonds (2005) issued his acerbic missive exploring "hatred" for HR, specifically mentioning training. He deplored what he viewed as the abuse of frazzled line managers by HR practitioners who "aren't the sharpest tacks in the box."

In most organizations, emphasis on the bottom line is a basic cultural assumption (Weick, 1979) and contributes to the propensity for line managers to discount the HRM function (Trice & Beyer, 1993). The inability or unwillingness to demonstrate results that are "organizationally valued" hurts the credibility of training managers (Taylor & O'Driscoll, 1998). Writers urge practitioners to better quantify their effectiveness (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Wright et al., 2001). Yet, beyond failure to measure, a more fundamental problem is disagreement over what constitutes effectiveness (McGuire et al., 2005). These debates serve to distract from any meaningful assessment.

Gender

The assumptions and values of most dominant organizational cultures and subcultures are upper management, and many professions are stereotypically masculine (Miller, 2002). Characteristics associated with masculinity include aggressive, ambitious, objective, independent, self-reliant, self-confident,

task-orientated, competent, and directive whereas characteristics associated with femininity include talkative, gentle, tactful, passive, empathetic, understanding, and sensitive (Glick, 1991). Traditionally, the concepts of masculinity and femininity are perceived to be antithetical (Klenke, 1996). This is key in creating and reinforcing "widely shared, taken for granted, oversimplified group differences" (Link & Phelan, 2001). Most occupations are stereotyped as either masculine or feminine, with masculine occupations linked to higher pay, higher status, and higher power (Evetts, 2003; Richeson & Ambady, 2001). "Full professions, virtually by definition, are the province of men" (Adams, 2003, p. 268).

Certain functions associated with HRM, including training, are perceived as female activities. Women are concentrated in areas that rarely lead to executive positions, such as HRM and public relations "where their 'softer' participatory style of management is viewed as better utilized" (Crampton & Mishra, 1999, p. 92). Based on the responses of males holding historically female jobs such as HRM, Lupton (2000) declared, "Real men do not work in personnel" (p. 43). According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2006), women make up 73% of HR managers compared to only 29% of general and operations managers and 17% of industrial production managers. The growing percentage of women in HRD has been linked to a decline in the status and perceived value of training as a contribution to organizational effectiveness and as a career (Hanscome & Cervero, 2003). Lupton asserted, "this association with women stems from personnel's origins as a welfare function and has proved difficult to dislodge despite the more managerial and strategic orientation of the modern-day function" (p. 40). Males in HRM advance faster and are more likely than females to enter senior HRM management positions with little knowledge or experience related to the field. Moreover, male HRM managers tend to undervalue stereotypical female functions such as training as solutions to organizational problems (Lupton, 2000).

Profession

Trice and Beyer (1993) stated that "the most highly organized, distinctive, and pervasive sources of subcultures in work organizations are people's occupations" (p. 178). Members of strong occupational cultures develop shared values, beliefs, and norms and may achieve substantial autonomy and deference from members of other subcultures. For example, because of their rigorous education, difficult certification process, and meticulous performance measures, most engineers are neither willing nor expected to compromise professional ethics and standards just to please members of other groups.

Historically, writers have lamented the pervasive ineptitude of many trainers, and HRD has not fared better (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Goldstein, 1991; Short, Bing, & Kehrhahn, 2003; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992). "There is limited evidence that HRD has really moved far from the fad-ridden gutters of false

short-term training panaceas" (Short et al., 2003, p. 239). Practitioners are chided for offering training interventions "without regard to their actual need . . . or theoretical basis" (Facteau et al., 1995, p. 2). Tannenbaum and Yukl reported that only 25% of organizations surveyed conducted any form of needs assessment and only 10% evaluated training outcomes. HRD practitioners are similarly disinclined to evaluate (Cascio, 2003; N. Clarke, 2004). Even knowledgeable practitioners will fail without sufficient standing to demand the time and resources necessary to design and implement effective training. Practitioners cannot challenge organizational values and assumptions at odds with the "social consciousness" of HRD (Bierema & D'Abundo, 2004) if only "dominant groups get their values and goals accepted as legitimate" (Bloor & Dawson, 1994, p. 279).

Characteristics of professional cultures include special knowledge, power to determine when and how to apply that knowledge, control over work, education standards of members, code of ethics, membership in professional associations, and reliance on other members as a reference group within the organization (Bloor & Dawson, 1994; Hollifield, Kosicki, & Becker, 2001; Trice, 1993). Based on an analysis of these factors, HRD is weak compared to professions such as medicine, law, engineering, accounting, or even HRM. A profession's strength is linked to issues such as "exclusive ownership of an area of expertise and knowledge and the power to define the nature of problems in that area as well as the control of access to potential solutions" (Evetts, 2003, p. 30). Instead, training practitioners are likely to adopt the beliefs and assumptions of a more dominate culture (Trice & Beyer, 1993).

Systematic body of knowledge. True professions are organized around bodies of knowledge over which its members strive to have "monopolistic control" (Jacobs, 1990). The unrelenting dispute over the theory and practice of HRD may be invigorating; however, it is difficult to establish a systematic body of knowledge without consensus. Debate often centers on seemingly mutually exclusive core values. Bierema and D'Abundo (2004) chided HRD professionals for their misplaced loyalties to organizations and profits instead of employees. However, practitioners must weigh the consequences and feasibility of challenging profit-driven cultures (McGuire et al., 2005).

Many practitioners prefer fads to interventions based on extensive training research (Camp, Hoyer, Laetz, & Vielhaper, 1991; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Salas & Kosarzycki, 2003). For example, the training manager of a large corporation questioned the practicality of training theory and research because, "in the real world, if you need the program tomorrow, you have to skip the analysis" (Kaeter, 1995, p. 67). In contrast, Caudron (2002) warned, "Corporate trainers stand to lose the most by hitching their wagons to the latest hot fad" (p. 39). The penalty for incompetence is so great that Orpen (1999) cautioned that it is "better not to offer training" if it is poorly designed or implemented

because it creates or confirms the belief that training is inconsequential or worse.

A professional code of ethics is a fundamental artifact of strong professions but requires a concrete theoretical foundation to be meaningful. This is especially critical in the face of recent corporate scandals. Yet, efforts to define unethical HRD behavior (Hatcher & Aragon, 2000) are hindered by the ongoing debate about the core values of the profession. Should professionals offer training linked solely to improved productivity or profit margins? Is it ethical to conduct ineffective training if a decision maker asks for it (Holton, 1998)? Moreover, discussions of ethics and morality often reveal an uncompromising tone that is dismissive of divergent points of view and the organizational realities of many HRD professionals (Krefting & Nord, 2003; McGuire et al., 2005).

Performance standards. There is a strong link between the credibility of training and demonstrable training effectiveness (Evetts, 2003; Galang & Ferris, 1997; Taylor & O'Driscoll, 1998). Yet evaluation beyond Kirkpatrick's (1976) reaction level is rare (Arthur et al., 2003; Sugrue, 2005). In fact, some practitioners disparage those who recommend evaluation. Deriding "training gurus and Ph.D. wannabes" who emphasize the importance of validity, a training executive argued that evaluating training effectiveness was a waste of money. He maintained that "management training is largely a matter of faith" and if employees seem interested in taking a training intervention, "it's probably good" (Hubbard, 1997, p. 77). Unfortunately, highly qualified practitioners may lack the perceived expert power to persuade organizational leaders that evaluation is worth the time and expense (Camp et al., 1991) or resist measuring results for fear of exposing a program's weakness (Goldstein, 1991).

Standardized training and restricted membership. Individuals are more likely to maintain the values of their profession than submit to the values of the organization when they share similar training and socialization (Bloor & Dawson, 1994). However, there is no standardized program or fundamental level of knowledge for trainers (Wexley & Latham, 1991). Instead, many practitioners learn on the job where the values and assumptions of the dominant culture guide behavior. Kuchinke (2001) asserted that HRD was not yet an academic discipline but claimed this was an asset because it afforded more flexibility. Nevertheless, it is impossible to develop a curriculum without consensus on core competencies.

Wang and Wang (2005) acknowledged that the "market" is flooded with practitioners boasting HRD expertise. Short et al. (2003) warned that HRD professionals cannot achieve status and power as long as many practitioners offer solutions "based on guesswork" instead of theory-driven research. Some practitioners recognize that the slow pace of professionalization undermines the field's credibility (Ruona et al., 2003) whereas others dismiss attempts at certification or credentialing (Claus & Collison, 2004; Kaeter, 1995). A recent

survey of HR professionals suggests that many decry their low credibility and autonomy but "attach little importance" to education and credentialing (Claus & Collison, 2004). Practitioners complain about the lack of legitimate power and suggest regulating more involvement (Shipton & McAuley, 1994). However, the number of unqualified or perceived unqualified trainers may be a greater obstacle (Gauld & Miller, 2004). The growing prevalence of the "accidental trainer" (Bartlett, 2003) harms the profession and ensures that effective training is accidental. It is foolhardy to demand autonomy and respect for a profession with a "low barrier to entry" (Claus & Collison, 2004).

Formation of occupational associations. There are several practitioner organizations including the Society for Human Resource Management and the American Society for Training and Development. These organizations consistently call for and support greater professionalism. However, the failure, especially among HRD writers, to reach consensus on the regulation or even definition of the field promotes continuous, exasperating, and often unfathomable debates. For example, in yet another examination of the HRD field, Sambrook (2004) observed that in the face of considerable disagreement on its theory or practice, "we continue our attempts to investigate HRD, so that we may understand better, teach and practice it" (p. 612).

Recommendations for Future Research

The incessant, often contentious, debate over fundamental HRD theory impedes HRD research, especially in the area of effectiveness (Bing, Kehrhahn, & Short, 2003; N. Clarke, 2004). Still, there has been growth in the number of studies exploring factors that contribute to effective training and other HRD processes. Unfortunately, findings that clearly show the value of needs assessment, criteria development, and evaluation appear to have limited influence on most practitioners. Research is needed to identify sources of resistance. Are practitioners unaware, apprehensive, or apathetic? The social-cognitive literature may shed light on the influence of perception and attribution on training effectiveness. Hallet's (2003) model of symbolic power could be useful in examining how perceived power evolves.

There is greater scholarly focus on the relationship between contextual factors and training effectiveness. However, organizational culture has been virtually ignored. Adopting the methodology used to examine the impact of organizational culture on functions such as discipline would be a logical start (Franklin & Pagan, 2006). Understanding the cultural beliefs and assumptions about the function and the profession is crucial to developing new strategies for elevating training and, ultimately, HRD. The use of qualitative methods such as the critical incident technique can better explain the gap between what individuals say and what they do (Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002). Asking

respondents to rank the relative importance of specific organizational practices can reduce social desirability bias.

Conclusion

Researchers investigate the pervasiveness of ineffective training and offer solutions; however, practitioners appear undaunted (Cascio, 2003). Its complexity and importance underrated, training is "devolving" to line management (Heraty & Morley, 1995) and increasingly labeled a "dead end" occupation (Hanscome & Cervero, 2003). At first glance, achieving training success is a simple matter of following well-established guidelines derived from decades of research. However, I suggest that ill-conceived or poorly executed programs reflect more than incompetence or unwillingness. Training failure can be a manifestation of the values, beliefs, and assumptions shared by members of various levels of organizational culture. The disregard for sound practices is an immediate cause of failure but also a reflection of cultural barriers that can circumvent the best-designed program. Beliefs that training is simple, unimportant, or pointless generate behaviors such as employing incompetent trainers, rejecting the recommendations of competent trainers, discouraging transfer of learning to the job, and failing to recognize positive transfer.

A condescending attitude toward training also undermines the profession. For example, it is perplexing that some writers propose outsourcing training so that HRD practitioners can pursue activities that are more complex. In reality, even simple interventions are challenging. What could be simpler than teaching highly educated professionals to wash their hands? Yet studies show an alarming level of noncompliance (Lankford et al., 2003).

Ultimately, training effectiveness depends on the power and status of the profession. Central to overcoming bias against training and HRD is improving the image of HRD. Real or perceived training failure undermines the profession. Nothing is more critical than reaching agreement on core competencies. The pursuit of a grand theory should not preclude consensus on midrange theories including the social context of training effectiveness (Ferris, Hall, Royle, & Martocchio, 2004). HRD must define itself or leave the task to others.

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