The Dynamics of the HRD Profession in the Netherlands

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Since 1990, studies have been carried out by the University of Twente to describe, compare and validate HRD roles, competencies and outputs between HRD practitioners in the USA and Europe. In 1993, a replication of the ASTD study was carried out in the Netherlands, which concluded that most of the ASTD roles were reflected in Dutch HRD practice. Findings indicate that the HRD professional in the Netherlands is largely defined as a classical or typical type of trainer.

Keywords: HRD Competencies, HRD Roles, HRD Professional

"Is the HRD profession going to change?" This is the principal question of this replication study, carried out in the Netherlands between January 1999 and September 1999. Since the beginning of the nineties, many comparative surveys have been conducted in the UK, Italy, Belgium, Northern Ireland (Nijhof & De Rijk, 1997), Germany (Odenthal & Nijhof, 1996), and the Netherlands (Van Ginkel, Mulder & Nijhof, 1996). The main goal of these preliminary studies was to gain a picture of the HRD profession in Europe and to see whether the profession is similar to the ASTD roles and competencies described by McLagan et al. (1989). The original question is therefore descriptive and comparative. In most of the studies, a trial was made to validate the outcomes according to the "McLagan Model". In some cases, and in line with the original studies, the question of HRD profiles was expanded in the direction of professional development and relationships to organizational characteristics of companies and HRD departments (Valkeavaara, 1997) and related to theories of personal growth.

Because of the time lag between the first study in the Netherlands (1993) and the situation in 1999, some new insights into the profession and the changes in the world of HRD have stimulated new discussions and questions about the changes in the profession in the last seven years. The availability of a zero-base data set from 1993 provides the opportunity for a replication study, and to see whether the HRD profession has changed. The basic question is therefore whether the HRD profession has changed and, if so, how and why? The assumption is that, on the basis of new trends, new roles have appeared and older ones changed. The study has the character of a monitor, following the main effects of trends in a certain occupational group, to identify new roles and competencies. The study can also falsify theses about the effects of view of learning organizations and their expected impact of turning HRD professionals into coaches and guides, instead of professional trainers. This information can also help to update HRD courses and programs at universities.

The main question of this study is descriptive in nature, and can be broken down into a set of sub-questions:
- What roles do HRD practitioners play, and are these different from 1993?
- What competencies and outputs are related to the roles in 1993 and 1999? Is there any relevant change to be perceived?
- Do megatrends have an impact on the work of HRD practitioners? What, how and why?

The following sections describe the theoretical background of the role studies as well as the trends and their implications for the field of HRD.

Theoretical Background: Professionalization, Role Concept and Performance

" Professional development is [...} the process by which individuals increase their understanding and knowledge, and/or improve their skills and abilities, to perform better in their current positions or to prepare themselves for a position to which they can realistically aspire in the near future" (McCullough, 1987, p. 37). This definition underlines the individual aspect of the professional, the necessity to improve current skills, to perform better and to prepare for the future. This definition is different from professionalization as a process of a group of professionals, in order to gain recognition and accreditation in society, which some writers define as identity formation (Thijssen, 1988). According to Thijssen, this identity formation process consists of four stages:
- task concentration
- job differentiation
- job standardization
- identity profiling

The Dutch Association of HRD Practitioners (NVvO) is nowadays very active in supporting standardization

and certification. This means that the membership is perceived as positioned at the second stage of identity formation, although in many cases steps toward the fourth level can be identified. The number of scholars and professorships at universities related to HRD has multiplied in the last ten years, as have journals and bulletins, conferences and organizations. At national and international level (European as well as global) not only have many new journals appeared in the last five years, but so have associations and conference organizations partly related to HRD, further education and vocational education as producers of initial jobholders. Alongside this process of identity formation, the field of research into HRD and HRM practice shows progress in terms of model evolution and model validation.

In Models of Excellence (McLagan, 1983), 15 roles of HRD practitioners were identified, which could be used for training and development and for describing the field of practice. The study was also criticized for lacking theoretical foundations and the absence of practical consequences. In 1989, McLagan & Sudolnik adopted the critique and replicated the study, using expert appraisals and validating panels. The result of this study was a total of 11 roles and 74 outputs; each role consisted of competencies in order to produce outcomes. In fact, human performance technology and role theory formed the theoretical basis of the study. Using cluster analysis and factor analysis, patterns of roles, competencies and outputs could be identified and validated. In 1996, however, McLagan reflected on these studies in the light of new trends, like information and communication technology, the rise of democracies, globalizing processes in business and industry, the trend toward core competencies of companies, outsourcing, views on the learning organization, and cost-benefit relationships, mostly leading to reduced HRD departments. On the basis of these trends, McLagan identified nine "new roles", which are, however, quite similar to those of 1989. Three roles that disappeared in her new scheme were carried out by more than 25% of the Dutch HRD practitioners in 1993, which is a substantial number.

From the viewpoint of Performance Improvement, Rothwell (1996) distinguished four new roles for HRD practitioners with the core competencies connected to these four roles:
1. Analyst, performing trouble-shooting procedures to diagnose gaps in human performance and identify opportunities for performance improvement;
2. Intervention specialist, selecting the right interventions to cover performance problems;
3. Change manager, being responsible for the implementation of interventions consistent with the intended results;
4. Evaluator, tracking the impact of the interventions and the consequences of the changes.

Rothwell defines 38 competencies and 158 outputs. The competencies are divided into 15 core competencies which are valid for all roles, and 23 competencies, each of which applies to a specific role. Outputs are split into *enabling and terminal outputs*. Terminal outputs are conditional upon enabling outputs. This is an important distinction when compared with the McLagan outputs. In McLagan's conception, all roles, competencies and outputs can have the same weight and relevance and have the same function. Rothwell takes the view of a workflow in which different competencies and outputs play different roles in different phases of the work process. Work is seen as a holistic pattern of activities to realize performance improvement. As a consequence of this conception, the ASTD entrusted to Rothwell the conducting of a new study in 1997 and 1998 of roles and competencies (Rothwell, Sanders & Soper, 1999). Instead of talking about HRD, the authors define workplace learning and performance (WLP) as "the integrated use of learning and other interventions for the purpose of improving individual and organizational performance" (p. xiii). The research is based on the question of which competencies WLP practitioners, senior WLP practitioners and line managers see as essential, now and within five years. Seven new roles have emerged from this study, with competencies and outputs. What is new is that the role of intervention specialist has been split into two new roles: intervention selector and intervention designer/developer. The sequence of roles is very dominant in this study: workflow is essential in this type of analysis. When looking at the outcomes of the McLagan and Rothwell studies, the differences prove to be marginal, although the differences between outputs in enabling and terminal are meaningful.

The European role studies of HRD by the University of Twente were greatly influenced by the ASTD studies. These studies show slight differences in culture and differentiation. The conclusion is that the role definitions are similar, but most of the time more competencies and outputs are selected per role. It could be said that the HRD roles of McLagan (1989) are valid for many European associations, but the content of the roles in terms of jobs and outputs seems to be broader (Odenthal & Nijhof, 1996). This might reflect the dominant role of small and medium-sized enterprises on the European continent, where jobs are more broadly conceived.

While the studies of McLagan et al. (1989), Rothwell et al. (1999) and Nijhof et al. (1997) have a lot of commonalities and show fairly stable results in time, the question is whether the original survey of 1993 should be changed on the basis of new insights into the world of work of the HRD practitioner. In order to make a decision on this, new trends in the field of HRD were analyzed to find indicators for new roles, competencies, and outputs. In the following section, an analysis is made of the trends and implications.

Trends and Implications

It is not easy to detect trends in HRD in a reliable and valid way. The distinction between a hype and a trend is not always unproblematic. When a trend is "a general tendency or course" (Webster's New World, 1997) and a hype " a promotion in a sensational way", it is clear that a trend in HRD is typified by its general character and can be identified in scientific journals and debates as serious scientific paradigm switches of thinking and research. Based on this notion, we will try to describe in a nutshell trends at the global level, at organizational level, at the level of an HRD department and at the level of the HRD professional. Some of these are based on empirical research, and some are idiosyncratic in nature. In all cases, there is some qualitative or quantitative argument to be considered.

Global Trends

Learning seems to be more important than training nowadays. This basic understanding shows a move away from the supply of standardized or customized training to employees, who are responsible themselves for lifelong or lifetime learning. Employability and transferability are becoming the leading motives for business and industry to see human capital as important resources with an exchange value. If employees invest in themselves through learning, the decision and organization about learning moves away from the organization to the individual. It is not too difficult to predict that the price to be paid for the 24-hour economy will be lack of loyalty, lack of commitment, and unstable organizations (Nijhof, De Jong & Beukhof, 1998).

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) in work and learning will have a great impact on HRD. "Just-in-time learning" seems to be one of the issues of learning at the workplace (Bastiaens, 1997). But ICT can also be used as a tool for learning outside the company and as a global communication tool. The worker as a self-directed learner would use this technology in the near future for employability, mobility and transferability in a learning society (Nijhof, 1999). Matching learning needs and organizing competencies and knowledge is possible using these new tools by intranet and internet; knowledge banks and intranets could be used for knowledge management and distance learning (Nijhof, 1997). The variation in learning modes, places and ages will be greater than ever. Classroom teaching will drop back to marginal proportions. The idea of learning as construction - as a social event - forces people to rethink their roles in training and learning, and to reframe designs and strategies for HRD departments (Lassnigg, 2001).

Trends at the Organizational Level

One of the most influential concepts at the organizational level is the concept of the learning organization and organizational learning (Senge, 1991) and, as a consequence of this concept, a whole series of studies of knowledge management (Davenport & Prusak, 1998), knowledge creation, and boundary crossing as a new interpretation of transfer as expanded learning emerged (Engeström, 1994). In many cases, there is a convergence with the psychology of learning according to the concepts of constructivism (Billet, 2001; Phillips, 1995; Simons & Ruijters, 2001) and anthropology (Wenger, 1998). Critique (Philips, 1995), however, may help to distinguish between very naïve forms of learning. In many cases, behaviorism is alive in performance technology, and many learning processes can be organized quite effectively according to the principles of cognitivism. Situated learning, cooperative learning and team learning could be powerful means of learning from a constructive view. The consequence is a redefinition of learning and learning environments (Kaiser & Holton, 1998).

Trends at the Level of the HRD Department and the HRD Professional

Some writers see collective learning and the ability to do this as an organization as a precondition for the future. Based on the notions of Nonaka and Takeuchi (1991) of sharing tacit knowledge and expertise, many HRD staff should break away from their roles and competencies, which are based on traditional models of classroom learning and formal knowledge exchange (Eraut, 2001). The role of HRD practitioner, especially the role of trainer, will disappear, while the tendency is for employees to learn through experience at the workplace. If lifelong learning is a serious issue, employee flexibility and employability is placed on the political and business agenda (Brown & Keep, 1999; Nijhof, Van Kieft & Van Woerkom, 2001; Sprenger, 1998). The future role of HRD practitioners could change to that of coach.

The use of new technologies, like Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS), as tools for learning at the workplace is predicted to be one of the growing fields in HRD. Bassi, Cheney, Van Buren (1997) conducted a study on the use of ICT and the motives for its use. These are: cost effectiveness, higher instructional quality, customized learning and speed, less hardware and fewer constraints, decentralized instruction and just-in-time motives, and a "teacher" capable of teaching when necessary. Recent research, however, shows that however rational these motives might be the social function of learning should not be underestimated. One of the predictions is that Intranet and learning using networks will take pride of place in this millennium (Bassi et al, 1997). The use of the PC and e-mail is as high as 95% and 81% respectively, while the more advanced technologies like EPSS score as low as 2.5%.

New Trends - New Roles?

As a consequence of knowledge management and outsourcing, one might expect that a company would have to organize interface functions for producing learning events. As a consequence of these trends, the role of

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purchaser of training became visible (Van Weele, Mulder & Nijhof, 1995). This role is defined by the following outputs: exploration and analysis of the market for training and development; communication within the organization; assessment of products and services; selection of providers, contracting; monitoring and control of quality, and customer satisfaction.

Trends in the field relating to the learning organization and competence management lead to a possible role of knowledge manager, whose main task is to fine-tune the knowledge needs of the organization and the available knowledge or expertise of employees. In terms of outputs, the knowledge manager produces the development of new knowledge, the targeted distribution of knowledge within the organization, the anchoring of relevant information in the organization, the effective combinations of knowledge, the identifying of information needs, and the fine-tuning of needs and available expertise.

Flexible organizations in combination with trends toward flexibility and employability will have managers in the near future who act more and more like coaches. A coach supports the employees, formulates targets and standards, delegates responsibilities, and provides a supportive shoulder when needed. He gives feedback and reinforces good results, including financial ones. The outputs of a coach are (Twilt, 1996): facilitating learning conditions; supporting learning processes; giving responsibilities; formulating targets and standards; organizing feedback and counseling and guiding to optimal performance.

Many writers perceive the competence manager as a possible new role for HRD practitioners. This role is the potential consequence of virtual organizational thinking and concepts of the knowledge worker and learning societies in which competencies have to be organized in such a manner that the organization as a whole will profit from the expertise. The basis of this role is to see in which direction the company is going to move in the near future. The competence manager has to play a major role in terms of strategy formulation and the definition of competence profiles, and the related skills and levels of mastery. This might lead to so-called personal development plans. It is clear that the knowledge manager and the competence manager have much in common. The latter is a more strategic role; the former a more tactical or operational one.

Quality management of training and development is still high on the agenda of companies. The implementation of quality standards occurs at local and international level. The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) and ISO are organizations promoting quality in order to achieve excellence and to foster competition worldwide to do better. Benchmarking is one of the tools that can be used to compare the quality of companies. It is the duty and the task of quality managers to manage and monitor the processes to produce quality. In the field of HRD too, quality managers have to design, develop, evaluate and adapt HRD programs according to quality standards.

Role or Competence: Entrepreneurship?

On the basis of an analysis of the literature, entrepreneurship is seen as one of the possible consequences of a changing labor market, where employers select and screen candidates in the perspective of flexible labor contracts. Odenthal & Nijhof (1996) found in their study of German HRD roles a new phenomenon: the entrepreneur.

However, it is difficult to perceive entrepreneur as a role with special competencies and outputs. It seems to be more adequate to formulate entrepreneur as a new competence requested by the market, a competence needed by many jobholders. Entrepreneurship is seen nowadays as a condition for a job and for different task areas, especially for business people. Entrepreneurship in the framework of HRD means a competence in starting an HRD company, department or innovation. This is based on niches in the HRD market or on a specialized skill or expertise; setting up a business plan, and being able to stimulate and motivate colleagues to collective action is the entrepreneurial competence par excellence.

In the last ten years, some important trends and developments have emerged. On the basis of the foregoing analysis, five new roles were identified, which were not included in the McLagan et al. study or in the Rothwell studies: purchaser, knowledge manager, coach, competence manager, and quality manager. These roles will be integrated into the survey to check whether they exist in practice, and whether the classical roles of trainer and coordinator of training and development are disappearing.

Survey Design and Instrumentation

This study was set up on the basis of a survey design as used in 1993 to obtain an answer to the main question and to a number of special, more detailed questions. This meant that the key instrument for collecting data was a questionnaire. While data were collected in 1999 and were compared with those from 1993, the possibilities of comparison were expanded using the questionnaire of 1993. The five new roles, with new competencies and outputs as well as the competence of entrepreneurship, were added.

The population was the membership of the Dutch Association of HRD Practitioners (NVvO) (N= 2476). In 1993, the size of the population was 1342. The response was seen as a sample of the population. Personal data was used to check the representativeness of the sample.

The questionnaire consisted of 7 parts:
- Part 1: The Job (formal label, tasks and duties)
- Part 2: Duty or role (experience, years, proportion of the workload, part-time/full-time)

- Part 3: Outputs of the role (101 outputs were defined, practitioners had to select which outputs were essential for their role);
- Part 4: Competencies of the role (relevance, expertise, level of mastery)
- Part 5: Developments and trends in HRD (opinions of practitioners in terms of impact of trends on their daily work);
- Part 6: Impact of new Information and Communication Technologies on their work and expectations for the next five years related to this;
- Part 7: General characteristics of respondents

Data collection took place in May 1999. The response, even after a non-response search, in which lack of time was the most frequent excuse, was about 13% (n=326), which is rather low for a group of professionals, who might be expected to be interested in their profession and professionalization. However, the response for other national surveys is similar (see Table 1). In 1993, the response was 70%, but from a preselected sample of 425, from a population of 1342.

Table 1: *Response in Different Countries using the Questionnaire*

Country	Send	Received	Proportion
Belgium (1993)	200	53	26.5
England (1993)	1740	228	13.1
N.Ireland (1993)	330	37	11.2
Italy (1993)	700	105	15
Netherlands (1993)	425	297	70
Germany (1996)	998	190	19
Finland (1997)	699	164	23.5

In 1993, the reliability of the different scales, based on Cronbach's alpha, was very satisfactory (Van Ginkel et al., 1994). In 1999, the alphas were also very satisfactory. The scores are presented in the next table. (Table 2).

Table 2: *Cronbach's Alphas for the Different Scales and Instruments*

Cronbachs alphas	NVvO study 1993	NVvO Study 1999
Roles	.76	.74
Outputs	.92	.94
Competencies (relevance)	.85	.90
Competencies (mastery)	.94	.92
Trends in HRD	n.a.	.70
Impact of trends on HRD	n.a.	.88
Use of new technologies (ICT)	n.a.	.83

The representativeness of the sample was checked against the population. The sample did not differ significantly in terms of age, branch, size of companies and jobs (tasks). In terms of gender, a significant difference was detected (t (2798)=2.932; p=0.003), but there was no effect of gender on the selection of roles or tasks. The conclusion is that the sample is representative of the population. (Kieft & Nijhof, 2000, p. 61). 99% had enjoyed higher education (university or polytechnic); in 1993, this percentage was slightly lower.

Results

The main question of this study is whether the HRD profession is changing as a consequence of global trends. The underlying questions are related to changes in competencies and outputs related to roles and the time interval of 7 years. First, we address the question of changing roles.

Role Change

What does the HRD profession look like in 1999? Respondents stated that about 10 duties were apart of their role, with a standard deviation of 3.7. A large number of these duties or tasks reflected developing activities, such as reading recent literature, designing and developing training, organizing networks and contacts, providing advice and consultancy to the manager. Professionalization seemed to be one of the most important activities, followed by training and communication within and outside the company. Personnel management was the responsibility of 25% of the sample. Because of the number of tasks, there seems to be a great deal of overlap between the different roles.

What roles did Dutch HRD practitioners play in 1999 compared with 1993? Table 3 gives an answer to this question. Almost 25% of the sample were trainers. This is the highest frequency, followed by coordinator of training (15%) and organization developer (15%). The role of management and coordination of training covers 13%. About 67% of the roles were covered by the traditional roles of managing, planning, coordination and execution of training. The new roles of coach (2.5%), competence manager (2.2%), knowledge manager (1.2%), quality manager (0.3%), and purchaser of training (0.3%) were marginal or almost non-existent.

Table 3: *Roles of HRD Practitioners 1993-1999 (in %)*

	1993	1999
Trainer	11.4	24.7
Coordinator of training	12.1	15.4
Organization developer	8.8	15.4
Manager of training strategies	10.8	12.7
Other+	***	8.6
Designer of training	9.8	4.3
Marketer	8.4	3.7
Career developer	11.1	2.5
Coach	***	2.5
Developer of training material	8.4	2.2
Competence manager	***	2.2
Needs analyst	10.8	1.9
Researcher	3.4	1.5
Knowledge manager	***	1.2
Evaluator and impact controller	5.1	0.6
Quality manager	***	0.3
Purchaser of training	***	0.3

*** This role was not part of the 1993 survey
+   'Other' means that respondents had chosen to take more than just one role.

A large number of the respondents were focused on training coordination and planning (almost 40%). OD and management of training were relatively high (almost 30%). About four roles covered 70% of the roles; in 1993, this was about 41%. What we perceive is an important change and even a concentration on four roles related to training.

Outputs

The role concept used by ASTD in 1989 and before concentrates on roles, competencies and outputs. Outputs are the consequences of actions based on competencies. Part of the problem is that outputs can have an intermediate effect or be an ultimate result of actions; ASTD does not distinguish between the two. Sometimes this concept may threaten the validity of the measurement. For the sake of comparison with the 1993 study, we maintained the concept of output and used 101 outputs for evaluation, based on all the roles, including the new ones.

Although ICT is growing in use in the professions, it seems that ICT barely penetrated the field of HRD in 1999. The output of "communication within the own organization" is very dominant.

Outputs connected with the implementation of training scored very high on the list. In Table 4, the top ten outputs are compared with those of 1993.

Table 4: *Top Ten Outputs in 1999 and 1993 (in %)*

Outputs	1999	1993
Realizing positive image HRD activities	69.2	81.2
Contracts for training	69.1	77.9
Evaluation processes	65.8	79.7
Professional advice or reference to third parties	64.6	82.4
Feedback to learners	62.7	75.0
Recommendations about necessary changes in the functioning of persons, divisions or organization	62.6	70.3
Team-building	62.4	58.2
Policy development of HRD training	61.9	77
Newly qualified people	60.7	71.4
Recommendations to management regarding HRD	60	71.4

Competencies

The ASTD survey distinguishes between four groups of competencies: disciplinary or subject matter, business-related, communicative, and intellectual competencies. In the survey, a competency was rated as relevant when 60% of the respondents scored on these competencies. From the data, we learned that communicative competencies were the most important ones, while business-related competencies scored the lowest. The standard deviation, however, was the greatest in this last category, which means that respondents differed in terms of the relevance of these competencies. This result might be affected by the difference between entrepreneurs and internal officers of HRD.

Table 5: *Relevance and Being Competent on Competence Categories*

Competencies	Relevance		Competent	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Discipline	2.06	.41	3.81	.62
Business	2.03	.61	3.77	.90
Communication	2.56	.41	4.62	.77
Intellectual	2.38	.48	4.34	.73

1= very important/relevant; 5= not important/relevant

Discipline or HRD Competencies. Formulating learning objectives was the most important skill, followed by insight into the learning process of adults. Respondents felt relatively competent in these skill areas. Research skills or competencies were not perceived as important, which seems strange in a profession in which the orientation toward outputs is dominant.

Business Competencies. None of the business competencies taken up in the survey were felt to be really important, based on the criterion that at least 60% of the respondents had to name them as important. Their own mastery of business competencies was rated as average.

Communicative Competencies. Most competencies were rated as relevant, especially social skills, feedback skills, raising questions, presentation skills, coaching, and guiding team processes. These skills are very important in the professional job of trainer and were evidently not seen as part of HRD competency or discipline like competencies. The level of skills was rated as high, with the exception of team processes.

Intellectual Competencies. Self-efficacy, intellectual versatility, and perception seem to be relevant intellectual competencies for HRD practitioners. The respondents estimated their skills in this area as rather high. Competencies like setting up scenarios for the future or creating models were estimated as low.

Outputs

Besides the qualitative analysis in terms of relevance and mastery, it was important to know how the quantitative dispersion of competencies related to 1993 and to the original ASTD study of 1989. From the data we could conclude that the ASTD study no longer fitted the Dutch situation in 1999. In Table 6 (not included) the outputs were compared between 1999, 1993 and the ASTD study of 1989. The main areas of activities of HRD professionals as formulated in 1993 functioned as points of reference.

From Table 6 (not included), we learned that most respondents realized more outputs than in the ASTD study (1989). This outcome was connected to the different designs of the studies. In the Dutch studies, the respondents could indicate which outputs were related to task areas. The number of outputs was 101 in 1999, and 74 in 1993. Even in 1993 Dutch HRD practitioners indicated far more competencies per area than did ASTD respondents . This might indicate a broader conception of the area in question in the Netherlands.

Looking at the proportions of the competencies, we see that needs assessment scored quite high in 1999, as did HRD policy and management. In 1993 OD came top. One of the possible paradoxes now is that the sum of competencies is not necessarily the most important or frequent role, as described earlier.

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