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## **HRD FROM A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE**

Written for 'Perspectives on HRD' – special issue of *Advances in Developing Human Resources*,  
Eds: David McGuire, Sandra Watson, Thomas N. Garavan, David O'Donnell

Monica Lee, Lancaster University, March 2006

The perspective I wish to explore is that of HRD as contextualised within the wider 'human condition'. As we conceive of, or operate within, that which we call 'HRD' we are not working in isolation. Our thoughts and actions stem from philosophical and political roots that, I shall argue, we deny at our peril.

I shall draw upon arguments that I have used elsewhere to show that whilst it is 'easy' to conceptualise HRD as limited to training and development, with, perhaps a few neatly added-on extra topics, this does not equate to the messy reality of practising HRD. This is most obvious for HRD professionals and managers who (increasingly) are being called upon to adopt an HRD role, who work in non-traditional organisations, and upon whom the wider political and philosophical aspects of the job impact on a daily basis. However, it can also be seen even in the most specialised HRD functions in large bureaucratic organisations – I can say this with confidence because HRD is about people, and people are influenced by wider, even global, politics and events – whether they are aware of it or not, whether they like it or not.

I shall first outline what I mean by a holistic perspective and will argue that regardless of our perspective HRD is played out on a global as well as a local stage. I will illustrate this by looking at three areas of global change: climate change, technological change and population change. Taken together we might extrapolate a future world of migration and conflict for the technologically poor, and one of small cluster organisations, high skill and mobility, and longevity for the technological elite. This will impact upon us all – influencing our jobs and our security – and also our morality. I conclude by suggesting that whatever our perspective-in-practice, if we do not take account of the wider picture; if we do not accept that our way of working is one of many; if we do not accept that we need to be able to justify what we do against a background of differences, then we are selling ourselves and our profession short.

### **A Holistic / Global Perspective**

There has been much debate recently about globalisation and globalism (see Costea 1999 for a brief discussion of this). This debate has occurred both within the media, linked to cultural imperialism, to free trade, and to issues of poverty and development, and also within HRD circles, linked to standardisation of professional criteria, course provision and so on. These debates are central to how humanity, and HRD develops, but are a side issue to, or a consequence of, what I want to discuss here.

These issues, though based in systems of belief and understanding, are about the practicalities of how so many people with so diverse aspirations and beliefs interact, and they arise, regardless of our circumstances and the perspective we adopt. They are also played out, in diminutive form, in our daily lives, within families, within workplaces, and with friends. They are about whose view is dominant, how resources are apportioned between individuals and groups, what value is placed upon individual rights and social justice, and so on.

I have argued elsewhere (Lee 2005) that these practicalities of how we relate to each other are rooted in our evolutionary history and how they are played out is part of the human condition. The nature of these interactions, the play of social groupings and the individuals 'being' (Lee 1996) within this occur regardless of how we study it and what we call it. Of course, as academics and professionals we make our living by trying to conceptualise and influence the human condition. We need to label, to categorise, to seek causality, to identify trends and so on in order to tame our understanding of the human condition – but in doing so we must not forget that we are building a diminished representation of it.

To employ a simile: as we gaze at the world there is much that we don't see, and there is much in our peripheral vision that we ignore – similarly the perspectives we adopt are limited by our need to focus (see Lee & Flatau 1995 for further discussion of this). As we focus we accentuate the difference between foreground and background, isolating the thing under our gaze; we delineate it and create boundaries around it; we stabilize it and objectify it, privilege it; we label it, developing it as an icon of the class of things it represents to us: by these means we can handle, manipulate and control it. Our visual senses do this as part of the way in which we process our environment, and similarly, we do this conceptually as we categorise and build representations and belief systems of our existence. This is a natural process: one that we exploit as we build our academic edifices.

As representations rather than reality, however, these edifices fall short of offering a full account of our existence, and are at times at odds with what we experience. For example, I have argued that it is impossible to truly define HRD, as HRD is a process and is constantly in the state of becoming (Lee 2001). To define something is to mis-represent it – yet nearly all of our research, teaching and practice invoke definitions of one sort or another. For many such lack of definition equates to chaos, yet by defining (by creating professional standards, syllabi, rules of engagement) we are to a greater or lesser extent, but in all cases, choosing to divorce the subject of definition from the wider pattern of becoming.

Furthermore, such definition objectifies and isolates the subject. For example, to try and understand ourselves and others in isolation is to fail (Lee 2002). Individuals and organisations are not unique entities – they are influenced by and co create (Lee 1997) each other, to examine one on its own is to get only part of the picture. Indeed, if we were to try and examine a group or organisation by looking at each individual we would not succeed – not only would the process of examining it change it, but, as has been argued since the early 1900's by the Gestalt school of thought, (see Wertheimer 1924) the 'big picture' is greater than the sum of the parts. For example, one person, in the right place at the right time, can have an inordinate and unpredictable amount of influence upon events - whether they are the person in charge or on the shop floor.

In addition, we make sense of our place in the world by understanding things through what they are not – to be simplistic: how can we know a good workplace if we have no idea of what constitutes a bad workplace? We cannot create standards, or best practice in isolation. Moreover, as we engage with different people, in different workplaces and cultures, we learn at least as much about ourselves and our own culture, as we do about the 'other' – hence the high value that is placed upon 'experience'. Much of this experience is tacit – we don't know we know it until something brings it to the fore (Lee 2004a). So how can we account for such experience? How can we communicate to those who do not have it? How do we measure it? How do we put it in a framework of understanding?

These, of course, are the sort of questions we ask when we are researching – and the same sorts of questions I have indicated above about the scientisation (ref) of our understanding impact upon the conduct of our research (Lee 2001). I am whole-heartedly in favour of scientific research where appropriate. The exploration of cause and effect, experimentation and the identification of trends, and so on, are vital to our development, but they only give part of the picture. Essentially they are based upon the notion of the norm and deviance from it, as located in an environment in equilibrium. Normal scientific method cannot easily cope with far-from-equilibrium or catastrophic events<sup>1</sup>, it does not account for the outlying or unique, it does not address the complexity of desire and belief. Qualitative methods do look to the unique, and, in principle, stand aside from normative assumptions such that they can give individual accounts of desire and belief, and can illuminate normative findings. Though it is worth pointing out that many methods, despite a lack of ‘numbers’ are employed, in practice, with the norm in mind and are fundamentally quantitative with a qualitative gloss. In either case, however, they do not easily deal with the catastrophic or complex.

A holistic perspective therefore, is more than just taking a wider view – it is also about looking and understanding in a different way – one that looks at the foreground AND the background, one that accepts interrelatedness and that the sum is bigger than the parts; one that acknowledges the power of the critical incident; one in which the research method adopted, the way of making sense, reflects a core part of the philosophy, rather than just a handy tool. Of course, different perspectives involve different ways of thinking, and different uses of language by which it is best to communicate their principles. I have been talking around, and from, a holistic perspective for quite a few years now (I first wrote about it nearly twenty years ago) but it is only in the last few years that theories and discussion of complexity (see Lee, 2003, (Ed) HRD in a Complex World, for example) have come to the fore and provided a pattern of language more suitable to convey what I am trying to say.

Notions of complexity have at their heart the fundamental difference between something that is complicated (and thus is ultimately understandable by examination of its constituent parts) and complex (which is greater than its parts, and so cannot be understood in this way). Many areas of research, from quantum mechanics, through biology to human systems, are now turning to theories of complexity by which to better understand what is going on. A holistic perspective is more a way of thinking than specifically applicable to the field of HRD, but it does have implications for how we approach that field – how we act and try to understand within, and account for, a world that is complex. I shall try and illustrate this by looking briefly<sup>2</sup> at some aspects of global change.

### **Global Change and the near future?**

If we accept the permeability of levels of analysis, the diffusion of influence between individual, organisation, nation and so on, and instead see each of these as elements within the bigger (complex, rather than complicated) picture, then it holds that HRD and each of us as HRD professionals and researchers are influenced by and can influence global issues. This is just one aspect of the perspective, and it is perhaps confusing to talk of a global perspective whilst also looking at aspects of global change as an example, but one reason for concentrating on this area here is that it has been largely ignored as irrelevant to the field of HRD. In recent years there has been increasing interest in National HRD (see McLean, 2004), and a greater pool of knowledge is being built about the nature and practice of HRD in

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<sup>1</sup> I mean this in a technical sense, by which a critical incident can completely change the nature of the system, or a pattern can reach a point from which there is no return to the original.

<sup>2</sup> This section comprises an overview of ideas and findings that I argued more thoroughly in Lee 2004.

different cultures. However, although there are an increasing number of exceptions, the field of HRD remains largely focused through western conceptualisations gazing upon training, development and performance in large profit-driven enterprises.

There seem to me to be three main foci of global change at present: climate change, technological change and population change.

**Climate change** provides us with a clear example of a potentially catastrophic event – one we can predict but unless we act quickly cannot prevent, and cannot revert from. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change states that there is new and stronger evidence since their 1995 report ‘that most of the warming observed over the last 50 years is attributable to human activities,’ and that ‘human influences will continue to change atmospheric composition [of greenhouse gasses] throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century’ (IPCC 2001). They predict increased maximum temperatures and more hot days over most land areas; higher minimum temperatures and fewer cold and frost days over most land areas; increased risk of drought over many land areas; more intense rainfall and snowfall events over most land areas; increases in peak wind intensities of tropical cyclones over some areas, accompanied by increases in peak rainfall and precipitation accompanying such storms; and that sea levels will rise between 9 and 88cm. It is worth noting here that whether or not we believe the climate is changing due to mans activities, it is, indeed changing, and quickly – and that current changes will have a profound effect on us, and as these changes intensify, so will their effects.

In some cases whole communities are at risk. For example, current projections of sea level rise and increased tropical cyclone intensity may make many small island states uninhabitable. Hay, J., and Beniston, M. (2001) In others, households within the same community can vary, in relation to attributes such as wealth, gender, age and ethnic origins (Clark, et al ,1998; Cutter, et al 2000). In richer nations, as evidence from the Great Plains shows, large-scale migration has not been used as an adaptive option since the 1930s, even though exposure to drought continues to this day.. However, many vulnerable populations (especially from developing countries that lack the capacity to cope with recurrent droughts and associated food shortages) will be left with little option but to adopt migration as their adaptive strategy. (Myers, 2002). For example, climatic changes in Pakistan would likely exacerbate present environmental conditions that give rise to land degradation, shortfalls in food production, rural poverty and urban unrest. Circular migration patterns such as those observed in northeastern Africa, punctuated by shocks of migrants following extreme weather events such as occurred in post-Mitch Honduras, could be expected. Such changes would likely affect not only internal migration patterns, but also migration movements to other countries such as Canada that host large Pakistani communities.

Migrants to California from the southwestern plains states in the 1930s more often than not consisted of intact nuclear families of above-average education, came from a range of occupational backgrounds, and had extended family support waiting for them in California. (Gregory, 1989) Yet these were not the typical demographic characteristics of those most adversely affected by the conditions in the source area—landless people, rural poor, the sick or elderly, those with little family support. Migration after droughts in East Africa tends to be undertaken most often by young males. In other words, those most vulnerable are not necessarily the most likely potential climate change migrants. To undertake migration, particularly over long distances, requires access to money, family networks and/or some other form of assistance or capital.

All large scale predictions of the effects of climate change involve scarcity and shift in renewable resources such as water, fertile land, wood for fuel, and fish stocks. It is likely that

as migration (particularly of the young and fit males) increases so conflict over resources will increase, both within and across national boundaries. Furthermore, scarcities may act to strengthen group identities based on ethnic, class or religious differences, most notably by intensifying competition among groups for ever dwindling resources. At the same time, they can work to undermine the legitimacy of the state and its capacity to meet challenges. As the balance of power gradually shifts from the state to the challenging groups, the prospects for violence increase. Such violence tends to be subnational, diffuse and persistent.

In summary, climate change is having an enormous effect upon the world, and this will increase. Local effects are unpredictable, however, predictions show that as non-renewable resources such as water, fertile land, wood and fish shift location or become scarce, so will the effected populations need to adapt. For many, however, the only method of 'adaptation' will be through migration. However, evidence shows that unless migrants have family or friends in other countries to which they can escape, and / or the resources to manage such travel, it is largely the fit, young and male who move. The highly vulnerable do not have this option. Both migration and the search for scarce resources create potential sources of internal and cross-national conflict.

**Technological change:** Key areas of technological advance at present seem to be biotechnology, nanotechnology, and new intelligence technologies. Biotechnology and nanotechnology offer the prospect of new ways to enhance our living conditions, longevity, and add to the adaptive strategies that can be employed in climate change by those who possess such technological advances. I shall, however, focus more on new intelligence technologies here, and particularly upon data management and communications technology.

These areas have revolutionised the western world. Not only can we handle, make sense of and store more and more information, we can also structure it differently. It is no longer necessary to have long chains of command. In theory, anyone in an organisation can have access to senior management, and vice versa. Technological change is leading to increasing open access – with concomitant need for extra security of 'hidden' data. Similarly, communications are opening up relationships across the world. The web, email and messaging are available to any with access to the systems. Information, facts, data and knowledge are available to any who know how to look for them. With wireless technology, alongside reductions in size of equipment and increase in battery power and with alternative energy sources, we are able to work from anywhere, and at any time.

Communications are not just about one to one. We have also seen rapid change in mass media with television and video phones revolutionising how we see the world. Small cameras and live data feed mean that we can have minute by minute exposes of 'world news'. We are in the middle of conflict and catastrophe as it happens - and the fight for ratings means that news has also to be entertaining. The news and our information sources have become economic and political tools in which the news has become a form of live soap opera, played around sound bites. We learn to ignore the bits that don't interest us and we become hardened to the many tales of woe and the plight of other communities. To some extent, in having to be so selective, we also become more, rather than less, biased in the face of so much information. Mobility and technological change bring us face to face with issues of personal freedom and traceability: Individual rights vs. Public safety.

Technology only benefits part of the population of the world. Large parts of the population do not have access to it and have far greater concerns than communicating with friends in a chat room.– and even if they did have the equipment they would not be able to power it, and probably not be able to use it – we the privileged assume world wide literacy.

Although I have concentrated on information technology here, the situation is the same with biotechnology and nanotechnology. The technological elite can benefit from the enhanced lifestyle and longevity that goes hand in hand with innovations in these areas. The technologically impoverished can not. Moreover, the high technology populations tend to be those that have high power consumption needs, which have contributed to climate change. Agreements associated with the Kyoto treaty apply to all nations, and as indicated by the political storms around this, some nations feel that it is unfair that their attempts to join the technology enhanced world are taxed in this way by those who have already benefited from being members of the elite for many years.

These factors mean that the divide between the technologically elite and others is increasing steadily as technology advances. The technologically elite have the world in their hands – virtually crossing geographical and national boundaries much as they wish. Their world, and that of the technologically poor are separating at a tremendous and accelerating rate – and this difference is around every aspect of the nature of their existence..

**Population Change**<sup>3</sup>. ‘In 1950, worldwide the average woman had five children. Today she has just 2.7, and the continued collapse of fertility is set to become the dominant demographic feature of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Pearce, 2002). The 2002 projection for the population of the world in 2150 is that in the best case scenario (as of Sweden – see below) it will be just over 5 billion, and thus below our current population of six billion, and in the worst case scenario (as of Italy) it will drop to just over 3 billion.

It takes an average of 2.1 children per woman of childbearing age to maintain the population at a constant level. The European Union has an average live birth rate of approximately 1.48 and Japan is hovering around a 1.3 birth rate: ‘Japan and all of Southern Europe - Portugal, Spain, Southern France, Italy, Greece - are drifting toward collective national suicide by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century’. Drucker (1999). The US at 2.1 birth rate appears within reasonable sustainability of population, however, it presents an anomaly because of its high migrant population. As well as higher than expected immigration (immigration between 1990 and 2000 was recorded at over 11 million versus the six million in the 1970s decade and 7 million in the 1980s decade) the immigration increase is expected to have a compounding effect in future years as the fertility rate of non-Hispanic whites was slightly over 1.8 and blacks was 2.1 whereas the Hispanic fertility rate was nearly 3.0. Accordingly, US total population rate is expected to continue to grow, however the balance of racial backgrounds within the population will change considerably.

In poor countries with a traditional patriarchal society, the spread of TV has opened many women’s eyes to a whole new world, and modern birth control methods have allowed them to turn those aspirations into reality. .. Not having children has become a statement of modernity and emancipation, and women are unlikely to give up their new freedom.’ (Pearce 2002.). Countries such as Sweden that have managed to stabilise their birth rates have done so because of their supportive child care policies, rather than because the women have different aspirations.

Most of this focuses on the technologically rich world, but it is worth noting that Rodal (1994) found that high child mortality and the probability that a man will die early act to lower the age at which women would choose to marry: occupations with high probabilities of dying young, marry earlier than those with a lower likelihood of dying young, and that higher expected child mortality encourages earlier marriage He estimates that by 2025, only two of the industrialized democracies will be among the twenty most populated countries in the

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<sup>3</sup> Much of this section is adapted from Coyne, Coyne & Lee, (2003).

world. Nigeria will be more populous than the USA, Iran more populous than Japan, Ethiopia's population twice that of France.

In summary, the population is declining sharply in the majority of the technologically rich world. It is also growing older as people delay having children. The figures for the US indicate slight variation from this, linked to high immigration figures. The reasons for the ageing population appear to be enhanced expectations of longevity & a stable environment. Those nations that have social support systems that enable care givers to maintain employment are maintaining a low but steady birth-rate. In contrast, in the technologically poor world, high child and male parent mortality are linked to early marriage and many children.

**Shifting Boundaries.** Perhaps the most striking change will be on boundaries. Geographical boundaries, such as shorelines, flood plains, and in some instances such as the Pacific Islands disappearing, whole areas, are going to shift with climate change. Maps will need to be redrawn. Similarly, as populations shift location national identity will be challenged. In some cases this will lead to conflict in support of maintaining such boundaries. More often, however, the shift is likely to be part of a political process as 'nations' absorb immigrants, who bring their own cultures with them. The ageing population means that skilled migrants will be welcome in many countries, which, otherwise, will not be able to maintain a sufficiently large workforce to support the children and those too old to work.

Changes in technology also mean that, at least for the technologically rich, the world becomes a smaller place – friends and work colleagues can be based in other continents and be just as close as if they were next door, or seen every day. There are few boundaries in the cyber world. This, also, erodes national boundaries, as people relate more freely across them. The boundary-less cyber world is also part of a different form of erosion of national boundaries – the economic one. Global environmental changes and associated negotiations over global resources, responsibilities, and population shifts are going to require global political and economic responses, which in turn can already be seen to be eroding the legislative, political and economic boundaries of nation states. Similarly, the power and economic influence of large multinationals challenges that of some nation states, and ignores national boundaries.

As boundaries become eroded so ownership and identity can become contested. These factors lead to the anticipation of increased conflict that is likely to arise – between the have's and have-not's, between residents and immigrants – within nations and between nations for power, resources and around local, national and global issues; and between governments and multinational bodies, and also between governments and dissatisfied populations.

**Shifting nature of organisations** It used to be said that an employee of a Japanese organisation had a job for life – yet, increasingly, what was meant by 'organisation' in this case, was the composite of the senior management who would not be sacked. The many other parts of the organisation (in so far as they contributed to the goals of the organisation) were outsourced, and thus did not count. This pattern can, in fact, be seen in all organisations, in which the boundary of membership is usually arbitrarily drawn to include those on the core pay-roll, yet includes many individuals and satellite businesses that contribute to the organisation's viability. As boundaries become more uncertain, so the nature of the traditional organisation becomes eroded. Large bureaucracies are being replaced by cross national

The future is likely to hold many more, smaller, innovative, entwined organizations who work for each other providing goods and services to whoever may want them across the world. As such they will not have all the separate functional areas usual for traditional organizations, but in association with the flattening effect technology has upon communication and the chain of command, individuals and offices within such organizations are likely to be multi-functional –

or, internal portfolio workers. The focus in these firms will be on skilled work, and the need to upskill workers. Those without the skills will increasingly fall by the wayside.

The pattern of work will also change. ... 'The most common type of household after 2005 will be comprised of single persons and married couples without children' (Poe, 2000). Women are working more across the board but the biggest increase has come from women married to high earning husbands, and Worrell & Cooper (1999) reported that in the buoyant job market, the demands of 'Generation X' were changing. Forty per cent (40%) of high flyers said they intended to leave their employer within two years. Only 7% expected to stay more than five years. The focus will be, increasingly, on how to manage high turnover, attract skilled staff, and retain those already employed.

**Flexible work patterns.** One of the main employee benefits identified by Coyne, Coyne & Lee (2003) was the ability to offer flexible work patterns. This will become increasingly important as the population ages, leading to a greater need for care, and thus more flexible work conditions for care givers. Although both Europe and US are expected to experience a rise in the median age, the US projection of relatively more children suggests higher public financing requirements for education as well as more pressure for public financing of child care activities. Europe's 'dependency costs' would appear to be more concentrated in the elder care areas. By 2050, European population over the age of 65 is projected to be equivalent to 60% of its working age population, whereas US population over 65 years of age is projected as 40% of its working age population.

Technological advances impact upon the area in several key ways linked to the ability to handle complex information more easily and at a distance, and to the need to retain and retrain those with the ability to manage the technological systems. Organisations are now able to manage their internal statistics and systems more fluidly, such that keeping track of flexible working and a wide system of varied benefits no longer presents the logistical problem that it used to do. Organisations are now able to offer tailored packages to meet the needs of individuals if they so wished.

Similarly, because of advances in technology, organisations are now able to offer many of their employees the opportunity to work from home, for at least part of the time. In this way the home computer becomes the equivalent to a work place terminal and the interface between the two becomes transparent. It becomes a flexible package that lends itself to use by non-care givers as well as care givers.

**Virtual Migration.** Flexible working and technological advance also mean that 'home' can be a mobile concept, and parts of the 'organisation' can be located across the world – as, for example, the rise of call centres in Bangalore which operate transparently, such that a person making a local call to a company in the UK does not realise that the call is actually being answered and managed by someone in India. This fundamentally changes the traditional notions of work and organisation. Wherever they are located, skilled individuals can work for several organisations from across the world at the same time, and similarly, wherever they are located, adept organisations can call upon the services of skilled individuals from across the world.

Skilled workers need be no longer bounded by geography or loyalty – they can sell their human capital to those that offer the best packages of pay and benefits. Human capital can be seen as the knowledge that individuals acquire during their life and use to produce goods, services or ideas in market or non-market circumstances. Organisations, however, have been slow to realise the value of human capital, and slow to develop the skills to be able to evaluate

it (Brown, 2002). Human capital can be seen as an intangible asset of the organisation, and is one that can be poached by other organisations and needs support and development to flourish.

We are moving into an era of physical migration and immigration (as people move to chase jobs and organisations attract employees from other countries) and also *virtual* migration and immigration. The social and political consequences of this have only just started to impact upon nations and have yet to be fully faced. There are also economic challenges. The state needs to find ways to tax and manage a highly mobile workforce that works, as needed, in other countries and that includes work from non-nationals on a piece meal and irregular basis. Parts of such work, especially the technology related parts, might also be hard to trace. Work based contributions to the national wealth such as employment tax might well be hard to administer.

### **HRD from a Holistic perspective.**

Although at an initial glance global issues such as climate change might not appear to really impact upon HRD, I hope I have illustrated that it is likely to have a fundamental effect, along with other global changes, upon the nature of work and working lives (let alone our private lives). I have presented a picture a world with less clear boundaries, a kaleidoscope of cultures and skills, similar to that which I have touched upon previously in which HRD is the glue of processes and relationships that holds the myriad perspectives together (Lee, 2003b; Lee, 2004b). This is a world of movement, tension, conflict and lack, balanced by rewards for the small, skilled, flexible and technologically aware organisations that succeed by working in harmony and partnership with a wide and shifting selection of other organisations from across the world. This is a world of migration and conflict for the technologically poor, and one of small cluster organisations, high skill and mobility, and longevity for the technological elite. This will impact upon us all – influencing our jobs and our security – and also our morality. As we prepare our students to become HR professionals, academics and managers we should be anticipating what their future needs will be: preparing them for the future, not the past. To do our job properly we have to look at the wider picture.

HRD needs to be at the centre of creating an organisational environment that stimulates and values workers, that meets their needs such that it retains them in a market-place where workplace benefits – including a nice supervisor – can outweigh the lure of a higher wage. HRD also needs to become a central part of the organisations strategy if it is to play a crucial balancing role in meeting the needs of the organisation and the employees in the uncertain and flexible organisation. For example, as the nature of work changes and becomes more fluid, so job descriptions which play an excellent part in a stable and more traditional organisational environment become outdated such that the job description can become an instrument of job limitation. The role of HR in negotiating different forms of job description that allow flexibility in the timing, location and nature of the work that is undertaken, whilst also protecting the needs and rights of each of the stakeholders, will be vital and challenging.

As the nature of work changes so HRD's core role in establishing the qualities and abilities required in successful employees and in promoting, developing and assessing these becomes essential. Some of these skills will be job specific. Others will reflect the key role HRD has in helping develop the attitudes and values, commitment, motivation and involvement, without which the organisation will be disjointed and inflexible. In other words, the organisations culture, from the CEO's to the lowest worker, needs to reflect and support the notion of flexible working: HRD will also increasingly need to pay attention to areas such as cross

cultural awareness, diversity, and conflict resolution. These areas will be needed both in terms of managing these within organisations and also as key skills that employees will need as they work flexibly across a range of situations: as they seek harmony and partnership.

In a world full of conflict HRD practitioners and the organisations and people that work with come face to face with hard choices on a daily basis and within their own spheres of operation. For example, Tim Hatcher and I have spent some time exploring the dilemma at the core of HRD – (Hatcher & Lee, 2003) in which HRD espouses and promotes democratic values in organisations that are, in essence, non-democratic. Therefore, merely by fulfilling their role HRD professionals are likely to come into conflict with others who are fulfilling the non-democratic managerial role assigned to them. HRD Professionals, therefore, need to be able to appreciate otherness, and to act politically and strategically – they also need to be able to act ethically and morally.

I have written elsewhere about the problems of working ethically as an HRD professional – despite the existence of ethical codes of conduct (Lee, 2003a). Such codes offer guidelines and suggested ways of working in a general sense, but are not written (and can not be written) in a way that proscribes for every event. Furthermore, as the traditional form of organisation, with its predictable environment and associated minimisation of ethical challenge becomes replaced by flexible working, so the associated ethical challenge will increase. This increase will effect HRD Professionals on an individual day – to day basis, and it will also effect HRD as a profession.

HRD needs to engage with the personal side of its work, and to appreciate the belief systems that underlie it. It also, increasingly, will be asked to take a collective view on world events – for example, should HRD (as a profession, and HRD professionals individually) be encouraging nations and organisations to engage in protocols established by the Kyoto Treaty in the knowledge of the tremendous harm that will happen if this is not done? Large scale interventions such as the adoption of political and ethical stances like this call for the involvement of the professional bodies.

As geographical and organisational boundaries lose their rigidity, people are increasingly turning to their professional bodies to enhance their sense of identity at work and provide a sense of permanence. After all, an individual is likely to be a member of one or more professional bodies all their working life, but may only to be with a single organisation for a few years. It is their profession that stays with them as they move from organisation to organisation; role to role, and; nation to nation. Professional bodies, therefore, are likely to become a more vocal champion of their members' needs and rights. They are also in a position to collaborate with, or act as mediator, between the organisation, the individual and the state. Perhaps it is the profession, also, who is able to adopt the broader view – to express their concerns about those who fail to leap the increasing skills and technology gap. Perhaps it is the professions who can foster ways of helping those who lack the resources or are less able to adapt to change.

There is another area in which the professions can play a vital role. As the workforce becomes more mobile and the nature of work more flexible, there will be an increasing need for benchmarking and being able to make sound judgements about the comparability of qualifications, attainment and provision. It is this point that takes me back in full circle to debates about globalisation and globalism. As we develop systems of flexible interrelated organisations that can draw employees from across the globe we need to establish some global understanding of what we expect such employees to be able to do – yet how do we avoid cultural imperialism? If HRD is to be an active and ethical agent in this new world in which the divide between the rich and the poor grows increasingly large, then HRD has to engage in

areas such as politics and policy; law and economics; strategy and structures; philosophy and morality; and so on. HRD, itself, has to become a partner in the struggles of the world in order to promote core aspirations of fostering a sustainable environment in which the needs of people are balanced and in which no one group or interest takes precedence at the expense of others, and in which the value of each element to the whole is recognised.

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