Leveraging HRD Competencies and Roles to Improve Managers’ Performance

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to investigate why some human resource development (HRD) competencies and roles are relatively more important for managers’ individual performance and how these HRD competencies and roles help improve managers’ performance. With this direction of research intent, a semi-structured interview with eight HRD professionals and eight non-HRD managers in eight different companies in Taiwan. The findings suggested that Taiwanese HRD professionals help managers’ job performance mainly by dealing with training planning and training needs analysis. In order to facilitate HRD-related jobs well, having good communication skills is also of great importance for HRD professionals. Moreover, they should be equipped with technology literacy to utilize learning technologies for carrying out training along with the application fundamental business knowledge. In terms of the role orientation, learning specialists and business partners are the two most critical roles HRD professionals play. The present study has two main contributions. First, through interviews, we reexamined the competencies and roles identified by prior empirical studies as more prevalent for HRD professionals, and discovered competencies and roles which can help managers’ performance comparatively. Second, the interview excerpts provided in-depth understanding of the targeted competencies and roles as well as explained why and how these competencies and roles benefit managers’ jobs. Overall, the findings generated strong evidence-based recommendations for selection, training, development, compensation, and performance appraisals for HRD professionals in Taiwan.

Keywords: Competencies, Roles, HRD professionals, Manager, Qualitative study, Taiwan

INTRODUCTION

With globalization, advances in information technology, and managerial innovation, the boundaries, scope, and concerns of human resource development (HRD) have become increasingly complicated and varied (Bernthal et al., 2004; Cummings & Worley, 2005; Lee, 2009; MacKenzie, Garavan, & Carbery, 2012; Swanson & Holton, 2009). HRD professionals now wear multiple hats in order to benefit organizational strategies, performance, and development (Kuchinke, 2003; Lawler, 2005; Long, Ismail, & Amin, 2012; Swanson, 1996; Werner & DeSimone, 2006). The important competencies and roles of HRD professionals have been continuously studied and updated in both academic settings and industrial practice (Bae & Song, 2009; Carliner, 2012; Egan, 2011; Kormanik, Lehner, & Winnick, 2009; Kuo, 2002; Rasool, Bashir, & Ramay, 2009; Sanghi, 2007; Xie & Huang, 2010; Yang 1994). Quantitative surveys have been employed to explore the competencies and roles of HRD professionals. Example research studies include McLagan’s (1989) model for HRD practice, Rothwell’s (1996, 1999) ASTD models for human performance improvement (ASTD models for workplace learning and performance (WLP) are a guide for HRD professionals), the 2004 ASTD study by Bernthal et al. (2004 Competency
Study: mapping the future: new workplace learning and performance competencies), and Chen, Bian and Hom’s (2005) replication of the ASTD WLP model in Taiwan.

In response to the changing environment, managers commonly take the responsibilities for improving organizational performance (Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002; London, 2003; Ladyshewsky, 2010; Wakefield, 2006). More specifically, managers enhance team members’ performance by providing necessary resources, coaching, and giving feedback (Ladyshewsky, 2010). Since both HRD and managers’ jobs and roles are related to performance, along with the drastic change in the globalized business environment, the issues regarding the linkage between HRD professionals’ competencies and roles and managers’ job performance merit more discussion.

Hence, this study focused on two purposes. First, through the exploratory manner and qualitative interview which seeks to investigate the interpretations both from managers and HRD professionals, this study explains why some HRD competencies and roles were identified as more important compared to others. Second, this study elaborates on how HRD competencies and roles contribute to improve managers’ performance.

Studies about HRD Competencies and Roles

Spencer and Spencer (1993) described the concept of competency as “an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation” (p.9). Competencies, in general, encompass a cluster of skills, knowledge, abilities, and behaviors that are required for people to succeed in their workplaces (Caldwell, 2008; Davis, Naughton & Rothwell, 2004; Harzallah, Berio, & Vernadat, 2006; Hollenbeck, McCall, & Silzer, 2006; Park, & Lee, 2011). Rychen (2004) further summarized competencies in an incorporative way: “each competency is a combination of interrelated cognitive and practical skills, knowledge (including tacit knowledge), motivation, values and ethics, attitudes, emotions, and other social and behavioral components that together can be mobilized for effective action in a particular context” (p.21). Given these definitions, Lin (2006), Lee (2006) and Gangani, McLean, and Braden (2006) noted that the definitions and usage of the term competency may vary from one organization to another. Gangani, McLean, and Braden (2006) believe that the most frequently used definition of a competency is, “a descriptive tool that identifies the skills, knowledge, personal characteristics, and behaviors needed to effectively perform a role in the organization and help the business meet its strategic objectives” (Lucia & Lespinger, 1999, p.5).

Most relevant studies have been conducted in the United States, Europe and Asia. In the 1999 ASTD WLP model, 52 important competencies were categorized into six groups, and seven important roles of HRD professionals were generalized. The International Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction (IBSTPI) sought out competencies for training instructional designers (Roytek, 2010; Richey et al., 2001; Sugar, Hoard, Brown, & Daniels, 2012) and managers (Foxon, Richey, Roberts, and Spannaus, 2003). Other relevant HRD studies conducted in Asia include the following: Chen, Bian and Hom (2005), Klink and Boon (2002), Kuo (2002), Lee (1994), Lee (2009), Xie (2005), and Zhu, Chen, and Warner (2000). HRD professionals’ competencies can be culturally different. For instance, by applying the ASTD model in a different workplace culture, Gray (1999) found some deficiencies in the ASTD model and threw light on the important competencies of HRD practitioners in New Zealand. Similarly, Chen, Bian and Hom (2005) examined these 52 competencies and the seven roles of the 1999 ASTD WLP competency model in Taiwan. Their results showed that while the 52 competencies were important for Taiwanese HRD professionals, the majority of HRD professionals in Taiwan did not have highly developed competencies and solid training either in HRD or HRM. Therefore, their results
implicitly suggested that HRD professionals in Taiwan play limited roles in their workplaces rather than the seven roles found in the 1999 ASTD WLP model. The study results indicated a lack of clarity in the practice of HRD in Taiwan, which provided the research rationale and motivation for the present study.

**Competencies and Performance**

Performance is the end results of the meaningful activities in organizations. “An organization’s performance is efficient if the organization is doing things right. An organization’s performance is effective if the organization is doing the right things” (Rothwell, Sanders & Soper, 1999, p.5) In other words, performance is the ultimate concern organizations have in that the growth of organization is the ultimate goal. Good performance refers to indices including successful operation, high profitability, high work quality, etc. To evaluate and improve performance, competency systems have been highly recommended by scholars and widely applied many job positions and industries. Spencer and Spencer (1993) suggest that the primary goal to use competency systems to evaluate and enhance individual performance. As for the application of competencies at organizational performance level, competencies can be applied in various purposes in HR functions, such as selection, performance management, compensation, and succession planning (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Based on the research and practical value prestigious scholars addressed, Levenson, Van der Stede, and Cohen (2006) investigated the relationship between managerial competencies and performance at both the individual and organizational unit levels in a quantitative way. In general, they found evidence that competencies are positively related to both individual performance and unit-level performance although the evidence for the latter is weaker. Inspired by the previous studies and findings, this study employed an in-depth interview method to dig deeper information regarding the authentic situations of HRD competencies and roles and managers’ performance in Taiwan. As foregoing, previous studies suggest that this issue concerning competencies and performance is valuable not only it is practical but also there is little studies discussing it. The dichotomy of individual and organization performance was also noted in this study in that scholars addressed that individual performance cannot be accumulated to unit or organizational performance (DeNisi, 2000; Levenson, Van der Stede, & Cohen 2006; Schneider, Smith, & Sipe, 2000).

**Research Questions**

Based on the literature, two research questions guided this study.

1. Why some HRD competencies are considered more significant and how do they contribute to help managers’ individual performance?
2. Why some HRD roles are considered more significant and how do they contribute to improve managers’ individual performance?

**METHODS**

The methodology was qualitatively driven, relying on interviews, we provided details and answers to “why” and “how” based on the proposed research questions of HRD professionals’ important competencies and roles, and managers’ individual performance.

**Participants**

A purposive sampling was implemented, in which the selection of target participants was carefully scrutinized from the pertinent business establishments in Taiwan. Patton (2002) points out that the sample
size in a qualitative study should consider the purpose of the study, and the appropriate sample size in some relevant qualitative studies ranged from 8 to 20 participants (Ellinger, Watkins, and Bostrom, 1999; Gibson, 2004; Sandberg, 2000; Polach, 2004). Therefore, a total of 16 participants were recruited for the present study — eight were HRD professionals, and eight were non-HRD managers. Half of the participants were from high-tech manufacturing industry and the other half were from finance industry. Care was taken to insure that the eight HRD professionals had sufficient knowledge and professional experience to provide concrete cases and examples of the important competencies for HRD professionals in Taiwan. In addition, the eight non-HRD participants had positions as high or middle-level managers who could provide different angles on information and perspectives concerning the support and benefits of competencies and roles of HRD professionals contributed to their job performance.

Wang and McLean (2007) have argued that it is not appropriate to use the US-based HRD definitions to describe the field of HRD and its functions and roles everywhere. Their suggestions provide implications and justify the necessity of the current study to the field of HRD in Taiwan. Due to differing organizational needs and other organizational factors, Taiwanese businesses often either use different terms for HRD or have only one-term-fits-all HRM (Chen, Bian & Hom, 2005; Lin, 2006). This makes it difficult to define what truly constitutes the essence and application of HRD in Taiwan. After our contact and interviews, we concluded that only HRD professionals in larger Taiwanese companies fit the general definition of HRD professionals. Therefore, all our interviewees were recruited from larger Taiwanese companies.

Data collection procedures

A pilot study was conducted to test the feasibility of the interview processes, questions, and data collection procedures. A semi-structured phone interview was employed to facilitate the candid expression of comments and opinions from the interviewees. Each interview with HRD professionals lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour, and each interview with non-HRD managers took 25 minutes to half an hour.

Data analysis

Most of the interviews were conducted in Chinese, along with some mixture of English and Taiwanese. A coding method proposed by Saldaña (2009) was used for the content analysis. All the analyzed data were transcribed, translated into English, and subsequently sorted into several categories. More specifically, with respect to the answers to the research question one, two steps were adopted to validate the ranking. First, based on the number of times each important measure of competence and role was addressed or emphasized during the interviews, the researchers counted and ranked all important competencies and grouped them accordingly. Second, to improve the validity and reality of the analytical results, necessary member checks were conducted afterwards to reconfirm the ranking of the importance of individual competencies and competency groups.

Findings

Research Question 1

Why some HRD competencies are considered more important and how do they contribute to help managers’ individual performance?

HRD competencies, such as training planning, training needs analysis, communication, technological literacy, business knowledge, and technical competencies were regarded as the more
important ones which can benefit managers’ jobs according to HRD professionals and managers. Training planning is one of the most critical HRD competencies because planned training is expected to leverage employee learning and foster their performance. Specifically, it is suggested that HRD professionals should have a clear picture of the corporate visions and strategies, and enhance development and performance at the individual, team, and organizational levels through planned training. In fact, this competence had been noted in various definitions for the HRD profession (e.g., McLagan, 1989; Swanson, 1996; Werner & DeSimone, 2006). Furthermore, training planning is more desired for HRD professionals who work with international companies in particular. The HR professionals indicated that not only must they collaborate with their HRD colleagues in the US headquarters and in other countries in order to obtain and share training resources, but they also must meet the special training needs and learning culture of their local employees. Here is an interview excerpt describing the essence and necessity of training planning in the workplace.

HRD [professionals] plan and design the training programs each year. In order to design a training program, we have to know the company’s operation strategies and the different needs of employees first. By predicting and analyzing the organizational development and employees’ jobs, we know what type of training will be needed to meet the organizational goals. We chose 14 courses last year, and 10 courses were commonly selected by the countries of the Asia-Pacific area as being the necessary courses, so we promoted these 10 courses in Taiwan. In addition to the courses shared globally, we have to arrange some regional courses for our local employees.

In addition, one of the non-HRD managers supported the importance of ‘training planning’ by stating that “they [HRD professionals] should have good training planning skills because the classes they provide are expected to be broad and deep enough. Some courses should simply help our jobs and some should further help our daily life. For instance, we benefit a lot from some practical courses regarding law and counseling.” This reflection explains that HRD professionals’ training planning need to support managers’ functional practice in various domains and aspects. Taking advantage of well-planned training, managers and their subordinates will be equipped with sufficient capabilities to execute their jobs and face challenges in their lives better.

Training needs analysis is also more significant because ensuring what training courses should offer is widely regarded as a core function of HRD. Furthermore, the integration of training planning and training needs analysis is critical since only by investigating training needs, can training be planned and carried out effectively and efficiently. Interviewees emphasized that this competence is particularly essential for the companies that their employees, such as engineers, need concrete training for operating new machines or equipment on a regular basis. The following excerpts explain how training needs analysis may impact managers’ and engineers’ jobs.

It is necessary to understand employees’ training needs before we do planning. For instance, our [HRD professionals’] goal is to help our managers work efficiently and effectively, so we must investigate their needs. That is training needs analysis. We should be able to find out what are the most necessary courses for our company and employees.

I think this [training needs analysis] is a basic skill of HRD professionals. We [HRD professionals] must know the training needs before the training courses are designed. By reading the records of the important meetings of our company, we can know what new equipment will be used in the coming year, subsequently we can devise training plans to train our employees to know how to operate and maintain the new equipment.

Communication was pointed to as a more important competence. HRD professionals should be two-
way communicators with good listening and questioning abilities. Since HRD jobs are extremely people-oriented, which means that they should be proficient in interacting with all organizational stakeholders, so interviewees underscored the rating of interpersonal competencies for them. The following interview excerpt emphasizes being patient and listening carefully to their inner customers are the ways to help managers.

It is important to have a fine relationship with all departments. We [HRD] usually need to contact managers directly to ask for their assistance. Also, listen carefully to their managerial problems. You cannot afford to get angry if some of them just don’t cooperate, or some of them have improper attitudes toward you. The most difficult problem is communication. The problems and techniques in communication are most difficult. Communication is very important; being a good listener is important. We need to understand our employees’ needs anyway.

With the growth of information and digital technology, technological literacy, such as computer literacy, computer-mediated communication, and electronic performance support system practice, has become important competence. Thus, many interviewees claimed that that they take advantage of learning technologies for offering better training service in their companies.

We have e-learning and the capacity to deal with an electronic performance support system. Last year, our management department training units used the human resource information system to operate some analytical functional jobs and their connection to training. We have several HRD professionals who focus on the development of the online curriculum and design.

Business knowledge competencies incorporate characteristics such as an understanding of the organization, knowledge of the industry, decision-making processes, decision criteria, being in touch with important issues, and understanding the implications of other operational units within an organization (Rothwell, Sanders & Soper, 1999). Both HRD professionals and managers gave their opinions about why ‘business knowledge’ is more important, as follows.

We [HRD professionals] must understand our industry to figure out what our old and new employees should learn. We are an international corporation; therefore, not only do we have to understand the situation in Taiwan, but also understand global business trends in order to arrange sufficient training for employees. Take expatriate training for instance, we need to clarify the strategies and goals of our company, and then we examine and plan the training courses for them.

Technical competencies were important because it is apparent that HRD professionals perform many administrative and routine jobs for managers. In order to help employees with enhancing job performance through appropriate training, understanding and application of their current work activities and process may be very critical. Thus, the technical competencies such as administrative skills, facilitation, feedback, learning, and promotion are explicitly described as important competencies for them.

Some people may think training [HRD] is easy because they only think about the delivery of courses. In fact, there are more chores to do in terms of training. Preparing training materials and administration are examples. Also, we must be able to teach classes, perform administrative duties, purchase and do chores, get a classroom, and contact the lecturers.

Research Question Two

Why some HRD roles are more important and how do these HRD roles contribute to improve managers’ individual performance?
Learning specialist

One HRD professional stated that “the basic job for HRD professionals is to help our organization improve its performance by training, so we need to know how to initiate a learning atmosphere in our company through the application of the ideas and characteristics of adult learning theories in training.” In addition, HRD professionals have many chances to teach and guide their experienced employees, such as managers, how to be good trainers because these managers are often required to give lectures, teach professional knowledge and skills, or share work experiences with all the other younger employees. Thus, HRD professionals need to be good learning specialists, meaning they should be versed at teaching and helping managers to facilitate training. As one interviewee suggested: “facilitating skills are critical during lectures. We trainers usually play the role of facilitator in our training, and we motivate them [managers] to be good facilitators as well.” Also, ‘providing feedback’ is desirable when interacting with managers since HRD professionals are usually asked their opinions about managerial issues and problems. One interviewee commented: “we need to give feedback on problems encountered by business staff that will encourage them to solve the managerial problems.” When trainees ask questions regarding their jobs, HRD professionals are expected to provide some possible and feasible solutions.

In addition to planning and designing regular lectures, HRD professionals must deliver special courses themselves when an appropriate external lecturer cannot be found. ‘Promotion’ may sound odd in terms of an important competence for HRD professionals, but the reality is that HRD professionals must promote their planned training to their main customers, the employees. Certainly, they should get support from all levels of managers in order to reach the predetermined training goals. One manager said, “HRD go to each unit to promote the training courses. They also need to ask business managers to recommend courses to their subordinates.”

To master everything related to leaning and training in an organization is not easy; according to the interviews, problems often arise, and HRD professionals have to know how to take care of these unexpected issues. As stated by an interviewee, “By predicting and analyzing the organizational development and employees’ jobs, we know what type of training will be needed to meet the organizational goals. Our training program was usually carried out after work or on the weekends. In the beginning, people complained and resisted a lot, so we tried some strategies to help. We made a mechanism which ties the career promotion, the working achievement appraisal and rewards with the training program in our company.”

Business Partner

Taking part in the strategic decision making meetings or process may or may not be a part of HRD professionals’ jobs since their positions are not high ranking for them to be considered decision makers. However, many interviewees mentioned that their high-level leaders and stakeholders tend to view training and development as a necessary and important function to help their organizations to achieve goals. Accordingly, the leaders of HRD, HRD managers or HRD executives, are usually invited to participate in the process of strategic decision making so that they can help implement these decisions through training and development. In addition, managers tend to consult HRD professionals about the effect of training on their employees even though training is not panacea for all cases. In this context, HRD professionals can play the role of ‘business partners’ since it is important for them to know business and industrial knowledge in order to participate at the this level. Here are some statements that support this role.
Our training center makes our plans based on the main developing directions and strategies of our company. From the strategic meetings led by our CEO and vice presidents, we can figure out the operative directions for next year. The coordinator of our training center will attend the meetings because we have been regarded as an important business partner in our company.

When we receive a training request from other managers, the training is sure to be held. Nonetheless, we still inform them that sometimes training cannot help them, and that they should try some other strategies or interventions to solve their problems. We understand that some managers just apply training for their employees in order to show their supervisors that they are doing something rather than nothing at all. When we encounter these situations, we always tell them that training cannot solve the real problem. We recommend them to try other methods.

Also, a supportive business partner should help to solve emergent problem. Because HRD professionals cannot and should not do everything on their own, empowerment or outsourcing management is required. They must be strategic at finding either internal or external resources and flexibly outsourcing their work to experts. One of the HRD interviewees once was asked to offer an Electronics class to novice engineers. She immediately contacted a professor at a national university since she did not have any prior experience and relevant expertise, and she successfully outsourced and arranged the training consequently. Furthermore, it is common for HRD to provide assistance and resources to support specific organizational activities or projects. One interviewee commented that “everything [in our workplace] now requires project management. We [HRD professionals] do need time and skills for project management. We must synthesize and organize the available resources to fulfill tasks and reach organizational goals effectively and efficiently.” As a result, HRD professionals should play a role as a business partner for managers. They should be clear about organizational goals and provide managers appropriate assistance.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the present study are recognized. First, the results are limited to the population of HRD professionals in Taiwan, and these may not be easily generalized to other non-Chinese cultures or job descriptions. Second, previous studies have stated the definition as one of the limitations (Lin, 2006). The same limitation could be applied in this study although the researchers carefully distinguished the definition of ‘HRD’ from other synonyms such as HRM, personnel, training and even industrial relations. Third, the answers given in the present study may have been influenced by factors such as the type of business, the structure or size of an organization, position level, personal experiences, and educational backgrounds. Fourth, the sample size of the present study was a very reasonable number in a qualitative study but might not be large enough to represent the entire population of HRD professionals in Taiwan from the lens of quantatative perspective.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study provides the explanatory interview excerpts to illustrate why some HRD competencies and roles are important and how they impact managers’ performance in Taiwan. Our findings generally correspond to the competencies and roles of HRD professionals outlined by Chen, Bian, and Hom (2005), but we still found something different. Furthermore, through interviews, the reasons for importance of main competencies and roles have been discussed as follows.
‘Training planning’ was an important competence, and ‘learning specialist’ was an important role. That is, the interviewees thought that ‘training’ or ‘learning’ are still the most major job duties for HRD professionals in Taiwan. Nevertheless, simply dealing with training routines or following managerial orders may not be sufficient. Taiwanese HRD professionals should be more proactive to deal with their job duties or work processes by careful and strategic analysis. When working on training needs analysis or training planning, as one HRD professional reported, a procedure including analysis, arrangement, organization, and evaluation should be carried out. Therefore, it is not surprising that non-HRD managers fully reply on HRD professionals’ professions and suggestions in terms of employee training planning and arrangement. They also highly praised that their HRD professionals’ analysis and suggestions are helpful and supportive so that they can receive and utilize training or other business strategies in management and leadership.

‘Business partner’ was a more important role, which suggests that HRD professionals in Taiwan should have substantial business knowledge and play a key role for corporate business and operation. However, HRD professionals and non-HRD managers had slightly different viewpoints on this role. HRD professionals emphasized that their business knowledge can contribute the most to their job success and it implies that they view themselves as critical ‘business partners’ or ‘strategic partners.’ Scholars have postulated that HRD can be expected to play a more strategic role in the organizational policy-making process today (Kuchinke, 2003; McLagan, 1989; Sanghi 2007; Swanson, 1996; Werner and DeSimone, 2006). From HRD professionals’ perspectives, business roles are critically more important since their training plans are always strategically geared toward improving individual and organizational performance. As one HRD professional shared, training has its functions and effects but cannot be overly amplified for improving performance, so HRD professionals should have sufficient business knowledge and a clear picture of their organizational development when providing suggestions.

However, non-HRD managers have a different viewpoint by stating that ‘training planning’ is the only most important for HRD professionals, whom they see as ‘learning specialists.’ Many companies interviewed here have an HRD unit or a formal training center for taking care of various HRD activities and functions, so they have a group of HRD professionals for training needs and design. From a non-HRD manager’s angle, HRD is still not a part of the policy-making team in most Taiwanese companies. Only HRD executives or managers in a few companies are regularly invited to join policy-making meetings or to play a critical role in the policy-making process. Thus, non-HRD managers view HRD professionals’ roles and competencies as more training-oriented.

‘Communication’ was viewed as one of the most important individual competency overall. This suggests that having good communication skills is critical for HRD professionals and building up solid international relationships are good approaches to carry out training and consulting services within workplaces. Without a good interpersonal relationship, trust may not exit. If company stakeholders do not trust HRD professionals’ work, employees may not benefit that much from the designed activities.

In Chen, Bian, and Hom’s (2005) study, ‘interpersonal competencies,’ ‘technical competencies,’ and ‘leadership competencies,’ were listed as the most important three competency groups. In our study, only the first two competency groups were valued according to our interviews. HRD professionals in Taiwan do need competencies, such as ‘communication’ and ‘facilitation skills,’ that fall within the ‘interpersonal competencies’ and ‘technical competencies’ groups. Both of these studies ranked individual competencies such as ‘communication,’ ‘analytical thinking,’ ‘interpersonal relationship,’ ‘project management,’ and ‘technological literacy’ among the top important competencies for HRD professionals in Taiwan. Yet, our interviewees did not agree that the ‘leadership competencies’ cited in Chen, Bian, and Hom’s (2005)
study were as important as the authors claimed. They provided job examples showing that ‘analytical competencies’ such as ‘training needs analysis’ and ‘training planning’ were the most important ones, which agreed with Chen, Bain, and Hom’s (2005) conclusion: the roles of HRD professionals in Taiwan are still very training-oriented.

Additionally, we discovered some interesting HRD phenomena in Taiwan. As many Taiwanese small-sized companies do not value HRD or HRM as larger companies do (Lin, 2006), their HRD professionals are generally young females with no formal HRD or HRM degree. Their job descriptions could be tantamount to that of an office assistant, and one of the most important job requirements is to show a good attitude for office chores and brighten the office atmosphere. This explains why ‘interpersonal relationship’ is one of the most important group in their broad survey by Chen, Bian and Hom (2005), and ‘communication’ is one of the most important individual competence in this study. Hence, it became obvious that the so-called “HRD professionals” in these small companies could not provide the information required by the research questions in the present study due to the limited content of their job descriptions. Thus, we focused on interviewing HRD professionals who were from larger companies with HRDs that had more complete and varied functions. More interestingly, HRD professionals in Taiwan are also required to perform HRM functions, such as building employee-employer relationships or recruitment. That is, all HR members are supposed to support one another in terms of HR functions and operations.

Due to concerns about the differences in HRD between small and large companies, the eight selected companies were all larger companies, which gave rise to another problem. It was more challenging to locate the target participants, the HRD professionals, in some of these Taiwanese companies either because of different terminology that was used for HRD or different organizational structures. Some companies had no jobs carrying the title of HRD professional and others had no department called HRD. However, they did have some departments, units or staff who mainly to cope with training, learning, development and performance. Therefore, we presented our study and defined our target participants as clearly as possible for looking for our interview participants.

**Implications for human resource development**

Our results were collected both from HRD professionals and non-HRD managers, the data are comparatively practical and reflective of actual HRD practice in Taiwan. All the important competencies emphasized here provided an authentic reference for recruiting, training, developing HRD professionals, and improving the work of HRD in organizations. For instance, based on our findings, when recruiting a competent HRD staff, we suggest that Taiwanese companies had better find people with the more important competencies such as good analytical skills, training planning experiences, administrative skills, and communicative skills. In addition, this study’s results provided concrete examples of HRD competencies that can be used in designing competency-based curricula for developing professional HRD practitioners in Taiwan. In order to help students develop their significant HRD competencies that are indispensable in workplaces, Taiwanese HRD or HRM programs in higher education may find some inspirations from this study for operating their curriculum and instruction. Also, the valuable opinions provided by HRD professionals and non-HRD managers can contribute to the relevant research in Taiwan. For HRD learners, our findings provide a great chance to learn about the real world of HRD through the voices of HRD incumbents. The perspectives of non-HRD interviewees should inspire a deeper understanding of the position of HRD professionals in organizations and the relationship between HRD and other organizational functions and departments.
HRD involves three subareas: training and development, career development, and organizational development, and these subareas should be well integrated if they are to contribute to the long-term operation and effectiveness of an organization (Swanson, 1996). According to our interviews, however, training has not been well aligned with career development, career management and organizational development in many Taiwanese companies. Although training can be an highlighted area of the HRD profession, the importance of training is not as highly valued outside the HRD department. Therefore, it merits more follow-up and future work in terms of promoting the effects and importance of HRD on employees and their job performance to other employees in Taiwanese companies. Last, this study’s results deepen better understanding of the current important competencies of HRD in Taiwan by providing many authentic and concrete examples and job descriptions. There are still more issues regarding the competencies of HRD professionals and other organizational events that could be explored in future research, the present study is just a starting point for further elucidation of the competencies and roles of HRD professionals in Taiwan.

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