Implications for HRD Practice and Impact in the COVID-19 Era

Introduction

In her first editorial as *HRDR*'s Editor-in-Chief, Yonjoo Cho encouraged HRD scholars to submit "thoughtful, meaningful, critical, and high quality theoretical, conceptual, and review articles that support theory building and that provide implications for HRD research and practice for turbulent times" (Cho, 2020, p. 337). We welcome non-empirical manuscripts that stimulate further inquiry and changes in research or practice in HRD and related disciplines. The purpose of this editorial is to reflect on what constitutes the relatively short "Implications for Practice" (IFP) section in *HRDR*. Especially in COVID times—and hopefully beyond—how do we craft claims about the relevance of theorizing in the HRD field for "changes in practice?"

In reviewing manuscripts, the new *HRDR* editorial team members have reflected recently on how some submissions to the journal overlook its theory-dedicated mission while several solid theoretical papers omit a consideration of implications for practice. *HRDR* reviewers reject empirical papers and require non-empirical papers without IFP discussions to be resubmitted. This editorial is a reminder, therefore, that while theoretical perspectives on HRD are non-negotiable for publishing in *HRDR*, IFP is also an essential component. Moreover, we challenge ourselves to go beyond mere "implications" to address the growing "impact agenda" in the academy. It is helpful to include specific examples of real-world benefits to HRD policies and practices and society more broadly within the UN's (United Nations, 2015) sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Crafting Implications of HRD Theorizing for Practice Discussions

Our interest in implications for practice is inspired by Bartunek and Rynes' (2010) review in the *Academy of Management Learning & Education* of the construction and contributions of "implications for practice" in articles in five top journals. They examined articles published during the early 1990s and 2000s before and after Hambrick (1994) posed the question: "what if the academy actually mattered?" We extend Bartunek and Rynes' (2010) insights over a decade later. We ask: "what are the key characteristics of IFP sections in *HRDR* articles?"

To gain insights into the characteristics of IFP sections, we analyzed discussions about implications for practice and practitioners in articles published in *HRDR* since 2010. A search on Google Scholar using the terms "*Human Resource Development Review implications for*

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practice" revealed 10 articles on the first page of results. Three of these were discounted as they were from other journals. Each of the seven articles chosen to inform the content analysis included a separate section on implications for practice. This is distinct from *HRDR* articles that conflate implications for research and practice. In the sample of seven articles where implications for practice were clearly signposted, we identified a focus on six characteristics: stakeholders, suggestions, solutions, semantics, significance, and sustainability.

Table 1 presents our findings. We found that it is helpful to indicate practical implications for whom. Commonly, stakeholders include HRD practitioners and professionals and organizations as well as employees, leaders, and line managers. Secondly, in proposing practical solutions, authors discussed systemic levels, changes in mindsets, and implications for training and learning. The scope of implications related particularly to productivity, especially finance, and employee satisfaction. Several suggestions appeared quite tentative while others were prescriptions or emphasized contingencies. The significance of implications included specific examples of interventions, the importance of building capacity, and advising HRD practitioners to question the methodology of workplace evaluations by external providers. Finally, we found limited examples of implications that were explicitly linked to the UN's SDGs. One exception was Hamilton and Torraco's (2013) paper on workplace strategies to help adults with limited education and skills. This paper implied the importance of quality education, decent work and well-being, and reducing inequality.

Table 1. Six-S Components of an "Implications for Practice" (IFP) Section in *HRDR*.

1. Stakeholders—who, at which level?	
HRD practitioners and professionals	"HRD practitioners can arrange mentoring/coaching opportunities for employees that may influence the way the employees see their tasks and expand the employees' relational boundaries" (Lee & Lee, 2018, p. 305). "It is important that the term talent should not be used by professionals merely because it is fashionable" (Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016, p. 287). "HRD professionals should intervene at appropriate levels and consider how to best support job crafting" (Lee & Lee, 2018, p. 304).
Leaders, line managers, employees	"In addition to working with employees, HRD professionals should train leaders and managers to better understand the nature and process of job crafting" (Lee & Lee, 2018, p. 305). "Seeking and sharing exemplary job crafting cases would also help to facilitate employees' job crafting behaviors" (Lee & Lee, 2018, p. 305). "It is at the level of the individual business unit and the individual employee where the most insight can be gleaned for the HRD practitioner. Engagement is a personal decision chosen by the employee for his or her own reasons . . . [T]hose reasons need to be better understood from the perspective of each individual, unit, and team" (Shuck & Wollard, 2010, p. 106).
Organizations	"HRD practitioners can help employees to find meaning in their work and redesign their jobs in ways that align with overall organizational goals" (Lee & Lee, 2018, p. 305).
HRD scholars, field	"For HRD to continue to develop credibility among other fields, HRD must develop systematic and uniform approaches to determining ROI" (Zula & Chermack, 2007, p. 259).
Multiple stakeholders	"There should be a shared understanding of what TD [talent development] means among the stakeholders": "head of HR, HR managers, and line managers" (Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016, p. 287).
2. Suggestions—what?	
Systems	"HRD must develop systematic and uniform approaches to determining ROI through the utilization of instruments and standardized measures for human capital planning" (Zula & Chermack, 2007, p. 259).
Mindset	"HRD should shift from a focus on short-term task-based match to a long-term dynamic organizational fit and from a focus on technical skills to behavioral traits and characteristics" (Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016, p. 288). "Organizational change requires individuals to reconsider their beliefs, values, and normative orientations" (Choi & Ruona, 2011, p. 64).
Training	"The attention of organizations to processes for improving performance such as training and development [for talent development] is not sufficient" (Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016, p. 287).
Learning	"The benefits of job crafting can be extended to employees' learning and development, which represents another significant purpose of HRD" (Lee & Lee, 2018, p. 306).
3. Scope of solutions	
Productivity, financial	"To support the practitioner, this article provides an overview of scholarship around the concept as well as suggested readings to review and theory to consider. The ability to understand and analyze available offerings can save organizations from investing large sums in measurement devices that are simply repurposed from older research" (Shuck & Wollard, 2010, p. 106). "The mentor should ensure that the performance expectations have been established and communicated to the mentee" (Germain, 2011, p. 139).
Satisfaction	"HRD practitioners can increase employees' performance and well-being by facilitating job crafting behaviors" (Lee & Lee, 2018, p. 305).
4. Semantics—how are implications framed?	
Tentative language	"HRD professionals should decide on their perspective [on] talent . . . their focus . . . and their specific situation and once decided, they should be consistent" (Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016, p. 287). "This article gives practitioners several directions to probe in assessing engagement levels . . . applications might entail determining . . . how the organization defines employee engagement" (Shuck & Wollard, 2010, p. 106).
Prescriptive	"HRD practitioners must utilize a proper planning methodology and empirically researched instruments for human capital planning" (Zula & Chermack, 2007, p. 259).
Contingencies	"An important tension in the workplace is . . . knowing that today's positions are not as stable as they once were and therefore the importance of flexible employees who can learn and develop new skills and expertise. HRD should find a way to reconcile the two by finding a balance considering the contextual factors of the organizations" (Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016, p. 288). "This article discusses the conditions the literature has most emphasized as conducive to fostering individual readiness for organizational change" (Choi & Ruona, 2011, p. 64). "When implementing change initiatives . . ., change professionals should emphasize the fact that organizational change should be regarded as a continuous process that occurs in a given organizational context"; "organizations should foster a learning culture to better cope with organizational change" (Choi & Ruona, 2011, p. 65).
5. Significance—why does the article matter in practice?	
Consequences—specific examples	"Researchers have found that job crafting interventions have been effective in increasing performance in practice. In their quasi-experimental study of primary school teachers, Van Wingerden et al. (2017) found that a job crafting intervention positively affected the teachers' in-role performance" (Lee & Lee, 2018, p. 306). "Clearly, the business case for developing employee engagement is strong." "When considering any investigation or intervention around encouraging employee engagement, HRD practitioners have to be aware of the consequences of their actions. . . . 'Is this organization willing to address an outcome that says employees lack the resources to perform optimally?'" (Shuck & Wollard, 2010, p. 107).
Capacity building	"This article is meant to help HRD practitioners become better consumers of employee engagement materials and literature. As a result of this research, practitioners should be better prepared to ask vendors and third-party consultants questions about their definition of engagement." "Practitioners who start at the behavioral level are missing the essence of employee engagement" (Shuck & Wollard, 2010, p. 106).
Methodology	"According to the literature, employee engagement has often been looked at from the organizational level . . . however, it is clear that employee engagement is an individual-level construct. The method of looking at engagement levels across an organization distorts the nature of the concept. This method is similar to averaging the rate of speed in a sprinting race and reporting the idea that everyone in the race ran at the same pace; it does not take into account the individuals" (Shuck & Wollard, 2010, p. 105).
6. Sustainability—long-term impact?	
Linked to the UN's sustainable development goals	"This study presents a significant, value-added contribution to HRD by bringing together fragmented knowledge from various disciplines of adult education . . . significant issues that emerge from this review are (a) adults with limited education and skills face multiple barriers to advancement, (b) new strategies are needed to help adults with limited education and skills" (Hamilton & Torraco, 2013, p. 322). "New HRD strategies are needed to help adults with limited education and skills. . . . Emphasis is needed on developing basic academic skills in the context of occupational preparation so these adults can acquire the skills they need to more fully participate in U.S. culture and employment" (Hamilton & Torraco, 2013, p. 324).

From Implications to Impact

There is a growing expectation to articulate the impact of academic research to society beyond academia and mere implications for practice. For example, the US National Science Foundation focuses on broader impacts of research that potentially benefit society. Adler and Harzing (2009) argue that the "primary role [of universities] is to support scholarship that addresses the complex questions that matter most to society" (p. 73). Although *HRDR* is an outlet for non-empirical papers, we welcome IFP sections that refer to impact and

organizations. For example, in their paper, Zula and Chermack (2007) state that "[h]uman capital planning (HCP) is a critical business process because of its transformational impact on the value the function delivers to the business" (p. 255). Such statements might be extended to consider societal, economic, and other wider forms of impact.

As new roles for HRD researchers and practitioners emerge in the current global crisis, Dirani et al. (2020) emphasize how HRD contributes strategically through sensemaking, communications, and distributed leadership. During the pandemic and beyond, the practical implications of HRD theorizing can be adopted to support employees' use of technology, their emotional stability, continuing learning and innovation, as well as organizational financial well-being and resilience. The most relevant SDGs for *HRDR* scholars include those that address decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation, and infrastructure; quality education; inequality; gender equality; poverty; good health and well-being; peace, justice, and strong institutions.

We are not advocating abandoning established HRD models to focus solely on COVID-related non-empirical manuscripts. We are reminding ourselves that HRD is both an academic field and a management function (Callahan & De Davila, 2004). Within the IFP sections of *HRDR*, we are encouraging authors to communicate that our theorizing is impactful as well as conceptually interesting.

Conclusion

The purpose of this editorial was to highlight the key characteristics of "implications for practice" sections in *HRDR*. These are challenging to craft in uncertain contexts. Practices are being severely disrupted and established theoretical models are being tested. Six key characteristics are offered here as a guide for authors writing about implications for practice in *HRDR* based on stakeholders, suggestions, solutions, semantics, significance, and sustainability. Moreover, there is a growing body of literature on research impact that offers rich insights for scholars into how we might more proactively communicate the benefits of our theorizing beyond mere implications to include impact on stakeholders outside the academy (e.g., Siverseten & Meijer, 2020).

We look forward to on-going debates about the implications and impact of HRD concepts. This includes from scholars whose own research impact is under-represented (Davies et al., 2020) and from parts of the world where few authors publish in *HRDR*. We also welcome theorizing HRD in contexts beyond the usual suspects such as micro and social enterprises. Helping

readers rediscover established theory in the context of prevailing preoccupations with rapid changes, social justice, virtual, and emerging themes in HRD will no doubt provide thought-provoking and impactful "implications for practice" insights in future *HRDR* articles.

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