

FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR HRD PROFESSIONALS IN EUROPE

FINAL REPORT

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FOREWORD

Before you lies the final official report, concluding the TSER funded project 'The role of HRD within organisations in creating opportunities for lifelong learning: concepts and practices in seven European countries' (ERB-SOE2-CT-2026).

The report was compiled, following official EU guidelines, thus it contains the following elements:

- n Abstract (1 page)
- n Executive summary (15 pages)
- n Background and objectives of the project (chapter 1)
- n Scientific description of the results (chapter 3 and 4) and methodology (chapter 2)
- n Conclusions and policy implications (chapter 5)
- n Dissemination of results (chapter 6)

The report was written by the project management team, using the input of all project partners. The partnership was a very fruitful one, working on the project a learning opportunity for all involved. Therefore, on behalf of all the partners, we would like to thank the European Union for funding this project. We hope the results live up to their expectations. All partners have expressed their intent to disseminate results further, by means of journal articles, conference papers, and by using it in their own future research projects etc. In doing so, we hope the results will be of interest to both academics and practitioners in the field of HRD.

Enschede, spring 2000

The project management team

ABSTRACT

This report describes a European study into the changing role of HRD as a result of the concept of the learning organisation. The following research questions guided data collection:

1. How do HRD departments in learning oriented organisations throughout Europe envision their own role in stimulating and supporting employees to learn continuously, as a part of everyday work (with the intent to contribute to organisational learning, and thus enhance organisational competitiveness)?
2. What strategies do HRD departments adopt to realise their envisioned role?
3. What inhibiting factors do HRD departments encounter when trying to realise their new role? How do they cope with these factors?
4. What differences in outlook can be found between HRD departments in European organisations and the perspectives on the role of HRD, which exists in the US and Japan?

Seven European countries were involved in the project: Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The partnership consisted of researchers from each of these countries. Data were collected throughout all seven nations.

To study the research questions, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods was used:

- Qualitative case studies: to gain an in-depth understanding of the concepts of the HRD-departments, the strategies they adopt to bring these into practice and the facilitative factors as well as the difficulties they encounter during this implementation process. In each participating country 4 cases were selected, so in total 28 case organisations participated.
- A survey of a larger group of organisations: to ascertain to what degree the findings are representative for more organisations, throughout the seven EU-countries that participate in the study. The questionnaire was constructed on the basis of the case study findings. A group of 165 companies participated.
- Literature review: To be able to compare the results of the European study with Japanese and US views on learning in work organisations, a literature review was conducted of publications about HRD in Japan and the US.

With regard to the first research question, it was concluded that HRD functions hold objectives in five areas: supporting the business; supporting (informal) learning; supporting knowledge sharing (as a special form of supporting informal learning); development and coordination of training and changing HRD practices (this is not a purpose in itself, but something HRD functions strive for, in order to better fulfil their tasks). With regard to the division of HRD tasks, it becomes clear that HRD professionals still carry the biggest share of responsibility for HRD, but managers and employees are important active partners, and are expected to become more so in the future.

The case studies yielded a wide range of strategies employed by HRD professionals to realise their envisioned role, without a clear indication of the relative weight of each of these strategies. Training-related strategies still fulfil a significant role. As such, results do not paint a picture of very innovative HRD practices, dominated by new methods such as knowledge management networks and stimulating learning climate in the workplace. Of course, for one part this is because HRD

objectives are not that far-stretched. Providing training is still an important aim. For another part, these outcomes might indicate that HRD practices to some extent fall behind HRD visions.

Are certain specific influences keeping HRD professionals from changing their practices more significantly? The factors which appear to burden the change process most strongly, are: insufficient time for learning on part of the employees; insufficient time for performing HRD tasks on the part of managers; lack of clarity on HRD's role.

The fourth and final research question was: What differences in outlook can be found between HRD departments in European organisations and the perspectives on the role of HRD which exist in the US and Japan? At this stage we conclude that there is no one single European model for HRD, and that there are subtle but meaningful differences as to the philosophies, strategies, and practices on HRD across the countries in the study. Having said this, the European situation was still compared to the outlook on HRD in Japan and the US. To this end, a literature review was undertaken. This review brought to light some interesting country-specific approaches with regard to HRD, though also for these countries, as for Europe, there is no overriding 'Japanese' or 'US' HRD vision. Differences between companies are huge.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Lifelong learning has become, and will remain, an important topic for Europe, as the continent develops into a "learning society" (Gass, 1996; Brandsma 1996). Work organisations are becoming important partners in this learning society, as they provide ever more opportunities for continuous learning to their employees, with the objective to optimise organisational learning. This new focus on employee learning changes the role of the Human Resource Development (HRD) function. As a result of a growing number of publications on HRD's role in organisational learning by fostering the learning of employees, the new role of HRD becomes clearer. However, many uncertainties remain for HRD professionals, especially with regard to the question of how to bring their new roles into practice. There is little 'recipe' literature, and there are only very few instruments to help HRD officers in this regard. Meanwhile, many interesting initiatives are being undertaken by HRD practitioners throughout Europe in facilitating employee learning on a continuous basis, on-the-job and off-the-job, and thus support strategic learning processes of the organisation as a whole.

This study aimed to examine these HRD initiatives, with two main objectives. The first objective was to look more closely into the specific interpretation that European companies give to the new role of HRD in fostering employee learning. Though several influential publications from a European origin have appeared in this field, literature on concepts such as the learning organisation and fostering workplace learning has traditionally been dominated by the perspectives of US and - to a lesser degree- Japanese practices. Because the situation in Europe differs from the situation in these countries, it is useful to gain more insight into the European perspective. By focusing fieldwork on several European countries, and comparing these results to literature from the US and Japanese perspective, insight was gained in the 'European dimension'. In this way the results offer a contribution to a European model for lifelong learning, which becomes increasingly important as the development of Europe towards a learning society is progressing. This model will eventually address the role of individuals, governments, systems for primary education, vocational education and adult education as well as the role of work organisations in creating opportunities for lifelong learning. The results of this study will hopefully feed the discussion on the contribution that one of these parties - namely work organisations - can make to the emerging European infrastructure for lifelong learning. In summary, the first objective of the study was to:

clarify the specific European outlook on the role that HRD in learning oriented organisations can fulfil in lifelong learning, and thus contribute to the discussion on a 'European model of lifelong learning'.

The second objective, at least equally important as the first one, was to contribute to the further professionalisation of HRD in Europe. HRD currently faces many questions and challenges as a result of the organisational need for continuous learning and change. It is important that HRD meets these challenges. Competent and proactive HRD professionals, who are able to assist organisations in the realisation of meaningful, strategic learning processes of employees, will help these organisations in securing their competitiveness. To further professionalisation of the field of

HRD, both concepts and practices of HRD departments were considered in this study. The term concept refers to the way in which HRD departments view their own role in the creation of opportunities for employee learning. The practices are the way in which HRD professionals try to bring their ideas into being, including the problems they face and the way in which they solve these. By deliberately taking into account the practical considerations, the result of the study is twofold: next to a broadened knowledge base it has led to a widened range of useful working strategies and instruments. Thus, the result can serve both as:

- practical guidelines for HRD practitioners throughout Europe on how to facilitate employee learning and thus assist their organisations in securing their competitiveness in a continuously changing environment;
- a venture point for further research on the changing role of HRD in work organisations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There is a theoretical framework on HRD's role within the concept of the learning organisation (outlined in chapter 1), but this has only very limited empirical validation. Moreover, it is unclear whether the framework is valid for the European situation, since much of the literature on which it is based is of American origin, and empirical data were only collected in the Netherlands. Therefore, to clarify the European outlook on HRD in learning oriented organisations, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

- 1) How do HRD departments in learning oriented organisations throughout Europe envision their own role in stimulating and supporting employees to learn continuously, as a part of everyday work (with the intent to contribute to organisational learning, and thus to enhance organisational competitiveness)?
- 2) What strategies do European HRD departments adopt to realise their envisioned role?
- 3) What inhibiting factors do European HRD departments encounter when trying to realise their new role? How do they cope with these factors?
 - n Which factors are conducive to the realisation of HRD's new role?
 - n How do these inhibiting and conducive factors influence the vision of the HRD department with regard to its own role?
- 4) What differences in outlook can be found between HRD departments in European organisations and the perspectives on the role of HRD which exist in the US and Japan?

PHASE I: CASE STUDIES

To study research questions 1 to 3, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods was used. In the first phase of the project, case study research was the main method. The aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of the concepts of the HRD-departments, the strategies they adopt to bring these into practice and the facilitative factors as well as the difficulties they encounter during this implementation process.

For this research project, it was decided to select cases from the population of learning oriented organisations in the seven participating countries, with over 500 employees. The reason to limit the study to larger organisations is that these organisations often have a more clearly recognizable HRD function than SMES. In order to select suitable case studies a preliminary research was conducted in each country. On the basis of studies already conducted (e.g. Leys, Wijngaerts & Hancké, 1992; Stahl, Nyhan & d'Ajola, 1993; Tjepkema & Wognum, 1995), an operationalisation was made of the concept of learning oriented organisations.

The most important selection criterion was: can the organisation be seen as a good example of a learning oriented organisation? For instance, do they value employee learning, provide facilities for (informal) employee learning, value and support the acquisition of learning skills? Other important criteria were whether the HRD tasks were carried out in a pro-active way (either by managers, HRD professionals or others), a clear vision on the role of HRD (professionals) in the organisation, and whether the organisation undertook interesting and innovative initiatives to support employee (and even organisational) learning. The aim was not to create a representative group, but to select 'good examples' of learning oriented organisations with a pro-active HRD function, since it is from such examples that the most interesting lessons can be learned. In case study research, this is a more fruitful approach than to select representative organisations (it is impossible to create a representative group, since the research group is so small). Following this procedure, a total of 28 cases were selected: four cases in each of the seven participating countries. As much as possible, each partner selected two cases in the service industry and two from manufacturing industry, to make a comparison between these two types of companies possible. Also with a view to facilitating comparison, the researchers tried, as far as possible, to select cases between 500 to 1000 employees. So, sometimes not the whole company was selected as a case, but one division or a single establishment. This proved to be difficult for some companies, so some of the cases are larger than 1000 employees.

After the partners had selected suitable case organisations, they collected data and compiled a case report for each organisation. Data collection took place in a number of ways to enhance reliability of the findings (a method commonly known as triangulation; see Yin, 1984). For a thorough analysis of the data, first a within case analysis was conducted by all partners, prior to writing the case study reports. Second, a cross case analysis was performed, both per country and overall, by the project management team. For these analyses, the matrix technique described by Miles & Huberman (1981) was used (See also: Yin, 1984).

PHASE II: SURVEY & LITERATURE REVIEW

In a second phase of the study a survey was held under a larger group of organisations, to ascertain to what degree the case study findings are representative for more organisations throughout the seven EU-countries that participate in the study. Moreover, to be able to compare the results of the European study with Japanese and US views on learning in work organisations, a literature review of Japanese and North American publications was conducted. This was used to ascertain whether there is a European outlook on HRD in learning organisations.

The primary respondents for the survey were HRD directors/HRD managers: those with a strategic/managerial role in the HRD function. Since they have a helicopter view of the HRD function, they were able to answer all the questions (on vision as well as on strategies). In case of very large organisations, the HRD function on the division level or a large establishment was selected, not the HRD function on the corporate level. In order to optimise response rates, respondents were approached by phone first, to ask whether they were willing to fill out the questionnaire ('warm approach'). If respondents agreed to participate in the study, questionnaires were subsequently sent by mail. The questionnaire addressed the same topics as the case study research: organisational context; vision of HRD function on own role; strategies to realise envisioned role; conducive and inhibiting factors.

Just like the case study research, the survey was aimed at HRD departments in large (500 employees or more) organisations, which can be considered to be learning oriented organisations. The primary objective of the survey was to verify case results. Therefore, it was important to select organisations according to the same selection criteria, namely: there is reason to assume the company can be regarded a learning oriented organisation (or aspires to be one); the company has an HRD function and the company has at least 500 employees.

Large organisations were chosen because these usually have a specialized HRD department with an explicit view on its own role within the organization. Though this may also hold true for some smaller organizations, the survey was held under large organizations only, in order to facilitate comparison of results. Furthermore, concepts and initiatives found in large organizations often also prove to be useful for smaller organizations, even SME's. The desired amount of organisations participating in the survey was approximately 140 (20 per country). Of course, this is a rather limited number, but the amount of learning oriented organizations was estimated to be not very high at the outset of this study. The total amount of learning oriented organizations with a pro active HRD department is estimated to be not very large, though this situation is somewhat different for each of the participating countries. Since some of the partners found it easier than expected to find suitable organisations who were willing to participate, for some countries the amount of respondents was higher than planned. Eventually, the questionnaire was filled out by respondents from 165 companies.

THE PARTNERSHIP

The research project team consisted of partners from seven countries, plus a member of the European Consortium for the Learning Organisation. The project management team consisted of researchers from the University of Twente (The Netherlands). The table below provides an overview of the partnership.

Country	Organisation	Research team
The Netherlands (project management)	University of Twente, Faculty of Educational Science & Technology	Prof. dr. J. Scheerens Prof. dr. M. Mulder Ms. S. Tjepkema, Msc Ms. H. ter Horst, Msc.
Belgium	Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School	Prof. dr. D. Buyens Ms. S. van Schelstraete, Msc.
Finland	University of Jyväskylä, Department of Education	Prof. dr. T. Vaherva Ms. H. Woods, Msc.
France	BLV Learning Partners	Dr. D. Belet
Germany	University of Chemnitz-Zwickau, Faculty of Economics Department of Personnel and Management	Prof. dr. P. Pawlowsky Dr. R. Reinhardt Ms. K. Meinicke, Msc. Ms. A. Buschman, Msc.
United Kingdom	Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham Business School, Department of HRM	Prof. dr. J. Leopold Dr. J. Stewart Ms. Dr. S. Sambrook
Italy	Isfol	Dr. M. Tomassini
Italy	Scienter	Dr. A. Cavrini
International	ECLO	Dr. M. Kelleher

Each partner organisation took care of data collection in its own country (the two Italian partners shared that responsibility for Italy). The project management team prepared drafts of all relevant documents, such as the data collection plan, data collection instruments, theoretical framework and the final report. The partners commented on those drafts, and their input was used to finalise documents. The partners met for two partner meetings, and otherwise communicated frequently through e-mail, phone and letters. The role of ECLO in the partnership was mainly to help find suitable cases and to facilitate the dissemination of findings.

RESULTS

CONTEXT

In a broad sense, the companies participating in the case study and the survey can be compared to each other, with regard to the organisational context factors.

Just as for the 28 case organisations, improving client focus is an issue of major importance to the 165 companies participating in the survey. Other key strategic issues are improving and innovating products, processes and services. Strategies with regard to developing human resources, since these are a key factor in improving organisational learning are relevant, but come in second place. They appear to be 'means to an end', instead of strategies with an inherent relevance.

Learning oriented organisations employ a rich variety of change strategies in order to stimulate their development toward a learning organisation. Creating a client oriented culture appears to be an often-used measure (more so than became apparent from the case studies). But initiatives in the field of changing organisational structures (such as implementing teams), attention to management development; changes in the strategy development process (e.g. sharing a mission statement); creating a learning culture and changes in HRD strategies and structure were also encountered.

The most important conclusion that can be drawn is that companies use a rich bouquet of change initiatives, in which no one type of change is particularly dominant. Which type of changes are initiated is probably determined by a mix of factors, such as strategical objectives, employee characteristics, current organisational problems, organisational structure and management style, etcetera. Unraveling these relationships falls beyond the scope of this project, which focuses mainly on HRD, not the companies as a whole.

The desire to become more client centered, among other things by continuous improvement and innovation, appears to be the main motivator for wanting to become a learning organisation. Though more people-oriented reasons (such as improving the quality of working life) seem to play a role as well.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: ENVISIONED ROLE

Conclusions from the case studies regarding important HRD objectives and the division of HRD tasks appear to be supported by the survey results. HRD functions have objectives in five areas:

- n Supporting the business;
- n Supporting (informal) learning;
- n Supporting knowledge sharing (as a special form of supporting informal learning);
- n Development and coordination of training;
- n Changing HRD practices.

All are rather important, some more so than others, but differences are too small to reflect a real rank order of objectives. Of course, changing HRD practices is an intermediary objective, it is not a purpose in itself, but something HRD functions strive for a reorganisation of HRD practices, in order to better fulfil their tasks. Most important to note is the expectation of survey respondents that objectives in the field of supporting informal learning and promoting knowledge sharing are expected to increase most in importance in the future. Also relevant to point out is that supporting the business (objectives) is one of the most important HRD objectives, but results from the question concerning HRD's involvement in important organisational change initiatives (see previous section) suggest that this involvement is usually not very large. So, the question as to in how far HRD fulfils a strategic role remains open.

With regard to the division of HRD tasks, it becomes clear that HRD professionals still carry the biggest share of responsibility for HRD (at least in their own estimation of the situation). Managers and employees are important active partners, and are expected to become more so in the future. Their role is predominantly one of identifying learning needs, stimulating and supporting informal learning, ensuring continuous learning (of oneself and others). HRD professionals provide support, among other things by organising training and supporting informal learning efforts.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: STRATEGIES

The case studies yielded a wide range of strategies employed by HRD professionals to realise their envisioned role, without a clear indication of the relative weight of each of these strategies. The survey attempted to establish somewhat of a ranking order: which strategies are considered most important? This proved difficult, since nearly all strategies are rated as 'relevant' or

'important' by the respondents. However, when overlooking the general picture it does become clear that training-related strategies still fulfil a significant role. Among the least important strategies are instruments and initiatives to increase employee responsibility for learning.

As such, results do not paint a picture of very innovative HRD practices, dominated by new methods such as knowledge management networks and stimulating learning climate in the workplace. Of course, for one part this is because HRD objectives are not that far-stretched. Providing training is still an important aim. For another part, these outcomes might indicate that HRD practices to some extent fall behind HRD visions.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: INFLUENCING FACTORS

Are certain specific influences keeping HRD professionals from changing their practices more significantly? Neither in the case studies nor the survey, an unequivocal direction of influencing factors could be established. In the case studies, some factors were found to negatively affect change processes in one organisation, while they were reported as positive driving forces for other companies. Sometimes factors were experienced as a negative and a positive influence at once in a single organisation (but in different parts). Survey results provide some insight into the most important influencing factors. There is a group of factors, such as motivation for learning or money for HRD activities, which impacts change sometimes positively (sufficient motivation, sufficient resources) and sometimes negatively (lack of motivation, lack of money). On the other hand, there is a small group of factors which in general appears to have a negative influence. The factors which appear to burden the change process most strongly, are:

- n Insufficient time for learning on part of the employees;
- n Insufficient time for performing HRD tasks on the part of managers;
- n Lack of clarity on HRD's role.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4

The fourth and final research question was: What differences in outlook can be found between HRD departments in European organisations and the perspectives on the role of HRD which exist in the US and Japan? First, some remarks have to be made with regard to differences between the European companies and countries participating in the study.

During the project various attempts have been made to find differences between organisations as to the envisioned role of the HRD functions, the strategies organisations employ to implement HRD within the framework of lifelong learning and ideas about the learning organisation, and the influencing factors. During the analysis of the case studies the research team tried to find differences between types of organisations, and an additional Masters thesis project was conducted to find these differences (Ilina, 1999). The organisations were divided into four cells, each of which corresponded with the selection criteria for the case studies: economic sector (service of industry) and production type (customer orientation or mass production). In neither the analyses of the research team, nor in the Masters thesis project, differences were found. It is therefore concluded that the type of organisation does not influence the way in which these organisations envisage the role of HRD, the strategies they employ to implement HRD activities, and the factors that facilitate the attainment of the envisioned role of HRD. This means that organisations of the type selected for this study (large organisations that are learning oriented) do not differ much as to their philosophies, policies and practices regarding the role of HRD and the way in which this is

implemented. Furthermore, in these organisations, factors that influence the implementation of the ideas tend to have the same impact.

Another issue that returned quite often was the question as to whether the results of the study are different for the different countries included in the study. In other words, is there a European outlook on the concept of HRD in the organisations selected? This appeared to be a question that was hard to answer, because finding national differences was not one of the research questions, and cultural, political, jurisdictional and other related factors were not included in the study. Nevertheless, based on the survey data some comparisons could be made, and although the absolute differences between countries in the study are small, there appeared to be some striking differences. It is hard to test these differences by the methodology used in the study. Various Kruskal-Wallis tests were performed, and the results showed that many of the items within variables were statistically different, but one can argue that this is hard measurement with soft data. Since most of the items in the survey are perceptual by nature, it is not sure whether cultural factors play a role in the explanation of the differences between countries. The comparisons showed that there were interesting national differences. These differences need to be studied further, as in the survey no questions were asked to explain the reasons as to why certain items were rated as being more important than others. It would be informative to link this further study to the national contexts, incentives for organisations and individuals to invest in HRD activities, policy measures taken by the national administration, law enactment in certain fields (like environmental law, law on labour conditions, safety), and the developments in the educational systems. This may show further intra-European diversity than has been found in this study. But above all, it may explain the diversity to a large extent, and this may lead to guidelines for European policy efforts to improve conditions for HRD in European countries. At this stage we conclude that there is no one single European model for HRD, and that there are subtle but meaningful differences as to the philosophies, strategies, and practices on HRD across the countries in the study.

Having said this, the European situation was still compared to the outlook on HRD in Japan and the US. To this end, a literature review was undertaken. This review brought to light some interesting country-specific approaches with regard to HRD, though also for these countries, as for Europe, there is no overriding 'Japanese' or 'US' HRD vision. Differences between companies are huge.

MAIN CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most important conclusion of this study is that the learning organisation is a metaphor that is still important for HRD professionals, as to:

- n the need for developing collective intelligence within organizations and organizational forms supporting such a need, overcoming the remains of fordism at different levels;
- n the importance of knowledge and in particular tacit knowledge which has to be recognized and valorized insofar it is embedded in human resources;
- n the overcoming of training-based development policies towards new policies fostering learning in different ways (support to competencies development, learning networks, learning self-assessment in the communities of practice, etc..).

The research shows the need for a clearer status of HRD within HRM and for significant improvements of HRD tools, techniques, types of interventions, self-assessment of goals and results. Such a status and improvements should be based on further growth of important issues, such as:

- n self-awareness of possibilities and limits of HRD function by the side of its members;
- n up-dating of professional skills, especially regarding the interpretation frames of the evolutionary realities in which HRD activities take place.

The crucial precondition is that HRD functions should increase their strategic orientation in order to being involved in strategic processes. HRD professionals are challenged to continuously evaluate and redefine their activities in order to meet these strategic requirements. However, these rather strategic aspects have not been investigated in detail so far.

The study also shows that the development of human resources is not a prerogative of HRD professionals. More and more it is becoming a business of line-managers. This has different reasons:

- n convergence of management of organisational competences (aimed at internal effectiveness and competitive advantages on the market), and the management of individual/communities competencies (based on explicit and tacit knowledge);
- n new ways of organising firms, in particular: a. the diffusion of forms of organisation by processes requires that line managers responsible for processes, or parts of them, can flexibly manage the resources at their disposal in view of specific dynamic exigencies of the processes (versus the relatively static exigencies of functions); and b. the decentralization processes require specific forms of local governance of knowledge and competencies (versus the traditional position of HRD in the headquarter).

There are discernible trends in the changing role of HRD professionals across Europe. These trends also suggest an expanding and increasingly significant role for managers and individual employees in HRD practices.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

This opening chapter first provides an overview of the main objectives of the study (section 1.1). After that the theoretical framework underlying the study is sketched.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Lifelong learning has become, and will remain, an important topic for Europe, as the continent develops into a "learning society" (Gass, 1996; Brandsma 1996). Work organisations are becoming important partners in this learning society, as they provide ever more opportunities for continuous learning to their employees, with the objective to optimise organisational learning. This new focus on employee learning changes the role of the Human Resource Development (HRD) function. As a result of a growing number of publications on HRD's role in organisational learning by fostering the learning of employees, the new role of HRD becomes clearer. However, many uncertainties remain for HRD professionals, especially with regard to the question of how to bring their new roles into practice. There is little 'recipe' literature, and there are only very few instruments to help HRD officers in this regard. Meanwhile, many interesting initiatives are being undertaken by HRD practitioners throughout Europe in facilitating employee learning on a continuous basis, on-the-job and off-the-job, and thus support strategic learning processes of the organisation as a whole.

This study aimed to examine these HRD initiatives, with two main objectives. The first objective was to look more closely into the specific interpretation that European companies give to the new role of HRD in fostering employee learning. Though several influential publications from a European origin have appeared in this field, literature on concepts such as the learning organisation and fostering workplace learning has traditionally been dominated by the perspectives of US and - to a lesser degree- Japanese practices. Because the situation in Europe differs from the situation in these countries, it is useful to gain more insight into the European perspective. By focusing fieldwork on several European countries, and comparing these results to literature from the US and Japanese perspective, insight was gained in the 'European dimension'. In this way the results offer a contribution to a European model for lifelong learning, which becomes increasingly important as the development of Europe towards a learning society is progressing. This model will eventually address the role of individuals, governments, systems for primary education, vocational education and adult education as well as the role of work organisations in creating opportunities for lifelong learning. The results of this study will hopefully feed the discussion on the contribution that one of these parties - namely work organisations - can make to the emerging European infrastructure for lifelong learning.

In summary, the first objective of the study was to:

clarify the specific European outlook on the role that HRD in learning oriented organisations can fulfil in lifelong learning, and thus contribute to the discussion on a 'European model of lifelong learning'.

The second objective, at least equally important as the first one, was to contribute to the further professionalisation of HRD in Europe. HRD currently faces many questions and challenges as a result of the organisational need for continuous learning and change. It is important that HRD meets these challenges. Competent and proactive HRD professionals, who are able to assist organisations in the realisation of meaningful, strategic learning processes of employees, will help these organisations in securing their competitiveness. To further professionalisation of the field of HRD, both concepts and practices of HRD departments were considered in this study. The term concept refers to the way in which HRD departments view their own role in the creation of opportunities for employee learning. The practices are the way in which HRD professionals try to bring their ideas into being, including the problems they face and the way in which they solve these. By deliberately taking into account the practical considerations, the result of the study is twofold: next to a broadened knowledge base it has led to a widened range of useful working strategies and instruments. Thus, the result can serve both as:

- practical guidelines for HRD practitioners throughout Europe on how to facilitate employee learning and thus assist their organisations in securing their competitiveness in a continuously changing environment;
- a venture point for further research on the changing role of HRD in work organisations.

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section outlines the main theoretical concepts underlying this study. First, the notion of lifelong learning and the development of a learning society are briefly discussed. This is followed by a reflection on the need for organisational learning and the concepts of the learning organisation and the learning oriented organisation (section 1.2.1). After that, the theoretical basis on the changing role of the Human Resource Development function as a consequence of the concept of the learning organisation is discussed (section 1.2.2).

1.2.1 ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING IN A LEARNING-ORIENTED ORGANISATION

The idea of learning throughout the life span is not new. The notion has already been in the spotlights during the seventies, when concepts such as 'lifelong learning', 'recurrent education' and 'education permanente', were coined. During the eighties, the discussion was continued on a smaller scale. Recently, the theme of lifelong learning has gained renewed attention (Brandsma, 1997). The most visible manifestation of this attention is the fact that 1996 was proclaimed as the official European Year of Lifelong Learning. This has rekindled previous discussions and instigated a new flood of publications, conferences and public debates.

LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LEARNING SOCIETY

Lifelong learning is defined by Brandsma (1997, p.10) as:

- n a process of personal development from employed and unemployed people that takes place continuously;
- n a process that can contain both informal and formal activities;
- n a process that makes demands upon structures in which lifelong learning takes place/can take place in creating the conditions that facilitate learning and learning to learn.

Lifelong learning is a process with many objectives, which the OECD describes as follows:

"It is geared to serve several objectives: to foster personal development, including the use of time outside work (including in retirement); to strengthen democratic values; to cultivate community life; to maintain social cohesion; and to promote innovation, productivity and economic growth."
(OECD, 1996, p.15)

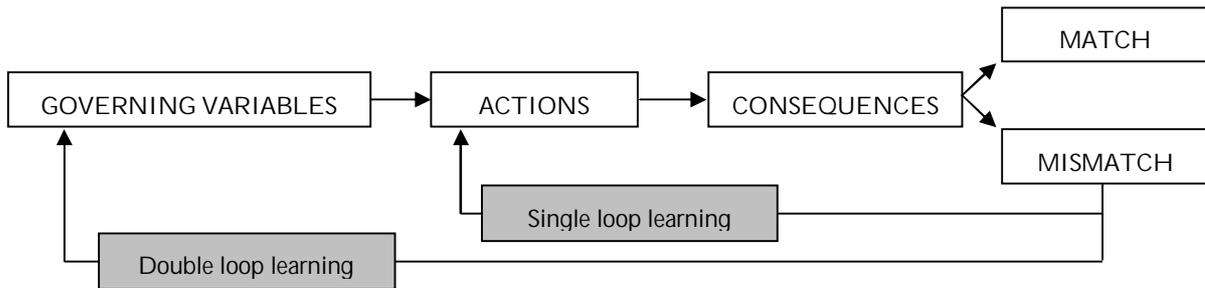
The relevance of lifelong learning gives rise to the need to develop a so-called learning society, which provides an infrastructure that supports learning throughout the life span. A learning society refers to mobilisation of not only the public education and training systems but of all sectors in society, like public authorities and individuals in creating opportunities for learning (Gass, 1996). Companies also play an important role in creating a learning society, as work grows to become an important source for learning opportunities (Pawlowski & Baumer, 1996). To an increasing degree, organisations deliberately set out to create these learning opportunities for employees, believing that they need 'learning individuals' in order to realise 'organisational learning'.

ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

Current business realities of many European organisations place ever more demands on their ability to respond quickly and adequately to changes in their environments, by improving existing products and services or by innovation (a.o. Carnevale, 1992; Nonaka, 1991). As a result of the ever-increasing rate of (technological) change - induced by developments such as globalisation and the current 'explosion of knowledge' - organisational capacity for learning is being pinpointed as the key ability for organisations in the nineties. New managerial concepts such as the learning organisation (Senge, 1990), the intelligent organisation (Pinchot & Pinchot, 1994; Quinn, 1994),

the knowledge creating company (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) and knowledge management (Drucker, 1995; Leonard-Barton, 1995; Pawlowsky & Baumer, 1996) reflect the search for ways to improve organisational capacity for learning.

There are several classifications of organisational learning processes (e.g. Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Bomers, 1990; Pascale, 1990; Swieringa and Wierdsma, 1992), practically all of which are based on the typology of Argyris & Schön (1978). This typology distinguishes between two types of learning: single loop and double loop learning. The diagram below (Argyris, 1992) depicts both processes.



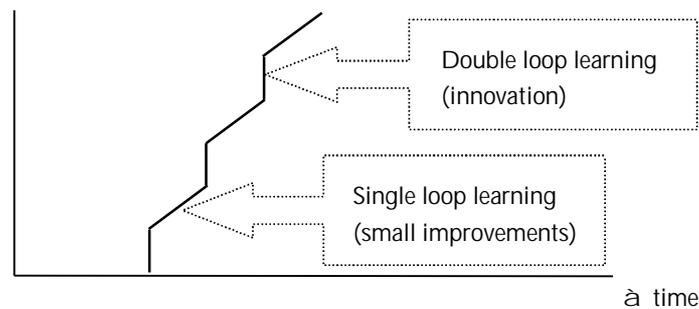
An organisation's governing variables are, for example, its mission statement, and its (tacitly held) assumptions on the best way in which to achieve the organisational goals. Organisations undertake actions based on these governing variables. These actions have certain consequences. Here, the figure distinguishes between two possibilities. On the one hand, the results can be as expected, in which case there is a match between the intended outcome and the actual outcome. On the other hand, it is possible that the results of an action are not what the organisation had expected, in which case there is talk of a mismatch between expectations and outcome.

SINGLE LOOP, DOUBLE LOOP AND DEUTERO LEARNING

In the theory of Argyris & Schön (1978) a mismatch is the starting point for an organisational learning process. The organisation has to find out how to change its actions in order to achieve the intended outcome. This learning process can occur at two levels. First the level of single loop learning: this means the organisation makes small adjustments in its actions, but doesn't radically change them. To take a simplified example: imagine a cook who discovers hotel guests find the cake he just baked is too sweet. The next time the cook bakes a cake, he adds a little less sugar to the dough than in the original recipe. In an organisational context a renewed version of a known product is a good example of an outcome of a single loop learning process.

However, making small adjustments on the action level is not always enough to solve the problem. Sometimes the reason for the mismatch is located on a deeper level: the organisation's governing variables. Then a double loop learning process is required in order to reach the intended outcome. To return to the example of the hotel cook: suppose he finds out the guests don't like sweet cake at all, but would prefer some salty dish instead. In this case he discovers that one of his basic assumptions - namely that guests like sweet cake - isn't accurate and needs adjustment. Instead of simply changing his cake recipe he now has to look for an entirely new dish to make (and an entirely new recipe). In the case of organisational learning the outcome of a double loop learning process could be, for example, the introduction of a completely new product, or introducing an existing product on a totally new market.

Double loop learning processes thus have much more far reaching consequences than single loop learning processes do. To illustrate this point, single loop learning is often (o.a.o Morgan, 1990) compared to keeping a ship on course by making small adjustments, whereas double loop learning resembles the process of changing a ship's course. Single loop learning leads to incremental changes in organisational functioning, whereas double loop learning results in renewal or innovation of existing practices, services or products. Therefore, both kinds of learning processes add to each other. Imai (1986) drew up the following figure to illustrate the supplementary character of both learning processes.



Next to the processes of single loop and double loop learning Argyris & Schön (1978) have determined a third level of organisational learning, which they labelled 'deutero-learning'. This refers to the capacity of organisations of learning how to carry out, and how to optimise its (single and double loop) learning processes. In other words, it refers to 'learning how to learn' (Thijssen, 1988; Senge, 1990; Swieringa & Wierdsma, 1992).

ORGANISATIONAL AND EMPLOYEE LEARNING

An organisation as such is an abstract notion, and so is its learning capacity. The ability of an organisation for learning is embodied in its employees. Employee learning thus is a necessary prerequisite for organisational learning (Kim, 1993).

For learning on an organisational level, organisations depend on the learning of their employees. In a sense employees embody an organisation's capacity for learning, since they embody the capacity to:

- n acquire or create new knowledge for the organisation (e.g. by learning from daily work experiences, studying new technological advancements or learning about work practices used by other companies);
- n disseminate this knowledge to others within the organisation;
- n apply the new knowledge in improved or renewed work practices, products and services.¹

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Together, these activities make up what is also known as a 'knowledge cycle', or 'organisational learning cycle': Dixon, 1994; Pawlowsky & Baumer, 1996).

In this respect, Honold (1991, p. 56) describes a learning organisation as:

'one whose members are continuously deliberately learning new things. They apply what they learn to improve the product or service quality, the processes involved in making the product or providing the service, the quality of the environment in which employees work and the performance of members of the organisation.'

However, employee learning in itself is not enough to ensure learning at an organisational level. In order for an organisation to learn, employee learning should not be limited to individual learning. Important in this respect is adequate (bottom-up) communication, and a certain amount of empowerment of employees within the operational core. The first allows learning experiences from employees on different organisational levels to be transferred to other levels. The latter creates opportunities for employees to use their learning experiences in order to make improvements in the workplace (a.o. Pascale, 1990; Senge, 1990).

LEARNING ORGANISATIONS AND LEARNING ORIENTED ORGANISATIONS

The high current rate of change in the economic and technological environment of many organisations has given rise to the development of a new managerial concept: that of the learning organisation. This concept provides general ideas on how to design and manage organisations in order to survive in a highly changing environment.

LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

A learning organisation can, in plain terms, be described as an organisation:

- n which responds to (and anticipates) changes in its environment by learning on a strategic level (by single loop and double loop learning); moreover, it deliberately aims at improving its ability for learning (deutero-learning);
- n which, in order to learn on a strategic level, makes use of the learning of all employees, therefore this employee learning is enhanced at all hierarchical levels.

One of the most distinguishing features of 'a learning organisation' is that it operates in an environment marked by a high rate of change. A learning organisation accepts both this environmental turbulence and the fact that it cannot predict which changes will occur. In the words of Pedler, Boydell & Burgoyne (1991): 'a learning organisation is marked by an acceptance that things don't stay the same for long.'

Though this may seem a trivial matter, this attitude differs considerably from the tacit assumption most organisations hold, namely that the environment will not change profoundly and certainly not in a way that can not be predicted on beforehand. Seen in this light, the acceptance of change as a part of everyday organisational reality means a notably different strategic outlook from more traditional organisational models.

As a consequence of this acceptance of change, a learning organisation does not work according to a long term detailed strategic plan. Instead, it has one overriding clear goal (often referred to as the organisational 'mission'), which serves as a general guiding principle for the course the organisation takes. It does not set out a specific 'route' by which it wants to reach this goal. In other words: a learning organisation knows where it wants to go, but does not plan on beforehand how to get there exactly.

Swieringa and Wierdsma (1990) use the metaphor of the 'traveller' and the 'tourist' to describe this attitude of a learning organisation with regard to strategic planning. Whereas the tourist typically travels according to a meticulously planned schedule, in which every step of the journey is laid down on beforehand, the traveller only has a broad idea of where he wants to go, and determines the exact route along the way. In doing so, he reacts to unforeseen circumstances. If the weather is particularly nice in one spot, for instance, he may decide to spend a few days extra in that area.

A learning organisation can be compared to a traveller. It knows where it wants to go (the 'mission') but plans how to get there step by step, constantly responding to changing circumstances. A clear picture of where the organisation wants to be in the long run, is indispensable. Without that, the company can easily lose its sense of direction as a result of the many incremental changes that are being made (Morgan, 1986; Senge, 1990).

Operating as a 'traveller' means there is a constant demand on the ability of the organisation to learn how to anticipate to changes and respond to unexpected situations in such a way that it can still reach its final goal. Thus, the organisation's capacity for learning becomes vital to its continued existence. That is - in short - the main reason why a learning organisation strives to continuously enhance its learning abilities on every level, in order to be able to react quickly and adequately to changes that might occur (o.a. Ansoff, 1987; Bomers, 1990; De Geus, 1988). A learning organisation is primarily an organisation that is capable of enhancing its own abilities for learning, it is capable of learning to learn (Thijssen, 1988; Senge, 1990; Swieringa & Wierdsma, 1992).

The second element in the definition above concerns the role of employees. As was mentioned earlier, for learning on a strategic - or organisational - level, organisations depend on employee learning. In a sense employees embody an organisation's capacity for learning, since they embody the capacity to:

- o acquire or create new knowledge for the organisation (e.g. by learning from daily work experiences, studying new technological advancements or learning about work practices used by other companies);
- o disseminate this knowledge to others within the organisation;
- o apply the new knowledge in improved or renewed work practices, products and services.

This notion affects the view of the added value which employees have for an organisation. Metaphorically speaking: the idea of the employee as a 'hired hand' makes way for the idea of the employee as a 'hired head'. Organisations need for their employees to learn, in the sense of acquiring new knowledge and skills and using these to improve existing work practices, products or services, or to jumpstart innovation. Learning, therefore, becomes part of everyday work. As Sugarman describes it:

in place of the old model, which was first learning, then work, we now have the new model: first learning, then work-which-includes-continuous-learning. We are not just learning to do the work better; we are building the organisation's knowledge base and revising its tools, processes and products, as we work. (Sugarman, 1998, p. 65).

And as this is the case, and employee learning takes on a strategic meaning for organisations, organisations seek ways to facilitate employee learning on an on-going basis (see e.g. McGill & Slocum, 1994; Winslow & Bramer, 1994). For instance by management acting not as a boss but as a 'coach', or by creating rich jobs which trigger learning.

This description doesn't do more than provide a general image of what a learning organisation is. It doesn't present a clear, tangible picture of such a company. This is mainly due to the fact that the concept of the learning organisation is not an organisational model in the sense of a blueprint. The concept is more adequately described as a metaphor or an ideal type (see a.o. Leys, Wijgaerts & Hancké, 1992), a way of looking at organisations whereby the process of organisational learning, and not the primary work process is at the centre of attention. This makes it very difficult to assess whether or not an organisation is a 'learning organisation'. Consequentially, there is very little insight into the question as to how many companies can be labelled as such. It is, however, clear that the management concept has gained a strong foothold. A considerable number of companies is experimenting with (parts of) the idea of the learning organisation. A logical starting point is the enhancement of employee learning.

LEARNING ORIENTED ORGANISATIONS

Organisations which focus on creating opportunities for employee learning, with the long-term goal of becoming a learning organisation, can be labelled 'learning oriented organisations' (a term coined by Leys, Wijgaerts & Hancké, 1992), organisations which:

- n create (on-the-job as well as off-the-job) facilities for employee learning;
- n stimulate employees not only to attain new knowledge and skills, but also to acquire skills in the field of learning and problem solving and thus develop their capacity for future learning ('learning to learn') (Tjepkema & Wognum, 1996).

The number of these so-called learning oriented organisations is as yet unknown, but given the popularity of management concepts such as the learning organisation, the intelligent organisation and knowledge management, the group could already be quite considerable. In any case, the number in general is estimated to be growing rapidly. One could say that becoming a learning oriented organisation is the first stage in the growth process towards a learning organisation. Becoming a learning organisation requires changes in organisational structures (e.g. process oriented structure instead of functional, the introduction of teams), culture (e.g. learning culture) and management styles (e.g. from hierarchical styles towards a coaching style). Becoming a learning oriented organisation, means making the first steps towards these changes. Especially in larger organisations, with a higher degree of specialisation, the HRD function traditionally plays an important role in employee learning. Its role changes considerably when their organisation becomes a learning oriented organisation, intent upon stimulating and supporting employee learning on a continuous basis. In the next section this changing role of HRD is discussed.

1.2.2 HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN LEARNING - ORIENTED ORGANISATIONS

As organisations develop into learning oriented organisations, this has a profound impact on the relationship between work and learning. Whereas learning used to be primarily equalled to training, it now becomes predominantly associated with learning from experience, and self-directed learning. Similarly, learning is no longer regarded as a classroom activity, but primarily as something that takes place on-the-job as a continuous, on-going activity. On the one hand this changing view of learning has far-reaching consequences for line management, which is expected to manage the workplace as a place fit for learning (for instance by fostering a learning climate, and by coaching employees). On the other hand it considerably affects the role and tasks of Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals, who are involved in the delivery of training activities for the organisation.

A NEW ROLE FOR THE HRD FUNCTION

Since concepts such as knowledge management and the learning organisation are primarily managerial concepts, there is a considerable amount of literature with practical guidelines on the new role of line management as a leader, a facilitator of learning processes and a coach (e.g. Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith & Kleiner, 1994; Van den Broeck, 1994). The role of HRD in this process, however, receives much less attention in the leading management literature on organisational learning. Yet, it is becoming the theme of a growing number of publications in the - more specialised - field of HRD. The role which is generally contributed to HRD practitioners in these publications is the role of consultant towards line management on how to facilitate and stimulate employee learning in the workplace, and how to link this learning to organisational needs and goals. Their work field broadens considerably, and the word 'trainer' (as they are sometimes called) is therefore really no longer an adequate label for their function. The new role of HRD practitioners will be that of a strategic learning facilitator, performance consultant or even change agent (Laiken, 1993; MacLagan, 1996; Marsick & Watkins, 1993; Onstenk, 1994; Pearn, Roderick & Mulrooney, 1995; Robinson & Robinson, 1995; Stahl, Nyhan & d'Ajola, 1993). In some organisations, HRD professionals operate as change agents, starting and supporting the change process towards a learning organisation. Of course, such proactive HRD practitioners fulfil a different role from HRD professionals in companies where management has the leading role in the change process, and where HRD is a more reactive function. In general, the field of HRD seems to be moving from a reactive, isolated business function to a more strategic factor in today's companies (Gavavar, 1991; Barham & Rassan, 1989).

Though the empirical basis for the new role of HRD departments is still very limited, some general working principles have been established, which reflect HRD departments' visions on their own new role in learning oriented organisations. These are based on a study of literature on HRD and organisational learning (Tjepkema, 1993a), and the findings of two small Dutch studies (using the case study approach) which were used to verify and add to the theoretical assumptions derived from that literature review (Tjepkema, 1993b; Tjepkema & Wognum, 1995). Both research projects entailed only six case studies, so possibilities to generalise the findings are very limited. Below, a brief characterisation of this vision is provided, followed by a short overview of the main consequences for the tasks of HRD professionals and the changing nature of HRD interventions.

GENERAL VISION OF HRD FUNCTIONS IN LEARNING ORIENTED ORGANISATIONS

Generally, HRD functions in learning oriented organisations appear to focus deliberately on the broader field of learning instead of on training (which is but one form of learning). One of the first priorities of training departments that deliberately choose to aim towards 'facilitating learning' instead of 'delivering training', is to change their name in order to reflect this new vision. Thus, the 'training department' changes into - for instance - the 'center for organisational learning and change' or the 'learning and development centre'. It is also common for these departments to (partly or completely) abolish the departmental structure, and place (part of the) HRD officers in the line organisation. Thus, an HRD 'department' in a learning organisation may look completely different from a training department in the traditional sense. Please note that in this report, the term HRD department is used to mean 'all HRD professionals in the organisation' (whether organised in a departmental structure or not). Next to HRD department, the term HRD function is also used.

The vision of HRD departments in learning oriented organisations with regard to their own role can be characterised by three basic principles. These principles are mentioned in the literature as well as by HRD departments who are working on the development towards a learning organisation (cf. case study research by Tjepkema & Wognum, 1995).

NOT 'TRAINING' BUT 'LEARNING'

Perhaps the most distinguishing working principle of HRD departments in learning oriented organisations is the above-mentioned broadened view of their own work field. It's not limited to training, but stretched to facilitating and supporting learning processes within the organisation, with the aim to contribute to meaningful organisational learning processes. In this respect, one HRD officer who participated in the study mentioned earlier, stated: 'organising courses is not our main goal, our main goal is to support and facilitate organisational learning.' As a result, the HRD department not only fosters formal learning, but also strives to enhance informal and even incidental learning. Next to that, the department not only focuses on individual learning, but also aims at facilitating the collective learning of groups and organisational learning (see also Stewart, 1996). This working principle leads to a broadened range of interventions provided by the HRD department. Moreover, the outlook of these HRD interventions changes. The interventions are specifically aimed not only at learning new qualifications, but also towards enhancing the learning capacity of employees.

LEARNING IS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The second working principle is that 'learning' is a shared responsibility of management, employees and the HRD department. The HRD department regards its own role in this respect as primarily supportive (e.g. the role of consultant). This implies a shift away from the - often implicit - idea that is, or used to be, typical for most organisations, namely that training is primarily the responsibility of the training department (see e.g. Barham & Rassam, 1989).

Employee responsibility for learning and training has two aspects. On the one hand they are increasingly held responsible for managing their own learning processes. They are expected to regard working and learning as to inseparable processes, and view themselves as 'continuous learners' (Watkins & Marsick, 1993). This means they have to make sure to keep up with the latest developments in their profession, and deliberately look for possibilities for making improvements in the workplace. On the other hand, employees also have a responsibility towards the learning of

their colleagues. More and more, employees operate as teachers and mentors in order to stimulate and coach formal and informal learning processes. The aim here is to stimulate the transfer and sharing of knowledge within the organisation.

LINK LEARNING AND WORKING

Thirdly, the processes of learning and working are considered to be very much intertwined. The employee is both a 'working learner' and a 'learning worker', learning is being regarded as a normal part of everyday work and working is seen as a rich source for learning (see McGill & Slocum, 1994). There is even a new term for employees which reflects this close connection between working and learning: the knowledge worker: people who possess relevant knowledge and apply this in order to improve processes, products and services (Kessels, 1995; Keursten, 1995; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

On-the-job learning is stimulated as much as possible. Therefore, also a considerable amount of training takes place on-the-job. This does not mean, however, that there is no room for off-the-job training activities. These will remain important, because in some instances they are the most suitable method for acquiring new knowledge and skills. But, they are no longer the dominating way to organise learning processes. They fulfil a supportive role with regard to the learning and training which takes place on the job.

TASKS OF HRD PROFESSIONALS

As training, and the support of employee learning in general, is becoming to be regarded as a joint task of line management, employees and HRD professionals, the tasks of HRD professionals change. On the one hand, a change of focus occurs in the way in which the HRD professional carries out his or her more traditional roles, such as the role of trainer, because of changes in the nature of training programmes (e.g. the focus on self directed learning and on establishing close links between training and working; see: 'HRD interventions'). On the other hand, this joint responsibility for HRD brings some new tasks for HRD professionals. In ever more cases the actual (formal or informal) training and development activities are being carried out by line management and employees, whereas the HRD officers monitor the quality of these HRD activities and provide assistance and advice from a professional point of view whenever necessary. In other words, different HRD roles (consultant, trainer, needs analyst, ...) are performed by different people (HRD specialists, managers, employees, ...).

Basically, case study research indicates that the two tasks which can be considered to be most typical for HRD professionals in companies which strive to become learning organisations, seem to be: consulting non HRD professionals (such as line management, subject matter experts and other employees) on HRD specific matters and quality control tasks with regard to training activities carried out by line management and/or employees (Tjepkema & Wognum, 1995).

HRD INTERVENTIONS

'Facilitating employee learning' in the broadest sense is the overriding concern of HRD departments in learning oriented organisations. As such, this leads to a broadened range of interventions provided by the HRD department. The focus is on informal learning, training activities are no longer HRD's main 'product'. Moreover, the outlook of HRD interventions changes.

The interventions are specifically aimed not only at learning new qualifications, but also towards enhancing learning capacities of employees. Especially development activities (which are less formalised than training) increase in number. Training and development activities differ in a number of ways. In training, on the one hand, concrete and measurable learning goals are formulated, preferably in behavioural terms. The training is conducted, following a detailed plan, based on a careful analysis of the training need. Development activities, on the other hand, are marked by more open-ended and roughly defined goals. The learners themselves carry the responsibility of reaching these goals, the 'trainer' merely performs the role of mentor, coach or facilitator. He guides the learning process, but doesn't completely control or design it. There is also no detailed structure, in which to fit the learning activities, only a rough outline. The activities are planned along the way. For this reason, these development activities are also known as semi-structured training. Examples of development activities are: Action Learning projects, work meetings in which employees communicate some of their knowledge to their peers (e.g. the results of a project they have been working on) or work with an experienced colleague in another department for a while (as a form of internal apprenticeship).

Though training is but one of the offered activities, it remains an important one. In many cases training remains the most suitable approach for the transfer of knowledge and the teaching of certain skills. The training methods change, however. The trainee will take a more active role toward his own learning and training. The trainer explicitly teaches trainees how to learn, and how to shape their own learning activities. This may foster a general learning attitude. Also, training and work are more closely linked. Not only by creating more on-the-job training, but also by using real-life problems in training activities (or simulating them). In this way, the transfer of learning is better protected.

Next to these changes in the nature of HRD interventions, attention is being paid to fostering learning on the job in general, by creating a work environment favourable for learning. Examples of conditions which facilitate learning (and on which the HRD department can exert influence), are: creating a mentor system, job rotation, organising meetings between employees with similar expertise who work in different parts of the organisation, providing materials for self study - for instance in an Open Learning Centre - or providing job aids. The most important condition for learning in the workplace, a stimulating work environment, (with a healthy learning climate, for example), remains mainly a responsibility of line management. HRD professionals can provide advice and assistance to line management in this respect.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research questions (section 2.1) based on the conceptual framework outlined in chapter one. Also, the research partnership is described (section 2.2). The main part of the chapter, however, is devoted to the design and realisation of the study. The study consisted of both case study research and a survey. The design of the case study is presented first (section 2.3), after which the survey design and realisation is discussed (section 2.4).

The theoretical framework on HRD's role, as outlined in the previous section, has only very limited empirical validation, since it is based on just a literature study and two small national case study research projects. Moreover, it is unclear whether the framework is valid for the European situation, since much of the literature on which it is based is of American origin, and empirical data were only collected in the Netherlands. Therefore, to clarify the European outlook on HRD in learning oriented organisations (the main objective of this study, see section 1.1), this study aimed to answer the following questions:

- 5) How do HRD departments in learning oriented organisations throughout Europe envision their own role in stimulating and supporting employees to learn continuously, as a part of everyday work (with the intent to contribute to organisational learning, and thus to enhance organisational competitiveness)?
- 6) What strategies do European HRD departments adopt to realise their envisioned role?
- 7) What inhibiting factors do European HRD departments encounter when trying to realise their new role? How do they cope with these factors?
 - n Which factors are conducive to the realisation of HRD's new role?
 - n How do these inhibiting and conducive factors influence the vision of the HRD department with regard to its own role?
- 8) What differences in outlook can be found between HRD departments in European organisations and the perspectives on the role of HRD which exist in the US and Japan?

PHASE I: CASE STUDIES

To study research questions 1 to 3, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods was used. In the first phase of the project, case study research was the main method. The aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of the concepts of the HRD-departments, the strategies they adopt to bring these into practice and the facilitative factors as well as the difficulties they encounter during this implementation process.

PHASE II: SURVEY & LITERATURE REVIEW

In a second phase of this study a survey was held under a larger group of organisations, to ascertain to what degree the case study findings are representative for more organisations throughout the seven EU-countries that participate in the study. Moreover, to be able to compare the results of the European study with Japanese and US views on learning in work organisations, a literature review of Japanese and North American publications was conducted. This was used to ascertain whether there is a European outlook on HRD in learning organisations.

2.2 THE PARTNERSHIP

The research project team consisted of partners from seven countries, plus a member of the European Consortium for the Learning Organisation. The project management team consisted of researchers from the University of Twente (The Netherlands). The table below provides an overview of the partnership.

Country	Organisation	Research team
The Netherlands (project management)	University of Twente, Faculty of Educational Science & Technology	Prof. dr. J. Scheerens Prof. dr. M. Mulder Ms. S. Tjepkema, Msc Ms. H. ter Horst, Msc.
Belgium	Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School	Prof. dr. D. Buyens Ms. S. van Schelstraete, Msc.
Finland	University of Jyväskylä, Department of Education	Prof. dr. T. Vaherva Ms. H. Woods, Msc.
France	BLV Learning Partners	Dr. D. Belet
Germany	University of Chemnitz-Zwickau, Faculty of Economics Department of Personnel and Management	Prof. dr. P. Pawlowsky Dr. R. Reinhardt Ms. K. Meinicke, Msc. Ms. A. Buschman, Msc.
United Kingdom	Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham Business School, Department of HRM	Prof. dr. J. Leopold Dr. J. Stewart Ms. Dr. S. Sambrook
Italy	Isfol	Dr. M. Tomassini
Italy	Scienter	Dr. A. Cavrini
International	ECLO	Dr. M. Kelleher

Table 2.1: The partnership

Each partner organisation took care of data collection in its own country (the two Italian partners shared that responsibility for Italy). The project management team prepared drafts of all relevant documents, such as the data collection plan, data collection instruments, theoretical framework and the final report. The partners commented on those drafts, and their input was used to finalise documents. The partners met for two partner meetings, and otherwise communicated frequently through e-mail, phone and letters. The role of ECLO in the partnership was mainly to help find suitable cases and to facilitate the dissemination of findings.

2.3 DESIGN AND REALISATION OF THE CASE STUDIES

For this research project, it was decided to select cases from the population of learning oriented organisations in the seven participating countries, with over 500 employees. The reason to limit the study to larger organisations is that these organisations often have a more clearly recognizable HRD function than SMES. In order to select suitable case studies a preliminary research was conducted in each country. On the basis of studies already conducted (e.g. Leys, Wijngaerts & Hancké, 1992; Stahl, Nyhan & d'Ajola, 1993; Tjepkema & Wognum, 1995), an operationalisation was made of the concept of learning oriented organisations.

The next step was the selection of possible case organisations. A variety of methods was used, such as scanning recent literature for case descriptions, scanning conference announcements and

using personal networks of the researchers. After a comparison on project level (e.g. to see if the cases complemented each other well), the selected organisations were then approached for a telephone interview. For the interview, the operationalisation was worked out in a checklist, which was used by all partners to select cases in their country.

CHARACTERISATIONS OF ORGANISATIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE CASE STUDY

The aim of this interview was to establish whether the organisations were willing to participate in the project and whether they met the most important selection criterion: can they be seen as good examples of learning oriented organisations? For instance, do they value employee learning, provide facilities for (informal) employee learning, value and support the acquisition of learning skills? Other important criteria were whether the HRD tasks were carried out in a pro-active way (either by managers, HRD professionals or others), a clear vision on the role of HRD (professionals) in the organisation, and whether the organisation undertook interesting and innovative initiatives to support employee (and even organisational) learning. The aim was not to create a representative group, but to select 'good examples' of learning oriented organisations with a pro-active HRD function, since it is from such examples that the most interesting lessons can be learned. In case study research, this is a more fruitful approach than to select representative organisations (it is impossible to create a representative group, since the research group is so small). Following this procedure, a total of 28 cases were selected: four cases in each of the seven participating countries. As much as possible, each partner selected two cases in the service industry and two from manufacturing industry, to make a comparison between these two types of companies possible. Also with a view to facilitating comparison, the researchers tried, as far as possible, to select cases between 500 to 1000 employees. So, sometimes not the whole company was selected as a case, but one division or a single establishment. This proved to be difficult for some companies, so some of the cases are larger than 1000 employees. A short description of the 28 cases is provided in table 2.2.

Country	Case organisation	Workforce	Core business
Belgium	DVV	1,000	Insurance
	Siemens Atea	1,400	Telecommunications
	Alcatel Bell, Belgium	7,300	Telecommunications and multimedia
	ISS, Belgium	3,100	Cleaning service
Finland	Vaisala	774	Meteorology
	Valmet paper machinery	2,200	Paper Machinery manufacturing
	Okobank Group, central cooperative	1,700	Banking services
	Outokumpu Zinc	750	Metal production
France	Motorola	2,700	Production of telecommunication equipment and electronic components

	Auchan Bordeaux	800	Retail (hypermarket)
	Accor	121,000 worldwide	Hotel and tourism services
	GT group	1,000	Road transport
Germany	Bosch Siemens Hausgeräte, Germany	14,500	Household equipment manufacturing
	Hoechst Schering AgrEvo	9,000 worldwide	Chemicals production
	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit	1,300	Consultancy (in technical areas)
	Sony Germany	1,100	Marketing & sales of electronic devices
Italy	Barilla	6,900	Food industry
	Bayer	2,400	Chemical pharmaceutical industry
	Lever	1,200	Cosmetics manufacturing
	Datalogic	480	bar-code manufacturing
The Netherlands	Akzo Nobel, BU Salt	240	Salt mining and production
	Ericsson Telecommunication, R&D department	450	Telecommunication
	BAC (IT centre Internal Revenue Service), division of Systems Development	1,100	IC-T products and services
	KIBC, BU Utility Building	650	Building industry
United Kingdom	Royal Mail, Nottinghamshire, operational unit	1,800	Postal services
	Rolls-Royce Aerospace, Airline Business Operations	2,000	Manufacturing aero engines
	Royal Scottish Assurance	550	Insurance
	Wolverhampton & Dudley breweries	10,500	Beer production

Table 2.2: Overview of the case organisations

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

After the partners had selected suitable case organisations, they collected data and compiled a case report for each organisation. Data collection took place in a number of ways to enhance reliability of the findings (a method commonly known as triangulation; see Yin, 1984). To gain insight in the way HRD departments view their own role in the organisation (research question 1):

- n in-depth interview with the head of the HRD department (as the person who maps the vision and sets out the general course of the department);
- n study of relevant documents (such as mission statements, HRD policy and plans).

The interview as well as the document study focused on the vision of the HRD professionals with regard to their own role in the organisation (what contribution does the HRD function want to make, how would it like to make it, how do the HRD specialists regard the cooperation with line managers and employees, etcetera).

To gather information on the strategies the departments adopt to realise the proposed role (research question 2), and the facilitative and inhibiting factors with regard to this process (research question 3):

- n in-depth interviews with the head of the HRD department and (some of the) HRD professionals;
- n interviews with approximately five line managers and approximately five employees;
- n study of relevant documents (such as instruments, function descriptions, information on training methods etc.).

The purpose of these interviews and the document study was to gain insight in the strategies HRD professionals to realise their envisioned role: how do they wish to bring their viewpoints into being? These strategies can contain, for example, experiments in new methods for HRD strategy formulation, changes in training approach, changes in the way the department is organised (for example by positioning HRD officers close to line management).

It was considered important to not only interview HRD professionals on the proposed strategy of the HRD-department, but also line management and employees. For this, there are two reasons. First, line management and employees are likely to notice the effects of the new strategies of the training department. Second, from what is now known on HRD departments in learning oriented organisations, training and development is not only a task of HRD officers, but also of line management and employees. Therefore, it was necessary to gain insight in the way they view these (relatively new) tasks.

INTERVIEWS

Four key variables can be recognised in the research questions: the organisational context: (learning oriented organisation), the vision of the HRD function, strategies employed to realise envisioned role and influencing factors. Each of these variables was worked out in topic lists, which were used by the researchers to conduct the interviews. The theoretical framework, described in section 1.2, was used as a basis to guide the questions. As described earlier in this section, four types of respondents ('roles') were interviewed for each case:

- n HRD managers;
- n HRD practitioners;
- n Line Managers;
- n Employees.

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

The most important means for collecting data were the interviews. However, it was also important to analyse relevant documents. The main objective was to verify if answers on questions with regard to the vision of the HRD department and strategies the department adopt to realise these visions are actually laid down in formal documents. It gives some indication if spoken words are not only words but also transformed into action plans and HRD strategies.

Documents were also used to collect further information of interest for the research. Examples of relevant documents are: mission statements; organisational policy & plans; HRD policy & plans; training plans; information on training methods; information on responsibilities towards employee/organisational learning; function descriptions; evaluation reports.

DATA ANALYSIS

For a thorough analysis of the data, first a within case analysis was conducted by all partners, prior to writing the case study reports. Second, a cross case analysis was performed, both per country and overall, by the project management team. For these analyses, the matrix technique described by Miles & Huberman (1981) was used (See also: Yin, 1984). The partners provided matrix reports of their cases to the project management team, next to their written reports.

2.4 DESIGN OF THE SURVEY

The primary respondents for the survey were HRD directors/HRD managers: those with a strategic/managerial role in the HRD function. Since they have a helicopter view of the HRD function, they were able to answer all the questions (on vision as well as on strategies). In case of very large organisations, the HRD function on the division level or a large establishment was selected, not the HRD function on the corporate level. In order to optimise response rates, respondents were approached by phone first, to ask whether they were willing to fill out the questionnaire ('warm approach'). If respondents agreed to participate in the study, questionnaires were subsequently sent by mail. The Italian partners considered a telephone survey more appropriate for the situation in their country. Therefore, in Italy the survey was held by telephone, using the same questionnaire as other countries.

The questionnaire addressed the same topics as the case study research:

- n organisational context;
- n vision of HRD function on own role;
- n strategies to realise envisioned role;
- n conducive and inhibiting factors.

Of course, the questionnaire also included some descriptive questions (on the organisation, HRD function, respondent etc.). The project management team drew up a first draft of the questionnaire, using the results of the case studies, topic lists from the interviews and other HRD surveys. Project partners were asked to provide feedback and ECLO asked 26 of its corporate members to fill out the questionnaire as a pilot test. On the basis of the pilot and feedback of the partners, the questionnaire was finalised.

SAMPLE

Just like the case study research, the survey was aimed at HRD departments in large (500 employees or more) organisations, which can be considered to be learning oriented organisations. The primary objective of the survey was to verify case results. Therefore, it was important to select organisations according to the same selection criteria, namely:

- n there is reason to assume the company can be regarded a learning oriented organisation (or aspires to be one);
- n the company has an HRD function;
- n the company has at least 500 employees.

Large organisations were chosen because these usually have a specialized HRD department with an explicit view on its own role within the organization. Though this may also hold true for some smaller organizations, the survey was held under large organizations only, in order to facilitate comparison of results. Furthermore, concepts and initiatives found in large organizations often also prove to be useful for smaller organizations, even SME's. The desired amount of organisations participating in the survey was approximately 140 (20 per country). Of course, this is a rather limited number, but the amount of learning oriented organizations was estimated to be not very high at the outset of this study. The total amount of learning oriented organizations with a pro active HRD department is estimated to be not very large, though this situation is somewhat different for each of the participating countries. Since some of the partners found it easier than expected to find suitable organisations who were willing to participate, for some countries the amount of respondents was higher than planned. Eventually, the questionnaire was filled out by respondents from 165 companies, table 2.3 provides an overview.

Country	Questionnaires (N)	Percent
• The Netherlands	17	10
• Belgium	39	24
• Finland	19	12
• Germany	27	16
• France	22	13
• United Kingdom	20	12
• Italy	21	13
• Total	165	100%

Table 2.3: Number of questionnaires from each participating country

CHARACTERISATION OF ORGANISATIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE SURVEY

As was mentioned in the above, the survey was directed at companies with over 500 employees. In order to achieve a large enough sample, a number of somewhat smaller organisations were also selected, though no really small companies. Also, it was checked whether the company had an HRD function (another important selection criterion). Table 2.4 provides an overview of the size of the companies participating in the survey.

Size	Number of companies (N)	Percent
• 0 - 500 employees	41	25 %
• 501 - 2500 employees	39	24 %
• 2501 - 5000 employees	23	14 %
• Over 5000 employees	56	34 %
• Missing	6	4 %
• Total	165	101 % [#]

[#] = over 100% due to rounding off

Table 2.4: Organisational size

The most sizeable group of participating companies consists of particularly large firms (over 5000 employees). In such cases, a large establishment was usually asked to participate in the survey. About a quarter of the companies is relatively small (under 500), and another quarter is of average size (between 500 and 2500). The rest (14%) counts between 2500 and 5000 employees.

Most companies participating in the survey (38%) have a divisionized structure, about a quarter (26%) has a functional structure. Other organisational forms are also represented in the sample, but only by very small portions of organisations. Table 2.5 provides an overview. Noteworthy is the relatively large amount of missing values (17%): not all respondents filled out this question, or answered it in a way which could not be analysed.

Structure	Companies (N)	Percent
• Division organisation	62	38%
• Functional organisation	42	26%
• Network organisation	11	7%
• Project organisation	6	4%
• 'Chain organisation'	1	1%
• Team organisation	1	1%
• Mix	14	9%
• Missing	28	17%
• Total	165	100%

Table 2.5: Organisational structure

Just as with the case studies, the aim was to create a sample in which manufacturing and service industry were more or less equally represented. Table 2.6 shows that service organisations are slightly over-represented: half of the survey participants come from service companies (50%). Over a third of the companies is from manufacturing industries, or combines production and trade (37%). A small proportion of companies is from the trade industry (7%).

Sector	Companies (N)	Percent
• Manufacturing industry (production)	57	35 %
• Service organisation for profit	58	35%
• Service organisation non profit	25	15%
• Trade (buy and/or sell)	11	7 %
• Industry and trade	4	2%
• Other / missing	10	6%
• Total	165	100%

Table 2.6: Organisational sector

An important question when considering the context of HRD is the way in which the HRD function is organised. Results for this question are presented in table 2.7.

Organisation	Companies (N)	Percent
• Central position HRD department	65	39%
• Local HRD department(s)	12	7%
• Central position HRD department and local HRD department(s) / Central and local HRD	8	5%
• Shared function of HRD staff and (line) managers	22	13%
• Shared function of HRD staff and competence managers	7	4%
• Shared function of HRD staff and external consultants	1	1%
• Shared function of HRD staff and corporate university	3	2%
• (Central or local) HRD practitioner(s) / consultant(s), not in separate department	7	4%
• HRD tasks are performed by line managers, no specialised HRD staff	3	2%
• Other / missing	37	22%
• Total	165	99%

Table 2.7: Organisation of HRD function

When considering the way in which the HRD function is organised in the companies participating in the survey, it becomes obvious that the most common organisational form is a centrally positioned HRD department (39%), (a) local HRD department(s) (7%) or a combination of the two (5%). A rather considerable portion of the companies organises the HRD function in a form other than a separate department. In those cases, HRD is most often a shared function of HRD staff and (line) managers (13%). In relatively few companies, HRD is shared between HRD staff and either competence managers (4%), external consultants (1%) or a corporate university (2%). Sometimes HRD practitioners carry the responsibility for HRD alone (4%), and in some other cases, this responsibility lies with line managers, no specialised HRD professionals are employed in those firms (2%). Unfortunately, a rather large proportion of companies did not (adequately) answer this question. The percentage of missing values is rather high (22%). Part of these companies probably have yet other ways to organise the HRD function.

CHAPTER 3

CASE STUDY RESULTS

The case study results are described in detail in the official case study report (Tjepkema, Ter Horst, Mulder & Scheerens, 1999a). Due to restrictions with regard to the size of this final report, the original case descriptions are not included in this chapter. Instead, this text provides an outline of the general results of the case study phase.

Before describing the major results, it is important to point out that from these data, it is not possible to make judgements concerning the situation in any specific country, because the project only incorporated four 'good examples' from each country. The researchers did not strive for a representative group of companies, since this is not possible in case research. It is impossible to make a judgement on the situation in a specific country based on only four cases, but the data were checked for national differences nonetheless. In general no significant differences were found between the situation in the seven participating countries. The only nation-specific finding was the existence of the Investors in People-programme in the United Kingdom, in which all British case studies participated.

This chapter presents an overview of the case results, organised according to each of the research questions (section 3.2 through 3.4). The first section (3.1) however, provides a sketch of the case organisations.

3.1 ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

Before answering the research questions it is important to describe the organisational context. This section therefore explores questions such as: "What are the companies main strategies?", "How and why do they want to increase their potential for organisational learning?" and "What are the main strategies employed to reach this aim?".

Section 3.1.1 outlines the main strategies adopted by the case organisations in order to respond to quickly changing environments. Section 3.1.2 outlines the change processes adopted by the case organisations with the aim to realise the strategies.

3.1.1 STRATEGY ELEMENTS

Table 3.1 provides the main results with regard to strategies of the case organisations. This table shows the categories of strategies/ strategy elements and the number of cases in which they were mentioned explicitly.

Strategies/ strategy elements	Mentioned
• Client Focus	22 times
• Innovation	14 times
• Improvement	14 times
• Flexibility	4 times

• Human resources as strategic factor in learning	25 times
• Other	16 times

Table 3.1: Strategies of the case organisations

CLIENT FOCUS, INNOVATION, IMPROVEMENT AND FLEXIBILITY

It was found that all 28 cases at the moment find themselves dealing with strong(er) competitive markets (caused for instance by globalisation) and/ or fast(er) changing technologies. As a result improving and innovating products, processes and/or services and becoming more client centred were mentioned as key strategy elements by case organisations in all seven participating countries. These strategies have in common that they all focus on improving flexibility of the organisation in order to respond quickly to the fastly changing environment. Some organisations mentioned strategies related directly to increasing their flexibility, for example reducing production or delivery times.

HUMAN RESOURCES AS A STRATEGIC FACTOR IN LEARNING

Human resources were mentioned by almost all case organisations (25 cases) as an important means to realise the before mentioned strategies or objectives. So, while business is inevitably becoming more technological, paradoxically it is people that are becoming the key to competitiveness (see also: Lifelong learning for European Business, 1993).

This factor is of great interest for this research project. Employee learning and other strategies that stress the importance of employee learning, such as knowledge management/ knowledge sharing and creating a learning culture were found to be key issues for these organisations.

Remarkably enough, only one organisation officially stated that it aims to become a learning organisation. So an important conclusion is that most organisations appear to be developing towards a learning organisation, by means of - for instance - improving employee learning and working on a learning culture, without explicitly stating this as a major organisational goal.

Also worth mentioning is the fact that the case organisations do not always focus on employee learning in order to innovate, improve or increase client-focus, but sometimes also because of a lack of vocational training (which was found in two of the four French cases) or because of a desire to retain employees and/or reduce employee turnover (which is the case for instance the Belgian cleaning company ISS).

OTHER STRATEGIES

A large variety of other strategies was also mentioned, each for just one or two cases. Most of these can be split up into two categories strategies used with the aim to optimise the internal organisation, and strategies used to increase competitiveness. Strategies used by some case organisations in order to optimise the internal organisation are:

- n a reengineering programme/ sharing information (mentioned once);
- n improving synergy (mentioned once);
- n world-wide standards (mentioned once).

Strategies use in order to increase competitiveness are, for example:

- n improve competitive position (mentioned once);
- n strengthening internal integration (mentioned once);
- n market shares (mentioned once);
- n aiming at a leading position (mentioned once);
- n maintaining profitability (mentioned once).

3.1.2 CHANGE PROCESSES

In order to realise aims such as client-orientation, innovation, improvement and flexibility many different change processes were mentioned by the case organisations. The main results with regard to the objectives of the change process are summarised in table 3.2. This table shows the categories of change strategies and the number of cases in which they were mentioned explicitly. A distinction was made between general strategies and strategies with regard to a learning culture and HR strategies.

Change process	Mentioned
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - management style (8 times) - strategy development process (6 times) - structure (18 times) - (IT) systems (8 times) - client oriented culture (3 times) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning culture 	12 times
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR strategies 	22 times
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other 	6 times

Table 3.2: Characteristics of the change process of the case organisations

GENERAL STRATEGIES

The first category of change processes concerns changes in the management style. These were mentioned by a quart of all case organisations (8 cases). In these cases special attention was paid to the development of line managers, who in most organisations play a key role in supporting and stimulating employee learning.

The second category of change strategies concerns changes in the strategy development process. These were mentioned by a fifth of the case organisations (6 cases). The following specific strategies were mentioned:

- n Sharing of mission/ profile (mentioned 3 times);
- n Development dialogue (mentioned 2 times);
- n Business improvement plan (mentioned once);

- n Annual management (strategy) cycle (mentioned once).

The strategies aim at translating the central business strategy into different operational policies and targets on the lower management levels. They also aim at involving managers (and sometimes even employees) in the development process of important organisational strategies. A good example was found at the Dutch building company KIBC. This organisation started the change process with the introduction of some new activities for strategy formulation, like strategy sessions and a joint strategy formulation processes. In these activities an active role of managers and employees in translating external and internal developments into a central organisational strategy was emphasised. The company also developed, in strong cooperation with managers and employees, a clear organisational mission and profile in order to inform both employees and clients in the market about the shared values and the strategies used by KIBC.

A large group of case organisations (18 cases) was found to be engaged in a reorganisation or smaller changes in the organisational structure as an important part of the change process. The following change activities were found:

- n Changes in organisational structures (mentioned 8 times);
- n Teams/ team building (mentioned 5 times);
- n Process orientation (mentioned 5 times);
- n Increase employee responsibility (mentioned twice);
- n Decentralisation (mentioned once);
- n Business Process Redesign, BPR (mentioned once);
- n Implementation of a network organisation (mentioned once).

As can be read from these activities changes made in organisational structures often concerned the adoption of a process-oriented structure instead of a product-oriented structure and the introduction of teamwork.

About a quart of the case organisations (8 cases) mentioned changes in IT systems. Most of them mentioned information and communication in general as important change elements (6 cases). A small group (3 German cases) specifically mentioned the use of IT networks in order to improve communication and knowledge sharing. Improvement of communication systems and the ways in which information is shared among employees can be regarded as ways to increase employee commitment to, and knowledge on, the organisation and the challenges it faces.

A small group of case organisations (3 cases) mentioned they were working on a client oriented culture as an important change strategy. A good example was found at the British brewery Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries. The key to achievement is seen by this company to be quality of products and service which, in turn, relies on the qualities of employees and the organisation culture as expressed by managerial and employee behaviour. Initiatives to bring about the desired change in culture are designed and led by HRD staff. Examples of these include Customer First Workshops and Challenge 2000+. The former engage diagonal 'slices' of staff in examining the meaning and operationalisation of customer service. They are followed up by HRD staff working with teams and sections/departments to produce 'Customer Charters', which specify achievable but 'stretching' targets. Charters have been agreed upon and adopted for retail and trade customers, and for some internal customers by support/corporate functions. Additional workshops are held to monitor and review progress, and decide on areas and means of improvement. Challenge 2000+ is a team building programme which again utilises diagonal slices of staff. The focus is on inter and

intra team work, and the purpose is to improve cross-functional communications and relationships to support a corporate focus on quality of products and services. It is perhaps significant that members of the Board of Directors engage as participants in these initiatives.

LEARNING CULTURE

Over a third of the case organisations (12 cases) mentioned the development of a learning culture as an important change strategy. The following activities were explicitly mentioned:

- n Improvement of learning abilities (mentioned 6 times);
- n Improvement of learning motivation (mentioned 3 times);
- n Creating a learning culture (mentioned twice);
- n Continuous employee development (mentioned twice);
- n Knowledge management techniques (mentioned once);
- n Making jobs more interesting (mentioned once);
- n A shift from training to learning at work (mentioned once).

So, in these cases efforts to increase possibilities for employee learning are visible. The following statement from a manager of the Finnish paper mill Valmet reflects this aim. According to him the goal is to create an organisation in which "everybody learns something, every single day".

HR STRATEGIES

For almost all case organisations (22 cases) it was found that changes in HR strategies are important for the change process of the organisation as a whole. Implementing competence management (mentioned by 9 cases) and personal development plans (mentioned by 5 cases) are the most frequently mentioned strategies. These are good examples of efforts to involve employees more actively in their own careers and to increase awareness of the importance of employee learning for the development of the organisation. Competence development was mentioned as a system to keep the competencies of employees as well as the total organisation up-to-date through on-going evaluations of competency gaps. The main aim of this system is to prepare employees for future challenges.

Personal development plans were found to be an important instrument used by managers in strong cooperation with their employees in order to support individual learning activities. This method also calls for an active role of employees in their own development process.

Other mentioned strategies are the following:

- n Corporate university (mentioned 3 times);
- n Changes in HR strategies/ systems (mentioned twice);
- n Employability (mentioned twice);
- n Company wide strategic needs analysis (mentioned once);
- n Self directed learning groups (mentioned once);

- n Training partnerships (mentioned once);
- n Department development plan (mentioned once).

With regard to the corporate universities it can be said that these were mentioned by three of the four French cases as an important factor in the change process. These universities have been implemented with the aim to link HRD closely to the company policy. These universities have broader tasks than providing training. Among other things they also give advice, support knowledge creation and knowledge sharing within the company and support change programmes.

OTHER

A small group of case organisations (6 cases) mentioned activities that cannot be placed in any of the before mentioned categories. The most interesting one to mention here, is the Investors in People (IiP) standard mentioned by all cases in the United Kingdom. Investors in People is a national standard awarded to business for effective investment in their people. This involves them in various activities, for example:

- n Having a written plan which sets out business goals and targets, and considers the part employees will play in achieving the plan;
- n Identifying resources for training and development in the business plan;
- n Encouraging employees to contribute to identifying and meeting their own job-related development needs.

It was found that all four cases in the UK either have an Investors in People standard, or strive for one. This can be considered as typical for the British situation, since it is a national initiative.

CONCLUSIONS

The organisations were found to adopt a large variety of change strategies to realise their development towards a learning organisation. Or, more directly, strategies with regard to the management style, strategy development process, structure, (IT) systems and culture (client – oriented) were mentioned as important tools to reach organisational goals like innovation, improvement and client centeredness.

For this research project the change strategies focusing on learning cultures and employee development are of particular interest. Both categories focus on organisational learning and employee learning and both include the role of HRD in the corporate change process. Offering more learning opportunities, improving learning motivation and supporting a continuous development process for employees were mentioned as important characteristics of the strategies concerning development of a learning culture. Examples of activities from the second category, HR strategies, include the implementation of competence management and personal development plans. Even more important to note is that all organisations appear to focus on the role of human resources in the organisation, not only on employee development but also on integrating HR activities and HR policy in business strategies.

One final observation is worth mentioning here. Though a common theme throughout the research has been the motivation for becoming more learning oriented, in order to realise improvements in business performance and competitive advantage, this seemingly causal relationship does not seem to be extensively evaluated in any of the organisations. In other words,

no-one has looked for 'proof' that increasing the organisational capacity for learning will indeed increase organisational effectiveness. Their trust in the concept of the learning organisation can therefore probably be explained as either an act of faith, or 'mimetic isomorphism' - copying what apparently successful organisations seem to be doing.

3.2 ENVISIONED ROLE OF THE HRD DEPARTMENT

The topic discussed in this section is research question 1: How do HRD departments in learning oriented organisations throughout Europe envision their own role in stimulating and supporting employees to learn continuously, as a part of everyday work? The envisioned role will be described by outlining:

- n Objectives of the HRD function (section 3.2.1);
- n Division of HRD tasks (section 3.2.2).

3.2.1 OBJECTIVES

The main results with regard to the objectives of the HRD function are displayed in table 3.3. This table shows the categories of objectives and the number of cases in which they were mentioned explicitly.

Objectives	Mentioned
• Support business in general / support current strategic objective(s)	23 times
• Support (informal learning)	22 times
• Support knowledge sharing	8 times
• Providing training	11 times
• Changing HRD practices / organisation	19 times
• Other	5 times

Table 3.3: Objectives of the HRD function

SUPPORTING THE BUSINESS

The first category of objectives, mentioned by nearly all case organisations (23 cases) concerns the strategic goal of supporting the business, either in a general sense, or by supporting specific current strategic objectives.

Examples of objectives expressing general support for the organisation are: 'helping the company to meet current and future challenges' (mentioned by 9 cases) and 'making sure training contributes to corporate strategy' (mentioned once). Another group of objectives which expresses that the HRD function aims to support the organisation in reaching its goals, contains goals focusing on 'keeping the organisational skill base up-to-date' (mentioned by 8 cases), or in other words: making sure the

workforce has the necessary knowledge and skills to fulfil the tasks required to realise organisational objectives. This task encompasses activities such as analysing the existing skill base, analysing current and future competence requirements, recruiting and training employees to make sure these requirements are met. Related objectives are therefore: 'defining key competence areas or organisational learning needs' (2 cases), 'helping to retain employees' and 'stimulating employee versatility' (both mentioned once).

Next to supporting the business in a general sense, some HRD functions mention specific organisational objectives which they seek to support. For instance:

- n Supporting culture change (mentioned by four cases);
- n Support managers in their new role (mentioned once);
- n Support customer orientation of the company (mentioned once).

SUPPORTING (INFORMAL) LEARNING

The second category of objectives, also mentioned by most organisations (22 cases) concerns goals with regard to supporting (informal) learning of employees and / or teams and the organisation as a whole. Within this category, three types of objectives can be distinguished.

First, objectives with regard to supporting employee learning in general, such as:

- n Promoting employee development;
- n Contributing to learning;
- n Contributing to competence development;
- n Supporting professionalisation of employees;
- n Support employee learning in the broadest sense.

All were mentioned once, twice or three times. Next to these general formulations, two companies use more specific formulations, which show a concern not only for supporting immediate learning, but also for learning across the life span. In other words: they appear to deliberately strive for creating 'learning workers', by: 'increasing the learning capacity of employees' and/or 'creating conditions for lifelong learning' (each mentioned once).

It is interesting to note the inherent tension between the desire to support the business that was mentioned earlier, and the objective to support individual learning. It is difficult to link the two, as some case organisations also experience. For instance the Finnish paper mill Valmet strives for a strong connection between training activities and business activities. In order to realise this link, once a year, development discussions take place. In these discussions, employees' needs and possibilities for development are evaluated. But, according to managers, these discussions do not yet create a connection between the organisational strategy and individual needs. With the help of personal development plans, only personal learning possibilities are identified. (Section 3.5 will elaborate on this instrument and other strategies used to reach the objectives).

Second, a group of objectives can be distinguished which expresses explicit support for informal learning, such as:

- n Implementing a learning culture (mentioned by 8 cases);

- n Using tools such as internal coaching, mentoring and job rotation to support informal learning (mentioned by 5 cases);
- n Stimulating and supporting new knowledge creation (mentioned by 4 cases);
- n Engage and motivate employees in learning and working (mentioned once);
- n Stimulate appreciation and use of informal learning opportunities on-the-job (mentioned once).

Notable again is the difference in terminology: whereas some companies use terms such as 'learning culture' and 'informal learning', others speak of knowledge creation.

Supporting learning does not seem to be simply a matter of providing opportunities for learning, stimulating motivation for learning is a recurring issue in some of these objectives mentioned above (e.g. 'engage and motivate employees'). Also, attention can be detected for creating a broad vision on learning. Traditionally many employees and managers (and even HRD professionals) adopt a limited view on 'learning'. They usually (implicitly) equate it to classroom learning, or training. In some case organisations, the HRD professionals were found to actively try to change this limited outlook towards a broader vision of learning. However, only one company, the British aero-engine manufacturer Rolls Royce Airline Business, mentions it as an explicit objective ('stimulate appreciation of informal learning opportunities on-the-job'). One of its HRD managers explained the relevance of this objective:

'There is an immense amount of on-the-job learning. Many employees would not have been conscious of this form of learning. If you asked them to list what learning they had been involved in, they would think 'what course did I go on, what hotel did I stay in, what exam did I take?' Learning means doing the job, learning from colleagues, training others, doing a First Aid Certificate, having an enlarged job. Coaching is important - often the coach learns more than the coachee. Every new experience is an opportunity to learn. Personal Development Diaries have been introduced, where employees jot down every learning opportunity.'

Third, a small group of cases explicitly mentioned not only to support individual learning, but also team and even organisational learning:

- n Support individual and team learning (mentioned by five cases);
- n Foster organisational learning/development (mentioned by four cases);
- n Introducing / improving the learning organisation (mentioned by three cases).

Of course, this does not mean that the other case organisations do not strive for these goals, other evidence suggests that most companies do not focus exclusively on individual learning (for instance, some HRD functions mention 'supporting teamwork' as a strategic objective). From these data it can only be concluded that but a relatively small group mentioned it explicitly.

SUPPORT KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Supporting knowledge sharing within the company can be seen as a sub-category of the set of

objectives relating to 'creating opportunities for informal learning', but it was decided to consider it separately. About a quarter of the organisations (8 cases) mention objectives in this field.

It is interesting to note that, whereas eight cases explicitly mention 'implementing a learning culture' and three cases 'introducing the learning organisation concept' (both mentioned in the previous subsection), another five use the term 'supporting knowledge management'. This is probably in part a matter of difference in terminology, but it also seems to reflect a somewhat different outlook on the type of learning processes the companies want to support. The term knowledge management appears to reflect a greater emphasis on sharing knowledge or making sure knowledge becomes available to more people in the organisation, whereas in the concept of the learning organisation, creating opportunities for learning (for instance by creating richer jobs and coaching) is also a very (or maybe even more?) important element. Three case organisations have mentioned objectives with regard to stimulating knowledge sharing. These objectives are: 'stimulate knowledge transfer', 'initiate inter-professional synergies' and 'support communication and developing knowledge exchange networks' (each mentioned once).

PROVIDING TRAINING

Whereas supporting (informal) learning and -more specific- knowledge sharing appear to be important objectives, it is interesting to note that only a third of the case organisations (11 cases) mention objectives with regard to providing training, such as:

- n Development and co-ordination of training (mentioned by 6 cases);
- n Offer a training supply (mentioned by 2 cases);
- n Administrative and logistic support of training programmes (mentioned by 1 case).

Remarkable is the objective of the French case semi-conductor plant Motorola, which mentions that it seeks to centralise its training efforts in order to get a more global and accurate view and a better strategic control of the training investments. It seems that this is a necessary prerequisite for ensuring that training contributes effectively to the corporate strategy, which is the HRD department's main aim.

Whereas only a small group of cases mentions objectives in the field of training, it is safe to assume that all case organisations have providing training as one of their goals, they just didn't mention it in the context of this study. This may be caused by a stronger focus of the interviews on HRD's role in supporting learning, but it may also be the case that the organisations currently consider their training-related objectives as less important and therefore didn't mention them.

CHANGING HRD PRACTICES

Objectives with regard to changing current HRD practices were mentioned by two thirds of the organisations (19 cases). Either in a very general sense ('improving the HRD function', mentioned once) but mostly in more specific terms, namely:

- n Integrating the HRD function within the organisation: 'providing services to / supporting management' (mentioned 8 times); 'working on a demand-oriented basis' (mentioned 3 times), 'stimulating management to become more sensitive to HRD issues' (mentioned twice) and 'integrate HRD in business functions' (mentioned once);

- n Adopting a more pro-active role as HRD department: 'changing from a reactive to a proactive role' and 'playing a leading role in the development of a new management system' (each mentioned once);
- n Adopting new work methods: 'realising /improving competence management' (mentioned twice)
- n Adopting a new approach to HRD: 'increase self-management' and 'change from human resource control to human resource development' (mentioned three times and once).

Especially the first category of objectives reflects a new way of organising the HRD function, based on a stronger integration within the work organisation, accompanied by a different division of HRD tasks (more specifically: a strong involvement of line management). This will be discussed more thoroughly in the next section. The objectives with regard to adopting a pro-active role seem in line with the objectives of supporting the business, mentioned at the start of this section.

An objective which catches the eye is 'expanding training activities to external markets', mentioned by the French transport company GT group. Whereas most case organisations seem to work to increase the link with their own company's objectives, this company also considers working for other organisations in the transport industry.

OTHER OBJECTIVES

A small group of case organisations mentioned objectives which did not fit in the previous categories. Most notably, three of the four British cases mentioned maintaining the Investors in People accreditation as an important objective. Again, this can be explained by the fact that this is a typical British phenomenon. IiP is a national programme, in which all four of the British cases participate.

Next to this, two case organisations mentioned employee commitment as an explicit objective. This is interesting, because it can be seen in relation to the corporate goal of using the human resource potential to reach strategic objectives (see section 3.1) and the issue of motivation (mentioned earlier in this section). Commitment is a necessary prerequisite for making a contribution to the company, by improving processes, helping solve client problems etcetera. If employees are not committed it is very difficult to motivate them to engage in learning processes in the workplace.

CONCLUSION

Overseeing the broad range of objectives, the following can be concluded. Most HRD functions in the case organisations seek to provide a strategic contribution to the organisation, by supporting the company in realising business objectives. For instance by ensuring that the workforce has the necessary competencies.

In trying to realise this strategic contribution, HRD functions not only provide training (mentioned explicitly by only a small group of companies, but probably an objective in all cases), but also seek to provide opportunities for (informal) employee learning in general (with knowledge sharing as an explicit form). In this respect, objectives such as creating a learning culture, creating a learning organisation and implementing knowledge management were mentioned, but are certainly

not dominant.

Finally, in order to provide these learning opportunities, and provide a strategic contribution, about two third of the case organisations have formulated objectives with regard to changing HRD practices. The most important ones are related to integrating HRD stronger with the work organisation, for instance by sharing HRD tasks with line managers. The latter subject is discussed in the next section.

3.2.2 DIVISION OF HRD TASKS

The objectives described in the above provide one part of the picture of how HRD professionals consider their own role within the organisation. Another important element is the way in which they think the HRD tasks should be divided among the three main parties involved: HRD professionals, line managers and employees. Table 3.4 summarises the main results, the text provides a more in-depth description.

Tasks HRD professionals, managers, employees	Mentioned
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRD professionals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ‘Traditional’ HRD tasks – ‘New’ HRD tasks 	23 times
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ‘New’ HRD tasks 	22 times
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management active role 	26 times
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees active role 	19 times

Table 3.4: Division of HRD tasks

HRD PROFESSIONALS

When considering the tasks of HRD professionals, it becomes obvious that an important part of their work still consists of what we might call ‘traditional’ HRD tasks. In most organisations (23 cases), the HRD department fulfils such tasks, the most important ones being: providing training (mentioned 15 times) and co-ordinating training (mentioned 13 times). This finding supports the assumption made in the previous section that training is still part of the work field of HRD professionals in these case organisations, even though it is not always mentioned as an objective in itself.

Other ‘traditional’ HRD tasks such as giving advice to employees (mentioned 4 times) and selection and recruitment (mentioned twice) were also mentioned, though not nearly as often. There is no reason to believe, however, that these tasks no longer form part of the task portfolio of HRD professionals. It is more likely that they were usually not mentioned explicitly, because they are not considered to be the most important tasks seen in the light of the changing role of HRD.

Perhaps more interesting than the regular HRD tasks are the ‘new’ tasks, which were also found. In total, in over two thirds of the organisations (21 cases) HRD professionals mentioned such non-traditional tasks as part of their task set. The most important ones are:

- n providing services and (practical) support to line managers (and employees) (mentioned 13 times);
- n consulting (mentioned 13 times).

Both tasks reflect a shift in the responsibility for learning towards managers, who (are expected to) become more active in supporting their employees in learning. The next paragraph will look more closely into their role. As for the HRD professionals: if managers take over some of the more practical HRD tasks, this means HRD professionals will have to support them in doing so, in order to ensure quality of HRD interventions. Some of this support may consist of providing learning resources (mentioned six times). This is in essence a rather practical role.

Having managers fulfil an active role in HRD also gives HRD practitioners room to give advice (consult) on HRD issues, which can be considered to be a more strategic role, since it provides HRD professionals with the opportunity to help managers link training to corporate needs and to use opportunities for informal learning at work (instead of only training). It also provides them with room to work on other more strategic tasks such as monitoring competencies, helping managers in their new role, offering new HRD concepts and promoting a learning culture (each mentioned once or twice).

So, by providing services and by giving advice, HRD professionals can work on achieving some of their objectives discussed in the previous section, such as supporting employee learning in a broad sense and supporting the business with HRD activities.

MANAGERS

As mentioned above, the supportive and consulting role of HRD professionals is consistent with the way in which they describe the role of managers and employees. In their envisioned role, management fulfils an active role in supporting employee learning (26 cases).

In about half of the case organisations (15 cases) management is already held responsible for employee learning. HRD practitioners from other cases indicated that management will carry that responsibility in the future (mentioned twice), or will share that responsibility with employees (mentioned three times). In practice this means that managers are (or will become) responsible for some of the practical HRD tasks, such as making individual development plans, monitoring competencies, defining learning needs, competence assessment, evaluation of training (each mentioned once or twice) or even more strategic tasks, such as implementing HRD policy (mentioned 4 times), implementing the learning organisation concept or fulfilling a steering role with regard to HRD (both mentioned once).

Worth mentioning is the situation in the Belgian cleaning company ISS. This company employs two HRD practitioners, who are responsible for the administration and logistic support of training programmes. Their role is very restricted and reactive, and consists primarily of providing employees with adequate and sufficient training possibilities. Responsibility for defining and implementing the concept of the learning organisation lies with top management, who defines HRD policies. Finally, line management is responsible for HRD in the daily work environment. This situation is interesting because it clearly provides an exception to the rule. In most cases, HRD professionals fulfil a more strategic and active role in the development of their companies, though the degree of pro-activity differs from company to company. Some HRD functions are actual change agents, while others are less active partners in the change process.

EMPLOYEES

Not only managers, but employees are also expected to fulfil an active role towards their own development, in about two thirds of the cases (19 cases). They either already have a responsibility for their own learning (14 cases) or will share that responsibility with management in the future (3 cases). Though rarely mentioned, employees sometimes even get a responsibility in providing training or fulfilling HRD tasks in general (both mentioned once). Two points are worth considering, given these results. The first is that there does not appear to be a difference between companies with a high degree of manual labour, and companies with a highly educated workforce. Employees are held responsible for their own learning both in companies from the manufacturing industry, such as the Finnish metal factory Outokumpu Zinc, the Dutch chemicals plant Akzo Nobel and the British brewery Wolverhampton & Dudley on the one hand, and professional organisations such as the Finnish Okobank, the German consulting firm GTZ and the Dutch IT centre BAC.

Interesting to note is however that the three companies whose HRD practitioners hope that employees and managers will share responsibility for learning in the future, are all production companies: the Belgian telecommunications company Alcatel Bell, the Italian food producer Barrilla and the Dutch building company KIBC.

This number is really too small to attach any conclusions, but it would not be surprising if employee responsibility for learning is more hard to achieve in production companies with the characteristics (either currently or in the past) of a machine bureaucracy, than in service industry companies with characteristics of professional bureaucracies. In the latter, employees traditionally already carry a large amount of responsibility for their own professional development (Mintzberg, 1979; Van der Krogt, 1991).

A second point to be made is that the specific type of responsibilities to be taken on by employees seems to be less clear than for managers. For managers, responsibility for HRD means to fulfil different practical, or even strategic HRD tasks. For employees, the picture is not so clear. It appears that they are mainly expected to engage in active discussions with managers in analysing their learning needs or drawing up their personal development plans, and show an active and motivated attitude towards learning in general. Only two organisations explicitly mentioned a role for employees in other HRD tasks, such as providing training.

CONCLUSION

In the division of HRD tasks as envisioned by HRD professionals, managers and employees both fulfil an active role. HRD professionals themselves appear to fulfil both a strategic and a more practical role. Their strategic role can be seen as an effort to link HRD closely to the business. The responsibility of managers can be seen in the same light, by actively helping employees in analysing learning needs and agreeing upon learning activities, as in those companies that work with Personal Development Plans, they help to preserve a close link between the challenges of the workplace and employee learning. An interesting initiative was found in the Dutch IT Centre BAC. In order to improve the link between HRD policy and company policy the HRD department wants to implement director groups in which HRD professionals, top managers, line managers and resource managers participate to improve this link.

The practical role of HRD professionals consists of providing practical support and resources

(tools, learning materials) for managers to help them fulfil their HRD tasks, and thus provide learning opportunities for employees.

Important to realise when considering this description on the HRD professionals' new role is that a gap may exist between HRD's self-image and vision and the expectations from the company. To give one example, according to HRD professionals from the Finnish Okobank, their role has been changed already. Previously, they worked mostly as trainers, but nowadays their main work consists of organising and co-ordinating personnel development functions. They try to clarify what the customers of the competence development unit need, maintain the flow of training available, put development functions together, motivate and stimulate employees for learning, and create a learning culture. But the Okobank-managers have another opinion of what HRD professionals are doing at this moment. According to them, the HRD unit is too far away from the business functions of the organisation. Due to this, the co-ordination between management and HRD is not yet clear and sufficient. Managers hope for more interaction, cooperation and new initiatives. They wish for a more active approach and want support in their responsibility for learning and development. They hope for a more consultative role of HRD professionals. Thus, it appears that the role of HRD professionals is changing, but still needs attention in this company. This probably also holds true for many more of the case organisations.

Though many HRD functions have not yet reached that point, it seems justified to conclude that the organisation of the HRD function is becoming more and more diffuse, and increasingly hard to identify and describe, as HRD is becoming ever more integrated within the business. This integration process appears to take place both with regard to policy-making (HRD policy linked more closely to, and eventually integrated in general strategy) as became clear from section 3.1 and 3.2.1, and with regard to the execution of HRD activities (from being performed by HRD department, to a shared responsibility of HRD professionals, managers and employees), as was described in this section. A very illustrative example of this integration is provided by the competence managers, active in the Research & Development division of telecommunication company Ericsson (also a Dutch case study). There are now three types of managers in this company: operational managers and process owners (who are responsible for process management) and competence managers (responsible for people management). The last operate as a kind of internal job agency: at the start of each new project, they see to it that each project has the necessary competencies (i.e. the necessary employees) to fulfil its objectives. Competence managers are part of the HRD function. Besides supporting employees with developing personal development plans and career development plans, they are also responsible for analysing required competencies in the organisation now and in the future.

Barham en Rassam (1989) describe this transition as the shift from the fragmented and formalised approach to the focused approach of HRD, which they predicted to emerge in ever more companies. In the fragmented approach, training is a peripheral activity for the organisation. Training is seen as a very separate functional activity, managed exclusively by training professionals. The organisation is 'offered' training packages, in a manner which is usually described as the cafeteria approach: the HRD department lists the available training supply in a training catalogue, from which managers and employees choose courses.

Companies whose training efforts were fragmented in the past may decide to put more resources into training and make the whole process more systematic. This approach is described by Barham & Rassam as the formalised approach, because the training system is often linked into organisational systems (e.g. the appraisal system) to ensure that training takes place on a regular

basis.

Under the focused approach, training and development are still much more closely integrated in the organisation. As Barham & Rassam describe it:

“It is [an approach] in which training is part of the lifeblood of the company, rather than being seen as a luxury or a dubious accessory. These firms are beginning to centre their training on three requirements: strategic business objectives, specific departmental needs and individual aspirations. Moreover, a recurring message is that the line managers themselves are taking a lead in directing training, rather than, as in the past, having to accept schemes devised by isolated training specialists. These companies are making a conscious attempt to root their training in what the organisation and its people actually need (Barham & Rassam, 1989, p. 122).”

According to the authors, the role of trainers in this approach shifts to those of advisers, consultants, providers of resources and facilitators rather than as ‘directive interventionists’. They go on to explain that companies who use training and development in this way see continuous learning by individuals as a necessity, as part of their competitive strength. They see both off-the-job training and work itself as opportunities to learn. As Barham & Rassam explain: ‘they don’t fall for the artificial distinction between work and learning’, but instead recognise that most people are learning all the time. Support is needed for all learning activities, from formal off-the-job training to informal learning on-the-job (Barham & Rassam, 1989). Based on the results described in this section, it can be concluded that most companies from this study are all making progress towards this focused approach to HRD.

3.3 STRATEGIES ADOPTED TO REALISE ENVISIONED ROLE

In section 3.2 a picture was sketched of the envisioned role of the HRD professionals. The picture that emerged was one of an HRD function which strives to actively support the business, by providing training and other opportunities for (informal) learning and knowledge sharing, so that the organisational knowledge and skill base is appropriate for realising the strategic objectives. HRD professionals, managers and employees are all active partners in this HRD function, it is not limited to an HRD department. This section takes a closer look at the strategies adopted by the HRD professionals to support learning in their businesses, and more specifically, to realise all their objectives. In other words, this section provides an answer to the research question: What strategies do European HRD departments adopt to realise their envisioned role? These strategies are very closely linked to the objectives described earlier.

Table 3.5 provides a summary of the main results, the text below the table provides details and tries to explain some of the results. The strategies are categorized by the type of objective they support.

Strategies	Mentioned
• Strategies aimed at supporting the business	20 times
• Providing opportunities for (informal) learning	21 times

• Providing opportunities for knowledge sharing	11 times
• Providing training	19 times
• Strategies with regard to changing HRD practices/organisation	20 times
• Other	4 times

Table 3.5: Strategies

SUPPORT BUSINESS IN GENERAL / SUPPORT CURRENT STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

A first category of strategies was found to be aimed at securing that HRD activities support the business (either in general, or with regard to a specific current strategic objective). These types of categories were mentioned by two thirds of the case organisations (20 cases).

The first and probably most important type of strategies, found in about a third of the organisations (9 cases) is having a strategic approach to training. The French semiconductor plant Motorola for instance, is moving from a catalogue approach to training, towards an approach in which contact with management is sought to ensure a good link between training and company needs. Closely related strategies are: adopting a demand-driven way of operating (mentioned twice) and supporting organisation development (mentioned once).

The second type of strategies is aimed not at supporting the business as a whole, but directed at specific organisational objectives, such as implementing teamwork (mentioned six times) or changing the organisational culture (mentioned twice). For instance, the Italian food producer Barilla supports the implementation and diffusion of self-designing work teams in manufacturing, by specific interventions aimed at reinforcing the already acquired results and by presenting them to different areas, where line managers decide to start implementation. The interventions are of a step-by-step kind, steered by the specific needs managers have at a given time. Training programmes are examples of interventions, but other interventions are also employed.

The third type of strategies refers to the use of HR instruments to ensure a contribution to the organisation. In particular, competence management was mentioned (6 times) and recruitment (3 times). Both can be used as instruments to ensure the organisational skill base meets the requirements. For instance, the Finnish steel producer Outokumpu Zinc has included a willingness to learn as a criterion in recruiting new staff. They use this as a means to create a staff that is motivated for learning.

SUPPORT (INFORMAL) LEARNING

Next to training, which remains an important strategy, other methods to support (informal) learning were also found to be used by over two thirds of the organisations (21 cases).

The first cluster of strategies that can be distinguished consists of strategies, employed to support (informal) learning from each other and knowledge sharing. Examples of methods are coaching (mentioned 9 times), mentoring (mentioned 4 times), working on different projects, Internet/Intranet and benchmarking (each mentioned two or three times). With regard to the latter, it is interesting to mention a programme started up by the British postal services, Royal Mail. The programme, called Pathfinders, entails a 'seeing is believing' benchmarking and problem-solving exercise for front-line employees. Eight employees are selected from each division, on an open

and competitive basis, to form a team to examine a 'real' business problem and suggest improvements against a chosen business approach. The business problem is sponsored or championed by an operational manager, who is involved in helping the team. This is a good example of a project which integrates learning and working, and stimulates employees to learn from each other.

The second cluster of strategies that can be discerned focuses on fostering employee responsibility for learning. Instruments and work methods such as Personal Development Plans (mentioned 6 times), self-directed learning (mentioned 4 times), Open Learning Centres and learner oriented learning methods (both mentioned 3 times) all serve to increase employee self-management with regard to learning. With regard to the latter, an interesting example could be found at the Finnish paper mill Valmet. As an alternative to a traditional language course, Finnish participants who normally function in different work tasks have been sent, as their guests, to German clients. During this trip, speaking in Finnish was banned. In this way, the participants developed international relationships, while at the same time improving their German language skills. This way of working is illustrative of a way of supporting learning in which employees have a great influence on the actual programme and in which informal learning opportunities are deliberately created.

Important to realise is that HRD professionals appear to also use these informal learning methods as a way to change current notions on 'learning'. For instance, the HRD department at the British brewery Wolverhampton & Dudley is keen to utilise a wide range of non-course based methods such as coaching, mentoring, visits and secondments next to the more formal courses, to encourage managers and employees to change their perception of training and development from associating it with 'courses' to being willing and able to link work and learning. An example of this is what is called in the company 'three in a car'. Here, a trainer will coach managers to improve their coaching skills by observing and providing feedback to a manager coaching one of their staff.

Though the strategies mentioned above often also stimulate group learning, a third type of strategies could be found, aimed specifically at supporting team or even organisational learning (mentioned six times). For instance, at the British insurance company Royal Scottish Assurance (RSA), HRD professionals participate in the design and conduct of national and regional sales meetings, in order to facilitate and influence team and organisational learning. For example, learning that may emerge from the experiences of an individual worker will be shared with his or her colleagues through regional sales meetings. This will be passed on by an HRD practitioner to other training staff, who in turn will disseminate it in their regions.

As a final note, it is interesting to mention the initiative from Alcatel Bell, a telecommunications company from Belgium, which has introduced a minimum amount of training hours. More specifically, every employee needs to follow 20 hours of classical training, 20 hours of on-the-job training, and 10 hours of Bell Permanent Training. This educational project should increase the employability of employees. Though at first glance it seems at odds with the general striving for increasing the use of informal learning opportunities, it can actually support such forms of learning. For instance, because it enables employees to rotate in different jobs, or because it increases their learning skills and self confidence in learning.

SUPPORT KNOWLEDGE SHARING

About one third of the HRD functions (11 cases) mentioned activities with regard to facilitating knowledge sharing, namely:

- n Knowledge sharing / knowledge management (mentioned 4 times);
- n Internet (mentioned twice);
- n Knowledge database (mentioned once);
- n Information system (mentioned once);
- n Knowledge exchange networks (mentioned once).

Interesting to note in this list, is the use of technology to support knowledge sharing. It is important to realise that the overview is far from exhaustive, probably more companies implement (a range of) strategies to facilitate knowledge sharing, but didn't mention them under this heading (e.g. workshops, problem solving teams etc.). Worth mentioning is that the organisations that did mention these strategies are nearly all service industry companies, only two manufacturing companies mentioned benchmarking (the Italian cosmetics manufacturer Lever) and the use of a knowledge data base (the Belgian telecommunication company Siemens Atea).

PROVIDING TRAINING

A substantial amount of the activities of HRD professionals of course remains training, mentioned by about two thirds of the companies (19 cases). Mostly the answers were very general in nature, such as 'formal training courses' (mentioned 11 times) or 'training and development' (mentioned once).

Some provide information on the content of the courses, such as 'function-related training', 'technical training' (both mentioned twice) or 'introduction training' (mentioned once). Other answers give some insight into the type of courses, for example 'on the job training' (mentioned three times), 'modular training' (mentioned twice), conferences or Action Learning (mentioned once). Modern media techniques are also sometimes used in providing training, such as 'video networking', 'teleclassing', 'Intranet' and 'virtual classes' (all mentioned once).

All in all, the results are too general in nature and too varied to permit a conclusion more detailed than the observation that 'traditional' training does have its place in the strategies employed by the HRD professionals to realise their objectives.

CHANGING HRD PRACTICES

A very interesting category is that of the types of interventions and strategies employed to realise the desired change in HRD practices or HRD organisation. Over two thirds of the organisations (20 cases) explicitly mentioned strategies in this respect.

The first is decentralisation of HRD activities (mentioned 7 times) or at least achieving a less centralised organisation of the HRD function (mentioned once). This can be seen as a means to distribute HRD tasks and responsibilities to managers and even employees and to ensure that HRD professionals are in close contact with the organisation. For example, the German household equipment factory Bosch Siemens deliberately has a decentralised HRD strategy despite the fact that the HRD department is a centralised function. Responsibility concerning many HRD activities is transferred to the decision-makers, who possess the necessary competencies and knowledge to judge which are necessary. This should enhance the link between HRD and organisational needs.

The second type of strategy, supporting management in HRD tasks (mentioned 3 times) and providing tools (mentioned once), seems to be aimed at the same purpose. Actually, both are not so much implementation strategies, but can be considered as the actual implementation of the new division of responsibility.

Third, initiatives to increase employee responsibility for learning were mentioned, namely the use of personal development plans (mentioned six times) and career development programmes (three times).

Interesting to note is that a small group of companies explicitly pays attention to professionalisation of managers with regard to HRD (mentioned 6 times). For instance, the Italian software company Datalogic has evaluated its managers to measure their ability and motivation to support employees in learning. Such measures clearly go beyond providing practical support for HRD tasks. Even more interesting to note is that only one organisation actively strives to improve the skills of its HRD professionals in order to fulfil the new role of consultant and provider of support for line management (the German consulting firm GTZ). Since this new role is so radically different from the traditional roles of HRD professionals, such as developing and providing training, it might seem logical to expect that such a training would be beneficial for HRD professionals throughout more of the case organisations. There is no evidence that the HRD professionals in the 27 other cases didn't work on their own professionalisation, it might be that more than one case employed activities in this respect. However, it can be concluded that this professionalisation is certainly not common.

OTHER STRATEGIES

With regard to the other activities that were mentioned, it is important to note that in all companies, the researchers looked for evidence which would describe how the HRD professionals aimed to evaluate whether they have actually achieved their objectives and - more broadly - their envisioned role. It has to be remarked that this evidence was not found in most organisations. Many HRD professionals do evaluate their training courses, but in few companies had they outlined a plan for evaluating their contribution on a more strategic level. As an example of a company that collects such information, the Belgian telecommunications company Alcatel Bell collects statistics on job rotation (a means for informal learning) and on training hours. The Belgian insurance company DVV is using evaluation instruments on different levels in the organisation, such as organisational business plans, balanced score cards and competence management. By using these instruments, DVV also wants to measure whether HRD's role has changed successfully. But they realise that measuring the success of being a learning oriented organisation is difficult and takes a long time.

A rather remarkable strategy is employed by the Belgian cleaning company ISS, in which formal training still plays a very important part. In order to support the development of a learning culture, and more specifically to stimulate motivation for learning, they provide certificates for employees who have received a certain amount of training. This might seem contradictory to the objective of stimulating informal learning, but in fact it can be seen as a measure which gives employees who hold negative ideas on learning a positive feeling and more self-confidence. Both are prerequisites for using learning opportunities and sharing knowledge. So this measure can be seen as a stepping stone towards creating a learning culture, even though it is associated with traditional training.

CONCLUSION

This section described the results with regard to the third research question: what strategies do European HRD professionals adopt to realise their envisioned role? It was found that the strategies could be categorised according to the main HRD objectives, described earlier.

So, a first category consists of strategies (mentioned by two thirds of the cases) aimed at securing that HRD activities support the business, either in general or with regard to a specific current strategic objective. For instance by adopting a very demand-driven approach to planning HRD activities and seeking close co-operation with management.

A second type of strategies (mentioned by two thirds of the cases) are those seeking to support (informal) learning by: supporting (informal) learning from each other and knowledge sharing, fostering employee responsibility for learning and supporting team or even organisational learning. Important to realise is that HRD professionals appear to consciously use 'new' ways of supporting learning as a way to change current notions on 'learning' (for instance, they hope that management and employees will no longer equate learning to classroom training, but also consider opportunities for informal learning, and for learning from each other).

Next to this, about a third of the companies specifically mentioned activities with regard to facilitating knowledge sharing, which might be regarded as a subset of the previous category. Interesting to note here is the use of IC-T to support knowledge sharing, though other methods were also found to be used.

A substantial amount of the activities of HRD professionals of course remains providing training (mentioned by two thirds of the cases). But the results in this field were too general to permit any specific conclusions other than the observation that traditional training does have a place in the portfolio of strategies employed by the HRD professionals to realise their objectives.

Finally, an interesting category is comprised of strategies aimed at changing the organisation of the HRD function, by actively involving managers and employees. For example by decentralisation of HRD activities, supporting management in HRD tasks and increasing employee responsibility for learning. Interesting to note is that a small group of companies explicitly tries to increase management's skills in the field of HRD. Only one case organisation mentioned that its HRD professionals have acquired new skills themselves, in order to fulfil their new consulting role.

All in all, it can be concluded that training is still an important strategy, but it is complemented by strategies to support other types of learning (such as coaching, using IC-T to promote knowledge sharing, etc.), and by activities meant to ensure a close link between training and organisational strategy. Important to note is that HRD professionals not only provide opportunities for learning, but also deliberately also try to change attitudes to learning. For instance, methods to support informal learning are also meant to change views of learning as a classroom activity. Some companies try to professionalise managers in the field of HRD. And some training-related measures are important for increasing motivation for learning and learner self-confidence. For instance, at the Belgian telecommunications company Alcatel Bell a minimum amount of training hours was declared and in the Belgian cleaning company ISS, employees receive a training certificate to boost their self-confidence. So, paradoxically enough, taking measures in the field of training can be a first step towards appreciating and using other opportunities for learning.

After studying the objectives and change strategies of the HRD departments it is now interesting to consider the practical change process, addressed by the following research questions:

- n What inhibiting factors* do European HRD departments encounter when trying to realise their new role? (section 3.4.1)
- n Which factors* are conducive to the realisation of HRD's new role? (section 3.4.2)
- n How do they cope with these factors? (section 3.4.3)

3.4.1 INHIBITING FACTORS

All case organisations faced factors which made the realisation of HRD's new role difficult. The most important ones are summarised in table 3.6. The text below the table provides a more detailed description and explanation.

Inhibiting factors	Mentioned
• Lack of motivation / responsibility for learning	19 times
• Lack of clarity on HRD's role	16 times
• Insufficient learning culture	12 times
• Difficulties of changing an existing situation	8 times
• Pragmatic factors	24 times
• Other	2 times

Table 3.6: Inhibiting factors

LACK OF MOTIVATION / RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEARNING IN MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEES

The first category of inhibiting factors, lack of motivation and/or responsibility for learning, was mentioned by two thirds of the case organisations (19 cases). A distinction can be made between a lack of motivation or feeling of responsibility on the part of managers for supporting employee learning (mentioned by 15 cases), and a lack of motivation for learning from employees or a lacking sense of responsibility for their own development (also mentioned 15 times). In the majority of cases, however, both were mentioned jointly (11 cases).

It is not sure what might cause the lack of motivation. Perhaps managers and employees are still used to a different way of working and don't want to give it up yet. Another possible

explanation is a lack of enthusiasm or faith in the concept of the learning organisation or training in general. Barham & Rassam (1989) found that managers in companies that used to have a fragmented approach to training, sometimes lack faith in traditional courses as valuable learning experiences, or came to see training as a cost, rather than an investment for the future. Of course, it takes time to change such a pattern of expectations, especially when managers and employees still implicitly equate 'learning' to 'training'. Employees and managers may be waiting to see positive results of this new approach. But other factors, such as a lack of time on the part of managers, lack of rewards for employees or lack of self-confidence when it comes to learning, could equally well play a role. Though the cause of the lack of motivation or sense of responsibility is unknown (and might be different for different organisations or even different managers and employees), it is clear that it can hinder the realisation of a shared responsibility for HRD between management, employees and HRD professionals.

LACK OF CLARITY ON HRD'S ROLE

A second category of inhibiting factors can be summarised as a lack of clarity on HRD's new role or, more general, the new approach to learning and working. Such factors were mentioned by half of the case organisations (16 cases). In general, the inhibiting factors can be divided into two sets.

The first is a lack of understanding on HRD's role. Some organisations mention a lack of understanding of the goals, tasks, responsibilities and/or objectives (or even evaluation criteria) of the HRD department (mentioned 8 times), or even a distance between managers and HRD department (mentioned three times). The two Dutch companies who have installed competence managers as a special type of managers with a large HR responsibility (telecommunications company Ericsson and IT Centre BAC) mention a difficult position for the competence managers, partly due to the fact that their role is still new, and different people have different expectations (mentioned twice).

The second is a lack of practical information on the need for learning, on learning processes (mentioned three times) and on learning possibilities (mentioned twice).

This role unclarity and lack of information probably contribute to the observed lack of motivation. It is very well possible that managers and employees are not always motivated to perform their new roles, because it is not clear to them what is expected, and what support the HRD professionals will provide.

INSUFFICIENT LEARNING CULTURE

The third category of inhibiting factors might seem like 'stating the obvious'. Nevertheless, a third of the case organisations mentioned a lack of a learning culture as an inhibiting factor to realising their intended role (12 cases). Apparently, it is very difficult to create a learning culture, if such a culture doesn't already exist, at least partially. Most cases in which this point is raised point to an insufficient learning culture in general (9 cases), others narrow it down to insufficient knowledge sharing (6 cases). This indicates that it is very difficult to motivate employees to share knowledge or engage in learning processes if they are not used to this, or perhaps even reluctant to do so (and so it might be that a relationship exists with the first category of objectives: lack of motivation for learning on the part of employees). This is supported by a literature and research review by Jones & Hendry (1992), who also found that a learning-oriented culture is bound to

enhance successful learning, whereas it is very difficult to create learning situations in companies with cultures characterised for instance by many bureaucratic values and inter-functional rivalries and power-politics.

DIFFICULTIES OF CHANGING AN EXISTING SITUATION

Of course, all innovations meet with resistance, the status quo is often very resilient to change. Therefore, the fourth category of inhibiting factors is not very surprising. About a quart of the case organisations (8 cases) report difficulties in changing old situations. A small part of them mentions fear of change or resistance to change as a barrier (3 cases). As some of the British case show, this resistance may come from employees, but also from management, who sometimes hesitate to empower their employees or to take on a new role themselves. Other companies point to more practical factors, such as old organisational structures which interfere with the new way of working (mentioned 3 times) or a compulsory training system which makes it difficult to implement new ways of learning (mentioned twice).

PRAGMATIC FACTORS

Next to more fundamental issues, such as a lack of motivation, resistance to change or an insufficient learning culture, which can be deeply ingrained in the organisational fabric, nearly all companies also experience more practical inhibiting factors (24 cases).

Mentioned quite often is a lack of time for learning on the part of employees (mentioned 16 times). The work pressure is so high that it is hard for them to find time for learning. Of course, this compounds to the problem of lack of motivation and lack of a learning culture. The problem is that it creates a vicious circle: when people are continuously working very hard to keep up with new developments and changes (reactively), but are too busy to learn and reflect on existing practices, this makes it very hard to find solutions which might decrease the work load (pro-actively).

The other more practical problems HRD professionals face concern their own role: lack of money or a lack of HRD resources (mentioned 8 times), a lack of time to develop new HRD initiatives (mentioned 6 times), lack of HRD professionals (mentioned 4 times) and lack of time to update materials (mentioned once). Of course the lack of time is associated with the lack of resources: if more money would be available, extra manpower could be hired. Interestingly enough, there is no apparent relationship between the organisations who mention a lack of HRD professionals or lack of time and the size of the HRD departments. Some of the organisations who mention this problem employ only two HRD professionals, but it is also reported by cases with as many as 70 employees. So it seems that the cause for this problem lies more in the fact that realising the new role is very time-consuming, because at the outset it means more tasks for the HRD professionals (the new tasks next to the traditional tasks, see section 3.2.2). Only when managers and employees will actually have taken over some of the HRD tasks, more room will be created.

It is also interesting to consider whether there is a relationship with the outsourcing policy many companies have followed during the beginning of the nineties. It is not sure whether this applies to many of the case organisations, but during the last few years, many companies have cut back on their training budgets, and hire or buy training rather than develop it in-house. It might be that some of the companies who are currently experiencing a lack of manpower have been through

such an outsourcing process.

OTHER FACTORS

Finally, two other factors were mentioned, which are very company-specific, and will therefore not be described in detail here.

CONCLUSION

The most important inhibiting factor appears to be a lack of motivation on the part of managers and employees to take on new learning tasks or to engage actively in learning processes. This lack of motivation is probably closely linked to two other inhibiting factors, namely a lack of clarity on HRD's role and an insufficiently developed learning culture.

Next to these rather deeply rooted problems, pragmatic factors such as a lack of time for learning (something which can also be related to a lack of motivation!), and a lack of time and money to develop new HRD initiatives also play a role.

3.4.2 CONDUCTIVE FACTORS

Next to factors which obstruct innovation of the HRD function, all case organisations can also point out factors which have a positive influence on the change efforts. In many cases they are just the opposite of the inhibiting factors, mentioned in the previous section. The most important ones are summarised in table 3.7. The text below the table provides a more detailed description and explanation.

Conducive factors	Mentioned
• Involvement management / employees	21 times
• Clarity on HRD's role	19 times
• Learning culture	5 times
• New organisational structure	5 times
• Pragmatic factors	10 times
• Other	7 times

Table 3.7: Conducive factors

INVOLVEMENT MANAGEMENT / EMPLOYEES

Whereas a lack of motivation for learning, or learning-related tasks, proved to be an inhibiting factor, about three quarters of the case organisations (21 cases) mention factors which indicate a strong involvement of management and/or employees. A small category (6 cases) experiences strong support from top management for HRD's new role. Obviously, this can not only have a motivating effect on the organisation, but might also make it easier for HRD professional to increase their resources.

A larger group of cases experiences active involvement of line managers (mentioned 16 times) or a general people skill orientation of management (mentioned 3 times). This makes it easier to involve line management actively in supporting learning. Interesting to note is that half the time, the companies that mention active involvement of managers as a positive factor, are the same ones that experience a lack of motivation from this group. Apparently, these companies have both managers who are positive, and managers who react more negatively to the new division of HRD tasks.

Lack of motivation from employees was also mentioned as an inhibiting factor. A small group of cases mentions it as a conducive factor: active participation of employees in their own development (mentioned 4 times) and employees are motivated to learn (mentioned 3 times). This number is considerably lower than the number of companies who mentioned it as an inhibiting factor. It does serve to support the proposition that if a lack of motivation can be changed into a strong involvement, this will strongly influence the change process in a positive way.

CLARITY ON HRD'S ROLE

About two thirds of the case organisations (19 cases) experienced that clarity on HRD's role in the organisation can enhance the innovation process. Factors that were mentioned include:

- n clear HRD communication (mentioned 11 times) and clarity on new role management (mentioned twice).
- n clear training systems, procedures or policy (mentioned 9 times) and concrete learning goals (mentioned twice)
- n a widely shared understanding of the importance of personnel development (mentioned 6 times).

Important to point out is that, save for a few exceptions, this point of clarity was not mentioned by the companies who mentioned a lack of clarity as a factor which blocked innovation (see section 3.4.1). This suggests that if unclarity on HRD's new role does hinder the adoption of that new role, it is shared widely throughout the organisation. And, likewise, if clarity on HRD's role helps the HRD professionals to progress in their new role, this clarity is also experienced throughout the entire organisation.

LEARNING CULTURE

If a company already has a corporate culture which is open to learning, this makes it easier to change HRD practices. HRD professionals from a small group of cases mention the corporate culture as a conducive factor in the change process (4 cases). They either experience a learning culture, or an innovation oriented culture (each mentioned twice). It is noteworthy that the amount of companies experiencing a positive effect from their companies' culture is much smaller than the group that experience a negative effect, due to a lack of learning culture (see section 3.5.1).

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES

Changes in organisational structures, or in jobs can also support the change process, as mentioned by a small group of companies (6 cases). New organisational structures can provide employees with more possibilities for learning during work, which gives HRD professionals a good starting point to support work-related learning (mentioned 4 times). For instance, the French

transport company GT group mentions that its employees have more possibilities for learning due to increased contact with customers. And the German chemicals producer AgrEvo and consulting firm GTZ experience that the introduction of teamwork and learning networks creates new learning opportunities. A flexible organisational structure was also mentioned (by 3 cases). So, whereas old organisational structures can hinder the adoption of a new HRD approach (see section 3.4.1), the renewal of such structures can actually support them. This observation is supported by a review of research and literature by Jones and Hendry (1992) who conclude that:

'The need for job challenges, enrichment and enlargement are regarded as crucial factors in creating learning. Opportunity to devote some time during the course of actually doing a job to self-development, giving room for reflection and 'personal space' is also important. Teamwork is seen as getting away from traditional individual assessment and isolationism. Where there is teamworking, combined with networking as a result of job enlargement, learning is further helped.' (Jones & Hendry, 1992, p. 45)

PRAGMATIC FACTORS

While the previous section (3.4.1) showed that pragmatic factors can inhibit changes of HRD practices, about a third of the companies (10 cases) experienced such factors to be helping the change process. Most important are ample opportunities for training and development and/or sufficient HRD resources. Sufficient manpower, or sufficient time for learning or for developing HRD materials were not mentioned as conducive factors (though a lack of them was mentioned as an inhibiting factor).

OTHER FACTORS

Next to these categories of conducive factors, which form the exact counterparts of the categories of inhibiting factors, three other factors were mentioned to stimulate the change of HRD practices:

- n Positive results of new HRD initiatives (mentioned 7 times);
- n Impact of training on competence development / salary (mentioned once);
- n Experience employees become trainer (mentioned once).

Noteworthy about this set of factors, is that their positive effect can be explained from their motivating character. Each of these factors can increase employee motivation for learning, and management's motivation to support employee learning.

CONCLUSION

When considering the factors that support the pursuit of HRD's new role, it is worth mentioning that most form an exact mirror of the inhibiting factors. Thus the most important conducive factor is active involvement, particularly from managers (whereas a lack of motivation from this group was an important inhibiting factor). It seems that most HRD professionals find themselves dealing with both active and motivated managers and with those that are not motivated.

Highly motivated employees were also mentioned as a conducive factor, but only by a small number of case organisations.

Clarity on HRD's new role is also an important conducive factor. Other factors, such as a learning culture, new organisational structures which provide more learning opportunities and pragmatic factors such as enough HRD resources, were also found to help the process along. However, these aspects were mentioned considerably less frequently as conducive factors, than they were pointed out as factors which hinder the role transition.

It might be that some of the conducive factors are necessary but insufficient conditions for organisations to become learning oriented. For example, despite increasing HRD resources and senior management commitment, until workload pressures and the organisation of work are addressed, and time is made for learning, employees will continue to see learning as extra to their daily work practices, perhaps even unnecessary and worthless. The need to meet targets and a task orientation impedes the development of a learning environment. Conversely, inhibiting factors might not necessarily preclude the achievement of becoming learning oriented. In some organisation, for example in Royal Mail and Rolls-Royce, despite shift work and daily targets, time is being found to enable learning events to be scheduled in work time and in the work environment.

3.4.3 (EXTRA) COPING STRATEGIES

The last question of the study is how HRD functions cope with the inhibiting factors (and / or fully use or stimulate the conducive factors). It was found that for many HRD departments, the strategies employed to realise their intended role were partially directed towards this aim. Therefore, those can be considered as the main 'coping strategies'. However, some specific (extra) coping strategies were also encountered. These are reviewed in this section. Table 3.8 provides an overview of the results. The table is followed by an explanation of the findings.

(Extra) coping strategies	Mentioned
• Communication	16 times
• Strategies to reduce workload	2 times
• Other	11 times

Table 3.8: (extra) coping strategies

COMMUNICATION

The most important strategies to deal effectively with inhibiting factors, such as a lack of motivation, appear to focus on increasing communication. Three types of communication strategies can be distinguished.

The first is communication directed at changing the view on (the need for) learning:

- n Involving employees and creating understanding for the need for learning by communication (mentioned 5 times);
- n Communication focused on: learning is not only training but also learning from others (mentioned 4 times);
- n Communication focused on learning on the job (mentioned once).

For instance, it was found that all French case organisations pay attention to sharing knowledge and communication improvements in order to let employees know why change is necessary, why learning plays an important role in the change process of the organisation and that learning takes place not only by following courses but also by learning from each other. And the HRD department of the British postal service Royal Mail is putting a new emphasis on learning as part of the job. If this communication succeeds to change attitudes towards learning, they might serve to increase motivation for learning, as well as enhance the creation of a learning culture and knowledge sharing.

A second category of communication initiatives focuses on increasing communication or even co-operation with managers and employees to direct HRD initiatives more closely to their needs:

- n Directing initiatives to wishes & needs managers and employees (mentioned 6 times);
- n Involvement of managers in activities (mentioned once).

For instance, the Italian software company Datalogic has adopted direct horizontal communication with line management as one of its main coping strategies. As is normal for middle-sized companies, new emergencies and changes are rather frequent. The HRD department deliberately adopts a very flexible approach and a listening attitude, which lead to teamwork between managers and HRD practitioners. One could say that the traditional distinction between line and staff is overcome. Such strategies can be expected to create goodwill and motivation. The Dutch building company KIBC found that improving communication and information flows are both very useful in decreasing resistance and increasing motivation for learning.

The third set of communication strategies focus on providing information on the position, roles and responsibilities of the HRD department (mentioned 3 times), on learning needs and on learning possibilities (both mentioned once). This might provide an antidote to the inhibiting factor of lack of information and might thus serve to increase motivation for learning and for actively participating in the renewed HRD function.

STRATEGIES TO REDUCE WORKLOAD

In order to reduce the workload of HRD professionals, and thus tackle the problem of a lack of manpower, two companies have adopted specific strategies, namely:

- n Recruiting new HRD professionals;
- n Delegating responsibilities to line managers and providing a training programme for those managers;
- n A more clear definition of HRD roles and tasks to avoid double work;
- n Providing administrative support for the competence managers so they can work on their more strategic tasks.

Each was only mentioned once.

OTHER COPING STRATEGIES

Next to these two types of strategies a range of other strategies was mentioned, namely:

- n Measures which can be seen as efforts to underline the professional approach of the HRD professionals, and to make sure the organisation has a positive approach to the HRD function, which might increase the motivation to adopt new HRD practices, namely:
 - n Showing added value of the HRD department (mentioned twice);
 - n A careful planning of HRD activities and policy (mentioned twice);
 - n Critical evaluation of effects of HRD (mentioned once).
- n Efforts to ensure that a lack of learning possibilities does not hinder the change process, namely:
 - n Continuously updating the supply of HRD initiatives (mentioned twice);
 - n Increasing possibilities for knowledge sharing / informal learning (mentioned once).
- n Strategies that are probably meant to increase motivation for learning in the workforce, by bringing in 'fresh blood', and making sure (through the recruitment process) that new workers are motivated for learning:
 - n Application of new selection criteria in recruitment (mentioned twice);
 - n Redeployment of some employees (mentioned once).
- n Activities that serve to provide the HRD professionals with a 'sounding board', and with new ideas for initiatives within their own companies:
 - n Networking with other organisations which are implementing the learning organisation concept (mentioned once);
 - n Internal and external networking (mentioned once).

CONCLUSION

With regard to the coping strategies, communication seems to be the key word. It is essential to make sure the organisation understands the new role of HRD, the intentions of the HRD department, what is expected of managers and employees (and why), the new vision on learning (broader than the old classroom approach) and has the necessary information on learning possibilities, for instance. This understanding and information is very important for managers and employees to be motivated to implement the changes and to bring about a fruitful partnership between HRD professionals, managers and employees.

Much has been written about the learning organisation. Advocates of the concept have tried to show that it is a powerful concept since it underlines the necessity of putting learning at the centre of corporate strategies. Critics have tried to deny the very possibility of organisations to learn, thereby rejecting the concept as a metaphor for creating the organisational energy to support and stimulate change and innovation. The case studies indicate that there are many organisations in Europe that have embraced the concept of the learning organisation in creating opportunities for lifelong learning. They have demonstrated that the concept is powerful and applicable, although they also experienced inhibiting factors in implementing the concept. Based on the case studies it can be concluded that the concept of the learning organisation is worthwhile for both the organisation and individual employees.

Furthermore, the case studies also showed important implications for HRD professionals in organisations. Companies that want to implement the concept of the learning organisation are facing a variety of HRD challenges, in mission, strategy, scope and operational implementations. Organisations have different coping strategies to deal with these challenges. An important observation is that nearly all of the companies studied in the case studies have concluded that HRD is top priority in realising the strategic ambitions. More than ever before, human resources are the key to organisational success, and continuous development of these resources has become a competitive advantage. This section summarises the case studies' main findings.

CONTEXT

It was found that all 28 cases at the moment find themselves dealing with strong(er) competitive markets (caused for instance by globalisation) and/ or fast(er) changing technologies. As a result improving and innovating products, processes and/or services and becoming more client centered were mentioned as key strategy elements by case organisations in all seven participating countries. These strategies have in common that they all focus on improving flexibility of the organisation in order to respond quickly to the fastly changing environment. Some organisations mentioned strategies related directly to increasing their flexibility, for example reducing production or delivery times.

Human resources were mentioned by almost all case organisations (25 cases) as an important means to realise the before mentioned strategies or objectives. This factor is of great interest for this research project. Employee learning and other strategies that stress the importance of employee learning, such as knowledge management/ knowledge sharing and creating a learning culture were found to be key issues for these organisations.

The organisations were found to use a large variety of change strategies to realise the development towards a learning organisation. Or, more directly, strategies with regard to the management style, strategy development process, structure, (IT) systems and culture (client – oriented) were mentioned as important tools to reach organisational goals like innovation, improvement and client centeredness.

For this research project the change strategies focusing on learning cultures and employee development are of particular interest. Both categories focus on organisational learning and employee learning and both include the role of HRD in the corporate change process. Offering more learning opportunities, improving learning motivation and supporting a continuous development process for employees were mentioned as important characteristics of the strategies

concerning development of a learning culture. Examples of activities from the second category, HR strategies, include the implementation of competence management and personal development plans.

Even important to note is that all organisations appear to focus on the role of human resources in the organisation, not only on employee development but also on integrating HR activities and HR policy in business strategies.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: ENVISIONED ROLE

OBJECTIVES

Overseeing the broad range of objectives, the following can be concluded. Most HRD functions in the case organisations seek to provide a strategic contribution to the organisation, by supporting the company in realising business objectives. For instance by ensuring that the workforce has the necessary competencies.

In trying to realise this strategic contribution, HRD functions not only provide training (mentioned explicitly by only a small group of companies, but probably an objective in all cases), but also seek to provide opportunities for (informal) employee learning in general (with knowledge sharing as an explicit form). In this respect, objectives such as creating a learning culture, creating a learning organisation and implementing knowledge management were mentioned, but are certainly not dominant.

Finally, in order to provide these learning opportunities, and provide a strategic contribution, about two third of the case organisations have formulated objectives with regard to changing HRD practices. The most important ones are related to integrating HRD stronger with the work organisation, for instance by sharing HRD tasks with line managers. The latter subject is discussed in the next section.

DIVISION OF HRD TASKS

In the division of HRD tasks as envisioned by HRD professionals, managers and employees both fulfil an active role. HRD professionals themselves appear to fulfil both a strategic and a more practical role. Their strategic role can be seen as an effort to link HRD closely to the business.

The responsibility of managers can be seen in the same light, by actively helping employees in analysing learning needs and agreeing upon learning activities, as in those companies that work with Personal Development Plans, they help to preserve a close link between the challenges of the workplace and employee learning. The practical role of HRD professionals consists of providing support and resources (tools, learning materials) for managers to help them fulfil their HRD tasks, and thus provide learning opportunities for employees.

Though many HRD functions have not yet reached that point, it seems justified to conclude that the organisation of the HRD function is becoming more and more diffuse, and increasingly hard to identify and describe as HRD is becoming ever more integrated within the business. This integration process appears to take place both with regard to policy-making (HRD policy linked more closely to, and eventually integrated in the general strategy), and with regard to the execution

of HRD activities (from being performed by HRD department, to a shared responsibility of HRD professionals, managers and employees).

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: STRATEGIES

What strategies did the companies adopt to realise their envisioned role? It was found that the strategies could be categorised according to the main objectives discussed in the above.

So, a first category consists of strategies (mentioned by two thirds of the cases) aimed at securing that HRD activities support the business, either in general or with regard to a specific current strategic objective. For instance by adopting a very demand-driven approach to planning HRD activities and seeking close co-operation with management.

A second type of strategies are those seeking to support (informal) learning by: supporting (informal) learning from each other and knowledge sharing, fostering employee responsibility for learning and supporting team or even organisational learning. Important to realise is that HRD professionals appear to consciously use 'new' ways of supporting learning as a way to change current notions on 'learning' (for instance, they hope that management and employees will no longer equate learning to classroom training, but also consider opportunities for informal learning, and for learning from each other).

Next to this, companies specifically mentioned activities with regards to facilitating knowledge sharing, which might be regarded as a subset of the previous category. Interesting to note here is the use of IC-T to support knowledge sharing, though other methods were also found to be used.

A substantial amount of the activities of HRD professionals of course remains providing training. But the results in this field were too general to permit any specific conclusions other than the observation that traditional training does have a place in the portfolio of strategies employed by the HRD professionals to realise their objectives.

Finally, an interesting category is comprised of strategies aimed at changing the organisation of the HRD function, by actively involving managers and employees. For example by decentralisation of HRD activities, supporting management in HRD tasks and increasing employee responsibility for learning. Interesting to note is that a small group of companies explicitly tries to increase management's skills in the field of HRD. Only one case organisation mentioned that its HRD professionals have acquired new skills themselves, in order to fulfil their new consulting role.

All in all, it can be concluded that training is still an important strategy, but it is complemented by strategies to support other types of learning (such as coaching, using IC-T to promote knowledge sharing, etc.), and by activities meant to ensure a close link between training and organisational strategy. Important to note is that HRD professionals not only provide opportunities for learning, but also deliberately also try to change attitudes to learning. For instance, methods to support informal learning are also meant to change views of learning as a classroom activity. Some companies try to professionalise managers in the field of HRD. And some training-related measures are important for increasing motivation for learning and learner self-confidence. For instance, at the Belgian telecommunications company Alcatel Bell a minimum amount of training hours was declared and in the Belgian cleaning company ISS, employees receive a training certificate to boost their self-confidence.

So, paradoxically enough, taking measures in the field of training can be a first step towards appreciating and using other opportunities for learning.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: INFLUENCING FACTORS

INHIBITING FACTORS

The most important inhibiting factor appears to be a lack of motivation on the part of managers and employees to take on new learning tasks or to engage actively in learning processes. This lack of motivation is probably closely linked to two other inhibiting factors, namely a lack of clarity on HRD's role and an insufficiently developed learning culture. Next to these rather deeply rooted problems, pragmatic factors such as a lack of time for learning, and a lack of time and money to develop new HRD initiatives also play a role.

CONDUCTIVE FACTORS

When considering the factors that support the pursuit of HRD's new role, it is worth mentioning that most form an exact mirror of the inhibiting factors. Thus the most important conducive factor is active involvement, particularly from managers (whereas a lack of motivation from this group was an important inhibiting factor). It seems that most HRD professionals find themselves dealing with both active and motivated managers and with those that are not motivated. Highly motivated employees were also mentioned as a conducive factor, but only by a small number of case organisations.

Clarity on HRD's new role is also an important conducive factor. Other factors, such as a learning culture, new organisational structures which provide more learning opportunities and pragmatic factors such as enough HRD resources, were also found to help the process along. However, these aspects were mentioned considerably less frequently as conducive factors, than they were pointed out as factors which hinder the role transition.

(EXTRA) COPING STRATEGIES

With regard to the coping strategies, communication seems to be the key word. It is essential to make sure the organisation understands the (new) role of HRD, the intentions of the HRD department, what is expected of managers and employees (and why), the new vision on learning (broader than the old classroom approach) and has the necessary information on learning possibilities, for instance.

This understanding and information is very important for managers and employees to be motivated to implement the changes and to bring about a fruitful partnership between HRD professionals, managers and employees.

CHAPTER 4

SURVEY RESULTS

After a thorough analysis of the results of the case study phase a questionnaire was constructed on the basis of these findings. This questionnaire consisted of both closed and open questions on the concepts and practices of HRD departments in learning oriented organisations. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to ascertain to what degree the organisations in the survey hold the same (or comparable) viewpoints with regard to their role in the organisation as those found in the organisations which participated in the case study research; adopted similar strategies to bring these viewpoints into being and point out the same (or similar) conducive factors as the HRD departments in the case study organisations, and encounter the same (or similar) difficulties in realizing their new role.

In other words, the survey mainly served as a means to test the findings from the case study research and to establish the degree in which these concepts and practices are common for HRD departments in large companies in the participating EU-countries.

This chapter provides an overview of the survey results. These are presented in roughly the same order as the previous chapter. First, the main organisational strategies of the survey companies are described (section 4.1). Then, the text zooms in on the HRD function: the envisioned role of the HRD departments (section 4.2), the strategies, adopted to realise this envisioned role (section 4.3), and factors influencing this process (section 4.4). Finally, a closer look is taken at the survey findings, to see whether country differences can be found (section 4.5). Next to a survey, a literature study was undertaken to examine whether the 'European approach' is different from the Japanese and US approach to HRD within the concept of the learning organisation. The results are summarized in this chapter (section 4.6).

HOW TO INTERPRET THE RESULTS (TABLES)

Before presenting the results in the upcoming sections, it is necessary to explain an important feature of the questionnaire. Many questions not only relate to the current state (e.g. how important are each of the following HRD objectives for your organisation?) but also to the expected evolution of this situation (e.g. Do you expect these objectives to become more or less important in the future?). Respondents were asked to indicate both current and expected future importance on a five-point scale.

For the current importance of each aspect, the scale runs from 1 - very unimportant - to 5 - very important -. For the estimated future development, scale values represent different meanings. The scale runs from 1 - much less important - to 5 - much more important -. Thus, when reading the tables, it is important to bear in mind that the mean scores displayed in the two columns (current and future importance) cannot be compared as such. For example, a '4' for current importance and a '5' for future importance, does not mean that the importance is expected increase with 1 point. Instead, it means respondents consider the item currently as 'important', and expect it to become 'much more important' in the future.

4.1 ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES

In the case studies, questions were asked such as: “What are the companies main strategies?”, “What are the main change strategies employed to reach this aim?” and “How and why do organisations want to increase their potential for organisational learning?”. The aim was to provide a background against which to interpret the findings with regard to the HRD function. In the survey, these questions were also asked in order to create a similar background description for the survey participants.

Section 4.1.1 outlines the main strategies adopted by the survey organisations in order to respond to quickly changing environments. Section 4.1.2 describes the change processes adopted to realise the strategies. Section 4.1.3 provides an overview of reasons companies have for wanting to become a learning organisation. The presentation of the data follows roughly the same format as that of the case studies.

4.1.1 STRATEGY ELEMENTS

In order to gain an overview of the main strategies of those firms participating in the survey, respondents were asked to indicate the importance of a number of possible strategy elements. A distinction was made between general strategy and human resource strategy. This list was based both on the case study results and general insights on relevant contemporary strategic issues. The respondents were asked to indicate both current importance of strategic elements on a scale from 1 - very unimportant - to 5 - very important -; and the estimated future importance, also on a scale from 1 - much less important - to 5 - much more important -. Results are displayed in table 4.1 (mean scores).

As becomes clear from this table, increasing client focus is an extremely important strategy element for the survey companies (mean score 4.5). Also important, but to a somewhat lesser degree are innovation and improvement of products and services, quality improvements (mean score 4.2) and optimising the internal organisation (mean score 4.0). There are no strategic issues which appeared to be not relevant. But the least important ones include mergers and outsourcing (mean scores of 3.1) and diversification (mean score 2.8).

Interesting to note is that the 'rank order' of the estimated future importance of each of these strategy elements is similar to the rank order of current importance. In other words, those strategy elements that are most important now, are also considered to increase most in importance in the future. Whereas those strategy elements that are not so central to the business now are also expected to become more relevant, but to a lesser degree. Respondents don't expect any major changes.

	Current importance		Future importance	
	Mean	N	Mean	N
General strategies				
• Increasing client focus	4.5	164	4.4	163

• Innovation products and services	4.2	164	4.2	160
• Improvements products and services	4.2	165	4.2	162
• Quality advantages	4.2	162	4.1	160
• Optimising the internal organisation	4.0	161	4.2	158
• Improving flexibility	3.9	164	4.1	162
• All strategic issues are aimed at increasing competitiveness	3.9*	159	4.0*	157
• Cost advantages	3.9*	155	4.1	153
• Concentration on core competencies	3.8	160	4.1	157
• Strategic alliances and networking	3.7*	161	4.0	159
• Internationalisation	3.6*	158	3.8*	157
• Mergers & acquisition	3.1*	153	3.4*	149
• Outsourcing of processes	3.1	157	3.4	153
• Diversification	2.8*	154	3.3*	149
	Current importance		Future importance	
Human resource strategies	Mean	N	Mean	N
• Improving knowledge sharing	3.8*	164	4.3	162
• Improving employee learning	3.8	164	4.2	161
• Improving learning culture	3.7	162	4.2	161
• Implementing competence management	3.6*	160	4.2	159

* = $Sd \geq 1.0$

Table 4.1: Organisational strategies

All in all, the picture is very similar to that of the case study companies. Here, an increased client focus was also found to be a main competitive challenge. Innovation, improvement and increased flexibility were also mentioned regularly, just as in the survey companies. Interesting to note is that strategies which were mentioned less by case organisations, such as strategies related to optimising the internal organisation, and strategies concerning optimisation of competitiveness, appear to be important in the survey companies. A feasible explanation is that case organisations mentioned these strategies less, because they focused on the one or two major strategic issues. Survey results suggest that these other strategic issues are, though to a lesser degree, also relevant.

With regard to the specific human resource strategies, it was found that strategies with regard to knowledge sharing, employee learning, creating a learning culture and implementing competence management are all considered relevant (mean scores of 3.8, 3.8, 3.7 and 3.6 respectively), but not as important as strategic issues of a more general nature.

Strategies with regard to the human resources however, seem less relevant than they appeared to be on the basis of the case studies. There it was found that almost all cases mentioned human resources as a strategic factor in (organisational) learning, and therefore employed strategies with regard to human resource development. The survey results indicate that though such 'people issues' are relevant, they are not among the main strategic challenges, such as increasing client focus, innovation and improvement and increase of quality. In this sense, survey results sharpen the image that arose from the case studies. It appears that the increased attention for development of human resources is a response to those strategic challenges affecting the core of the business (and in that sense, they are of secondary importance).

4.1.2 CHANGE PROCESSES

Another important aspect of the organisational context is the actual changes that organisations implement in order to meet their new strategic challenges. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of a number of change initiatives (based on the case study results) on a scale from 1 - very unimportant - to 5 - very important -. Since the case studies showed a large variance in involvement of HRD functions in realising change programmes, the question of HRD's involvement was also posed. Respondents were asked to indicate to what degree HRD was involved in realising the intended changes, also on a scale from 1 - no involvement - to 5 - high active involvement -. Results are presented in table 4.2 (mean scores).

The list of possible change initiatives was based on case results. As it happens, the change programmes which were most common for the case organisations are also the most important ones for the survey participants. Improving a client oriented culture appears to be the most important change initiative (mean score 4.2), which is in line with the general observation that increasing client orientation is a main strategic challenge. Remarkable however, is the fact that this was mentioned by only a very small group of case organisations (namely 3). Apparently, when considering the entire group of learning oriented organisations, this is a more important issue than it appeared to be, judging from the case studies.

Next to general change processes, case study results revealed attention for creating a learning culture. The survey supports the conclusion that such change initiatives in this field are important to learning oriented companies (attention to communication and knowledge sharing, 4.0; improvement of a learning culture, 3.8 and improvement of learning abilities, 3.6).

A third group of initiatives which was found in the case studies concerned changes in the field of HRD itself. Some of these changes also appear to be implemented in the survey organisations such as changes in HRD strategies (3.7) and changes in HRD organisation (3.4).

Change initiatives	Current importance		Involvement of HRD	
	Mean	N	Mean	N
• Creating / improving client orientated culture	4.2	163	3.5*	160
• Attention to management development	4.0	163	4.3*	160
• Attention to communication and information sharing	4.0	158	3.8	154
• Changes in organisational structure	3.9	160	3.5*	157
• Improvement of learning culture	3.8	161	4.0*	158
• Process orientation	3.8*	158	3.2*	154
• Increased employee responsibilities	3.8	162	3.4*	158
• Translating central strategies in operational policies on a lower level	3.7*	159	3.3*	154
• Changes in HRD strategies	3.7	159	4.1*	154
• Team building	3.6*	159	3.5*	155
• Sharing a mission statement	3.6*	159	3.2*	154
• Improvement of learning abilities	3.6	159	3.9*	157
• Changes in HRD organisation	3.4*	158	3.9*	155

* = $Sd \geq 1.0$

Table 4.2: Change processes and involvement of HRD

As can be expected, involvement of HRD is highest in those areas which are directly associated with learning and development, such as management development (mean score 4.3), changes in HRD strategies (mean score 4.1), improving a learning culture (mean score 4.0), improvement of learning abilities and changes in HRD organisation (both a mean score 3.9). In other areas, also those that are important to the business, HRD involvement is less (e.g. attention to communication and information sharing, improving client orientated culture) or even moderate (creating a process orientation, sharing a mission statement, translating central strategies in operational policies at a lower level). This means that HRD's role as a strategic partner is in general not considered to be very well established. It appears that most HRD professionals narrow down their own role, and don't position themselves as strategic partners in realising business objectives, such as creating a client oriented culture. This appears the case for a majority of HRD functions, but exceptions do exist. Case results showed that in some instances HRD operates as a real change agent, taking the lead in innovations. The fact that the Sd for all these items is particularly large (in all cases larger than 1.0) also is indicative for considerable differences between respondents.

4.1.3 MOTIVES FOR BECOMING A LEARNING ORGANISATION

A third element of the organisational context which was investigated concerns the motives of the participating companies for becoming a learning organisation. This element was not included in the case studies as such, but appeared to be an important issue, since case results indicated that organisations differ in their reasons for using the concept of the learning organisation. Therefore, the survey included a question on motives for wanting to become a learning organisation. Respondents were asked to indicate the importance of each of several possible reasons, on a scale from 1 - very unimportant - to 5 -very important. Results are presented in table 4.3 (mean scores).

Reasons for becoming a learning organisation	Importance	
	Mean	N
• Need for innovation	4.1	159
• Increasing employee commitment	4.1	160
• Improving quality of work	4.0	161
• Increasing possibilities for personal development	4.0	159
• Economic factors (e.g. cost reduction, competitiveness)	3.9*	161
• Improving employee retention	3.5*	160
• Improving quality of life of employees	3.4*	158

* = Sd \geq 1.0

Table 4.3: Reasons for becoming a learning organisation

Interesting to note is that both business-related and personnel-related motives are significant forces driving implementation of learning organisation concepts. For example, a need for innovation and economic factors (e.g. cost reduction, increasing competitiveness) play an almost equally important role (mean scores of 4.1 and 3.9) as the desire to increase employee commitment, improving the quality of work and increasing possibilities for personal development (mean scores of 4.1, 4.0 and 4.0. respectively).

Important to consider is that the business-related motives are probably paramount, whereas personnel-related motives are a result of the business challenges. Companies need a highly committed, multi-skilled workforce, with a low turnover, in order to realise improvements, innovation and a strong client focus. Motivation and employee retention can be stimulated by providing employees with learning possibilities and (thereby) improving the quality of their work. Moreover, the survey was held under HRD professionals, who are in a people-oriented line of work, and therefore might have biased views on the importance attached to these kinds of motives.

Two motives which were found in some of the case organisations, namely implementing learning organisation principles in order to keep employees from leaving the company, and improve quality of working life, appear to play a less important role (though even those motives are not totally

unimportant).

4.1.4 CONCLUSION

As for the organisational context, the survey confirmed the picture that arose from the case studies. In a broad sense, the companies participating in this survey can be compared to the organisations which served as case studies.

Just as for the 28 case organisations, improving client focus is an issue of major importance to the 165 companies participating in the survey. Other key strategic issues are improving and innovating products, processes and services. Strategies with regard to developing human resources, since these are a key factor in improving organisational learning are relevant, but come in second place. They appear to be 'means to an end', instead of strategies with an inherent relevance.

Learning oriented organisations employ a rich variety of change strategies in order to stimulate their development toward a learning organisation. Creating a client oriented culture appears to be an often-used measure (more so than became apparent from the case studies). But initiatives regarding changes in organisational structures (such as implementing teamwork), attention to management development; changes in the strategy development process (e.g. sharing a mission statement); creating a learning culture and changes in HRD strategies and structure were also encountered. The most important conclusion to be drawn is that companies use a rich bouquet of change initiatives, in which no one type of change is particularly dominant. Which type of changes are initiated is probably determined by a mix of factors, such as strategic objectives, employee characteristics, current organisational problems, organisational structure and management style, etcetera. Unraveling these relationships falls beyond the scope of this project, which focuses mainly on HRD, not on companies as a whole.

The desire to become more client centered, among other things by continuous improvement and innovation, appears to be the main force driving development towards a learning organisation. Though more people-oriented reasons (such as improving the quality of working life) seem to play a role as well.

4.2 ENVISIONED ROLE OF THE HRD DEPARTMENT

The previous section described the context for the HRD functions, as companies which strive to become learning organisations from a combination of motives, and in which increased client centeredness and an increased ability for improvement and innovation are key words.

They seek to improve learning possibilities for employees from a strategic necessity, and start up a wide variety of initiatives to do so. Research question 1 concerns the way in which HRD departments in these learning oriented organisations envision their own role in stimulating and supporting employees to learn continuously. As for the case studies, in the survey this role was investigated by identifying the objectives of the HRD function (section 4.2.1) and the division of HRD tasks (section 4.2.2).

4.2.1 OBJECTIVES HRD FUNCTION

Main survey results regarding the objectives of the HRD function are displayed in the table below. The respondents were asked to state the current importance of several HRD objectives (on a scale from 1 - very unimportant - to 5 - very important -), and whether or not they expect this relevance to change in the future (on a scale from 1 - much less attention to 5 - much more attention -). The list was constructed based on case study results. This table shows mean scores for each of the objectives and their (current and future) importance, according to the respondents.

Objectives	Importance of the objectives in the current situation		More or less attention in the future?	
	Mean	N	Mean	N
• Support current strategic objectives in general	3.9	157	3.9	153
• Support current organisational change programmes	3.8	159	3.8	154
• Support management development	3.8	160	4.1	156
• Promoting employee development / contributing to employee learning	3.8	160	4.0	156
• Increasing learning abilities employees /managers	3.5	160	4.0	156
• Stimulating use of informal learning opportunities	3.5*	160	4.0	155
• Implementing a learning culture	3.4*	160	4.0	155
• Supporting communication / knowledge sharing	3.7	161	4.1	155
• Development and coordination of training	3.9	161	3.7	157

• Efficiency of HRD activities	3.6	158	3.9	154
• Increasing utilisation of HRD services within the organisation	3.6	159	3.8	154
• (Further) professionalisation of HRD practitioners	3.6	160	4.0	156
• Changing HRD practices (like adopting new work methods or adopting a more proactive role)	3.5	158	4.0	154
• Concentration on core competencies of the HRD function	3.3	157	3.6	153

*= $Sd \geq 1.0$

Table 4.4: Objectives HRD function

SUPPORTING THE BUSINESS

In the case organisations, the primary category of HRD objectives concerned supporting the business, either in a general sense, or by supporting specific current strategic objectives and / or change programmes. The importance of these objectives is confirmed by the survey. Supporting current strategic objectives and change programmes are both rated as 'important' (mean scores of 3.9 and 3.8).

SUPPORTING (INFORMAL) LEARNING

An almost equally relevant category of objectives, mentioned by most case organisations concerns goals with regard to supporting (informal) learning of employees and / or teams and the organisation as a whole. Within this category, two types of objectives could be distinguished:

- objectives with regard to supporting employee learning in general;
- explicit support for informal learning.

For the survey organisations, these objectives also appear to be highly relevant. Objectives from the first category (supporting management development and promoting employee development) were both rated as important (both 3.8 mean score), and are expected to become more important in the future (4.1 and 4.0 mean scores). Objectives from the second category (increasing learning abilities, stimulating the use of informal learning opportunities and implementing a learning culture) score a little less high, but are still considered rather important (mean scores of 3.5, 3.5 and 3.4 respectively). Interesting to note is that all of these objectives are expected to become more important in the future (mean scores of 4.1, 4.0, 4.0 and 4.0). So even though current attention for supporting informal learning is not as great as for other objectives, this attention is expected to increase considerably.

A small group of cases explicitly mentioned not only to support individual learning, but also team and even organisational learning: In the survey, companies were also asked to indicate the relative attention paid to employee, team and organisational learning. Respondents were asked to indicate the current attention and the desired attention for each of these types of learning. Table 4.5 displays the results.

Type of learning	Percentage of attention in current situation		Percentage of attention in desired situation	
	Mean	N	Mean	N
• Individual learning	51%	147	36%	142
• Group / team learning	31%	147	37%	142
• Organisational learning	19%	143	28%	138
• Total	101%#		101%#	

=more than 100% due to rounding off differences (both from respondents and researchers)

Table 4.5: Distribution of attention over individual, team and organisational learning

Interesting to note is that in the current situation about half of the attention goes to individual learning, whereas in the desired situation, this percentage is less. In the current situation, individual learning appears to be most important, whereas in the ideal situation attention is divided more equally across individual, team and organisational learning. Necessary to consider when interpreting these findings, however, is that a relatively large proportion of the respondents did not answer this question (or at least, did not answer it completely). Apparently it was a difficult issue. Moreover, the differences between respondent appears to be quite high. The Sd for the current attention to individual learning is 24% (for team learning: 19% and for organisational learning 16%). For the desired situation, opinions differ a little less, the Sd for desired attention for individual learning is 15% (team learning 14% and organisational learning 14%).

SUPPORTING KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Though supporting knowledge sharing and communication can be considered a sub-category of supporting 'informal learning', it was decided to consider this objective separately. It was not mentioned very often in the case studies, but survey results indicate that it is a rather important objective for many organisations (mean score 3.7).

PROVIDING TRAINING

Objectives with regard to providing training (such as development and co-ordination of training, or offering a training supply) were also mentioned less often by the case organisations. However, from the survey it appears that development and coordination of training is in fact a relatively important objective (mean score 3.9). All in all, expectations after the case studies that the relative unimportance of objectives related to training was not representing actual practice, but instead was probably caused by focusing the interviews on HRD's role in supporting learning, seems to be supported by the survey data.

CHANGING HRD PRACTICES

Objectives with regard to changing current HRD practices appeared to be relatively important for the case study organisations. For the survey respondents objectives in this area (efficiency of HRD activities, increasing utilisation of HRD services, further professionalisation of HRD practitioners, changing HRD practices and concentration on core competencies of the HRD function) are also rather important (mean scores of 3.3 to 3.6).

FUTURE

When overlooking the expected future importance of all of these objectives, it has to be noted that almost all are considered to become more relevant. Of course, it is not possible to pay more attention to all of these aspects, choices will have to be made, to establish priorities. From the survey results it is not possible to predict which objectives will become a priority.

4.2.2 DIVISION OF HRD TASKS

Next to HRD objectives, an important element in the vision of HRD professionals with regard to their own role is the way in which they think HRD tasks should be divided among the three main parties involved: HRD professionals, managers and employees. This was investigated in the case organisations, and also in the survey. Case study results showed that in the division of HRD tasks as envisioned by the HRD professionals, managers and employees both fulfil an active role. HRD professionals themselves appear to fulfil both a strategic and a practical role. The strategic role being on in which they try to link HRD closely to the business. The practical role consists, among other things, of providing practical support and resources (tools, learning materials) for managers, to help them fulfil HRD tasks and thus provide learning opportunities for employees. Next to that, more traditional tasks also were important (such as providing and coordinating training) for HRD professionals. All in all, it was not very clear to what degree the role of HRD professionals was changing into a consulting role, and how strong the involvement of managers and employees was with regard to HRD tasks. Therefore, in the survey respondents were asked about the roles of the HRD function, as well as the co-operation between HRD professionals, line-managers and employees with regard to HRD activities.

First, respondents were asked to delineate the tasks of the HRD function, by indicating the degree to which the HRD function fulfils certain roles on a scale from 1 - not at all - to 5 - completely -. They were also asked to indicate if they think HRD should fulfil these roles more or less, on a scale from 1 - much less - to 5 - much more -. The results are displayed in table 5.6 (mean scores).

The most important role is design and realisation of HRD processes (mean score 3.9). Also important, but to a lesser degree, is providing operational support for line-managed learning processes (mean score 3.5). In this respect, the survey supports case study findings: HRD professionals do fulfil consulting tasks (and pragmatic support) but traditional tasks in the design and realisation of training also are important. When looking at the desired situation, it is noteworthy that respondents think all tasks should be fulfilled more. Only the design and realisation of HRD processes, the currently most important role, does not need to change very much, according to their estimation (mean score 3.6, other elements mean scores from 3.9 to 4.1). It should be noted

that the question of the desired situation is answered by considerably less respondents (mean missing value is 10), apparently it was a bit more difficult to answer.

Role	Current situation		Expected evolution	
	Mean	N	Mean	N
• Design and realisation of HRD processes	3.9	162	3.6	156
• Operational support for line-managed learning processes	3.5	160	3.9	155
• Proactive development and implementation of innovative HRD concepts	3.3*	161	3.9	155
• Management of relationships	3.3*	162	3.9	156
• Management of the HRD function	3.2	160	4.0	155
• Support for defining and implementing of organisational strategies	3.1	161	4.1	155
• Realisation of organisational change projects	3.1	161	4.0	156

* = Sd \geq 1.0

Table 4.6: Roles of HRD

As a second question, respondents were asked to estimate in percentages how responsibilities for HRD activities are currently divided between HRD professionals, managers, employees and external training providers, and how they would like this division to be. Table 4.7 presents the results (mean scores).

Parties involved	Percentage of responsibility in current situation		Percentage of responsibility in desired situation	
	Mean	N	Mean	N
• HRD professionals	43%	141	34%	136
• Managers	28%	141	33%	138
• Employees	17%	137	23%	136
• External training providers	17%	134	14%	129
• Total	105%*		104%*	

(* = more than 100% due to rounding off differences)

Table 4.7: Parties involved in HRD

When considering the current situation, HRD professionals appear to carry most responsibility (almost half, 43%), according to the respondents. Managers are also an important category (28%), whereas employees and external training providers are seen to carry considerably less responsibility for HRD. Important to note is that respondents do not agree very much in their estimations, Sd for HRD professionals is 23%, for managers 19%, for employees 16% and for external trainers 15%. This might indicate considerable variety throughout the different organisations (that is: in some organisations management, for example, carries more responsibility than in others), a picture that was also encountered in the case study organisations. For the desired situation, respondents are somewhat more agreed on the indicated desired amount of responsibility for HRD professionals (Sd is 17%; for managers, employees and external trainers Sd is 16%, 15% and 11%). Overall, they seem to find it desirable that HRD professionals carry a little less responsibility (34%), whereas responsibility of managers (33%) and employees (23%) increases somewhat. In other words, involvement of both latter parties in providing HRD is not as large as it should be, according to HRD professionals. The involvement of external training providers is not expected to rise. On the contrary, respondents indicate they think their involvement will decrease (to 14%). This appears contradictory to current trends of increasing involvement of external trainers and consultants (e.g. Raper et al., 1997). Finally, when interpreting these results, it should be noted that the percentages of missing values are quite high for this question. Apparently, many respondents found it difficult to answer.

HRD tasks	HRD professionals	(Line) management	Employ-ees	External institutions	No opinion
Training needs analysis (N = 165)	138	129	68	9	2
Making personal development plans (N = 164)	96	125	88	4	5
Consulting on employee development (N = 163)	131	84	28	27	9
Providing training (N=164)	125	61	20	91	3
Coordinating training (N=162)	151	25	7	14	3
Evaluating training (N=163)	147	76	65	17	3
Monitoring competences (N = 158)	103	119	37	9	6
Promoting a learning culture (N = 159)	144	86	23	8	9

Implementing the concept of the learning organisation (N=158)	121	71	22	12	25
Implementing HRD policy (N=160)	145	93	13	6	3
Identification of potentials (N=161)	126	132	26	22	2

Table 4.8: Who fulfils HRD tasks?

This rough sketch provides only a general insight in the division of HRD tasks. Respondents were also asked to specify involvement of different parties for different HRD tasks, such as training needs analysis, making personal development plans etc. The results for this question are presented in table 4.8 (the table contains frequencies).

HRD PROFESSIONALS

When considering the tasks in which HRD professionals are involved, it immediately becomes clear that, in most organisations, they are involved in almost all tasks. Only in making personal development plans (96 organisations) and monitoring competencies (103 organisations) their involvement is slightly less. Especially in tasks such as coordinating training (151 organisations), evaluating training (147), promoting a learning culture (144) and implementing HRD policy (145), they are almost always involved. So, results support the finding from the case studies that HRD professionals fulfil a mix of - what was labeled as - 'traditional' and 'new' HRD tasks. Traditional tasks include coordinating and evaluating training, new tasks include promoting a learning culture and implementing the concept of the learning organisation.

MANAGERS

Managers are also involved quite often in almost all HRD tasks listed in this table. So, though they carry less responsibility, managers do have an active role in supporting employee learning. Only for coordinating training they seem to play a very modest role in most companies (only 25 organisations indicate that managers are involved in this task). Tasks in which they are involved for the vast majority of organisations are: training needs analysis (129 organisations), making personal development plans (125), monitoring competencies (103) and identification of potentials (132). So, management appears to have a role mainly in monitoring and analysing HRD needs. It seems logical to involve them in this issue, in order to ensure that HRD efforts focus on actual business needs. It is remarkable to notice that managers are not involved to a high degree in tasks such as promoting a learning culture and implementing the concept of the learning organisation.

EMPLOYEES

From the case organisations it became clear that not only managers, but employees were also expected to fulfil an active role towards their own development. Survey outcomes indicate that they do, up to a certain level. Employee involvement is only very limited in issues regarding development of personnel in general, such as coordinating training (7 organisations) and implementing HRD policy (13 organisations). In so far as they fulfil HRD tasks, these are mainly aimed at their own development. Employees are reported to be actively involved in making personal development plans (88 organisations), training needs analysis (68) and evaluating training

(65) by a considerable part of the organisations. For other HRD tasks, smaller numbers of companies report an active role for employees.

EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONS

External institutions are also involved in executing HRD tasks, though not on a massive scale (this is in line with the findings from the previous question, namely that external institutions carry but a small percentage of HRD responsibility). Their most important task is (as could be expected): providing training. A large proportion of the companies lists them as being involved in this HRD task. Other relatively important task appears to be consulting on employee development (27 organisations) and identification of potentials (22 organisations). External institutions are involved only seldomly in tasks such as making personal development plans (4 organisations), implementing HRD policy (6), promoting a learning culture (8), monitoring competencies (9) and training needs analysis (9).

4.2.3 CONCLUSIONS

All in all, the conclusions from the case studies regarding important HRD objectives and the division of HRD tasks appear to be supported by the survey results. HRD functions have objectives in five areas:

- Supporting the business;
- Supporting (informal) learning;
- Supporting knowledge sharing (as a special form of supporting informal learning);
- Development and coordination of training;
- Changing HRD practices.

All are rather important, some more so than others, but differences are too small to reflect a real rank order of objectives. Of course, changing HRD practices is an intermediary objective, it is not a purpose in itself, but some HRD functions strive for a reorganisation of HRD practices, in order to be better able to fulfil their tasks. Most important to note is the expectations of the survey respondents that objectives in the field of supporting informal learning and promoting knowledge sharing are expected to increase most in importance in the future. Also relevant to point out is that supporting the business (objectives) is one of the most important HRD objectives, but results from the question concerning HRD's involvement in important organisational change initiatives (see previous section) suggest that this involvement is usually not very large. So, the question as to in how far HRD fulfils a strategic role remains open.

With regard to the division of HRD tasks, it becomes clear that HRD professionals still carry the biggest share of responsibility for HRD (at least in their own estimation of the situation). Managers and employees are important active partners, and are expected to become more so in the future. Their role is predominantly one of identifying learning needs, stimulating and supporting informal learning, ensuring continuous learning (of oneself and others). HRD professionals provide support, among other things by organising training and supporting informal learning efforts. This picture is consistent with case results. A somewhat surprising, and difficult to interpret, finding is that external agencies are expected to become more involved in the future - a situation that contradicts current trends.

If HRD professionals want to create a situation in which managers and employees are active partners in HRD, and in which informal learning in the workplace is stimulated next to formal training programmes, how do they go about realising this situation? This issue is addressed by the second research question: What strategies do European HRD departments adopt to realise their envisioned role?

Again, respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of use of several HRD strategies on a scale from 1 - never - to 5 - very often -, and the expected increase or decrease in attention in the future, from 1 - much less attention - to 5 - much more attention -. Results are summarised in table 4.9 (mean scores).

From the case studies, five clusters of strategies could be identified, linked to the five categories of HRD objectives. The first, and a very important one, consisted of strategies aimed at supporting the business. The questionnaire included three strategies for supporting general company objectives, one of which appears to be used quite often (implementing teamwork, mean score 3.5) and the others sometimes (implementing competence management, implementing culture change programmes, mean score 2.8).

The second category of strategies is linked to the objective of stimulating (informal) learning. The survey indicates that strategies from this type are also used considerably, such as stimulating workplace learning (mean score 3.4). A cluster of strategies concerns initiatives aimed at supporting (informal) learning from each other: coaching (3.2), using intranet (3.1), benchmarking (3.0) and mentoring (2.8). A second cluster concerns initiatives aimed at fostering or increasing employee responsibility for learning: improvement of learner oriented learning methods (2.7), self-directed learning programmes (2.5) and Open Learning Centers (2.3). On the whole, measures from the latter category appear to be somewhat less important. Extra support for this assumption can be found in the relatively large number of respondents which did not answer these questions (the most logical explanation for this being that they do not use these strategies or do not find them relevant).

Knowledge sharing can also be considered as a separate cluster (apart from supporting learning from each other). Strategies in this area include the implementation of knowledge exchange networks (mean score 3.0) and stimulating knowledge management (mean score 2.9). These are rather important.

But more important are training-related strategies. When considering the total list of current HRD strategies, training courses appear to be used most often (mean score 3.8). Implementing new types of training courses (mean score 3.4) and using modern media for training (3.2) are also important training-related strategies.

HRD strategies, techniques, instruments	Frequency of use in current situation		Future use	
	Mean	N	Mean	N

• Implementing teamwork	3.5	156	3.9	153
• Using competence management	2.9	156	4.1	154
• Culture change programmes	2.8	156	3.9	151
• Stimulating workplace learning	3.4	159	4.1	158
• Personal development plans	3.3*	163	3.9	159
• Coaching	3.2	162	4.1	158
• Using Intranet	3.1*	163	4.1	158
• Benchmarking	3.0*	157	3.8	151
• Mentoring	2.8*	155	3.9	150
• Improvement of learner oriented learning methods	2.7	152	3.8	146
• Self-directed learning programmes	2.5*	158	3.7	149
• Open learning centre	2.3*	147	3.5*	140
• Knowledge exchange networks	3.0*	160	4.0	156
• Stimulating knowledge management	2.9	158	4.1	154
• New training courses	3.8	158	3.5	155
• New types of training courses	3.4	158	3.8	155
• Use of modern media for training	3.2	161	4.0	158
• Supporting management in HRD tasks	3.4	159	3.9	152
• Decentralisation of HRD activities	2.9*	156	3.4	147

* = Sd \geq 1.0

Table 4.9: HRD strategies

The fifth and last category of strategies are those related to changing HRD practices. Strategies with regard to involving other parties actively in HRD issues were found to be used quite often, for example supporting management in HRD tasks (mean score 3.4) and decentralisation of HRD activities (mean score 2.9).

All in all it can be concluded that the strategies used are to a great degree similar to the strategies used by the case study organisations. Most noticeable is the importance (still) attached to formal training programmes. Next to newer methods for supporting learning (e.g. learning networks), training remains an important learning mode. The case studies provided no insight into the relative weight of each of the strategies, they merely made clear that all these types of

strategies existed. Survey results indicate that some strategies are clearly used more often than others. Strategies related to training for instance, are more important than strategies related to increasing employee responsibility for learning. In general, however, differences are not very striking. Just as with general change strategies on the organisational level, HRD change strategies form a rich bouquet in which not one strategy dominates.

Interesting to consider are the right hand columns of the table above: do respondents expect the nature of HRD strategies, techniques and instruments to change in the near future? From studying the table it immediately becomes apparent that respondents expect all strategies to become more important (range from 3.4 to 4.1). There is no immediate difference between strategies in the field of training and in other areas (such as supporting informal learning or changing the HRD function). Though differences are relatively small, it is interesting to notice that the few strategies for which the difference between present use and expected use is relatively high are: using competence management and stimulating knowledge management. Both are currently not used very often (mean scores of 2.9), but are expected to be employed more in the future (mean scores of 4.1). Nevertheless, differences are too small to attach much weight to these observations.

CONCLUSION

The case studies yielded a wide range of strategies employed by HRD professionals to realise their envisioned role, without a clear indication of the relative weight of each of these strategies. The survey attempted to establish somewhat of a ranking order: which strategies are considered most important? This proved difficult, since nearly all strategies are rated as 'relevant' or 'important' by the respondents. However, when overlooking the general picture it does become clear that training-related strategies still fulfil a significant role. Among the least important strategies are instruments and initiatives to increase employee responsibility for learning.

As such, results do not paint a picture of very innovative HRD practices, dominated by new methods such as knowledge management networks and stimulating learning climate in the workplace. Of course, for one part this is because HRD objectives are not that far-stretched. Providing training is still an important aim. For another part, these outcomes might indicate that HRD practices to some extent fall behind HRD visions. Since HRD professionals do want to broaden their horizon by also supporting more informal modes of learning, and by cooperating with managers and employees, but in practice, their work is still dominated by the more traditional, training related tasks. Of course, this is to be expected, after all, new insights as a rule precede changing behaviour. Moreover, HRD professionals probably deal with expectations from employees and managers regarding their own role, and the products they deliver. It is not possible to change these from one day to another. But perhaps there are other factors influencing the change process? The next chapter looks into this question.

So, though HRD objectives indicate that HRD professionals are not only interested in providing training, but also seek to support other forms of learning, HRD practices reveal that training is still very dominant. As a result, training related tasks are still very important in their total task load, next to newer tasks, such as consulting line management on creating learning opportunities. And though HRD professionals feel it is important to share responsibility for HRD with line management and employees, they still carry most of the responsibility themselves (according to their own estimation).

All in all, it is relevant to investigate whether there are specific reasons for this situation. Are certain specific influences keeping HRD professionals from changing their practices? Or is the current prevalence of training activities a desired result? This section presents survey results concerning the practical change process, addressed by research question 3: What inhibiting factors do European HRD departments encounter when trying to realise their new role, and which factors are conducive to the realisation of HRD's new role?

Case results revealed a wealth of influencing factors, associated with issues such as employee motivation for learning, management's readiness to take on learning tasks, clarity of HRD's role, learning culture (or lack thereof) and pragmatic issues such as time and money. Interesting to note was that whereas in some organisations a highly motivated workforce was found to be a positive influence, other companies had to deal with the opposite: a lack of motivation for learning stifled change. In general, each conducive factor had an inhibiting force as its counterpart. Moreover, in many cases, organisations mentioned one factor - e.g. management involvement - as both a conducive and an inhibiting force at the same time, because in some parts of the company managers were highly motivated and supported changes, whereas in other parts, managers were not so motivated and thereby held back changes.

Based on the case study results, an overview of the most important influencing factors was put to the survey respondents. They were asked to indicate whether these factors were present in their companies, on a scale from 1 - insufficient / low / negative - to 5 - sufficient / high / positive -, and how their presence or absence influenced the attainment of HRD objectives, also on a scale from 1 - very negative - to 5 - very positive -.

By establishing both the existence of the influencing factors and the way in which they influence the change process (in a negative or positive way), it was hoped that the general direction of the influencing factors would become clear.

Table 4.10 presents the results for this question (mean scores).

Influencing factors	Existent in organisation?		Nature of influence	
	Mean	N	Mean	N
• Results of new HRD activities (negative - positive)	3.5	138	3.7	151
• Motivation for learning (low - high)	3.4	142	3.8	157

• Attitude to change (negative - positive)	3.3	142	3.6	156
• Money for HRD activities (insufficient - sufficient)	3.3*	140	3.4	154
• Motivation for sharing knowledge (low - high)	3.1*	141	3.5	155
• Learning culture (insufficient - sufficient)	3.0	142	3.5	151
• Clarity on HRD's goals (low - high)	3.0	141	3.4*	154
• Time for HRD professionals (insufficient - sufficient)	3.0	138	3.3	151
• Flexibility of organisational culture (low - high)	3.0*	140	3.3	152
• Clarity on HRD's role (low - high)	2.9	141	3.4*	155
• Time for learning on part of employees (insufficient - sufficient)	2.8*	141	3.3	152
• Time for managers for performing HRD tasks (insufficient - sufficient)	2.5	137	3.0*	150

* = Sd \geq 1.0

Table 4.10: influencing factors and the nature of their influence

The table shows that all influencing factors which were found in the case studies are also experienced by survey respondents. The first group of influencing factors are generally rather positive in nature. Respondents report rather positive results of new HRD activities (mean score 3.5), a rather positive motivation for learning (mean score 3.4), a slightly positive attitude to change (mean score 3.3), sufficient, though not very much, money for HRD activities (mean score 3.3) and a slightly positive motivation for sharing knowledge (mean score 3.1). When considering the nature of the influence of these factors, these appear to have a positive influence (mean scores ranging from 3.4 to 3.8).

A second category of influencing factors are rated rather neutral: generally speaking, respondents do not experience a strong learning culture, but don't find a negative culture either, report neither clarity nor unclarity on HRD's goals, report neither sufficient nor insufficient time for HRD professionals and rate their organisation's flexibility as neither sufficient nor as insufficient (all mean scores of 3.0). Remarkably enough, respondents appear to experience a positive effect from all these factors. For example, even though they do not describe their company culture as a learning culture, they still report this feature to have a positive influence (mean score 3.5).

The third category of influencing factors form a slightly negative force: respondents report a slight lack of clarity on HRD's role (mean score 2.9), some lack of time for learning on the part of employees (mean score 2.8), and some lack of time for managers for performing HRD tasks (mean score 2.5). Mean scores are too high to consider these factors to be powerful negative forces, and this also shows from the scores on the nature of their impact. Generally speaking, these aspects are considered to have a neutral (time for managers: 3.0) or rather positive influence (clarity on HRD's role: 3.4, and time for learning on part of the employees: 3.3 on HRD's new role).

CONCLUSION

All in all, survey results provide an important addition to the case results. As in the case studies, no unequivocal direction of influencing factors could be established. In the cases, some factors were found to negatively affect change processes in one organisation, while they were reported as positive driving forces for other companies. Sometimes factors were experienced as a negative and a positive influence at once in one organisation (but in different parts). Survey results provide some insight into the most important influencing factors. There is a group of factors, such as motivation for learning or money for HRD activities, which impacts change sometimes positively (sufficient motivation, sufficient resources) and sometimes negatively (lack of motivation, lack of money) (see table for a full overview). On the other hand, there is a small group of factors which in general appears to have a negative influence. The factors which appear to burden the change process most strongly, are:

- Insufficient time for learning on part of the employees;
- Insufficient time for performing HRD tasks on the part of managers;
- Lack of clarity on HRD's role.

So, it appears that in so far as HRD professionals find it difficult to establish their new role, they experience a lack of time on behalf of employees and managers to engage in learning or HRD tasks. Of course this is an often heard complaint, work pressures are increasing. Possible reasons are that managers still are only judged on their operational results, not on achievements with regard to employee development (see also Onstenk, 1997), a lack of skills on the part of managers to fulfil HRD tasks (which makes it more time-consuming at first) (see also Onstenk, 1997). Explanations for the experienced lack of time for learning on the part of employees are that they still associate learning very strongly with classroom training (Simons, 1999), they don't value workplace learning as much. Paradoxically enough, a lack of time should make new modes of learning (just-in-time, just-enough, close to the workplace or on-the-job) more attractive than training (see also Keursten, 1999). Apparently it doesn't. It might also be that they are not yet used to their new role as 'active learner', and / or may feel not skilled enough to take the initiative for their own learning processes in their own hands. Whatever the case, if HRD professionals find themselves unable to break this cycle, all parties become stuck in a status quo.

This makes it particularly important for HRD professionals to articulate their own vision on learning and how they wish to support it very clearly. Unfortunately, the fact that they mention a lack of clarity with regard to their own role indicates that this is not yet the case. Either they find it difficult to establish their own role very distinctly, or (and?) they find it difficult to communicate this role in a clear and convincing manner to managers and employees. Whatever the case it appears important to pay attention to this issue. How can HRD-ers tempt managers and employees to become active partners in creating learning organisations?

The results presented in the previous sections show that there is only a limited amount of variation in the organisational strategies, envisioned role of the HRD departments, strategies adopted to realise the envisioned role, and factors that influence the process of implementing learning organisation concepts. The criterion used to make this observation is the standard deviation. The standard deviation of many items of this part of the study, are 1.0 or less. There are however a couple of items that have higher standard deviations. For instance, for the strategy elements the current and future importance of increasing competitiveness, internationalisation, mergers and acquisitions, and diversification show a standard deviation of 1 or more. The same holds for a number of change initiatives, namely: process orientation, translating central strategies in operational policies, team building, sharing a mission statement, and changes in the HRD organisation. As to the motives for becoming a learning organisation various reasons for becoming a learning organisation show some variation; this holds for economic factors, improving employee retention, and improving quality of life of employees. Finally, concerning the envisioned role of the HRD departments, strategies adopted to realise the envisioned role, and influencing factors, there are very few differences that exceed the stated value of the standard deviation. Thus it can be concluded that the main results are very homogeneous.

Nevertheless, it is important to review the differences within the results across types of organisations, and countries. This comparison will be made in this section.

4.5.1 CROSS-ORGANISATIONAL COMPARISONS

First, further analyses were made to check whether the variations had any relation to the type of organisation. To study cross-organisational differences in the data, the main categories of types of organisations were selected. These were 'division', 'network', and 'functional' organisation. (Nearly all organisations fell into one of these categories. Other organisational types were mentioned as well, but this was only incidentally the case.) Subsequently, the questions were selected from the questionnaire for which the differences could have important consequences for the conclusions that were formulated in the previous sections. These questions dealt with:

- the current and future general strategies organisations (expect to) employ to cope with changes in their environment;
- current and future HRD strategies that support these strategies;
- current change strategies that are employed to support the most important strategic issues;
- the degree of involvement of the HRD department in major change initiatives employed to support the most important strategic issues;
- the reasons for organisations to become a learning organisation;
- the actual and desired degree to which the HRD function fulfils various HRD roles;
- the frequency by which HRD strategies are adopted by the HRD function and present and in the future;

- the level and direction of the influence of facilitating factors on the attainment of the envisioned role of the HRD function.

In table 4.11 the questions, the total number of items within those questions, and the number of statistically different items per question are listed. The standard chosen to include an item in the total number is $p < .10$. Needless to say this is a conservative standard for finding differences. Even with this conservative standard, only 13 of the 146 (=9%) of the items are statistically significant. That means that the divisional, network of functional organisations that were selected for this survey do not differ much when it comes to the answering strategic challenges, the employment of general change strategies, the way in which this is supported by HRD strategies and principles of the learning organisation.

Variables	Total number of items	Number of sign. Diff. Items (Organis.Diff)
1. Current general strategies	14	3
2. Current HRD strategies	4	0
3. Future general strategies	14	1
4. Future HRD strategies	4	0
5. Current change strategies	13	4
6. Future change strategies	13	1
7. Degree of involvement of HRD department	6	0
8. HRD function fulfills this role	7	2
9. HRD function should fulfill this role	7	0
10. Current adopted strategies by HRD function	20	1
11. Future adopted strategies by HRD function	20	0
12. Current value of influencing factors	12	0
13. Influence of listed factors on HRD function	12	1
Total	146	13

Table 4.11: Total number of items for the selected questions in the questionnaire, the number of statistically different items for these questions that are statistically different by type of organisation (Division, Network, Functional) by question (p -level $< .10$) (from one item the data are missing)

It can be concluded that the way in which organisations in the study copes with change and implement the ideas and principles of the learning organisation does not differ much between divisional, network and functional organisations. So, as to this issue, this further analysis of differences for types of organisations confirms the results presented above. The results are rather

homogeneous, also for different types of organisations.

4.5.2 CROSS-COUNTRY COMPARISONS

Next to a check for organisational differences, further analyses were made to see whether differences could be attributed to country differences. The approach followed to compare the country differences is basically the same as the one used to compare the survey data by organisational type. The differences in the results of the analyses is striking however. The amount of differences of the items between types of organisation was limited, whereas it was found to be quite considerable for the differences between countries. The numbers of items for which the country differences are statistically significant are presented in table 4.12.

Variables	Total number of items	Number of sign. Diff. Items (Country Diff.)
1. Current general strategies	14	10
2. Current HRD strategies	4	4
3. Future general strategies	14	11
4. Future HRD strategies	4	4
5. Current change strategies	13	12
6. Degree of involvement of HRD department	13	9
7. Reasons to become a learning organisation	7	3
8. HRD function fulfils listed roles	7	7
9. HRD function should fulfil the listed roles	7	5
10. Current adopted strategies by HRD function	20	17
11. Future adopted strategies by HRD function	20	9
12. Current value of influencing factors	12	12
13. Influence of listed factors on HRD function	12	9
Total	147	112

Table 4.12: Total number of items for the selected questions in the questionnaire, the number of statistically different items for these questions that are statistically different by country by question (p-level < .10)

The total number of items that are statistically different by country is 147 (76%). It must be noted however that many differences are relatively small, although the maximum difference

between averages of countries exceeds 2.0 points on the 5-point-scale.

The most striking differences per country will be elaborated on below, by country. First, for each country, the main differences of the country scores versus the cross country average are pointed out. Then, these differences are explained more thoroughly, and possible explanations are sought. Important to note is that the following presentation of country specific observations refers to HRD professionals' perceptions of corporate strategies, the role of HRD itself in creating opportunities for organisational learning and influencing factors that have an impact on organisational learning processes. This should be kept in mind, since perceptions of HRD professionals as to corporate processes do not necessarily reflect the perspective of the entire organization, nor that of other than HRD functions.

The cross country comparison shows that Finland and France frequently score above the cross country averages, and Belgium (and to a lesser degree Germany and the United Kingdom) score more often below the average. The other countries (the Netherlands, and Italy) score around the average. Furthermore, all averages are higher than 3.0 (except 4 variables for certain countries; they score below 3.0, but 2.5 or more). This means that all organisations in all countries are quite positive about the strategies they adopt (or want to adopt) to cope with various challenges, the way in which HRD is seen as a strategic effort to support change processes, the involvement of the HRD Department, and the roles HRD functions play and have to play in supporting change.

Finland is characterised by the fact that the organisations in the study are quite positive about the future general and HRD strategies adopted to cope with the challenges of the organisations, the change current strategies, the philosophy that the HRD function should fulfil the roles that are distinguished in the study, the frequency by which HRD strategies are adopted, and the weight of the influence facilitating factors have on the attainment of the envisioned role of the HRD function.

For French organisations it is remarkable that the current general and HRD strategies score highest compared to the organisations in the other countries. Together with Finnish organisations, future HRD strategies are considered to be important, and the HRD department is more involved in change processes than in organisations in other countries. French organisations also think (as the Finnish), that HRD functions should fulfil the listed roles more than organisations in other countries do. The same holds for strategies that will be adopted in the future.

Belgian organisations score lowest on current general and HRD strategies, change strategies, involvement of the HRD Department, the level to which HRD functions fulfil roles that are distinguished in this study, the frequency of strategies adopted, strategies that will be adopted in the future, and the importance and value of the influencing factors.

For German organisations it is observed that the reasons for becoming learning organisations, the level in which HRD functions fulfil their roles, and the value of the influencing factors score highest of the countries studied. But on the other hand, future general and HRD strategies, and the level to which HRD functions should fulfil certain roles scores the lowest. This may indicate that many German organisations already have implemented certain general and HRD strategies, that HRD functions fulfil the desired roles, and that there is little more to wish.

Organisations in the United Kingdom score least on the reasons for becoming a learning organisation, the roles HRD function should fulfil, and the value of the influencing factors.

For the Netherlands and Italy it can be noted that future strategies adopted score least in the Netherlands and highest in Italy. For the rest, the organisations in these countries score below the extremes of the other countries.

Summarising the results on the cross national comparison, the average scores are presented in table 4.13.

Variables	Countries							
	NL	B	Fi	G	Fr	Uk	It	Tot
1. General strategies (current)	4.1	3.5	3.9	3.8	4.2	3.6	3.7	3.8
2. HRD Strategies (current)	4.0	3.4	4.2	4.2	4.3	3.6	3.7	3.9
3. General Strategies (future)	3.9	4.1	4.3	3.6	4.2	4.0	4.1	4.0
4. HRD Strategies (future)	4.2	4.4	4.7	3.9	4.7	4.4	4.4	4.4
5. Change Strategies	3.9	3.4	4.3	3.8	4.0	3.9	3.8	3.8
6. Involvement HRD Department	3.4	3.3	3.9	3.7	4.1	3.8	3.6	3.7
7. Reasons learning organisation	3.8	3.8	4.0	4.1	3.9	3.7	4.0	3.9
8. HRD function fulfils roles	3.5	2.7	3.4	3.7	3.6	3.3	3.6	3.3
9. HRD function should fulfil roles	3.8	4.0	4.1	3.7	4.1	3.7	3.9	3.9
10. Frequency strategies adopted	3.4	2.5	3.5	3.4	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.1
11. Strategies adopted (future)	3.8	3.8	3.9	3.9	4.1	3.9	4.1	3.9
12. Influencing factors (influence)	3.1	3.0	4.0	3.8	3.9	3.3	3.4	3.5
13. Influencing factors (value)	3.0	2.9	-	3.5	3.2	2.8	3.4	3.1

Table 4.13: Mean scores of organisations on the selected variables by country.

THE NETHERLANDS

Differences between the scores on the variables of the Netherlands and the average cross country range is from +0.3 to -0.4. Most differences do not exceed 0.1, which means that the scores of the Dutch sub sample are rather consistent with the average of all countries taken together.

At the level of the means, the influence various factors have on the attainment of the envisioned role of the HRD function is less powerful than in most of the other countries (average difference is -.04; only Belgium scores lower). On item level, the discrepancy is most striking for the time managers have for performing HRD tasks, and time for learning on part of the employees. The attainment of the envisioned role of the HRD function is – according to the respondents in the Dutch organisations – rather indifferent from these factors.

The second ‘negative’ mean difference for the Netherlands concerns the degree of involvement of HRD departments in major change initiatives employed to support the most important strategic issues (-0.3). At item level sharing a mission statement scores lowest (2.7). This indicates that the HRD department is not so much involved in sharing the mission statement. It could be that corporate communications offices have had the task to do so. But it is not unusual for corporate CEO’s to communicate the mission statement to branch management directly. The second item that scores below 3.0 on average concerns the translation of central strategies (2.9). HRD departments in the Netherlands are less involved in this than those in most other counties.

There are two positive deviations of 0.3 from the country. The first concerns the current answers to strategic challenges. At item level, the importance of fusions/mergers and acquisition as strategic challenges score 0.6 points higher than the across country average. For increasing

competitiveness and cost advantages, the mean differences are 0.5. This implies that Dutch organisations are heavily focused on mergers and take-overs and the like, increasing competitiveness, and cost advantages compared to the organisations in the other countries in the sample.

The second deviation concerns the strategies that are adopted by the HRD function. There is one item that is remarkable in that it scores 0.7 higher than the average of all countries. This item is about the open learning centre. Apparently, considerably more organisations in the Netherlands have implemented open learning centres compared to the organisations in the other countries in the survey.

BELGIUM

It is remarkable that the Belgian scores are the lowest scores on average. This is especially the case for the variables that describe the current situation. For the future situation, still half of the variables are scored below average. For the rest, the future related variables score on average.

Aspirations on the other hand are quite high. On the 5-point scale, Belgian organisations did not score a five. This is considered to be just too high. Even a 4 is not scored. This may be caused by cultural factors, in the sense that Belgian respondents tend to answer these kinds of questions modestly.

Another surprising observation is that the scores on the economic variables score low too. This is essential for Belgian organisations. The employee related questions are scored as very high, which indicates the importance of the "soft side" of Belgian organisations.

As to improving learning abilities, there appears not to be a difference between the actual and desired future situation.

A question can be asked as to the role of the HRD professional. Is HRD really a strategic partner in Belgian organisations? The results indicate some doubts in this respect. Knowledge management is done by R&D departments for instance; HRD departments are not playing the support role they would like to have.

FINLAND

It seems as if in Finland, the organisations studied are currently answering to strategic challenges by increasing client focus, improving products and services, increasing competitiveness, concentrating on core competencies and by networking. At the same time, the key HRD strategies are the following ones: improving knowledge sharing, implementing competence management and improving employee learning.

The future answers are mainly the same as the current ones but they will be intensified and added by improving flexibility plus quality and cost advantages. It is remarkable that HRD functions will play a more central role.

The most striking current change strategies within the Finnish organisations are process orientation with team building, translating central strategies via sharing a mission statement, displaying more attention to management development and to communication and improving

learning culture and learning possibilities.

The degree of involvement of the HRD departments in Finland seems very strong too. They are very actively participating in major change initiatives, e.g. in translating central strategies and in sharing mission statements. They are acting more and more as change agents. The main responsibilities of the HRD professionals are to give operational support for line-managerial learning processes, for defining and implementing organisational strategies and for realizing organisational change projects.

The Finnish HRD departments seem to be quite innovative in these strategies by implementing new types of training courses, stimulating workplace learning and knowledge management, by implementing teamwork and using benchmarking and intranet. The main arguments for trying to build up a learning oriented organisation are very typical ones: to increase possibilities for individual and collective learning and development, to increase employee commitment and to improve the quality of life.

GERMANY

As to the German organisations, it can be observed that there is much variation in the means on the variables compared to the means of the other organisations. Most of the deviations are positive. The deviation of the following variables is 0.3 or more: the future answers to strategic challenges (general strategies), the current answers to strategic challenges (HRD strategies), the degree to which the HRD functions fulfil the listed roles, the frequency by which the listed strategies are adopted by the HRD function, the level of influence of certain factors, and the value of this influence. The one variable that scores much lower than the cross country average (-0.5) is about the future answers to strategic challenges (HRD strategies).

As to the current strategies of HRD professionals in German organizations, a strong customer focus, product and service innovations as well as quality advantages are emphasized. The focus seems to be especially on knowledge-intensive areas of generating competitive advantages. This impression fits with the general emphasis of knowledge and qualification as core resources and advantages of German companies in comparison with other countries. This impression is supported by HRD strategies that were scored very high, such as improving knowledge-sharing, the corporate learning culture and employee learning. In comparison, strategies such as optimizing the internal organization, diversification, mergers and acquisition, and cost advantages seem to receive far less attention. Looking at the classical strategic management argumentation (e.g. Porter 1985), German companies rather seem to stress quality advantages than cost advantages or niche strategies.

As indicated above, German HRD professionals scored future importance of these strategies much lower than the cross country average. This means that increasing focus on these strategies has less than average priority. This observation can be attributed to several aspects:

- 1) It is possible that HRD professionals consider corporate and HRM strategies to be successfully established and implemented. In this case, it is not necessary to stress them far more in future.
- 2) Furthermore, there is the possibility that respondents have a more pessimistic orientation on future challenges and HRD's impact or influence on coping with and controlling them. This aspect fits with an observation of the case study research that

strategically relevant processes are rather planned and implemented by top and line management than by HRD functions.

- 3) HRD professionals (respondents) might have a restricted insight into corporate strategic planning and, therefore, future strategies and their importance for the company. Insofar, they would not be competent to reliably provide information on current and future strategies.

The analyses that follow support all of these explanations to a certain extent.

Considering the reasons for the German companies to become a learning-oriented organisation, the need for innovations seems to be the core item. This aligns with the innovation and knowledge generation (R&D) perspective observed with regard to corporate strategies.

German HRD functions seem to stress rather traditional HRD tasks as the design and realisation of HRD processes, proactive HRD concepts or the management of relationships. In this area, it exceeds the cross country average. On the other hand, more proactive areas of HRD activities that are discussed in recent publications on HRD such as the operational support for line-managed learning, support for strategic planning and realization of organizational change initiatives (e.g. Ulrich, 1997; Blancero, Boroski & Dyer, 1996) are only partly fulfilled by HRD functions, although this almost aligns with the cross country average. Analyzing this, HRD still seems to have a rather traditional self-understanding of its impact on creating not only traditional learning in the scope of personnel development but also on strategically relevant processes of knowledge management.

Considering the extent to which HRD functions should fulfil these roles in future, HRD should fulfil the more proactive HRD activities (only) partly more. This implies that these activities are not very highly emphasized by the HRD professionals in order to facilitate organisational learning. Furthermore, the German scores in this regard are even lower than the cross country average. Looking at the currently relatively high level of traditional HRD activities, these areas should not be improved in future.

Looking at the strategies, instruments and methods HRD functions deploy, it has to be pointed out that innovative learning methods such as modern media, knowledge exchange Networks, Intranet, Coaching or self-directed learning are most frequently used. Interesting to note, implementing teamwork was scored very high. This is contradictory to the results regarding change management initiatives. Once more the observation is confirmed that aspects of knowledge generation and diffusion seems to be a major concern in German companies. Probably because of the high application level of these innovative learning methods, the respondents indicated that these methods will be used not more or less in future. This score is once more below the cross country average.

Regarding influencing factors on the realisation of HRD's envisioned role, it can be observed that aspects of learning culture and motivation for knowledge sharing have to be pointed out for German organisations. Moreover, their influence is scored even higher than the cross country average. On the other hand, the current degree of realisation of these influencing factors is rather high and also higher scored than that of organizations in other countries.

Interestingly, almost all influencing factors are partly or nearly realised. Compared to the other

countries, it becomes obvious that they are scored much higher. Especially motivation for learning, attitude to change and flexibility of the organizational structure are to be pointed out.

Next to this, there is an area of HRD-related influencing factors such as clarity on HRD's role, clarity on HRD's goals, money for HRD activities, time for HRD professionals and results of new HRD activities that score high with regard to their impact on new HRD roles. Looking at the degree of their current realization, they are scored to be highly realized in the German countries and even higher than the cross country average.

FRANCE

In most French large companies, HRD is mainly driven by economic and strategic challenges such as increasing client focus, competitiveness, innovation rate or reducing costs. Generally speaking, HRD strategies and change strategies, are focusing on training, management development, competence management and organisational structure change.

However, there seems to be a growing awareness of the importance of HRD in the future global strategies of these large companies, and an emerging trend, although not very widespread, towards fostering learning processes both at the individual and the team level.

The role of the HRD department is often restricted to the classical training role. In the major change initiatives it is mainly involved in management development and training issue, but very little in leadership/managerial issues which are supposed to be more the domain of top management (communication policy, organisation development, power structure changes, learning culture, etc.).

The learning organisation concept appears to be very little known and correctly understood still. For those who begin to understand the concept, the main reason to evolve towards a learning organisation is linked with economic, strategic and commercial factors: the need to innovate and to improve the competitiveness of the organisation by a permanent adaptation and thus permanent learning processes. The concept of the learning organisation remains still quite fuzzy and even "exotic" in the present French corporate world. The discrepancy with other countries in the study, especially Anglo-Saxon countries, can be largely explained by various specific cultural features of the French educational and organisational environment.

The HRD function which is rarely distinguished as such within the HRM department, appears to have three main roles, ranked as followed by decreasing order of importance:

- n design and realisation of HRD process (which are mainly classical training processes);
- n operational support for the line managers learning processes;
- n management of internal relationship mainly through internal communication improvement.

Generally speaking, the HRD function as such is less developed and identified compared to other countries in the survey. However, a growing importance can be noticed of the role of HRD professionals in the definition and in the implementation of organisational strategies and change processes. The HRD function concentrates strategies on training activities with some autonomy in this area and to a lesser degree on the participation to teamwork and programmes on culture

change in the most advanced companies.

In the near future, the main strategies that will be adopted by the HRD department will be the application of the new information technologies to training (intranet, internet, modern multi-media, etc.), the development of self-directed learning programmes which are considered as potential means to reduce costs and time for training actions. But we can also see the emerging importance of competence management and knowledge management, but very often with an information technology focused approach which stresses more the tools side than the real new leadership dimensions.

UNITED KINGDOM

For the UK, the variation of the means of the variables from the average cross country scores is very limited. The highest discrepancy is -0.3 . This holds for the future answers to strategic challenges, and the value of the influencing factors that can have an influence on the attainment of the envisioned role of the HRD function. The most striking finding is that internationalisation scores far below average as a current answer on the strategic challenges of organisations (-1.3). Another interesting observation is that increasing competitiveness is also considerably less than average (-0.8), although it is still scored in the middle of the scale (3.1). Next, it can be noted that focusing on core competence is maybe somewhat less that generally reported in the literature. Compared with the cross country average on this item, British organisations score lower (-0.6). Certain HRD strategies are also less employed by British organisations; this holds particularly for implementing competence management (which is consistent with the fact that British organisations tend to focus less on core competence), and improving knowledge sharing. As to the value of factors that can have an influence on the attainment of the envisioned role of the HRD function, two items are scored relatively far below the cross country average. These are the money for HRD activities and the clarity on HRD's goals.

Furthermore it is striking that only two variables exceed the cross country averages, but the discrepancy is only 0.1 . So in fact the British results show average to less than average results.

Three observations of potential interest and significance can be made about the UK in comparison with the other countries included in the study. Each of these will be discussed in turn, including an attempt to explain the reasons for the differences. These explanations are though purely speculative, as establishing reasons for identified differences did not form part of the research design.

The first item reported above is that UK respondents indicate less emphasis than most of the other countries on internationalisation as a strategic challenge facing their organisations. This seems to be the case both currently and for the future. However, this observation would be at odds with the idea that international trade is of less importance to UK companies, or that the UK is somehow less affected by global competition. It is at least arguable that the reverse is the case in that the UK has a longer tradition and higher incidence of international trade and global competition than some at least of the other countries included in the study (see for example Hirschey et al., 1995). It is possible therefore to suggest that greater experience of internalisation in the UK explains the observation. Companies in the UK perhaps have more confidence in their ability to operate internationally, and to respond to global competition, and so are less likely to rate internationalisation highly as a strategic challenge compared with alternative challenges. Whether this confidence is misplaced is of course a different question.

The UK also appears to emphasise the effects on and for employees as reasons for becoming a learning organisation more than do some of the other countries. This observation is suggested by the ratings given to improving quality of work, improving employee retention and increasing employee commitment, both within the UK and when compared with other countries. There are many possible reasons for this being the case. One which can be speculated as being more likely than others is the UK experience of promoting and creating flexible labour markets. It is arguable that the UK has been a leading proponent of this policy objective and has achieved a degree of success in creating such markets (Hollinshead & Leat 1995). A possible consequence of this is 'success' in bringing about a change of attitude towards employment contracts on the part of employees as well as employers (Bryson 1999). Thus, individuals as employees deliver less commitment and loyalty to companies in response to lower levels of employment security. Over time, this has resulted in employers needing to respond in turn by developing alternative ways of gaining employee commitment and retention. Developing the characteristics of a learning organisation is one such approach. So, UK companies show interest in the concept as a means of responding to some of the 'unexpected' or 'unintended' consequences of increased labour market flexibility. There is little empirical evidence against which this assertion can be tested. It does though provide a logic which may explain the survey results on this question.

The final observation of interest from a UK perspective is that UK companies currently utilise information and communication technologies in HRD practice less than most of the other countries. This is suggested by the responses to modern media and using intranet as current HRD strategies. Speculations may be possible but no explanation for this immediately presents itself. It is though an observation of particular significance for HRD practitioners in the UK.

The implications for HRD practice that arise from these observations are again a matter of speculation. Three though can be suggested. First, UK HRD practitioners may be a little complacent about the significance of internationalisation. They may also be out of step with the attention given to the issue by their senior management colleagues. Second, the same may be true of their response to the potential offered by the emerging ICT technologies. Third, the benefits claimed for flexible labour markets may have to be tempered by increased understanding of some of the unanticipated consequences. More research is needed on this question. Given the significance of the issue to policy makers across Europe, such research should perhaps be given a high priority.

ITALY

For the Italian organisations it can be observed that the means on the variables are very much aligned to the cross country averages. There are two variables that show a positive discrepancy of 0.3; these are: the frequency by which certain (HRD) strategies are adopted by the HRD function, and the value of the factors that can have an influence on the attainment of the envisioned role of the HRD function. All other variables score between +0.2 and -0.2 from the cross country averages.

As to the HRD strategies that are adopted more than in other countries, the use of modern media for training, and benchmarking are the two items that are most positively rated by the respondents. As to the influencing factors it can be observed that the Italian organisations in the study are emphasising the positive value of this factor more than the other countries represented in this study. In their opinion, clarity on the role of HRD helps in the attainment of the envisioned role of the HRD function.

The impression is that Italian respondents overestimated their own role. The presented picture of the role of HRD seems to be more positive than reality. This may be caused by the interests of HRD professionals who would want to gain more recognition of the role of HRD. This is consistent with the results on the items about the time and money that would be important factors to realise the envisioned role of the HRD function.

Finally, it seems that Italian organisations are going along with the trend to being participating in the strategic decisions, whereas it in many cases is still an isolated function. The trend is that HRD professionals try to support management, but that they overestimate the opportunities of the future.

4.4.3 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion of the cross organisational and country comparison is that the survey results and conclusions hold. There are no significant differences as to the type of the organisations. There are small differences by country, but these are also limited. But many of these differences are statistically significant. The analyses showed that some country specific conclusions can be drawn as to the importance of certain variables that pertain to the consequences of change processes for various current and future general and HRD strategies that are and will be adopted to cope with change and challenges of the organisation, the way in which the HRD department is involved in these processes, the reasons for implementing the ideas of the learning organisation, the current and desired roles and strategies of HRD functions, and the factors that influence the attainment of the envisioned role of the HRD function. In future studies, these country specific differences can be elaborated and explored to see why they exist, and whether it would be desirable to develop European policy measures to stimulate countries to at least pay attention to the present situation and to try to implement actions to improve the conditions for life long learning and human resource development. This study has not explored these reasons explicitly, the possible explanations presented in the above were purely speculative.

ORGANISATION AND COUNTRY DIFFERENCES

It can be concluded that the results are quite homogeneous. Variation in HRD philosophies, strategies, and practices exist though, which cannot be explained by industry differences. There are some indications that countries do make a difference, although variation in the survey results between countries is limited.

4.6 LITERATURE REVIEW: COMPARISON WITH US AND JAPAN

The survey results indicate that little differences exist between each of the countries participating in this study. But is this to say that there is a specific European outlook on HRD in the context of the learning organisation? To answer this fourth and last research question, a review of literature on HRD in Japan and the US was made, in an attempt to compare HRD views in those countries with those encountered in this European study. The results are reported in a separate document (Differences in outlook between European, US and Japanese HRD departments, Ter Horst et. al., 1999), this section provides a summary of its main conclusions.

Literature was searched in several databases on the basis of key words such as training, HRD, learning organisations, innovation and competitiveness in Japan and the USA. In addition to this, new literature was found in the lists of references of the respective publications ("snowball method"). Finding useful publications about HRD in Japan and the US proved to be not so easy. First of all, there is the language barrier when studying Japanese literature. Secondly, there is much literature about HRD in the respective nations, but not much that has been written about specific cases or is based on research. Thirdly, much of the literature is not up-to-date. The literature used for this review was mainly restricted to descriptive and analytic publications about the position of HRD in the nations studied. The sources varied widely in quality. The emphasis was placed on referenced and high quality publications. Research literature was used whenever possible.

The aim of the literature review was to answer the visions of HRD departments in the USA and Japan and on the role of these departments in learning (oriented) organisations. On the basis of this, a Japanese and US outlook could be outlined and compared with each other and with the European outlook.

It proved difficult to say whether Europe has its own specific outlook on HRD when compared to Japan or the US. Based on the literature review, commonalities in outlook between Europe, Japan and the US appear more significant than the differences. This may be caused by the fact that within the European study, data collection is restricted to large organisations only. Our impression is that the literature about HRD in Japan and the US is also predominantly based on large organisations. That means that the context of many organisations is comparable, as that is the global economy. If small and medium sized companies would be included in the study, the results might have been different, as many SME's only work for regional or even local market, which are more diverse in the sense that they operate in varying regional and local economies.

When looking at the new vision of HRD on their role, again commonalities overrule the differences. This is also understandable, as important functions of HRD are to contribute to employee development, improving job performance, problem solving, organisational performance improvement, and career development. HRD functions in European as well as the US and Japanese organisations see themselves more and more as a strategic partner. Supporting the business and contributing to achieving business goals are pinpointed as new HRD goals.

Differences however can be found in roles of HRD professionals. In Europe and the US this role –generally speaking- changes from trainer to consultant. Moreover, a more active role is expected from managers and employees. Managers get more responsibility for employee learning and employees are expected to take responsibilities for their own development process. For the HRD professionals, this means they will have to support them in doing so, in order to ensure quality of HRD interventions. Some of this support may consist of providing learning resources. This is in essence a rather practical role. Having managers fulfil an active role in HRD also gives HRD practitioners room to give advice (consult) on HRD issues, which can be considered to be a more strategic role, since it provides HRD professionals with the opportunity to help managers link training to corporate needs and to use opportunities for informal learning at work (instead of only training). It also provides them with room to work on other more strategic tasks such as monitoring competencies, helping managers in their new role, offering new HRD concepts and promoting learning.

In Japan, the manager, and not the HRD function, is the major partner in employee development. The manager is fully responsible for employee development but for instance also for creating a learning culture. Just as is the case in Europe and the US, from Japanese employees an

active role is expected in their own development process. But it appears that this is already the case in Japan for a long time.

An HRD function, as it exists in European and US companies, seems not to exist in Japan. Large organisations in Japan do have a training department, which merely focuses on providing training and/or training materials. But an HRD department with HRD professionals and with other tasks (rather than “traditional” HRD tasks), such as supporting a learning culture, supporting knowledge management etc. is very rare in Japanese organisations.

With regard to the HRD strategies, differences can also be found in HR approaches. This in contrast with the commonalities found in organisational context and HRD visions.

First, differences can be found in training forms. While in Japanese organisations formal learning on-the-job, supplemented with informal learning on-the-job are the most used forms of training, US and European companies tend to focus on formal off-the-job training modes, in combination with informal learning on-the-job. Especially the last mentioned approach has currently gained a lot of attention in US and European organisations. The focus on formal learning-on-the-job, in Japanese organisations can be explained by strong guiding concepts in this country, lifetime employment and seniority based practices. Moreover, in Japan, a strong emphasis is placed on group processes. In contrast to this, in America the emphasis is put on individuals. Europe can, in this respect, be characterised by focusing on both, as well on individual as group development.

A final word is necessary about the internal variation of HRD philosophies and strategies in Europe. Although in this study many commonalities were found, there are also many differences, as became apparent in the previous section. An instinctive response to the question as to whether there are differences in HRD within Europe is: ‘Of course’. Not only do the business contexts vary, but there are also different national histories, cultures and traditions, which have led to different national jurisdictions and regulations in countries. The differences become apparent in cross-European diversity in rights on educational leave, differences in training taxes, fiscal deductibility of training costs, relationships between (vocational) education and HRD, and differences in school-to-work transition practices.

However, when looking at the major theme of this study, HRD in the learning oriented organisation, and especially the vision on the HRD function, the commonalities appear to be larger than the cross-European differences. Therefore we did compare “Europe” as a whole to Japan and the US. Of course, these are in themselves nations within which the differences between companies are also large. So, all in all, the reflection on similarities and differences between Europe, Japan and the US, is based on an overall look, and based on (gross) generalisations about the situation in these nations. Of course there is no such thing as a European, US or Japanese HRD model, but still it was an interesting exercise to make a comparison between HRD practices in these different countries, and though it has not yielded a ‘European HRD profile’, it has provided some extra background context against which to interpret the insights of this European study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the main conclusions from the case study research, the survey and the literature review (section 5.1). From these findings some recommendations for practice and research are deduced (section 5.2).

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

Below, before reviewing the main answers to each of the research questions, the general organisational context of the companies participating in the study is sketched.

CONTEXT

In a broad sense, the companies participating in the case study and the survey can be compared to each other, with regard to the organisational context factors.

Just as for the 28 case organisations, improving client focus is an issue of major importance to the 165 companies participating in the survey. Other key strategic issues are improving and innovating products, processes and services. Strategies with regard to developing human resources, since these are a key factor in improving organisational learning are relevant, but come in second place. They appear to be 'means to an end', instead of strategies with an inherent relevance.

Learning oriented organisations employ a rich variety of change strategies in order to stimulate their development toward a learning organisation. Creating a client oriented culture appears to be an often-used measure (more so than became apparent from the case studies). But initiatives in the field of changing organisational structures (such as implementing teams), attention to management development; changes in the strategy development process (e.g. sharing a mission statement); creating a learning culture and changes in HRD strategies and structure were also encountered. The most important conclusion that can be drawn is that companies use a rich bouquet of change initiatives, in which no one type of change is particularly dominant. Which type of changes are initiated is probably determined by a mix of factors, such as strategical objectives, employee characteristics, current organisational problems, organisational structure and management style, etcetera. Unraveling these relationships falls beyond the scope of this project, which focuses mainly on HRD, not the companies as a whole.

The desire to become more client centered, among other things by continuous improvement and innovation, appears to be the main motivator for wanting to become a learning organisation. Though more people-oriented reasons (such as improving the quality of working life) seem to play a role as well.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: ENVISIONED ROLE

Conclusions from the case studies regarding important HRD objectives and the division of HRD tasks appear to be supported by the survey results. HRD functions have objectives in five areas:

- n Supporting the business;
- n Supporting (informal) learning;
- n Supporting knowledge sharing (as a special form of supporting informal learning);
- n Development and coordination of training;
- n Changing HRD practices.

All are rather important, some more so than others, but differences are too small to reflect a real rank order of objectives. Of course, changing HRD practices is an intermediary objective, it is not a purpose in itself, but something HRD functions strive for a reorganisation of HRD practices, in order to better fulfil their tasks. Most important to note is the expectation of survey respondents that objectives in the field of supporting informal learning and promoting knowledge sharing are expected to increase most in importance in the future. Also relevant to point out is that supporting the business (objectives) is one of the most important HRD objectives, but results from the question concerning HRD's involvement in important organisational change initiatives (see previous section) suggest that this involvement is usually not very large. So, the question as to in how far HRD fulfils a strategic role remains open.

With regard to the division of HRD tasks, it becomes clear that HRD professionals still carry the biggest share of responsibility for HRD (at least in their own estimation of the situation). Managers and employees are important active partners, and are expected to become more so in the future. Their role is predominantly one of identifying learning needs, stimulating and supporting informal learning, ensuring continuous learning (of oneself and others). HRD professionals provide support, among other things by organising training and supporting informal learning efforts.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: STRATEGIES

The case studies yielded a wide range of strategies employed by HRD professionals to realise their envisioned role, without a clear indication of the relative weight of each of these strategies. The survey attempted to establish somewhat of a ranking order: which strategies are considered most important? This proved difficult, since nearly all strategies are rated as 'relevant' or 'important' by the respondents. However, when overlooking the general picture it does become clear that training-related strategies still fulfil a significant role. Among the least important strategies are instruments and initiatives to increase employee responsibility for learning.

As such, results do not paint a picture of very innovative HRD practices, dominated by new methods such as knowledge management networks and stimulating learning climate in the workplace. Of course, for one part this is because HRD objectives are not that far-stretched. Providing training is still an important aim. For another part, these outcomes might indicate that HRD practices to some extent fall behind HRD visions.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: INFLUENCING FACTORS

Are certain specific influences keeping HRD professionals from changing their practices more significantly? Neither in the case studies nor the survey, an unequivocal direction of influencing factors could be established. In the case studies, some factors were found to negatively affect change processes in one organisation, while they were reported as positive driving forces for other companies. Sometimes factors were experienced as a negative and a positive influence at once in a single organisation (but in different parts). Survey results provide some insight into the most important influencing factors. There is a group of factors, such as motivation for learning or money for HRD activities, which impacts change sometimes positively (sufficient motivation, sufficient resources) and sometimes negatively (lack of motivation, lack of money). On the other hand, there is a small group of factors which in general appears to have a negative influence. The factors which appear to burden the change process most strongly, are:

- n Insufficient time for learning on part of the employees;
- n Insufficient time for performing HRD tasks on the part of managers;
- n Lack of clarity on HRD's role.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4

The fourth and final research question was: What differences in outlook can be found between HRD departments in European organisations and the perspectives on the role of HRD which exist in the US and Japan? First, some remarks have to be made with regard to differences between the European companies and countries participating in the study.

During the project various attempts have been made to find differences between organisations as to the envisioned role of the HRD functions, the strategies organisations employ to implement HRD within the framework of lifelong learning and ideas about the learning organisation, and the influencing factors. During the analysis of the case studies the research team tried to find differences between types of organisations, and an additional Masters thesis project was conducted to find these differences (Ilina, 1999). The organisations were divided into four cells, each of which corresponded with the selection criteria for the case studies: economic sector (service of industry) and production type (customer orientation or mass production). In neither the analyses of the research team, nor in the Masters thesis project, differences were found. It is therefore concluded that the type of organisation does not influence the way in which these organisations envisage the role of HRD, the strategies they employ to implement HRD activities, and the factors that facilitate the attainment of the envisioned role of HRD. This means that organisations of the type selected for this study (large organisations that are learning oriented) do not differ much as to their philosophies, policies and practices regarding the role of HRD and the way in which this is implemented. Furthermore, in these organisations, factors that influence the implementation of the ideas tend to have the same impact.

Another issue that returned quite often was the question as to whether the results of the study are different for the different countries included in the study. In other words, is there a European outlook on the concept of HRD in the organisations selected? This appeared to be a question that was hard to answer, because finding national differences was not one of the research questions, and cultural, political, jurisdictional and other related factors were not included in the study. Nevertheless, based on the survey data some comparisons could be made, and although the absolute differences between countries in the study are small, there appeared to be some striking

differences. It is hard to test these differences by the methodology used in the study. Various Kruskal-Wallis tests were performed, and the results showed that many of the items within variables were statistically different, but one can argue that this is hard measurement with soft data. Since most of the items in the survey are perceptual by nature, it is not sure whether cultural factors play a role in the explanation of the differences between countries. The comparisons showed that there were interesting national differences. These differences need to be studied further, as in the survey no questions were asked to explain the reasons as to why certain items were rated as being more important than others. It would be informative to link this further study to the national contexts, incentives for organisations and individuals to invest in HRD activities, policy measures taken by the national administration, law enactment in certain fields (like environmental law, law on labour conditions, safety), and the developments in the educational systems. This may show further intra-European diversity than has been found in this study. But above all, it may explain the diversity to a large extent, and this may lead to guidelines for European policy efforts to improve conditions for HRD in European countries. At this stage we conclude that there is no one single European model for HRD, and that there are subtle but meaningful differences as to the philosophies, strategies, and practices on HRD across the countries in the study.

Having said this, the European situation was still compared to the outlook on HRD in Japan and the US. To this end, a literature review was undertaken. This review brought to light some interesting country-specific approaches with regard to HRD, though also for these countries, as for Europe, there is no overriding 'Japanese' or 'US' HRD vision. Differences between companies are huge.

MAIN CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most important conclusion of this study is that the learning organisation is a metaphor that is still important for HRD professionals, as to:

- n the need for developing collective intelligence within organizations and organizational forms supporting such a need, overcoming the remains of fordism at different levels;
- n the importance of knowledge and in particular tacit knowledge which has to be recognized and valorized insofar it is embedded in human resources;
- n the overcoming of training-based development policies towards new policies fostering learning in different ways (support to competencies development, learning networks, learning self-assessment in the communities of practice, etc..).

The research shows the need for a clearer status of HRD within HRM and for significant improvements of HRD tools, techniques, types of interventions, self-assessment of goals and results. Such a status and improvements should be based on further growth of important issues, such as:

- n self-awareness of possibilities and limits of HRD function by the side of its members;
- n up-dating of professional skills, especially regarding the interpretation frames of the evolutionary realities in which HRD activities take place.

The crucial precondition is that HRD functions should increase their strategic orientation in order to being involved in strategic processes. HRD professionals are challenged to continuously evaluate and redefine their activities in order to meet these strategic requirements. However, these rather strategic aspects have not been investigated in detail so far.

The study also shows that the development of human resources is not a prerogative of HRD professionals. More and more it is becoming a business of line-managers. This has different reasons:

- n convergence of management of organisational competences (aimed at internal effectiveness and competitive advantages on the market), and the management of individual/communities competencies (based on explicit and tacit knowledge);
- n new ways of organising firms, in particular: a. the diffusion of forms of organisation by processes requires that line managers responsible for processes, or parts of them, can flexibly manage the resources at their disposal in view of specific dynamic exigencies of the processes (versus the relatively static exigencies of functions); and b. the decentralization processes require specific forms of local governance of knowledge and competencies (versus the traditional position of HRD in the headquarter).

There are discernible trends in the changing role of HRD professionals across Europe. These trends also suggest an expanding and increasingly significant role for managers and individual employees in HRD practices.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

THE ROLE OF MANAGERS

This research has again confirmed that managers fulfil a key role in changing HRD practices. For instance, it is expected of them to perform assessments and needs analyses, work on development plans for their staff, motivate employees for learning and manage the workplace as a place fit for learning. But it was also confirmed that it is sometimes difficult to get them to fulfil this active role, either because of their work load, lack of affinity with HRD tasks or a lack of skills in this field.

On the short term, it is necessary to find strategies to involve managers in HRD, by changing their views on learning and increasing their motivation to support learning. In other words, a similar attitude change as is expected from employees is also necessary for managers. HRD professionals from the case studies tried to realise this attitude change by actively supporting managers in their new tasks or even by professionalising them in the field of HRD.

In the long run, it would be interesting to consider incorporating HRD skills in all management training programmes, if HRD is truly to become an integrated part of business. The way in which managers support their staff in learning could then also become an issue in performance appraisals and management career planning. It seems necessary to reflect on the current management education in the European countries. Does it prepare managers to adequately fulfil an active role in development of their employees? Likewise, providers of vocational education, training and development could also be asked to reconsider the content of their programmes for managers and

HRD professionals and make necessary adjustments to reflect the changing roles of both.

But first, it seems necessary to open up the debate on what exactly is expected of managers with regard of HRD, and what remains (or becomes) the role of HRD professionals. Role unclarity is widespread, and confuses the issue. Some seem to expect the HRD function to vanish, as learning issues are more and more integrated with general management, while others appear to see a different (strategic, supportive, consulting) role for HRD professionals. Sometimes, HRD literature can be quite normative in this respect, as Horwitz rightfully observes: 'The HRD literature is somewhat normative and rethorical in exhorting line managers to take responsibility for training and development. The reality is that this is the exception rather than the norm. (Horwitz, 1999, p. 188)

He goes on to point out that delegation of HRD responsibilities carries problems and risks. For instance, line managers are not specialists in people development and ownership of HRD responsibility may not be part of their performance objectives (which often consider more bottom-line financial and short term objectives). If HRD is truly to be integrated in line managers' work packages, it is essential that both parties (line managers and HRD) jointly reach agreement on mutual expectations and find solutions for practical as well as more fundamental problems in this respect (See for instance Ellinger, Watkins & Bostrom, 1999 for a study on how managers perceive their own role as learning facilitators).

STRATEGIC CHALLENGES FOR HRD PROFESSIONALS

HRD functions should be more precisely defined and recognized by top management as a major part of the global development strategy of the company. Human assets are becoming the most important wealth of an organisation if they are adequately nurtured and if their potential is efficiently developed and exploited. The actions must follow more closely the common corporate talks in this area.

The HRD role and strategies must be reconsidered in the future from a learning perspective instead of the classical training/teaching perspective as still is the case very often. This implies a much broader role and importance of the HRD function.

But such a change is linked to the knowledge and to a correct understanding of the very concept of the learning organisation which is still largely unknown or confused with other concepts. Top management has to be more and more sensitive to this emerging and revolutionary concept, which more and more appears to be at the core of the future performing and competitive organisations. They will have to play a major and crucial pedagogic function to make it understood by everybody and to progressively apply it to their corporate environment. What usually would mean a drastic leadership and organisational change.

HRD should take care of its internal development perceiving the risks of power losses, and even disappearance in some cases, if the relationships with the lines are not taken into account and self-reform (as mobile internal consultants) are not undertaken.

The results of the survey show that the primary tasks of HRD functions seem to be to develop competencies and services that enable them to offer strategic (knowledge) potentials for the company and that – by delivering value added to the organization – ensure their legitimization and acceptance within the organization. At the same time, HRD is challenged to demonstrate their competencies and value-adding services. Briefly, HRD has to transform to a certain extent and it has to evaluate its processes and services in order to communicate its contribution to

organisations' success to internal constituencies. As of now, evidence (from literature and research) suggests that HRD currently is generally not very well integrated into the corporate strategies of many organisations. Therefore, it is not seen as a viable mechanism for achieving competitive advantage. HRD is seen more as a cost, than an investment, and considered as a means of removing specific skill shortages (Garavan, Heraty & Barnicke, 1999; Barham & Rassam, 1989).

An essential pre condition is that HRD functions increase their strategic orientation in order to get involved in strategic processes. And HRD professionals are challenged to continuously evaluate and redefine their activities in order to meet these strategic requirements. However, these rather strategic aspects have not been investigated in detail so far.

SKILLS HRD PROFESSIONALS

As the HRD professionals are changing their practices, their own role changes considerably. Instead of trainers, they now become consultants, who also have to manage the link between their activities and company strategy. This requires a totally different set of skills (and attitudes, since it is more a role 'behind the scenes' instead of 'on stage!'). Interestingly enough, this study revealed only one company to be deliberately increasing skills of HRD professionals. It would be worthwhile to consider supporting professionalisation of HRD professionals on a more broad scale. Professional associations from different European countries could organise professionalisation events for their members. Creating lively and inspiring networks of HRD professionals where they can exchange ideas and commonly try to solve difficult challenges also would form a useful contribution. Existing national and European platforms (such as ECLO) can be used as a basis.

This may also serve to create a common terminology. Whilst the project has focused on the role of HRD practitioners in learning oriented organisations, it has become apparent that many practitioners do not adopt the term HRD and do not speak of their organisations as being learning oriented. However, their roles are indeed characteristic of what has been described as HRD, and their organisations do indeed display many of the features associated with learning (oriented) organisations. The issue of language and terminology is an important one, and meanings and definitions must be further explained and shared if academics and practitioners can learn from each other and together.

EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING

Next to the challenges for line managers and HRD professionals it seems very crucial that employees are motivated for learning. If they are not, this imposes a serious inhibiting factor to realising the new work practices. If individual employees do not see the importance of learning, they will not seize the opportunities. An important aspect with regard to motivation is an appreciation of more informal ways of learning and development, and a sense of responsibility for their own learning. This means a considerable shift from the traditional views employees (tacitly) hold on learning. HRD professionals from the case organisations were found to actively try to change these views, which seems a very relevant thing to do. It would be worthwhile to explore ways in which this attitude change can be brought about (e.g. by adopting different HRD practices, but also by targeted HRD interventions and work methods). One attempt to increase motivation, also found in some of the companies from this project, is to provide training credits and provide career guidance. As Chaplin stated:

'Companies should be encouraged to have their in-house programmes validated by appropriate awarding bodies. This will ensure that the quality of the programmes is judged against national or European norms. It will give employees completing such programmes recognition of achievement with value and credibility outside the company. By these means, more employees will be encouraged to participate in the programmes and the reputation of the company as a learning company will be enhanced.'

And: 'Companies should ensure that all learning achievements by their staffs are recognised by publicity, appropriate promotion and reward. Such measures will motivate other members of the workforce to become involved in lifelong learning.' (Chaplin, 1993, p. 92)

Since these both provide promising measures, it is worthwhile to investigate them further, but other avenues should also be found and explored to motivate employees for learning on an intrinsic basis, and to change their view of learning as a classroom, teacher-led activity.

CREATING AN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

As was explained in chapter 1, the context for this study is the gradual evolution of Europe towards a learning society. Companies are becoming important partners in the new infrastructure for lifelong learning, as they create more learning opportunities on- and off-the-job. In order to truly create an infrastructure for lifelong learning, cooperation between the different parties is necessary. In order to support learning in the workplace, companies could seek cooperation with (higher) institutions for vocational education and with universities, as is being done on an increasing scale (sometimes stimulated by the EC, as in the case of the EUROPRO). The VET-sector itself is also actively looking for ways to prepare their students for lifelong learning, for instance by:

- n not only teaching vocational skills but also paying attention to the development of skills such reflection and thinking skills;
- n not using only classroom approaches, but also looking for ways to incorporate on-the-job learning.

So, a lifelong learning infrastructure is already developing. As companies are indeed becoming important partners in this infrastructure (as also indicated by the results of this study), it is important that they take part in the discussion:

If learning initiatives in Europe are to meet the needs of industry, leaders of industry must ensure that their views are taken into account in the design of such initiatives, It is essential, therefore that industrialists participate fully in professional, national and European initiatives, to foster and take forward lifelong learning. (Chaplin, 1993, p. 92).

Perhaps here too, national and European associations of HRD professionals could play an active role in such discussions, as spokespersons of industry.

HRD STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING A LEARNING ORGANISATION

In addition to this case study report, a practitioner's book was compiled of the most interesting examples of HRD initiatives (Ter Horst, 2000). This book provides a wide collection of ideas which HRD professionals throughout Europe may use to transform their own work practices. Though many different strategies were used in order to stimulate the development towards a learning organisation, one strategy deserves special attention: competence management.

The results of the case studies show that a vast majority of the companies are implementing strategies for competence management. The strengths of this strategy should be exploited. Frequently stressed strengths are the vertical and horizontal alignment of strategic goals and operational plans, and human resource management instruments like hiring and selection, assessment and payment, and training and development. Competence profiles play an crucial role in the process of competence management. Core competencies and competency profiles of group of employees or job familiar can be linked, competency profiles of individual employees can be determined, competencies of employees can be assessed, and competence development plans can be formulated. Management and employees can make agreements on the development of the competencies, and for this they have a wide range of options, of which training is one, but coaching, learning projects, job rotations, learning from colleagues, learning on the job, on-line learning in an open learning resource network are others.

Since competence development is seen as a key element of implementing the concept of the learning organisations, further research is needed as to the development of valid and useful competence profiles, the facilitating and inhibiting factors in competence assessment and development, and coping strategies of organisations that try to overcome problems in implementing competence systems.

ORGANISATIONS AND GOVERNMENTS

There is also a role for companies as a whole and even governments in supporting a shift towards integration of HRD in companies in such a way that it supports processes of lifelong learning. First, companies could reinforce policies devoted to human resources as fundamental knowledge resources. It is important that organisations grow to understand how the notion of permanent learning of individuals and teams has important consequences for the strategies and activities implemented, so that all workers can benefit from this.

For public administrative bodies, it is important that strong policies are developed and implemented to support the principles of life-long learning; one can think of new labour laws that also foster the learning organisation concept. Policy makers could take account of these changing roles in directing their support for vocational education, training and development for managers and HRD professionals. And it would be helpful if administrations and governmental agencies could set the example in adopting a clear learning organisation approach and more sophisticated human resources development policies.

There is also a possible role for EU and national governments, mainly in increasing the links between the policies devoted to labour/employment/HR on the one hand, and those on industrial development on the other hand. Many financial lines reserved to adult training could also be employed promoting forms of human resource development at the company level (also with the support of social partners).

FUTURE RESEARCH

A recommendation of methodological nature is to investigate the mentioned aspects of HRD evaluation. Nowadays, there is still little evidence to indicate HRD's added value to the business, investments in HRD are still very much done as an 'act of faith' (Garavan, Heraty & Barnicle, 1999). It could help the development of HRD as a strategic factor, if more becomes clear on the benefits on the organisational level. To do so, it is necessary to find ways of evaluation to include internal customers and constituencies of the HRD function to assess the impact of HRD on organizational learning and, therefore, organizational success.

Important themes for future research are the study of vision of employees and managers on the issues studied. How do they consider learning? What are effective modes of learning? What do they expect of HRD professionals? How does communication with HRD professionals proceed? How do they work with the strategies implemented in the field of HRD, e.g. competence development, what are the experiences and the effects? Empirical evidence on these issues could foster the discussion on HRD tasks for line managers and HRD professionals.

Another issue for further investigation is the differences between the different nations within the EU. This study indicated that there is not a single 'European vision on HRD'. Rather, there appear to be differences for each of the countries, as a result of differences in a.o. (corporate) cultures, management styles and the wider (vocational) educational systems. This study did not fully explore these differences, but it would be interesting to do so, in order to enable managers, policy makers and HRD professionals to learn from each other.

CHAPTER 6

DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter describes the plan for dissemination of the main findings of this study. Each of the partners actively participates in this dissemination process, which has already started.

REPORTS

A first and important element in the dissemination strategy is the series of reports that were published regarding the project:

- n Tjepkema, S., Horst, H. M. ter, Mulder, M & Scheerens, J. (eds.) (1999a) Future challenges for Human Resource Development professionals in Europe. Part I Results of case studies in 28 companies on lifelong learning in learning oriented organisations. Enschede: University of Twente.
- n Horst, H. M. ter, Mulder, M., Tjepkema, S. & Scheerens, J. (1999b) Future challenges for Human Resource Development professionals in Europe. Part II: A literature review on differences in outlook between European, US and Japanese HRD departments. Enschede: University of Twente.
- n Horst, H. M. ter, Tjepkema, S., Mulder, M. & Scheerens, J. (eds.) (2000) Glimpses of changing HRD practices in learning oriented organisations throughout Europe: Practitioner's book. Enschede: University of Twente.
- n Tjepkema, S., Mulder, M., Horst, H. M. ter & Scheerens, J. (eds.) (2000) Future challenges for Human Resource Development professionals in Europe. Part IV: Results of a survey in learning oriented organisations in 7 countries in the European Union. Enschede: University of Twente.

PLANS FOR A BOOK

Currently, the members of the management team and the British partners (prof. dr. Jim Stewart and dr. Sally Sambrook) are in contact with the publisher Routledge (part of the Taylor & Francis group) in order to get a book on this project published.

ARTICLES

Several of the partners wrote articles based on the results of the project. An overview was provided to the EU at an earlier time. The partners agreed to continue writing articles (and conference papers) in both national and international journals. Especially the following journals and magazines were identified as possibly useful media for publication (The names of the partners in brackets are on the editorial advisory board of these journals).

- n The learner (Mike Kelleher);
- n International journal of Training and Development (Martin Mulder);
- n Journal of European Industrial Training (Martin Mulder);

- n Opleiding & Ontwikkeling (Saskia Tjepkema);
- n HRD Quarterly (Martin Mulder);
- n HRD International (Sally Sambrook);
- n CEDEFOP journal (Martin Mulder).

CONFERENCE PAPERS

Several of the partners engaged in conferences in the field of HRD and education. For instance:

In September 1999, the annual ECER conference was held in Lahti, Finland. A symposium was given by some project partners. The symposium concerned the main research questions and was based on the case study research and the literature review. On the basis of this, a special issue of the International Journal for Training and Development will be composed.

In May 2000, several of the partners presented results at the ECLO conference. In september 2000, a group of partners plans to present results in a symposium at the ECER conference. It is also foreseen to present some results at the European 2001 conference on research in HRD.

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