# Enhancing the Role of the HRD Function: The Case of a Health Services Organisation

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## ABSTRACT

Human Resource Development continues to grow in importance within organisations due to the strategic priorities of competitiveness and change. The present study examined the role of the HRD function in a services organisation. The study specifically investigates the perceptions of key stakeholders on the alignment of the HRD function with the strategy of the organisation and the challenges faced by the organisation in moving from a more traditionally oriented function to one that is perceived to be strategically integrated. The study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to explore stakeholder perceptions. In general, the results indicated that senior management involvement in HRD is essential for perceived strategic integration. Respondents reported inconsistent practices concerning systems of learning transfer and the depth of evaluation. However, respondents overall perceive that HRD adds value. Implications for the management of HRD and management involvement in HRD activities are discussed.

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## INTRODUCTION

Human resource development (HRD) is now more frequently used in public sector organisations (Deloitte, 2004), however HRD departments vary considerably in terms of their strategic alignment. Strategic alignment focuses on the interrelationships between HRD professionals and HRD stakeholders, including employees, line managers, top managers and relevant training providers. Strategic alignment also focuses on the link between HRD activities and organisational goals and objectives (Wognum & Mulder, 1999). Barney (1991) and McIntyre (2004) highlight three strategic roles for HRD: HRD involvement in shaping the organisation's competitive strategies; the use of HRD strategies to support the competitive strategy of the organisation; and the development and implementation of the HRD function's own strategies.

The focus of this study is on the repositioning of training and development within a public sector organisation from a traditional provider and reactive function to a strategically aligned function. The study organisation sought to focus on the alignment of HRD to become more strategically integrated, and use HRD as a strategy for both change and the enhancement of customer service. It considered such questions as: what challenges did the organisation encounter when seeking to move from a more traditionally oriented function to a function that seeks to be strategically integrated?; and how do the perceptions of stakeholders and their perceived roles and commitments influence the delivery of HRD? The study focused on the practice issues that organisations encounter when repositioning the training and development function to make it more strategically integrated.

The adoption of strategic models of HRD practice is relevant to public sector organisations in Ireland. They have experienced significant wide-ranging changes in recent years, in particular the introduction of more business-focused and customer-led approaches to how they operate (Lawler & Hearn, 1995; Mavin & Bryans, 2000; Williams, Blackwell, Gorby, O'Connell & Russell, 2003). There is increasing demand for improved quality and efficiency of service delivery and changing customer demands. These changes are coupled with strict financial controls and increased accountability. Public sector organisations are increasingly concerned with ensuring that employees possess the competences and skills to be effective

in this changing context. These challenges bring into focus the strategic role of training and development (Deloitte, 2004; Finn, 1997). Training and development is one of several strategies used to manage the transitions that public sector organisations are required to make. Public sector employees in Ireland perceive training and development as an effective strategy for coping with change (Deloitte, 2004; Williams et al., 2003).

This paper presents the findings of a multi-method study conducted within a medical training and hospital establishment. The paper addresses key debates around strategic human resource development and the characteristics of strategically integrated HRD. The paper then presents findings on the perceptions of employees and management on the integration of HRD. It also discusses the implications of these findings for both research and practice.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF STRATEGICALLY ALIGNED HRD

The concept of strategically integrated HRD is well established in the literature (Garavan, 1991; Sadler-Smith, 2006; Walton, 1999). It focuses on the interplay between HRD practices and the broader context within which these practices play out. This context consists of the broader business environment, the internal context including strategy, structure, culture, climate, leadership, job characteristics and individual expectations. In terms of the management and alignment of strategically integrated HRD a number of issues are highlighted which we now discuss.

### Participation and Support

Participation and support are considered two important and related components of effective strategic HRD alignment. Participation is defined as active involvement of stakeholders in decision-making concerning HRD. Support is defined as the level of support available to employees before participating in training and development activities and post-training in terms of applying the skills and knowledge learned on the job. Three key internal stakeholders are relevant in HRD decision-making: employees, line managers and top managers. This is often referred to as the HR triad (Jackson & Schuler, 2003).

*Employees*

Employee participation in HRD is increasingly highlighted (Blyton & Turnbull, 1998; Garavan & Heraty, 2001; Marchington & Wilkinson, 2002). Management generally favour a unitary approach. It is usual for management to decide if and how employees are involved and they are disposed towards participation and involvement in day-to-day operational issues. However, day-to-day concerns provide less scope for employees in decision-making. Blyton and Turnbull (1998) advocate that employee participation is predicated on maintenance and control over the training and development agenda.

Employees are likely to benefit more than others from some form of participation in decisions concerning HRD (Holton & Baldwin, 2003). Garavan and Carbery (2003) found that particular learner barriers inhibited participation. These included poor self-confidence, lack of motivation, a perceived lack of management and peer support and work restrictions. Marchington and Wilkinson (2002) have argued that employee involvement in HRD decision-making may be beneficial because it can help employees understand what the organisation is trying to do and, in turn, have an impact on post-training performance.

Support is an important concept in the context of HRD. Broad and Newstrom (1992) have argued that the majority of training investments do not produce full and sustained transfer of new knowledge. Brinkerhoff (1997) demonstrated that as little as 8 to 12 per cent of what trainees learn is translated into improved job performance. Lack of support is manifest in a number of ways, including hostile co-workers, resistant subordinates, uninterested supervisors and an inappropriate learning culture. Several commentators (Bates, 2003; Jones, 1995; Naquin & Baldwin, 2003) argue that the employee's immediate supervisor is the most proximate in terms of influencing the learner's behaviour. Brinkerhoff (1997) highlights that the unsupportive supervisor ignores, dis-encourages skills use or punishes employees who are not going to use the skills they have learned. The unsupported employee will continue to repeat old behaviours with the result that managers and employers will come to view training as a waste of time. Naquin and Baldwin (2003) emphasise the importance of management and the trainees' immediate supervisor in providing pre-programme support and thus facilitating post-programme transfer of learning. Cohen (1990) found that trainees

who entered training expecting some kind of supervisory follow-up reported stronger intentions to transfer what was learned.

*Line Managers*
The emerging concept of the strategic partner (Barney & Wright, 1998; Schuler, 1992) contends that HRD should help line managers resolve business issues and align HRD activities with the achievement of organisational goals. Strategically focused HRD relies on the commitment and involvement of line managers. Lee and Chee (1996) found that amongst the characteristics of organisations at the top end of the HRD maturity scale, HRD was perceived as supporting business strategy and HRD specialists and line managers worked in partnership with each other. Line managers are recognised as being in the best position to take an active role in developing people whose performance they are expected to manage (Heraty & Morley, 1995) and play a key role in assisting the transfer of new skills (Ellinger, 2004; Rouillier & Goldstein, 1993). Additionally, Mitsuhashi et al. (2000) found there are relatively few differences between HRD specialists' and line executives' perceptions of the importance of HRD. There were however different perceptions in terms of expected practices. Hyman and Cunningham (1998) argued that line managers tend to be task-oriented which diverts their attention away from HRD issues towards production priorities.

Line managers are crucial stakeholders whose role in HRD is often underdeveloped. The literature highlights a range of challenges inherent in line manager involvement in HRD. Maxwell and Watson (2004), for example, divide these into conceptual and practical challenges. Practical challenges highlighted include: line manager commitment to HRD, line manager understanding of HRD issues, trust between line managers and HRD professionals, power and contradictions inherent in the role, line managers' abilities to carry out HRD activities, line manager training in HRD philosophy and values, and perceptions of organisational support for HRD. Sloman (2003) acknowledges that many managers appear to be undertrained and are often not motivated to develop employees. Trust appears to be an important issue (Gilley & Maycunich Gilley, 2003). A lack of trust will inhibit consultation possibilities and prevent a successful partnership emerging. Brewster and Larsen (2000) argue that the power relationship between line managers and top

management is indicated by the degree to which line managers are delegated full responsibility for HRD and HRM activities. Yip, Kwong, Priem and Cycyota (2001) suggest that hierarchical rank may not be as significant for the line manager as their ability to integrate strategic and operational level information. They are in close proximity to daily operations, their team and customers. The line manager is required to balance a range of structural and political interests without having sufficient power and authority to influence top management. Thus, they are required to balance their own interests with those of top management. Renwick (2003) points out that this role consists of a balancing of political and workload pressures which often militate against being able to prioritise people management and HRD issues sufficiently. Numerous commentators have highlighted that a lack of training in HRD may reduce its priority for line managers (Brewster & Soderstrom, 1994; de Jong, Leenders & Thijssen, 1999). Thornhill and Saunders (1998) argued that the rejection by line managers of HRD responsibilities is likely to negatively impact on the status of the HRD function and the perception of HRD amongst employees.

*Top Management*
There is support for the proposition that top management support and participation in HRD is one of the key preconditions for a strategically aligned HRD function. This support and involvement is likely to advance the status of HRD and ensure that it makes a significant contribution to the organisation's strategic plans (Brinkerhoff & Gill, 1994). Fricker (1994: 24) for example highlights that 'chairmen and chief executives need to recognise the value of learning as the primary force to facilitate and achieve change in their organisation'. He also argues that senior executives have a key role in ensuring that line managers share their commitment to HRD. The research evidence indicates that top management support, participation and involvement is frequently missing (Carnevale, 1990; Guest, King, Conway, Michie & Sheehan-Quinn, 2001). There is likely to be espoused support but this is less frequently followed up by action (Holton & Baldwin, 2003). The top management's leadership role requires them to match their espoused support with consistent demonstrable commitment (Baldwin & Magjuka, 1991). Dyer and Holder (1988), in the context of HRD, pointed out that the top

management are probably the most powerful of the counteracting forces. Budhwar (2000) argues that without top management support, human resource activities will fail to be part of the early stage of the strategic decision-making process.

## Information
Information in the context of a strategically aligned HRD function refers to the extent to which it has systems and processes in place to identify and gain insight into the issues that have a HRD solution. The literature highlights that data from various organisational levels is needed to decide which HRD goals and objectives should be given priority in order to align HRD activities with other organisational goals. The generation of this information may be secured through a number of processes, including training audits (Clardy, 2004), proactive and reactive training needs analyses and training evaluations processes (Yorks, 2005).

Gilley et al. (2002) point out that one of the best ways to develop a strategic partnership approach is to identify and audit HRD activities. They view the audit as a beneficial way of identifying the values and benefits of HRD interventions and thus determining if HRD activities are of value to stakeholders in meeting their goals.

Training needs analyses are central to the effective generation of data and information. They have value in determining which problems can be solved through HRD. Several HRD theories highlight that the competences which employees have need to be managed and controlled (Fomburn, Tichy & Devanna, 1984). The development of employees should be consistent with the general requirements imposed by the organisation. Indeed, Huselid (1995) highlights that the effectiveness of the organisation depends on the extent to which human resource strategies and business strategies fit together. Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992) argue that any strategic change in direction, adjustment of policy or procedures or change in structures and work systems must be assessed for its effects in terms of learning needs. The analysis of training and development needs helps to provide this necessary information. Rossett (1999) highlights that many HRD professionals fail to see needs analyses as an important activity. They are often likely to see it as a waste of time, energy and effort. Line managers and senior management often

also hold this view. Numerous commentators have highlighted the need to gain support for needs analyses (Rossett, 1992; Rummler & Brache, 1995) through the identification of internal sponsors and advocates. HRD professionals need to acknowledge that information comes from a variety of sources including internal sources such as top management, direct supervisors, employees and position description and external sources such as other similar organisations.

Various commentators criticise the lack of meaningful evaluation of training activities. Kirkpatrick (1994) highlights that many HRD specialists will think about doing more but will not do so for several reasons: thorough evaluation is not considered important or urgent; they lack the skills to perform it and there is no pressure from senior management to perform it. Kirkpatrick envisaged four levels of evaluation: participants' reactions, learning, application and results. Moller and Mallin (1996) found that lack of time is an important reason for not conducting evaluations. The lack of effective evaluation means that there is insufficient information to use for revising programmes and selling HRD to stakeholders.

**Formalisation (Consultation and Communication)**
Consultation and communication processes are essential elements of strategically aligned HRD. These elements refer to the approach that HRD specialists use to interact with key stakeholders. Central to the development and implementation of a partnership model is the need to develop collaborative relationships. Garavan et al. (2003) indicate that HRD professionals are more prone to utilising a single sovereign model of operation rather than a more networked model. The more effective HRD practitioners are more likely to network and form alliances with key internal stakeholders (Poell, Pluijmen & Van der Krogt, 2003; Tjepkema, ter Horst, Mulder & Scheerens, 2000).

Block (1999) and Gilley and Eggland (1992) highlight that HRD professionals need to recognise that clients bring considerable experience and are a valuable resource to be acknowledged and tapped. This may be difficult for some HRD professionals to realise or may arise due to power and politics. Evidence suggests that knowledge is used at the individual level for both control and defence (Brown & Woodland, 1999) and that if individuals perceive that power comes from the knowledge they possess, it is more than likely they will be less consultative and hoard the knowledge.

It is also likely that key internal stakeholders may resist consultation and joint-ownership. For example, line managers may resist consultation initiatives and fail to see the benefits. There may be a perception that HRD professionals do not understand the real business of the organisation and only serve to create a distraction rather than add value. It is also possible that the HRD professional may consider that line managers may not have the skills to provide valuable information and suggestions (Torrington & Hall, 1998). Mulder (1992) has reported that using managers as trainers, for example, is not without problems. Thijssen (1997) also supported the criticism of the manager as trainer as they have little time for these activities, are not trained for the role and are not paid for the task.

**Learning Culture and Climate**
Organisational culture and climate influences the diffusion of HRD and its ultimate effectiveness (Bates, Holton III & Seyler, 1997). Olsen (1998), for example, highlights that the existence of a positive culture will positively impact the transfer of learning. Rao (1999) highlights that specific elements of learning culture include a proactive orientation, trust, authenticity, openness, risk-taking and self-awareness. Bates (2001) defines a continuous learning culture as a reflection of an organisation's belief system that regards learning as a key responsibility of all employees. It also incorporates values, which support learning and its use. The general proposition holds that where positive values in respect of learning are widely shared throughout the organisation they have the potential to influence participation in training and perceptions that HRD can add value. Gilley and Maycunich Gilley (2003) are strong advocates of a learning culture. They argue that such cultures are the result of a collaborative effort between all stakeholders in the organisation. They identify a number of benefits that may be derived from having such a culture, including greater employee commitment, high performance, enhanced organisational capability and developmental readiness.

**HRD Goals, Objectives and Strategies**
The menu of HRD goals, objectives and strategies is considerable. HRD goals and objectives vary considerably in their reach and focus. Some interventions focus on skills, others on attitude change;

some are directed towards individuals and others towards groups. The reasons for participating in HRD programmes will vary considerably. Wognum (1995) and Rossett (1987), for example, suggest four major reasons for HRD. The reasons can focus on the improvement of work performance, the improvement of certain work practices and change and renewal in the organisation. Wognum and Mulder (1999) found that the main emphasis for HRD was for changing and renewing purposes, while improvement-related programmes came a close second.

The literature on the strategic integration of HRD highlights that it is first of all necessary for the organisation to recognise the need to strategically align HRD. The strategic alignment of HRD has both vertical and horizontal dimensions. Vertical alignment focuses on the relationship between HRD practices and strategy. Horizontal alignment focuses on the relationship between HRD and HRM practices. Vertical alignment requires a number of specific organisational responses. These may take the form of HRD representation at senior levels in the organisation, the formalisation of HRD policies and selection of appropriate strategies, the development of systems for information collection and consultation with stakeholders. It will also involve an increase in line managers' HRD responsibilities and clearly articulated HRD goals and objectives. These are important actors but of themselves insufficient. It also requires a commitment by the HRD professional to be strategic in outlook, to understand the key business issues and values and to possess effective business acumen including, where possible, line management experience. It also requires top management commitment to HRD and the development of a culture and climate appropriate to HRD. Horizontal alignment requires that HRD takes account of the overarching HRM approach and of specific HRD practices.

## CONTEXT OF STUDY

### Research Site
The Dublin Dental School and Hospital is an organisation that is associated with Trinity College Dublin and the Eastern Regional

Health Authority. The original institution, "The Incorporated Dental Hospital of Ireland", was established in 1884. The Dublin Dental Hospital Board, established in 1963, was responsible for collaborating with the three dental schools in Dublin: Trinity College Dublin; University College Dublin; and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, in the provision of clinical training. In the 1970s these three dental schools were amalgamated into one School of Dental Science, Trinity College Dublin. The Dublin Dental Hospital Board governs the Dublin Dental Hospital. This is a Statutory Body appointed by, and answerable to, the Department of Health and Children. The Dublin Dental Hospital Board is the employing authority for all staff, including the clinical academic staff who also hold full academic appointments with the University of Dublin, Trinity College, which bears academic responsibility for the standards of education and research. The Dublin Dental School and Hospital's mission statement identifies it as 'a centre of excellence in patient care, education and research, provided in a safe environment, which enhances the learning experience of our students and the delivery of care to patients in an integrated and balanced way. This is achieved by the effective use of the available resources and in response to the needs of the community through governance, partnership, investment in our staff, valuing diversity and the integration of technology.'[1] The School and Hospital employs approximately 315 people in professional, technical, managerial and administrative roles.

We chose this site due primarily to the challenges it is currently experiencing, as a public sector organisation, in its internal and external environment and the specific purposeful initiatives taken by the HR manager to repositioning training and development to respond to these changes. The training and development function is incorporated within the HR function. The HR function reports directly to the CEO.

**Methodology and Fieldwork**
The study utilised both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The particular methods used were structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. These multiple methods were used to enhance the validity of the findings reported.

*Questionnaire*

The structured questionnaire included published measures of strategic integration, effectiveness of systems of transfer and evaluation and perceptions of the value of HRD. Table 8.1 provides a summary of the scale items utilised in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was administered to all 315 employees. 114 questionnaires were returned. This represents a response rate of 30 per cent.

**Table 8.1: Details of Questionnaire Variables**

| Measures[2] | Measure Description | Sample Item | Reliability |
|---|---|---|---|
| Strategic Integration, Involvement & Support of Management | This twelve-item scale focused on how respondents perceived that the HRD system was strategically integrated, encouraged involve-ment and had support from management. A Five-Point Likert scale is utilised. | 'Even during budget cuts, your department's top managers do all they can to preserve training and development opportunities for their employees' | .95 |
| Effectiveness of Systems for Evaluation and Learning Transfer | This seven-item scale measured respondents' per-ceptions of the effectiveness of evaluation and learning transfer processes. A Five-Point Likert scale is utilised. | 'After employees receive training and development, they are asked to provide feed-back on what material they put into practice in their job' | .91 |
| Perceived Value of the HRD Function | This five-item scale measured perceptions of the value of the HRD system. A Five-Point Likert scale is utilised. | 'The training and supported by the department are worth the time and money spent on them' | .89 |

**Exhibit 1: Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

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**Respondent Participation and Involvement**
Outline what training and development (T&D) events you have undertaken in DDS&H since September 2003
What is your evaluation/opinion on these interventions (take one intervention at a time)
  • Your interest in attending each intervention
  • Quality of each intervention
  • Relevance to your job
  • Achievement of programme objectives

**Transfer of Learning**
Have you had the opportunity to put the knowledge/skills gained from each/any of these interventions into practice in your work? Can you describe these opportunities?
  • Describe any changes in behaviour/changes in how you approach your work.
  • What would you have done in this instance before attending the programme?
  • What was the effect of the action/behaviour on your overall performance?
Explain why you believe this change in behaviour is due to the specific-programme.
Do you think each programme was a good investment for the organisation? Why?

**Facilitators and Inhibitors to Learning Transfer**
What facilitated your ability to put the knowledge/skills gained from the programme into action at work?
What factors hindered your ability to put the knowledge/skills you learnt on the programme into practice at work?

**Value and Effectiveness of Training and Development Function**
In your opinion how important is training and development to the organisation's success? Explain.
In your opinion how important is training and development to enabling you achieve your objectives? Explain.
In your opinion how important is training and development to your superiors? Explain.
Overall, how satisfied are you with the training and development provided for you by the organisation? Explain.

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*Structured Interviews*
We selected a sample of forty employees to participate in an interview. Over 60 per cent of the interview participants were non-management,

consisting of technical, operational and nursing staff (47.5 per cent) and administrative staff (12.5 per cent). 37.5 per cent of the interview participants were at management level: senior managers, consultants and academics (27.5 per cent) and line managers and team leaders (10 per cent). The interviews ranged in length from twenty to forty minutes. Interviews were used to solicit perceptions and evaluations of various dimensions of the strategic integration of HRD. Exhibit 1 outlines the interview questions.

*Analysis of Data*
The questionnaire data was analysed using SPSS. We calculated means and standard deviations for all items included in the study. We also calculated the reliability of each scale item. The interviews were content-analysed to identify key themes. We identified the respondents' level in the organisation.

*Sample Description*
Over 37 per cent of the respondents were management level, representing senior management, consultants and academics (18.9 per cent) and line managers and team leaders (18.9 per cent). Over 62 per cent of the respondents were non-management. Non-management categories included technical, operational and nursing staff (41.4 per cent) and administrative staff (20.7 per cent). 63 per cent of the sample were female. Table 8.2 provides further details on the study sample.

Table 8.2: Sample Details (n=114)

| Organisation Tenure | | Highest Obtained Qualification | | Age | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| < 1 Year | 14% | Junior Certificate | 7% | 16–24 | 4% |
| 1–3 Years | 26% | Leaving Certificate | 12% | 25–34 | 43% |
| 4–6 Years | 15% | Higher Certificate | 10% | 35–44 | 15% |
| 7–10 Years | 10% | Diploma | 14% | 45–54 | 25% |
| 10+ Years | 25% | Degree | 14% | 55+ | 3% |
| | | Post-Graduate Diploma | 5% | | |
| | | Masters | 7% | | |
| | | PhD | 6% | | |

## THE STUDY FINDINGS

**Strategic Alignment Involvement and
Support by Management of HRD**
Table 8.3 summarises the perceptions of managers concerning strate-
gic alignment, involvement and support by management of HRD.
Means and standard deviations are presented for all employees and
for manager and non-manager groups. The analysis indicates that all
of the means are above the midpoint. There are some significant
differences in perceptions between manager and non-manager
employees. The highest means concern strategic alignment and
support of senior managers for HRD. Both managers and non-
manager respondents perceived that top management viewed training
and development as a means of helping the department achieve its
mission [M = 3.87]. Managers were more likely to perceive that top
managers strongly supported the development of new skills and
knowledge among all levels of employee [M Managers = 4.02; M
Non-managers = 3.72]. Both managers and non-managers perceived
that the department supports employees in their efforts to continu-
ously improve knowledge and skills [M = 3.63]. Managers were
more likely to perceive that during budget cuts top managers would
do all they could to maintain training and development opportunities
for employees [M Managers = 3.88; M Non-managers = 3.52]. The
lowest means are concerned with provision of integrated on-the-job
learning activities and provision of a broad range of training and
development activities. Respondents indicated that learning activities
are less effectively integrated into work activities [M = 3.06] and that
the organisation provides a range of learning activities [M = 3.04].
Managers and non-manager respondents differ significantly in their
perceptions of these aspects of HRD. Overall the questionnaire data
reveals that respondents perceived that top management are
supportive but not necessarily as involved in HRD. They do seek to
achieve the strategic integration of HRD with the mission and goals
of the organisation and jobs.

*Strategic Integration*
Respondents provided observations, which indicate that senior man-
agement are concerned with integrating HRD into organisational goals

**Table 8.3: Perceptions of Strategic Alignment, Involvement and Support of Management**

| Scale Items | All Levels of Employees (n=114) | | Management Only (n=42) | | Non-Management Only (n=69) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | S. D. | Mean | S. D. | Mean | S. D. |
| Top managers see T&D as an important way of helping the department achieve its mission | 3.87 | 1.019 | 4.00 | 1.104 | 3.78 | 0.960 |
| Top managers show commitment to T&D by spending time promoting and delivering it | 3.55 | 1.131 | 3.73 | 1.073 | 3.47 | 1.126 |
| Top managers strongly support the development of new skills and knowledge among all levels of employees | 3.81 | 1.179 | 4.02 | 1.093 | 3.72 | 1.183 |
| Even during budget cuts your top managers do all they can to maintain T&D opportunities for their employees | 3.67 | 1.120 | 3.88 | 1.131 | 3.52 | .097 |
| The kinds of T&D activities that are encouraged relate to what top managers are trying to accomplish for your department | 3.61 | 1.145 | 3.64 | 1.224 | 3.59 | 1.102 |
| Top managers help their employees meet personal T&D goals and needs | 3.36 | 1.128 | 3.64 | 1.100 | 3.18 | 1.117 |
| Top managers are closely involved in determining the department's T&D goals and activities | 3.48 | 1.115 | 3.67 | 1.162 | 3.36 | 1.074 |

*(Continued)*

**Table 8.3:** (*Continued*)

| Scale Items | All Levels of Employees (n=114) | | Management Only (n=42) | | Non-Management Only (n=69) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | S. D. | Mean | S. D. | Mean | S. D. |
| The department provides a programme of T&D activities that meet the needs of employees. | 3.24 | 1.156 | 3.49 | 1.121 | 3.09 | 1.160 |
| Structured learning activities are built into the job so that employees are constantly learning | 3.06 | 1.225 | 3.33 | 1.183 | 2.88 | 1.228 |
| Department managers personally provide T&D for their employees | 3.33 | 1.106 | 3.66 | 0.998 | 3.11 | 1.127 |
| The department offers a broad selection of courses and other T&D activities | 3.04 | 1.117 | 3.17 | 1.175 | 2.96 | 1.081 |
| In general, the department supports me in my efforts to continuously improve my knowledge and skills | 3.63 | 0.969 | 3.77 | 0.770 | 3.54 | 1.070 |
| **Overall Scale** | **3.45** | **0.899** | **3.66** | **1.095** | **3.35** | **1.111** |

**Exhibit 2: Perceptions of Strategic Integration**

*'Training and development is vital for the organisation's success' (Team Leader)*

*'Training and development needs to be set into context and signposted at every stage' (Manager)*

*'Staff need to be consulted about their needs' (Manager)*

*'Any training and development needs to constantly focus on organisational objectives' (Consultant)*

and objectives and the training and development needs of employees. Exhibit 2 provides examples of perceptions of strategic integration.

*Support and Involvement*
The interview data reveals significant conflicts in the perceptions of respondents concerning the support and involvement of senior managers in HRD. They provided more confident assertions of support rather than involvement. Interview respondents provided specific examples of where they perceived that senior management was supportive of HRD. These include actions by Department heads to organise specific training initiatives, actions to facilitate learning transfer, the allocation of sufficient time for training and development activities and the customisation of training initiatives to suit the needs of the organisation.

Respondents made very clear distinctions between the supportive behaviours of senior managers and their active involvement in decisions concerning HRD. Some managers were verbally very supportive but not actively involved. Respondents in a number of cases mentioned the lack of follow up, lack of assistance in transferring learning; managers did not initiate involvement in training and development and did not prepare personal development plans with employees. Respondents also indicated that decisions concerning participant selection for training and development were made in an arbitrary manner. This was in some cases attributed as much to the approach taken by HR to fill courses as it was to the role of managers in making decisions concerning selections for training and development.[3]

A significant proportion of respondents attributed the lack of active involvement of senior managers in training and development to a multiplicity of contextual factors including scheduling difficulties, lack of

time, union issues, the perception that management felt threatened and concerns that the organisation may lose their investment in training if the employee leaves the organisation.

The interview data is also illuminating concerning the provision of on-the-job training and pre-programme support. A significant proportion of interview respondents indicated that they commenced their role or job without any training. If they required help they could observe co-workers. Employees were given relatively little scope to influence training and development decisions. They indicated that senior management or the human resources department invariably made decisions concerning training and development. In some cases there were opportunities for self-selection. The PDP (personal development planning)[4] initiative did however improve the level of involvement by employees in training and development decisions. Exhibit 3 presents the responses of respondents on various dimensions of support and involvement.

**Effectiveness of Systems of Evaluation and
Learning Transfer**
Table 8.4 summarises the perceptions of respondents on a number of items related to the evaluation of HRD and learning transfer within the organisation.

The questionnaire data reveals that evaluation processes are mixed in terms of sophistication and level of evaluation undertaken. Both manager and non-manager respondents perceived that employees are asked to provide feedback outlining their satisfaction with the training [M = 3.57], however managers are less likely to be asked to provide feedback on the effectiveness of training provided to their employees [M = 3.03]. The analysis also reveals that both managers and employees perceived that they are held accountable for transferring learning.

*Systems Evaluation*
The interview data also helps explain some of these findings further. The responses indicate that the sophistication of evaluation is at the lower end. There is also a level of realism concerning the feasibility of more sophisticated evaluation. Evaluation was a relatively new addition to the HRD system and the responses support the view that managers play a limited role in making systematic evaluations of

### Exhibit 3: Participants Perceptions of Support and Involvement by Management

**Perceptions of Involvement and Support**
'Management are very proactive and positive about training and development, particularly HR. There seems to be a very positive attitude to developing people in the organisation over the last 2 years' (Administrator)
'There is a good level of management "buy-in" to training' (Manager)

**Evidence of Supportive Management Behaviour**
'The team leader runs an induction programme and my manager runs relevant technical programmes for the team' (Technician)
'My manager is excellent and helps people put their learning into action' (Technician)

**Evidence of Lack of Support**
'[Some levels of management] are co-operative but won't get involved' (Officer)
'I will get a lot of support from my manager but I will have to drive it. I need support to come from the top down in case I don't see some areas [for development]' (Manager)
'The problem [with putting it into practice] is getting the follow up [from manager]' (Administrator)
'I was having my PDP with my manager and she was taking all the notes and she was supposed to send me all the notes. After three weeks I am still waiting for my SMART goals... I am very unhappy about the meeting... I had the feeling she wasn't following through on what she was saying' (Officer)

**Ineffective Selection for Interventions**
'They [managers] need to focus on the person and the job they are doing rather than throw them out [throw employees onto programmes]. It should be discussed more, a more collaborative decision regarding what I do and don't attend' (Officer)
'My manager picks which ones I should go on when she could be missing out on ones I think I need myself, I should be able to choose courses' (Officer)
'I can't follow through on some of the courses because of my job [courses not applicable to job]' (Officer)
'I have seen on a quarterly basis the list of training courses they ran by email. One of the concerns I have is that sometimes once the email goes out, there seems to be a rush to fill places and you are told we [HR] want 2 people from your team...I put people on a course that looking back now wasn't the right thing to do...after the person attended the course we found out that she should have attended another course first' (Manager)

**Possible Explanations for Perceived Levels of Support**
'She [manager] would be quite interested in having us all trained but it doesn't work that way. We would be the busiest part of the hospital so if one of us is missing, the others have to carry the extra weight' (Officer)
'With team-building it was suggested we send all our team. But who was going to run the department. It's not feasible' (Manager)
'Managers are very supportive and very anxious that we do it [training]. It's the Personal Development Planning thing' (Officer)

Table 8.4: Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Systems for Evaluation and Learning Transfer

| Scale Items | All Levels of Employees (n=114) | | Management Only (n=42) | | Non-Management Only (n=69) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | S. D. | Mean | S. D. | Mean | S. D. |
| Employees are held accountable for using what they've learned in their T&D activities back on the job | 3.32 | 1.056 | 3.11 | 1.051 | 3.45 | 1.048 |
| Managers are held accountable for following up and encouraging their employees to apply what they've learned through training back on the job | 3.28 | 1.161 | 3.29 | 1.315 | 3.27 | 1.060 |
| After employees receive T&D they are asked to provide feedback on their satisfaction with the course | 3.57 | 1.009 | 3.57 | 1.092 | 3.56 | 0.964 |
| After employees receive T&D they are asked to provide feedback on how much they have learned | 3.20 | 1.013 | 3.12 | 1.122 | 3.25 | 0.950 |
| After employees receive T&D they are asked to provide feedback on what material they put into practice in their job | 3.11 | 0.994 | 2.94 | 1.179 | 3.22 | 0.854 |
| Employees are asked to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the T&D that their managers received | 2.94 | 1.095 | 2.97 | 1.185 | 2.92 | 1.045 |
| Managers are asked to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the T&D that their employees received | 3.03 | 1.143 | 3.09 | 1.269 | 2.98 | 1.037 |
| Overall Scale | 3.18 | 0.882 | 3.15 | 1.173 | 3.23 | 0.994 |

employee performance post-training. The majority of the evaluation that takes place is informal in nature. Exhibit 4 provides a summary of qualitative perceptions on systems of evaluation.

### Facilitation of Learning Transfer

Respondents identified a number of practical strategies that were used by the organisation to facilitate learning transfer. These included follow-up discussions with managers, the provision of role-play and feedback during training programmes, the provision of assistance by managers to transfer learning, managers requesting feedback on what took place during the programme and the preparation of post-training action plans.

Barriers to transfer typically involved the lack of time to implement learning, difficulties in putting theory into practice, the lack of follow-up by the manager, a lack of follow-up by the HR department and a lack of scope in the current job to utilise knowledge and skills. Respondents also highlight the lack of management willingness to change practices. In general, the responses suggest that the involvement of managers is an important dimension of effective learning transfer. Involvement equates to collaborative processes and agreement on ways to implement learning. Exhibit 5 provides a summary of qualitative responses regarding the facilitators and inhibitors of learning transfer.

**Exhibit 4: Respondents' Perceptions of Systems of Evaluation**

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**Perceptions of Current Evaluation System**

'Every time I've been on a course [my manager] asks me what was covered and how can you use what you learnt in your job. She has been very supportive' (Nurse)

'In relation to the benefit/value of training, it is currently very difficult to assess. It needs to be benchmarked so that the organisation can gauge the return financially and on other levels, e.g. level of staff motivation, decreased absenteeism etc.' (Manager)

'They need to look into [further] evaluation of training' (Manager)

**Evidence of Informal Post-Training Evaluations**

'I feel my staff work more efficiently as a team now [post team-building programme]' (Manager)

'My two girls have come on immensely and I would think it's due to all the courses' (Senior Administrator)

**Exhibit 5: Perceptions of Facilitators and Inhibitors
of Learning Transfer**

*Facilitators of Learning Transfer*
'Training is fantastic but I think that everybody has to make it their own...You
have to take ownership of your department and adapt it [training and devel-
opment activities provided by the HR department] to suit your department. It's
worked in my department and I've gotten brilliant results from it' (Manager)
'My manager is excellent and helps people put their learning into action'
(Technician)
'At the Tuesday morning meetings we are asked to give feedback on courses
and we write up a report so others can read on what we've done' (Nurse)

*Evidence of Learning Transfer*
'Employee X would always have been very volatile, as in very unhelpful
and saying [to a customer] she maybe wouldn't have such a thing [that
customer requested]. But now [post-training on customer care] she is saying
"well hang on now, we don't have any at the moment but I will go down to
stores and see what happened and what the problem is and I will get back
to you." They [the customer] go away a little happier' (Manager)
'They [managers] went through the PDP training. It's better now than the
eight month review we did when I was working as an officer' (Senior Nurse)
'Now [post-training on team building] I will cover other areas...Say I was
finished my work I would go over and help them [others in team], even
though it has nothing to do with what I am doing but I can slot into any
place...before the course I might be saying I couldn't cover such an area.
The course helped me [on] how to deal with it better. It changed my attitude'
(Officer on team building course)

*Barriers to Learning Transfer*
'About three months ago I attended a programme on feedback and mentor-
ship for students but there has been no follow-through on this' (Consultant)
'A lot of it is organisational behaviour-based. The theory and examples are
based on the more private industry and not within the remit of the public
sector because we are very different. I felt that in training it was hard to
bring it back to your domain' (Manager)
'I'm facing a wall. I don't deal with the public anymore...I can't put the
things [from the customer care programme] into practice like if I was at the
front desk' (Officer)

## The Contribution of HRD to the Organisation
Table 8.5 summarises the perceptions of respondents concerning the
contribution of HRD to the organisation. Respondents perceived
that time spent on training and development is time well spent

Table 8.5: Perceptions of Contribution of HRD

| Scale Items | All Levels of Employees (n=114) | | Management Only (n=42) | | Non-Management Only (n=69) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | S. D. | Mean | S. D. | Mean | S. D. |
| T&D activities provide learning that is practical for use on the job | 3.79 | 0.846 | 3.56 | 0.998 | 3.95 | 0.699 |
| T&D gives employees an opportunity to learn the skills and behaviours that will help them to get rewarded and promoted | **3.52** | 1.017 | **3.36** | 1.099 | **3.61** | 0.959 |
| The T&D activities supported by the department are worth the time and money spent on them | 3.78 | 0.929 | 3.83 | 0.985 | 3.75 | 0.899 |
| The T&D activities supported by the organisation are worth the time and money spent on them | 3.70 | 0.937 | 3.76 | 0.969 | 3.67 | 0.924 |
| The time I spend on T&D is time well spent | **4.03** | 0.785 | **4.00** | 0.939 | **4.05** | 0.678 |
| **Overall Scale** | **3.76** | **0.748** | **3.70** | **0.998** | **3.81** | **0.832** |

[M = 4.03]. They also perceived that the training and development activities supported by the organisation are worth the time and money spent on them [M = 3.78]. Non-managerial employees had more positive perceptions concerning the extent to which training and development provides opportunities for employees to learn the skills and behaviour that will help them to get rewarded and promoted [M Managers = 3.36; M Non-managers = 3.61]. Non-managerial employees had more positive perceptions that training and development provides learning that has direct application to the job [M Managers = 3.56; M Non-managers = 3.95]. Overall the respondents had positive perceptions on the value of training and development to the organisation.

The interviews revealed further information on the respondents' perceptions of the contribution and value of HRD. Management respondents reported positive perceptions of the contribution of training and development to the organisation and individual departments. Managers are likely to perceive that training and development is less valuable where it is not customised to the organisation, there is a lack of information concerning the purposes of training, it is not evaluated and the follow-up systems are ineffective.

Non-managerial employees did acknowledge that training and development can contribute to organisational success, more productivity and enhanced service to customers. They also emphasised that training and development was of benefit to them. They placed emphasis on enhanced job satisfaction and the need to undertake training and development, which leads to certification. Training and development is more likely to be perceived as valuable when it is integrated with personal and organisational objectives, when it meets aspects of the employee's psychological contract and when it is perceived as relevant to the current or future context.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND STUDY LIMITATIONS

This study investigated the perceptions of how a public sector organisation has sought to integrate HRD with the strategic priorities of the organisation, the role of manager support and involvement in HRD and the effectiveness of learning transfer and evaluation systems.

**Exhibit 6: Perceptions of the Contribution of Training and Development**

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**Management Perceptions of the Value of HRD**

'They [management] know that training and development is vital to holding onto people' (Administrator)

'The PDP training will pay off in the long run because of the positive motivational spin-offs' (Team Leader)

'The organisation gets a good return on its investment in training. There is a direct return when people are still with us because they are more effective in their jobs. In addition those who left the organisation were also useful in that they provide a secondary return by providing contacts and we can call in a favour from them' (Consultant)

'The central focus needs to be on patients and the central ethos of the organisation needs to be refocused on this. Top-down change is needed and training and development can then help to cement this change' (Consultant)

**Factors likely to Reduce Perceptions of Value**

'They [trainers] need to use more DDS&H-relevant examples' (Senior Administrator)

'I'm concerned that people may go on courses but not implement the learning' (Consultant)

**Non-Management Perceptions of Value**

'Training is very important because my last job was dead-end and offered no hope for advancement. If people feel that the organisation is interested in its workers then people will work harder and progress more' (Technician)

'It's well worth the investment because you need to invest in your people to develop the organisation' (Administrator)

'Very [important]. If your staff are well trained you are getting a better service' (Nurse)

'Training and development is integral to helping me to achieve my objectives' (Administrator)

'It was good. It gave me more confidence to deal with students and dentists' (Nurse)

'It was very useful and practical. It helps me to analyse problems better and explore options and solutions rather than being overwhelmed by the problem' (Nurse)

'I'm able to deal with customers and problems more myself now rather than phoning someone for help' (Officer)

**Possible Explanations for Perceptions of Value**

'I think others in my area feel like, sure, we know these people skills already, we would be a little cynical' (Officer)

> *'I think a lot of that [people management] comes naturally. Yes it would be nice to get some training in them [staff management, interpersonal skills, organisational skills] but I wouldn't jump on it and go seeking them'* *(Officer)*
>
> **Factors of Importance to Non-Management Perceptions of Value of Training & Development**
> *'I would expect them [trainers] to give you a basic level training to get you into the job and then...they can build on that to a different level...so you can do basic management and then advanced management. This is what I thought would happen'* *(Assistant)*
> *'Any training and development needs to constantly focus on organisational objectives'* *(Consultant)*
> *'They need to open it up... some of them [training] is more geared to certain disciplines in the hospital'* *(Manager)*

The study findings reveal that senior management involvement in HRD is essential for perceived strategic integration. Management espoused support for HRD and there appeared to be a corporate cultural commitment to HRD. However, it would seem that this support and commitment does not always extend beyond acting as a point of contact for information on training initiatives, authorising attendance and providing passive support. While this is important and valued, it was not sufficient. There are inconsistent perceptions concerning systems of learning transfer. However, the extent of management involvement and support distinguished between respondents who perceived the systems positively and those who perceived them negatively. Respondents recognised and valued the systems in place for conducting level one evaluations and emphasised the need for systems to be developed to enable other levels of evaluation. The overall perception is that HRD adds value. However, a number of factors were identified related to the strategic integration processes, including systems and processes in place for pre-programme support, training needs analysis, programme design and post-programme support, which may diminish perceptions of integration.

The transition from a traditional training and development function with a strong focus on operational and tactical concerns to a more strategically integrated HRD function occurs at a number of different levels. At one level it is possible to talk about more

superficial changes, which more likely involve the positioning of HRD within the overall managerial hierarchy and the nature of reporting relationships. These types of changes are of themselves insufficient. A more fundamental shift is required in the form of the core beliefs and values of managers and employees and particularly the actions of employees and managers in respect of training and development pre- and post-training. These latter elements usually prove more difficult to measure and understand. The HRD specialist must be committed to understanding the business, s/he must have a strong relationship with line managers and a broad base of business knowledge. Ultimately the development of a strategically integrated HRD function is related to the enhancement of the organisation. This involves processes that embed learning and knowledge-sharing as a key concern for all employees and a situation where learning is automatically considered a source of competitive advantage.

The study indicates that while managers and employees share some common concerns about the contribution of training and development, the priorities of senior managers and employees inevitably differ. Managers are more concerned with the organisation level contribution whereas employees focus on individual level concerns. Human resource development is a multi-level concept involving strategic, tactical, operational and individual priorities. These various levels emphasise differing priorities and perspectives and they are unlikely to be always compatible.

The study findings highlight a number of important implications concerning the management of HRD and the delivery of training and development programmes. The existence of a clearly formulated and well articulated HRD strategy and policy will influence employees' and managers' perceptions and attitudes towards HRD. The existence of well-articulated HRD policy and strategy are of themselves insufficient. These elements can be regarded as statements of intent. What employees look for is evidence of action. The way in which management communicates HRD values and implement HRD practices will impact the extent of diffusion of training and development practices. Managers need to pay close attention to the environment in which a particular training or learning intervention occurs. Various aspects of the workplace need to be given special

consideration. These include providing learners with the necessary time, money, equipment, facilities and opportunities for the training and taking deliberate steps to ensure that employees believe the resources provided are sufficient. Employees are less likely to value training and development where they perceive that insufficient resources are available. Employees must perceive that the training and development has value.

The importance of senior and line management commitment is of considerable significance. Various characteristics of the HRD function are important here. The quantitative analyses indicated considerable variation in perceptions between managers and non-managers in terms of what constitutes support. The qualitative analyses does suggest that where the key stakeholders had positive perceptions concerning the levels of support, involvement and commitment of key organisational members, they were more likely to give more favourable evaluations of the effectiveness of training and development. If organisations are to achieve an effective strategic alignment of training and development then it is important that managers have positive attitudes towards HRD. As part of the decentralisation of HRD, line managers are increasingly required to fulfil HRD activities. They must believe in the value of this type of activity, otherwise that are unlikely to perform these HRD activities. Tensions and ambiguities exist regarding the role of line managers in involving and supporting employees in respect of HRD. Line managers appear not to be perceived as a barrier per se, however there is evidence that line managers may not act as proactive agents providing HRD. It is not sufficient alone to espouse policies that focus on the inclusion of line managers in the training and development process. They are not a guarantee that managers will follow up their words with actions.

The change process that has occurred within the study organisation is still at a relatively early stage. This transition process will continue to be emergent. It must be incremental given the complexity of the change that is desired and the context within which the change is taking place. It takes time for key stakeholders to adapt to a new HRD philosophy and new HRD policies, structures, relationships and expectations. It is possible that the initial vision of a new approach to HRD may not actually emerge as anticipated and other unanticipated practices may develop.

1 Dublin Dental School and Hospital internal document.

2 Taken from Holder Kunder (1998).

3 The HR manager stated that phase one of the plan for improving the training and development system in DDS&H was to offer a selection of training programmes which had been identified through a training needs analysis as required by the organisation. Managers could then decide how many and what members of their staff to send on the programmes. As there was no culture of training and development in DDS&H, she sometimes made it compulsory to send a specific number of staff. She hoped this would begin the introduction of a culture of training and development. One respondent did identify that her change in attitude towards training was due to being required to participate in the PDP training programme.

4 PDP is a reference to the Personal Development Planning programme. This programme is aimed at encouraging collaboration between employees and their managers for the purposes of identifying training needs.

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