Reflection Paper

2014 AHRD International Conference in the Americas

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Throughout the 2014 AHRD conference, I have reflected on several aspects and gained great inspirations. Before attending the conference, I used to despise online technology and new innovations about HRD. I feel that traditional learning and research methods are the leading strategies and irreplaceable in the HRD field. However, D. Hrubec states that besides traditional methods, there are numerous emerging methods and technologies available to help HRD professionals prepare and equip employees to better do their jobs (personal communication, February 21, 2014). In addition, according to Hrubec, Han, and Lee (2014), besides traditional learning methods, technology-based learning methods are becoming prevalent and more widespread in recent years. After attending Hrubec's presentation, I reflect new technologies allow employees to have a wide range of choices based on their schedules and regional diversity, and have more personalized designs which encourage employees' self-directed study.

However, according to L. P. Thomson, it is difficult for employees to corporate teamwork, and some online information can be ambiguous to trainees (personal communication, February 21, 2014). In addition, according to D. Hrubec's statement, every technique has its own advantages and limitations, and it could be daunting to determine which methods to use and when to use them (personal communication, February 21, 2014). After discussing with D. Hrubec, we reached an agreement that using several methods for training design and operation could be the most effective way to help employees learn and retain information. Moreover, training methods play an important role in an organization. By using appropriate methods, organizations can not only help employees gain skills and knowledge, but also benefit companies to attract potential talents and select the most fit. In this case, I reflect although human interaction will always remain a key component of workplace training, technological forms of

training help enhance traditional trainings. Moreover, HRD professionals need to combine the various methods into an effective blended learning approach.

On top of that, I really enjoyed the innovative session, which provides participants with a sharing-friendly environment and brings great ideas and inspirations. During the conference, I attended the "Big Data" innovative session, and gained several new insights on online database. According to Microsoft, big data is "increasingly used to describe the process of applying serious computing power….seriously massive and often highly complex sets of information" (MIT Technology Review, 2013, para 10). Before the innovative session, I basically had no idea about big data, and S. Munn provides me with a brief outline of this data-oriented method. According to S. Munn, big data has four characteristics, which are commonly referred to as the 4Vs (personal communication, February 20, 2014): The first V is volume as refers to the huge amount of data. The second V is velocity and refers to the speed in which big data is generated. The third V is variety and refers to the variety sources of big data. The last V is veracity as refers to the reliability of data and the need to assess accuracy of data (Marr, 2013).

However, after walking away from this session, I have left with more questions than answers of the applications of big data. From my understanding, the traditional ways of collecting data, such as interview and questionnaires, are more effective and accurate techniques used in HRD researches. In this case, I discussed with S. W. Yoon during the lunch time. He agrees with my concerns that it could be difficult to ensure the accuracy of the sources of big data. However, he states every method has its own limitations and advantages, and data involved in the big data system are already well assembled, and do not require access to respondents or subjects (S. W. Yoon, personal communication, February 20, 2014). In addition, many types

of information about the social and behavioral world have been collected and are available to

researchers via big data (S. W. Yoon, personal communication, February 20, 2014). In this case,

I reflect that although achieving sound big data analytics still needs a long way to go, big data

offers a great opportunity for HRD professionals to use a variety of data sources to help make

informed decisions in the workplace. Moreover, as data involved in big data could not be

relatively accurate just because a government agency or other source gathered the original data.

Therefore, HRD professionals must be concerned with validity and reliability, as well as with

some problems unique to this technique.

In addition, due to the emergence of convenient, high-speed Internet technologies, people

who choose on-line learning as their primary learning method is extremely popular nowadays. In

this case, most of the sessions I have participated are related to on-line learning and web-based

teaching methods. When I attended T. Lee's presentation about learning through web-based

authoring tools, I was amazed at the richness and variety of web-based learning tools. During the

discussion of Lee's presentation, we concludes that although on-line learning is categorized

according to one of the delivery methods of distance education, the features of on-line learning

are extremely different from traditional commercial television broadcast or telecommunication

courses. Furthermore, I reflect quality of online teaching, however, has often been uneven and is

a key area that requests more attentions if this fast-growing medium is ultimately going to serve

well the needs and interests of adults learners.

Moreover, another takeaway from T. Lee's presentation is that self-directed learning

(SDL) is an important factor to reach the successes of on-line learning (personal communication,

February 22, 2014). According to Sharpe and Kelley (2013), SDL allows employees taking in

charge of every aspect of their learning. I believe this type of learning can boost motivated employees to learn better and achieve their personal goals. However, for employees with no motivation to learn, self-directed learning may confuse them and lead to a discouraging result (Carla, personal communication, February 22, 2014). From my personal experience, to solve this problem, I suggest to create a CD plan to help employees find out their goals and inner needs of learning. An all-sided CD plan allows employees identify their goals by considering the company's needs, and at the same time, leading them to a clear career path and leaning enthusiasm.

However, although mapping out a plan might help get some individuals on a path of development, it would not motivate employees to learn or boost their self-detection (T. Lee, personal communication, February 22, 2014). According to Sharpe and Kelley (2014), the lack of awareness about what skills to possess is one of the reasons why some employees do not have motivations or self-directions. In this case, I reflect teachers can awaken employees' inner needs and boost them to learn with passion by facilitating employees to understand what skills they need. However, mapping a CD plan is not a one-size-fit-all approach for every employee, and organizations need to add coercive measures and incentive measures into their training design and options.

Furthermore, according to Akobo (2014), organizations value diversity management as a core strategy for global positioning and competitive advantage, and HRD professionals should find ways to apply HRD theory and practice into diversity management. During Akobo's presentation, one of the participants states that diversity can be a source of strength in the workplace, as well as a source of strength in employee training (personal communication,

February 21, 2014). I reflect that not only organizational level needs to value workplace diversity, but also trainers and training designers need to take differences into consideration. Moreover, I believe different groups of people have various learning styles and levels of learning efficiency. For instance, younger generation need more control over their learning experience, and are more goal-oriented. On the other hand, people from the baby boomer generation enjoy learning from their own experience, and need more time to digest new knowledge.

However, according to V. Arghode, all adult learners share things in common, as they all resist being forced, judged, or embarrassed during the training process (personal communication, February 20, 2014). In this case, I reflect trainers should be patient, and take the pace of class slow and flexible. And it is important for HRD professionals to pay close attention to their employees' emotional and psychological safety. And from my personal experience, except for cultural diversity, age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability are also potential sources of difference. In this case, it is also important for training developers and trainers to recognize employees as individual human beings with a variety of characteristics, personalities, needs, motivations, skills, and experiences.

In addition, S. W. Yoon states that diversity trainings bring opportunities for different generations to learn from each other, and help individuals reach their own potentials (personal communication, February 20, 2014). Moreover, according to Scott, most of the organizations have confronted impending retirement of the Baby Boomer generation and an aging workforce (2007). In this case, I reflect the challenge to retain the existing knowledge, experience, and enterprise confidential information of top talents becomes more and more important. I believe HRD professionals should not only support and focus on generational diversity, but also form a

sharing-friendly environment. In this way, experienced professional talents could have a chance to share their experience with newcomers, and maintain their valuable knowledge within their organization.

Last but not least, I have learned a great deal from the AHRD conference which made me think this was one conference I should try to get to every year. This conference helps attendances absorb presenters' introductory inputs, and transfer the information into listeners' own outputs. And it is not only helps me share many insights with others, but also brings great fun, and helps me get to meet lots of people in the field of HRD. Moreover, by focusing on other participants' valuable thoughts, I start to understand what the main areas of HRD studies are about, what is the similarity and peculiarity between them, and also why they are all so important. It was a wonderful experience for me to go over and pass on to others who have not had the chance to attend.

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