Teaching Human Resource Development to Human Resource Management Students: Cultivating the Blending of Management Development Methods in the Online Learning Environment

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Abstract. Historically from the time of the Hawthorne Studies to 21st century, most managerial and business programs of study have focused on the management of employees. However, as businesses and industries have evolved over the years, the needs of employers, as well as the skills of employees have changed. Consequently, there has been a strong focus on employees in a marketplace today which is competing with a shrinking workforce, as predicted by the Hudson Institute [1]. It was predicted that the 21st workforce would have more minorities, people with disabilities, and more females. As more Baby Boomers have retired, American businesses have affected by the shrinking workforce, new employees with limited skills and experience, and changing technology which require a workforce with the ability to think more than physical work for the accomplishment of their organization’s goals. Since the inception of the newer field of Human Resource Development (HRD) founded by Dr. Leonard Nadler, more Human Resource Management (HRM) programs have been incorporating certification and program concentrations in the field of HRD. This paper will focus on the teaching of HRD within HRM programs in terms of blending management teaching methods with the use of the online learning environment.

Introduction

As many countries and academicians prepared for the upcoming year 2000, many writers prior to this time proceeded to make predictions to warn both business, community, and industry leaders of forthcoming changes. However, while some studies were minimal, some writers took a bold attempt to make clear predictions, which did turn out to be true, even 17 years after the turning of the century. In 1988, the Hudson Institute made the prediction that many workers in the 21st century would need at least a bachelor’s degree at a minimum to compete for basic starting jobs, whereas, their parents had to have at least a high school diploma. As a result, many educational institutions could see the need to make changes, and they started to market heavy not only for the undergraduate degrees, but also, they rushed with a dramatic approach to entice more graduate enrollees as they could see there would be a stronger need for employees with graduate and post-graduate degrees.

Consequently, at almost two decades after the turning of this new century, one can see in the field of academia that more adult learners enrolling in graduate programs (equally important to note here, some adult learners have been enrolling in their second, third, and fourth graduate degree programs) [2]. However, one might question whether the direction of adult learners be limited by their previous learning experiences in which learning styles were “forced on them”. Thus, with these forced learning styles, have they affected the way one still learns and works in today’s workplace and learning environment? However, it has been established by educational scholars that perhaps this earlier programming can be changed and a new way of learning may be feasible. Therefore, we have to wonder whether or not previous learning matters or perspectives of learning can be changed. The reason why this is important to emphasize in this juncture of this writing is the fact to establish that the connect of Human Resource Development (HRD), which is another field completely, can be
introduced in another formerly established program of student, namely, Human Resource Management (HRM) to interlink these two disciplines to better educate and prepare today human capital (workers) for today’s business workplace.

One way to look at the changing of previous learning is a managerial topic covered in management studies known as unlearning. Hedberg’s (1981) concept of “unlearning” has gained acceptance by educators, as well as business leaders and training instructors/consultants in today’s educational and work environments. [3] Thus, as many businesses and organizations have been transitioning from functional organizations to learning organizations in order to capture, manage, and use their knowledge gained from their workers and processes within the organization, one can see a new way to harness knowledge from workers and help make changes or develop their own best practices. As a result, this helps organizations to seek better ways to communicate and distribute these new elements of knowledge, as well as to develop better mastery of their new knowledge. [4] Nonetheless, both the field of education and business are changing, but the question is whether or not if both areas can achieve their needed goals with the help of each other. In order to compete with other educational institutions in today’s modern, technological worlds, many colleges and universities are moving to online learning. In the following section, there will be a brief overview of how schools are transitioning from the traditional learning environment to a virtual one. This will help to add to the framing of this paper to show why HRM programs are sustaining their programs and increasing their students’ skills sets with the incorporation of other disciplines, while still achieve all needed learning objectives for their core and specific courses within their program of study.

**Technological Impact on Today’s Learning Environment**

Today’s adult learner will learn their course work in a variety of learning environments and platforms, and thus, this gives the learner more freedom to select their learner and adjust their coursework to their learning style. The fields of business and management education have changed over the past several decades, just as the field of technology has been constantly evolving. As one can see the impact of economic, educational, social, and political factors which have affected many in business and industry. Ever since the day so the Hawthorne study in terms of time and management concerns, business has determined that they need better skilled employees in order to compete in the 21st century, yet be technologically savvy. As a result, academia has had to rethink their approach to education in terms of moving away from the educational outdoor setting of Socrates’ time, known as Socratic teaching, to a more modern and sometimes student-centered approach versus the traditional teacher-centered approach. Therefore, despite the various types of technology being used or considered in both the academic or business worlds, the type of subject matter may also have an impact on the learning experience. Consequently, as educational schools move from a “teacher-centered” approach to a “student-centered” one, the teaching strategies and methodologies will be important to help the adult learner to achieve their full potential in such a learning environment. On the other hand, some learner-centered activities may fare better with certain classes and programs of study, whereas, some variety may be needed for an instructor with a “teacher-centered” approach to facilitate quality learning for today’s adult learners. Therefore, today’s educations will need to embrace many forms of technology in order to ensure that adult learnings may be engaged and motivated. [5]

**Distance Education Evolution to Online Education**

Distance education has been documented back in the “1800s with the correspondence course of Pittman Shorthand, it has been evolving. It has grown from a correspondence course to a more technological evolution of recordings, ranging from records, VHS tapes, TV shows, and now online learning courses.” [6] While there was a steady evolution of learning media over the past century, the 1990s helped to revolutionize educational offerings with the advent of Learning Management
Systems (LMS), ranging from names of Blackboard, Educator, D2Learn, WebCT, and more. As more people were seeking educational opportunities, but constrained by personal, work, and family factors, this new type of learning helped to forge a new beginning to educational opportunities for the working adult. One key research group has been conducting studies on the changing demographics of the adult learning and online learning in general. According to a study by the Babson Survey Research Group (2013), it was noted that the number of U.S. higher education learners enrolled in at least one online course has now exceeded 7.1 million. [6] Meanwhile many educational critics have argued that while education institutions may continue to hold steadfast to traditional teaching methods, some have realized with the diminishing number of enrollees in traditional classes on campus has been seen as the writing on the wall. As a result, more educators and administrators have seen this new and growing form of learning starting to catch more momentum than ever before. Consequently, Allen (2013) wrote that, “While the rate of growth in online enrollments has moderated over the past several years, it still greatly exceeds the growth in overall higher education enrollments.” Consequently, the survey’s findings indicated that “33% of higher education students now take at least one course online, while 90% of academic leaders believe that it is likely or very likely that a majority of all higher education students will be taking at least one online course in five years’ time.” [8]. Further, there appears to be a change in learning patterns with today’s adult learner, so, many educational institutions are reconsidering their curricula and course offerings to attract more non-traditional students to increase their enrollment as opposed to closing their institutions due to lack of enrollment. Finally, some educational institutions have been able to forecast learning trends and made modifications to their curricula in order to compete with other schools. The pressures and stress of maintaining profitable enrollments caused many administrators to re-examine and rethink their enrollment criteria and marketing approaches or perhaps facing the possibility of close their doors. [9, 10, 11]

Need for Curriculum Change for New Environments, Learners, and Technology

While businesses, industries, and technology changed, organizations have had to change their roles and functions during a multitude of times, and perhaps “change hats” or “change colors” in order to meet the needs of their customers, almost like a chameleon effect in order to “adapt” to their various environmental factors in terms of survival. Kanter (2012), noted ten reasons why people tend to resist change, namely: 1) loss of control; 2) excess uncertainty; 3) surprise, surprise; 4) everything seems different; 5) loss of face; 6) concern of competence; 7) more work; 8) ripple effects; 9) past resentments; and 10) sometimes the threat is real. In the context of academia, the Ivory Tower is changing its ability to withstand economic pressures from various challenges, issues, and stakeholders.[12] Due to changing and challenging in today’s college and university budgets, many of these academic institutions have been forced to face the harsh economic realities to either adapt, diversity, and/or create new changes in order to attract more students or face extinction. While many academicians may think that business and management studies must be taught one way and in one environment, these antiquated ways of thinking are starting to die out as a result of reasons previously discussed in this paper. Thus, it should be noted that the “chameleon effect” may also be affected by the dominant logic of the organization and organizational. Bettis and Prahalad (1995) looked at how the leadership of an entity can control the flow of certain types and amounts of communication forms throughout the given organization. [13] Thus, some organization may go through changes over time either slowly evolving or on a faster basis than anticipated. Due to the limitation of page restrictions, the paper is limited in further discussion of specific course work, but more will be shared in further writings.

Summary

Thus, we have one key question to keep in mind here -- how does this approach with a real world application connect the student from the classroom to the real world needs? While learnings need to
be able to promote themselves at work and job interviews, the question is whether they have the needed knowledge and skills sets to set them apart from all other candidates. In fact, sometimes it is beneficial for one to rethink their approach, whether they are a job seeker or an organization. Further, Nonaka (1986) stated that “Self-renewal of an organization can be seen as a process of dissolving an existing organizational order and creating a new one. Order in an organization refers to the structural and cognitive order which affects the pattern of the members of the organizational activities, namely, the pattern of deployment, organizational structure, systems, processes, and cultures. There can be no self-renewal without dissolution and creation of order” (p. 3). Finally, as technology is ever changing, educational offerings will need to evolve and change in order to compete with the needs of adult learners, educational institutions, and business in general.

References