Title   **The future of HRD research**

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EHRD

Conference

Sixth international conference on HRD research and practice across Europe:
"Human Resource Development: Promoting Learning, Performance, and Integrity"
Tilburg 22-24 May 2006

Supported by the University Forum for HRD (UFHRD), the Academy of HRD (AHRD) and Euresform; hosted by the Department of HR Studies, Tilburg University, Netherlands.

Conference chair: Rob Poell

[Conference home page](#)

Closing session

Panel discussion
The future of HRD research - strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and actions

Overview of major issues addressed by the participants -
based on the PPT presentations of the panel group and the recorded discussion

Rapporteur: Sabine Manning

Statements by the panel group*)

Jamie Callahan, Joseph Kessels, Victoria Marsick, Lidewey van der Sluis, Jim Stewart

Proceedings of discussion

Peter Kuchinke, Barry Nyhan, Toshio Ohsako, Rob Poell, Neelu Rohmetra, Lidewey van der Sluis, Jim Stewart

*) The text of the slides is available on the conference home page ([pdf download](#)).

Statements by the panel group

Jim Stewart, Nottingham Trent University, UK

Strengths
1. Well established outlets for research
2. Growing maturity in the work
3. Growing relationships with practice
Weaknesses
1. Esoteric argument
2. Focus on organisations as locus of HRD practice
3. Insularity, both geographic and conceptual
Opportunities
1. Recognition of HRD's importance
2. Growth in (inter)national collaborative research
3. Area of international HRD
Threats
1. Too little attention to needs of practitioners
2. Academic space and standing
3. New blood needed for HRD research
Action
1. UFHRD and AHRD to support international partnerships/ HRD
2. Raise standing and status of HRD research / journals
3. Increase relationships with practice

Lidewey van der Sluis, Free University Amsterdam, Netherlands

1. Besides learning from 'best practices' benchmarking of 'worst practices' is also valuable for organizational development
2. Learning from failures contributes more to HRD and organizational development and change than learning from success does

Jamie Callahan, Texas A&M University, USA

Gazing into the Crystal Ball (>>> [full text](#))

- Organizational interests dominate HRD practice and scholarship
- Emerging voices challenge us to question the interests served by HRD interventions
- Disengagement <---> Transformation
- Future: Constructivist Critical HRD

Joseph Kessels, University of Twente, Netherlands

- HRD research should reflect the diversified field of HRD practice.
- Instead of striving for a longitudinal and deep investigation into a "Grand Strategy" (Schwab, 1978),
- based on exploration, description, correlation, experimenting and theory building,
- it might be more fruitful to encourage researchers to follow their personal interests and curiosity, and accept a research attitude,
- characterised by "disciplined eclecticism" (Shulman, 1986).
- The expanding diversity in research topics and approaches, should not be regarded as a weakness of HRD but as a rich landscape for sense making and meaning.

Victoria Marsick, Columbia University, USA

Strengths
> Care about practice
> "Broker" role
> Take interdisciplinary view of problems and solutions
Opportunities
> Access to organizations enables relevant studies on critical problems
> Strategic learning focus (individual/organizational)
Weaknesses
> BUT which customer view?
Distorting/partial lens?

> BUT language of business?

> BUT academia based on silos: will it get you tenure?

Threats

> BUT studies may be: confidential, PR'd, "unique"…vs. meta-analyses

> BUT does tight focus reduce slack, lead to tunnel vision, core rigidities?

Action: Reframe the way we think about our role in practice (our values and interests vs. those of many customers) and academia (how to value interdisciplinary view)

Source	HRD Conference Tilburg 2006: Agenda of closing session in 'Conference programme and abstracts' (p 7) and text of the panel slides on conference home page (pdf download).

Proceedings of discussion

Toshio Ohsako, Consultant, UNESCO/UNEVOC, Sweden
I agree with most of your ideas, especially Professor Callahan's idea that HRD research should be critical to existing practices. We should always critically watch what various agencies are saying and doing, including governments, unions, research bodies, international organisations - we are free, so this aspect of critical mind is quite important.

Neelu Rohmetra, University of Jammu, India
An international perspective of HRD - cross-national and cross-country perspective - should constitute future initiatives in HRD research and practice. Besides, the scope of an international perspective should travel across a wide array of countries, covering economies like India and China. Such efforts would be extremely useful in boosting up HRD research across the Globe. Focus across nations and borders have already taken off in India, and researchers in India have initiated a good deal of cross-country comparisons. In short, HRD has to be seen in much broader context – from just individual motivation and skill building to OD, change, learning and cross-cultural/ national perspective for deriving a synergistic view of issues in HRD analysis.

Peter Kuchinke, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
What we describe as the weaknesses of our field are often our strengths. Our tendency to see things in a cross-disciplinary way should not be seen as a weakness but as a strength, because it reflects the complex nature of the problems and the issues that organisations are facing. So rather than trying to mould us into a traditional academic discipline we should take solace in the fact that we represent in our various approaches the nature of reality that perhaps exists.

Lidewey van der Sluis, Free University Amsterdam, Netherlands
We have to think about what is the goal of organisations. Should organisations be places where human resources, the people who are working there, can develop themselves, as Professor Kessels has just said, to ensure an individual role of learning, or are organisations just places to earn money, have a good performance and be effective and sustainable in the future. HRD policies and practices should be based on a vision on organisations that lies in the spectrum between these two extremes. The strengths and weaknesses of HRD will depend on that vision and determine therefore the core of the issues we are now going to deal with.

Jim Stewart, Nottingham Trent University, UK
One of the weakness is an overemphasis on organisation as the locus of HRD practice. HRD occurs in many other settings such as communities as well as at societal level. In addition work organisations are continuously changing and they are not the same now as say twenty years ago and they will be different again twenty years from now. So, traditional HRD designed for traditional organisations is not relevant as a major focus of research.

Barry Nyhan, Cedefop, Greece
I just want to comment on the problem of research and practice, following on from Professor Callahan. We need to move in HRD towards a kind of constructivist research approach – collaborative research, where practitioners are the drivers for identifying the issues, and the researchers are the facilitators to join with them in looking at the problems. I think that can promote the issues of democracy, participation and justice.

Rob Poell, Tilburg University, Netherlands
That concludes our panel discussion. We have to think about the relationship between individual, social, organisational and societal aspects. We are going to organise more conferences in the future to look at these aspects.

Source	Recording of the panel discussion at the closing session of the HRD Conference Tilburg 2006 (see [introduction](#))