1. Introduction: the variety of methods for researching HRD
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RESEARCHING HRD

Any scholar delving into the Human Resource Development (HRD) journals or textbooks for the first time would immediately be made aware of its multifaceted nature and the importance of HRD for both organizations and the people who work for and within them. They would also quickly become knowledgeable of a wide variety of issues associated with the development of people, the need to understand these fully and the importance of good quality research for doing this. However, what would not be so immediately apparent is the variety of research methods used by HRD scholars. Yet, as the chapters in this Handbook reveal, there are a wide range of methods available to, and used by, those researching HRD.

The last two decades have seen a plethora of research methods textbooks published. Some of these texts have taken broad disciplinary foci such as business and management (for example: Cameron and Price, 2009; Saunders et al., 2012), considering both quantitative and qualitative paradigms. Others have chosen to focus upon a particular grouping of methods within organizational research, such as quantitative or qualitative methods (for example: Symon and Cassell, 2012), or to concentrate on one specific method such as interviews (for example: Cassell, 2015) or questionnaires (for example: Ekinci, 2015). Whilst such books are both informative and insightful, their nature invariably means that the particular methodological challenges presented by HRD within a particular paradigm or for a particular method cannot be addressed fully.

As HRD research has developed, a growing variety of data collection methodologies and analysis techniques have been adopted, with research designs incorporating mono, multiple and mixed methods approaches. The knowledge and insights gained from the use of particular data collection and analysis techniques has been dissipated across a wide range of journals. These have included specialist HRD journals such as *Human Resource Development International* and the *European Journal of Training and Development*; Human Resource Management (HRM) journals such as *Human Resource Management* and *Personnel Review*; as well as more generalist business and

management and organizational psychology journals. Whilst these journals and the associated articles highlight the methodological openness of the HRD field, they are rarely able to offer a comprehensive picture of the use of particular methods within HRD research. Rather their reading reveals the necessity for an up-to-date overview of the methods that are being used to help support HRD researchers in their use.

The aim of this book, therefore, is to draw the wealth of research methods experience gained by researchers working within HRD into one volume. Reflecting the methodological plurality revealed in the journals, the editors and contributors to this volume have explored and researched HRD from a variety of directions. The book therefore reflects and utilizes the research experiences of leading HRD scholars to provide a range of insights on methods for those researching HRD.

The development of HRD research has given rise to definitional debates, which are well addressed in the literature (Kuchinke, 2000; Lee, 1997, 2001; McLean and McLean, 2001; Wang and McLean, 2007). Drawing from the evolving nature of HRD from 'training' to 'training and development' to 'development' and its relationship with HRM, these debates focus on defining development through its purpose and end point (Lee, 1997). They consider what should be included or excluded within the definition; the functions and purpose of HRD, such as learning (Watkins 1991) and performance (Swanson, 1995); whether a unifying definition is appropriate given the different (national) contexts within which HRD operates (Wang and McLean, 2007); and if development should be considered a 'thing of being' or a 'process' (Lee, 2001). Another facet of these issues is that HRD is not confined to work organizations; Sambrook and Stewart (2010), for example, argue that higher education is itself a site of HRD practice. We have therefore taken a broad conceptualization of HRD in offering advice to our contributors, being guided by Lee's (1997) four overlapping forms of development:

- maturation, in which people progress through inevitable stages;
- shaping, in which people are moulded to fit the organization through named steps;
- a voyage, in which individuals are involved in a transformational shift through internal discovery;
- emergent, in which individuals develop through interaction with others.

In this volume we therefore both recognize and embrace the diversity of conceptualizations of HRD found in the literature, and this is reflected in variations between the chapters.

Invariably a volume such as this cannot be a research methods text-book, covering all areas of method as they apply to HRD. As editors we have sought to identify and draw together in one volume those areas that we, and our contributors, believe require particular attention when researching HRD. The task we set our contributors was to examine pertinent methodological issues and methods, emphasizing those practical concerns of particular relevance to both new and more experienced HRD researchers. In particular we wanted HRD researchers to share their experiences of these issues; of what works and what does not work, and of the challenges and innovations.

Each substantive chapter adopts a similar structure commencing with a short summary and an introduction. This is followed by a discussion of the method or issue and its application to HRD research. As pluralists we believe that no one method or methodology, be it quantitative, qualitative, used on its own or in combination, is superior to another. Rather we believe the choice of method is dependent upon the context, the research question and the researcher. We therefore asked our contributors to discuss their own experiences of the method or methodological issue when undertaking HRD research and to reflect upon these within their chapters. In doing so we wanted our contributors' chapters to inspire and inform their readers, rather than provide a full review of all the relevant literature. Consequently, following the discussion and list of references, each chapter also offers further annotated reading.

The book's 24 substantive chapters are organized into four parts: Conceptual Issues, Qualitative Research, Quantitative Research and, finally, Methodological Challenges.

PART I: CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Part I considers a range of conceptual issues in HRD research. These include the philosophical and paradigmatic assumptions that underpin research, the purpose of research and the need for practitioner relevance, and systematic reviewing of existing literature.

The opening chapter (Chapter 2) is concerned with an issue of importance to all HRD researchers: how to locate and take ownership of both the paradigmatic and philosophical underpinnings of your research. Here Bob Hamlin outlines and offers insights from his personal experiences over a quarter of a century of HRD research. Within the chapter he outlines differing purposes of mono, multiple and mixed methods research designs and offers a simplified framework to support researchers in their own philosophical deliberations. In so doing his chapter also provides an

overview of the epistemological and ontological debates that underpin the research strategies and methods discussed in subsequent parts of the book.

Chapters 3 and 4 are both concerned with the science of HRD research, addressing issues regarding the purpose of systematic enquiry and the need for practitioner relevance and usefulness. In Chapter 3 Eugene Sadler-Smith explores debates surrounding management as a design or explanatory science and the implications of these debates for HRD research. Within the chapter he contrasts the mission of design science to developing actionable knowledge with that of explanatory science, namely to describe, explain and predict. Posing the question as to whether HRD research might better be placed as the former, Eugene emphasizes how design science principles might help in the development of valid knowledge to support intellectually curious practitioners and assist in solving organizational field problems. The themes of relevance and usefulness are developed further in Chapter 4 by Jeff Gold and colleagues. They focus on the importance of scholarly practice within HRD research and its utility for tackling complex workplace issues. Acknowledging a relevance gap between academic research and practice, they explore and critique roles, strategies and behaviours for HRD scholar-practitioners, introducing Flyvbjerg's (2001) argument for making social science more relevant by moving in the direction of phronetic social science. Using six scholar-practitioners' voices, Jeff and colleagues consider how, when faced with competing or a plurality of values, phronetic social science's emphasis on practical wisdom and prudent judgements is articulated in HRD research.

The last chapter in Part I (Chapter 5) considers the use of systematic review to examine the extant HRD literature. Acknowledging that the need to review the literature is widely accepted by researchers, in this chapter Céline Rojon and Almuth McDowall outline how such an evidence-based approach can offer advantages in areas such as HRD where the literature is wide and fragmented. Drawing on their own experiences of conducting a systematic review, as well as that of other existing systematic reviewers, they outline the key features of the methodology. This is subsequently benchmarked against both traditional narrative reviews and the use of meta-analysis to consider the advantages and potential disadvantages of systematic review, alongside practicalities and challenges being discussed. In offering their insights, Céline and Almuth note that, although systematic review is time-consuming, taking skill, effort and determination, it supports a move towards evidence-based management within HRD.

PART II: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Part II focuses upon qualitative research, that is, research using non-numeric data, or data that have not been quantified. As such it includes chapters concerned with the use of specific strategies for qualitative research within HRD, such as action research and ethnography, as well as chapters focusing upon specific data sources and techniques such as social media and photo elicitation and systematic content analysis.

The first two chapters in this section are concerned with ethnography and the role of the researcher within this. In Chapter 6 Dawn Langley explores the distinct contribution of ethnographic research to understanding HRD practices, arguing that it enables the HRD researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which people make sense of their organizations. Within this she emphasizes the importance of building rapport between the researcher and participants, both outlining associated challenges and drawing on her own experiences to suggest ways these might be overcome. Dawn also highlights the impact for researchers of exposing the lives of others and themselves in their research and writing, noting the difference between talking about lived experiences and seeing these reported and recorded in print. The importance of self and the role of researcher are developed further in Chapter 7 by Sally Sambrook in her exploration of the use of autoethnography. Using the context of higher education, she illustrates the value of this method by outlining how the autoethnographic researcher can bring personal insight and understanding to wider sociological and cultural issues within sites of HRD practice. Sally offers three exemplars of using autoethnography within the higher education context, which might be adapted to other HRD contexts. She also exposes some of the challenges of adopting autoethnography, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness and the need to draw upon self as a source of data.

Chapters 8 and 9 are concerned with the use of visual methods. In Chapter 8 Kate Black and Russell Warhurst provide an overview of the contents of the visual methods toolbox from which HRD researchers might select. Following an exploration of the different traditions of visual methods and alternative research designs, they outline 17 different visual methods, providing more details for four of the five methods they consider to have notable potential for HRD research. Chapter 9, by Russell Warhurst and Kate Black, focuses on the fifth such method, photo-elicitation interviewing. Arguing that this method is, as yet, underutilized, Russell and Kate examine its development as a method and its value to HRD research. Using an illustrative example of non-formal workplace learning of professionals they note that the method can offer

new and novel insights supporting inductively based theorizing. However, they also highlight shortcomings and potential pitfalls, not least the particular ethical concerns associated with using photographs.

Although action research can use both quantitative and qualitative data either separately or in combination, the inclusion of an illustrative example using qualitative data led us to locate Rosalie Holian and David Coghlan's chapter in this section on qualitative research. In this chapter (Chapter 10) Rosalie and David explore the theory and practice of action research, highlighting how it is an evolving process undertaken in a spirit of collaborative enquiry. They illustrate how, within an HRD context, it can be used both to bring about change in organizations and, through focusing on real organizational problems or issues, generate actionable knowledge of use to the world of organizations. In Chapter 11 Kiran Trehan and Clare Rigg focus on the use of critical action learning research, a development of the action learning approach in HRD research. Critical action learning emphasizes learning and development through critical engagement in both action and reflection. However, as in action research (discussed in Chapter 10), the research component incorporates the expectation that knowledge is created for the wider world.

The themes of undertaking HRD research that is useful to the world of organizations and of involving practitioners in that research are continued in Chapter 12. Here Mark Saunders and colleagues explore the application of the Service Template Extended Process (STEP) to HRD research to support applied HRD research in collaboration with practitioners. Adopting Schein's (1999) process consultation framework they outline how STEP can be used to surface values and underlying assumptions, acting as catalyst for both single- and double-loop learning.

Chapter 13 focuses upon the use of actor network theory and discourse analysis. Using the context of an online environment, Peter Evans describes how the theory and analysis can be used to investigate the social practices and community-forming activities associated with professional development. Within this Peter examines the usefulness and challenges of this research approach, highlighting its suitability for researching social media environments.

The last chapter in Part II (Chapter 14) offers new insights into the most frequently used qualitative method in HRD research, the interview. In this chapter Paul Tosey highlights the importance of designing and asking clear, unbiased questions in order to elicit data of good quality. Drawing on a project that investigated managers' metaphors of work–life balance that was informed by the practice called 'Clean Language', Paul shows how questions can be designed to minimize the risk of inadvertently introducing the interviewer's constructs, whether via their questions or their

interpretation. In doing this he highlights a range of issues of relevance to all those using interviews. These include the difference between content-focused and epistemic conceptions of questioning, and the importance of precision in designing and using interview questions.

PART III: QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Part III commences with three chapters that look at different facets of the most prevalent method for collecting quantitative data, the survey. This is followed by a chapter exploring two data collection techniques less widely used in HRD research, namely the Critical Incident Technique and the Vignette Technique. The final two chapters in this part respectively offer overviews of the use of two quantitative analysis techniques: structural equation modelling and systematic content analysis.

In the first chapter (Chapter 15) on the use of surveys, Cinla Akinci and Mark Saunders provide an overview of the use of questionnaires in organizational HRD research, focusing on commonly occurring methodological issues and associated concerns. They illustrate this from their personal experience of four applied research projects within a large organization, emphasizing the importance of considering the entire process of questionnaire design, delivery and collection and data input and analysis as a whole rather than just its separate components.

This theme is developed with a particular focus on online and telephone surveys in Chapters 16 and 17. In Chapter 16, Jim Stewart and Victoria Harte focus on the issue of online survey non-response, arguing that reasons for this fall into three categories: design of the questionnaire, personal motivation of the respondents and the method used to distribute the questionnaire. Within this they note that the method of distribution is particularly significant in relation to the assumed online preferences of generation X (those born from the mid-1960s to early 1980s) and generation Y (those born from 1982 onwards and believed to engage automatically in web technologies). In Chapter 17, Maura Sheehan and colleagues consider issues of maximizing telephone survey response. Highlighting the continued utility of the telephone survey, Maura and colleagues focus upon ways of tailoring survey design and administration to leverage potential respondents' participation. They illustrate this with examples drawn from their international HRD research.

Chapter 18 explores how Critical Incident Technique (CIT) and the Vignette Technique (VT) can support HRD research. Using examples drawn from her research on informal learning and behaviour at work, Regina Mulder illustrates the relative advantages and disadvantages of

both techniques in addressing challenges caused by the nature and the complexity of workplace HRD research settings. Within this she highlights how these techniques can be used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, and addresses associated methodological issues, in particular the need to ensure context-boundedness and authenticity.

The final two chapters in this section discuss less widely used quantitative analytical techniques, which offer considerable potential for HRD researchers. In Chapter 19 Christoph König and colleagues discuss the use of structural equation modelling (SEM) in HRD research. They explain how SEM can offer a flexible quantitative data analysis tool to investigate complex problems generated by the hierarchical interdependencies between organizations, teams and individual employees and how these alter over time. Following a description of the method, Christoph and colleagues use the example of a study of the development of innovative work behaviours to illustrate its utility. Drawing on this they note the statistical rigour of SEM and the opportunities it can offer as a basis for improving organizational practice and policy. Finally in this part of the book, in Chapter 20 Rob Poell provides an overview of systematic content analysis, an approach to quantitatively analysing qualitative data. Rob's chapter looks briefly at its history and its main characteristics, advantages and disadvantages within HRD research. He illustrates these issues with an empirical example in which he shows how large amounts of qualitative data can be usefully summarized numerically, the resultant tables allowing scientific and practically relevant conclusions to be drawn.

PART IV: METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Methodological issues of researching HRD are highlighted throughout this volume as contributors discuss and reflect upon their own research. In Part IV our contributors devote entire chapters to common challenges of particular importance to HRD researchers. These are the adoption of a critical perspective, the use of mixed methods, gendered constructions, the need for reflexivity and alternative ways of researching extra-sensitive topics.

In Chapter 21 Jamie Callahan and Gary Connor return to the use of quantitative and qualitative paradigms first highlighted by Bob Hamlin in Chapter 2. In particular they challenge the hegemonic notion that critical paradigms, and in particular critical HRD research, necessitate qualitative research. Jamie and Gary argue that a focus on the qualitative epistemological underpinnings of critical theory is counterproductive to achieving critical social transformation, illustrating this with a mixed methods

example. The practice of mixed methods in HRD research is explored further in Chapter 22 by Steven Tam and David Gray. They outline and illustrate how mixed methods research designs can allow critical insights to HRD research. Using an example drawn from an empirical study of learning practices in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), Steven and David highlight how qualitative and quantitative methods can be combined in a variety of ways and how one method can be used to provide focus for another. Like others in this volume, they also emphasize the importance of the research question.

Key issues for gender research in HRD are highlighted by Sharon Mavin and Jannine Williams in Chapter 23. Noting that gender research can be a highly political process, with significant negative or positive impact for both researchers and participants, they examine the importance of gender aware HRD and a range of issues in gender research. Sharon and Jannine present and illustrate these issues using research that operationalizes a Multi-Stakeholder Framework for analysing gendered media constructions of women leaders.

Returning to issues associated with research in action (introduced in Chapters 10 and 11), Carole Elliott and Valerie Stead explore in Chapter 24 how opportunities for research in action can be created through adopting a post-structuralist sensitivity to leadership development within the classroom. Using examples from their own experience, they illustrate how leadership development methods can also act simultaneously as methods of enquiry, constituting a research–teaching cycle. Building on those experiences, Carole and Valerie argue that reflexive enquiry requires a framework that exposes developmental activities to critique and informs the development of theory and continuing educational practice.

Our final chapter (Chapter 25), by Thomas Garavan and Clíodhna MacKenzie, considers the methodological challenges of researching HRD topics that are extra sensitive due to their potential for negative outcomes. In this they outline alternative innovative approaches to sourcing both primary and secondary data unobtrusively. Thomas and Clíodhna outline the advantages and associated issues of using data collection methods in comparison to more traditional methods and illustrate how the use of content analysis frameworks and Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) can augment such non-obtrusive collection methods.

MOVING FORWARD

As we intimated at the start of this introduction, this volume represents a sharing by HRD researchers of their thoughts, experiences and ideas

about researching HRD. Whilst it is not a textbook, we believe it offers insights into a wide range of research methods, both mainstream and less frequently used, that HRD researchers will find both invaluable and useful. As editors we trust that this handbook will both inspire and inform HRD research and contribute to existing and future debates about researching HRD.

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