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Exploring Human Resources Development from National Development and Economic
Development Contexts in Mexico

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Abstract

The field of human resources development (HRD) is formally recognized and developed as a professional discipline in a limited number of countries (X. Wang & Mclean, 2007). Defining the field of HRD from the perspective of a developing country creates some challenges arising from the global factors that affect countries' performance and direction. While several Latin American countries have been included as a HRD research territory, Mexico has not received much attention despite being the second largest country in the region and the top 11 economy in the world (World Bank, 2011). Therefore, this integrative literature review's intent is to explore policies and practices in Mexico fitting the national development (Cho & McLean, 2004) and economic development perspectives of HRD (G. G. Wang & Swanson, 2008). This exploring process starts by differentiating both ideological paradigms and evaluating the type of activities they represent before going on to discuss the current status of HRD in the country. This integrative literature review hopes to provide evidence of the Mexican government's role in facilitating and administering activities fitting the centralized national HRD model (Cho & McLean, 2004) as well as a variety of performance oriented HRD activities.

Keywords: Mexico, Human Resources Development, Economic Development, National Development

Exploring Human Resources Development from an Economic Development and National Perspective in Mexico

During the last decade, several publications have attempted to look for consensus in terms of defining the field of Human Resources Development (HRD) in a traditional organizational context. However, the expansion of the field in the international development arena has captured the attention of HRD scholars and practitioners, who have engaged in a debate about the parameters of the domain in a national perspective. The protagonists of this debate are two contrasting paradigms in terms of defining the field of HRD. The first one tries to define HRD from a national development perspective and promotes flexible parameters in terms of the scope of the field (Cho & McLean, 2004). The second paradigm tries to simplify the definition of HRD in an economic development perspective (G. G. Wang & Swanson, 2008). Defining the field of HRD in the perspective of a developing country creates some challenges that arise from the global factors that affect countries' performance and direction. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore HRD policies and practices in Mexico from national development and economic development perspectives. This review process starts by differentiating both ideological paradigms and evaluating the form they represent, before going on to discuss the current status of the field in the country.

Data Selection Criteria

Two different methodologies were utilized in order to fulfill the purpose of this review. First, available English language literature related to Human Resources Development and National Human Resources Development was reviewed. Also, a literature search about HRD in Mexico was performed but the material available was scarce due to the limited number of domestic scholars and practitioners involved in international journal publications. Spanish

language literature then was reviewed under different names such as human resources policies, national development, vocational training, higher education programs, education development, employment programs, and economic development strategies. This list of searching terms was generated after identifying common terms used in English publications related to HRD in Mexico. The analysis of the data collected consisted of a two simple step process. First, English language literature was reviewed for emerging themes. Next, Spanish material related to these themes was analyzed and conclusions were drawn.

Brief History of HRD activities in Mexico

Mexico's first HRD effort resulted from the economic momentum reached between 1950 and 1970 as well as the beginning of a national industrialization strategy at the end of this period of time (Powell, 2003). This first national attempt consisted of providing free basic education to the masses as well as establishing Vocational Training Institutes (VTI) in order to fulfill the needs of the domestic industries (Powell, 2003). This effort was continued when in 1948 the federal government opened two institutes of technology in North Mexico. Two decades later a total of seventeen regional institutes were founded across the country. These institutions were under the umbrella of the Secretariat of Education, and their intent was to fulfill regional social and industrial needs (*Breve historia de los Institutos Tecnológicos en México*, 2008). However, the debt crisis of the 1980s forced the government to restructure its financial system as well as to facilitate investments from foreign capital. The result was the establishment of new and complex industries including more than 1300 manufacturing sites (usually referred as maquiladoras) along the U.S.-Mexico border. Nevertheless, at that time, the federal government was still the largest employer via its state owned companies, such as PEMEX (Petroleum Company), the Federal Electricity Commission, the Mexican National Railroads, as well as all positions in the public

education system (Kras, 1989). The signing of the North American Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 enhanced the presence of foreign companies looking for a qualified and low-cost workforce. The National Plan of Development (1995-2000) dedicated a section to training and development under the segment of economic development/productivity. This five year plan included the creation of a National Labor Certification System with the mission of aligning the population to standards in terms of education and qualifications (Federal, 1996). The following National Development Plan (2001-2006) emphasized its approach to HRD in the form of enhancing the middle and higher education system (Federal, 2001). The current National Development Plan (2007-2012) was designed to continue with a similar focus as its predecessor. The plan intends to enhance the national education system as well as to develop educators and scientists under international standards (Federal, 2006). Mexico's participation in the open market has made its economy subject to the rigors of international competition. The country faces the challenge of developing its workforce of almost 50 million for the volatile open markets and to ensure its social stability (INEGI, 2012).

Defining HRD from Two Paradigms: National Development and Economic Development Perspectives

The lack of consensus in HRD has resulted in an ambiguous definition of the field, which has led to two different ideological paradigms and unique practitioner experiences. One point of view promotes the need to define HRD in a national development perspective. This approach supports the definition that takes into account national factors such as intended audiences and beneficiaries, scope of activities, government and national legislation, and the country's economic stance (Abdullah, 2009). The second HRD paradigm claims that the former has stretched the purpose of HRD to boundaries that belong to human development. Opponents

believe that the inclusion of new functions generates confusion among practitioners and puts on jeopardy the credibility of the field. Supporters of this perspective based their definition of HRD on the optimization of resources to ensure the survival and development of organizations in competitive markets (Swanson, 1995).

Defining HRD from a National Perspective

McLean and McLean (2001) led an international effort to define HRD from different national perspectives. The authors compiled the definitions provided by practitioners from twelve countries and defined HRD as the following:

Any process or activity that, either initially or over the long term, has the potential to develop adults' work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity and satisfaction, whether for personal or group or team gain, or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation or ultimately, the whole of humanity. (p. 322)

However, the scope of the field varies from one country to another due to factors that influence the life of the population such as government influence, beneficiaries, national legislation, domestic industries/activities and the level of economic development (Abdullah, 2009). Also, the status of the country as a lower income, lower/upper middle income or higher income can dictate the direction and strategies adopted in the field of HRD (Bank, 2011b). The definition of the field from a national development perspective clamors for a humanistic approach where strategies to improve organizations, communities, or nations are anchored on the need to provide individuals with opportunities for human development. For the purpose of this paper, the broad definition provided by McLean and McLean (2001) can be simplified as the one provided by HRD practitioners in Thailand since it is the only country that shares the same classification (upper middle level income) provided by the World Bank (2011b). This definition provides an indication of the functions and scope that might be required from the field of HRD in a developing country.

HRD is an interactive process of enhancing and facilitating the development of capabilities and potentials of individuals, organizations and communities through organization development and community development to attain effectively efficiently and harmoniously personal and organization goals, as well as communal goals. (McLean & McLean, 2001, p. 326)

In this case, HRD in Thailand aims to develop organizations or communities by facilitating strategies of individual development that can enhance social harmony. The complexity of defining HRD in a national perspective is proportional to the needs of each country and the level of development of the population.

Defining HRD from an Economic Development Perspective

The need for consensus in the field of HRD has resulted in different proposals such as the definition of the field from an economic development perspective (G. G. Wang & Swanson, 2008). This approach intends to define the functions of HRD based on core issues of economic development:

The efficient and effective utilization of resources to meet productive goals in a competitive environment. (Swanson, 1995, p. 1)

This definition departs from the humanistic perspective that is considered in a national perspective. Also, the selection of strategies that can enhance economic development is heavily influenced by the country's level of urgency. For the purpose of this paper, the second level (pre-conditions ready to take off) of Rostow's Theory of Development Stage will be used to explore the field of HRD in Mexico. In summary, Swanson and Wang (2008) argue that the scope of HRD from the perspective of developing countries is dictated by their urgency for economic development.

Exploring HRD in Mexico from a National Perspective

For the purpose of this paper, only four factors that influence HRD practices in a national perspective were considered. The complexity in defining the socio-economic status of a country

and the unpredictable factors limit the strategies for human development. These factors are intended audiences and beneficiaries, scope of activities, government and national legislation, and the country's economic stance (Abdullah, 2009).

Scope of Activities

This section refers to HRD activities related to training, career development, and organizational change (McLean & McLean, 2001). The Mexican government assigned the responsibility of leading these activities to the Secretariat of Education and the Secretariat of Employment. However, none of these entities are mentioned in the National Plan for Development (2007-2012) and the responsibility is solely credited to the Executive Branch. One of the five foundations of this document is dedicated to make the national economy more competitive, which can enhance employment opportunities. Under this section the plan lists a sub-heading dedicated to training and developing the population. The objective of the plan is to enhance the social well-being of the population. The Secretariat of Employment (Employment, 2012) dedicates part of their resources to the training and development in different areas.

Administrative Skills Training. The list of activities includes (a) Quality and Production; (b) Gender Equality; Innovation; (c) Negotiating Tools; (d) Planning Tools; (e) Decision Making; (f) Leadership; (g) Workforce Value; (h) Productivity as a Professional Employee; (i) Competition in the Domestic Market; (j) Managing Training Programs.

Technical Skills Training. The list of activities includes (a) Basic Management and Accounting; (b) Commercial Warehouses; (c) Dining Services; (d) Training (e) Assessment; (f) Ergonomics; (g) Telemarketing; (h) Office Processes;

General Skills Training. The list of activities includes (a) Positive Attitude; (b) Critical Thinking and Problem Solving;

Literacy. The list of activities includes (a) the Use of Computer Hardware; (b) the (c) Use of Windows Programs; (d) Web Searching; Digital Culture.

Life Skills. The list of activities includes (a) Individual Rights; (b) Communication and Interpersonal Relationships; (c) Masculinity; Paternity; (d) Job Searching.

Intended Audiences and Beneficiaries

According to the HRD definition provided by practitioners in Thailand, the main beneficiaries of the programs are individuals in local communities and regions across the country. The preface of the National Plan for Development (2007-2012) signed by the Mexican President Felipe Calderon, explicitly states that the beneficiaries of the strategies mentioned in the document are the country's population.

Government and National Legislation

The National Plan for Development (2007-2012) attempts to enhance the participation of the private industry in the capacitation and development of individuals but programs related to these two areas are rely heavily on the federal government. This influence is visible in the roles assigned to the Secretariat of Employment and the Secretariat of Education as providers of HRD programs. However, during the last two decades, Mexico has gained relevance in commercial and security matters for the United States and Canada due to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the natural boundaries that both countries share. Since 2003, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the U.S-Mexico Training, Internships, Exchange, and Scholarship Initiative has promoted the creation of academic and research bi-national agreements (Development., 2009).

U.S.-Mexico Higher Education and Training Agreements. This effort has resulted in more than 28,002 activities, especially in non-degree training, through 64 university partnerships (Development., 2009). Some of the projects were (a) Partnership for Improved Management of Watershed Resources in the Lower Colorado River; (b) Partnership for Healthy Watershed Management Training in the Sierra Norte Region of Oaxaca; (c) Partnering to Save Chiapas' Forests and Protected Areas; (d) Strengthening Ecotourism in Chiapas Through Indigenous Cooperatives Capacity Building in Southern Mexico; (e) Connecting Small Business to the World; (f) Engaging Communities to Improve Waste Water Management.

The Canadian government promoted the Program for North American Mobility in Higher Education among the United States and Mexico. The purpose of this program was to increase the quality of human resources development and prepare the population of the NAFTA countries for the competitive global markets (Canada, 2011).

Canada-Mexico Higher Education and Training Agreements. The program resulted in 10 trilateral projects that were performed from 2002 to 2009. The list of the projects with the participation of Mexican institutions was (a) The Alliance to Achieve and Maintain Competitiveness in Logistics Through Strategic Leadership within NAFTA; (b) The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Sustainable Community Development; (c) Alliance to Promote the Sustainability of the Environment Through Energy Efficiency Across NAFTA; (d) North American Consortium on Rehabilitation Engineering and Healthcare Technology For the Individual; (e) NAFTA Preneur: Developing Students' International Entrepreneurial Working Skills in a Cross-Cultural Environment; (f) Framing the Future: Green Building Technology; (g) Profiles in Entrepreneurship: North American Models of Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship; (h) Developing Public Policy Capacities in a North American

Perspective: Investigating Perceptions and Building New Continental Frameworks; (i) Tri-National Indigenous Rural Tourism and Community Development ; (j) Migration Studies Initiatives to Promote Curricular Development and a North American Community.

Country's Economic Stance

The content of this section shares the same information as the one presented in the following heading related to exploring HRD from an economic development perspective. The overlapping of both paradigms (national development and economic development perspectives) will be presented in the discussion section.

Exploring HRD in Mexico from an Economic Development Perspective

According to the World Bank (2011), Mexico is considered an upper level middle income country (GDP per capita \$3976 to \$12275). The country shares this classification with other 53 countries (Bank, 2011a). The Secretariat of Economy Plan 2007-2012 emphasizes the need to increase the competitiveness of the country in the global markets. In this document, it is explicitly stated that the economic activities must support the National Plan for Development (2007-2012). Specifically, objective 7 emphasizes the need to enhance the level of human development as well as access to a better patrimony. Also, objective 1 states that training and development should be provided in order to enhance individuals' opportunity to obtain a job. Mexico's need to become more competitive in the global markets has forced the government to move into the services industry. The current global economic indicators which measure countries' performance put a lot of value to activities such as retail trade, transport, financial, professional, and personal services such as education, health care, and real estate services (Bank,

2011b). These type of activities required a highly educated workforce which can only be achieved through education and HRD programs.

HRD Programs Based on Economic Development

Multiphase Skills-Based Human Resources Development Program. The Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) approved a 5 year-\$55.4 million HRD project aimed to enhance the quality and efficiency of technical education. This program intends to fortify the performance of key sectors of the Mexican economy such as the auto industry, auto industry, electronics, chemicals, construction, textiles and apparel, leather and footwear, aircrafts, software, tourism, agriculture, retailing and in-bond assembly (Bank, 1994).

World Bank-Retraining Program on Employment and Wages (PROBECAT). In 1994, the World Bank funded a large training program that aimed to enhance the skills of the unemployed population. The participants not only were trained for six months but also paid for their participation. At the end of the program, the participant were given employment (Bank, 1994).

Discussion

The field of human resources development (HRD) is formally recognized and developed as a professional discipline in a limited number of countries (X. Wang & McLean, 2007). The purpose of this literature review was to explore the presence and form of HRD in Mexico from national development and economic development perspectives. These two contrasting paradigms provide different guidelines that help defining the functions and scope of the field. Marquardt, M., Berger, N., and Loan, P. (2004) attempted to provide the general status of HRD in distinct countries/regions of the world by providing a list of cultural factors as well as organizations with an active approach to the field. However, this material omitted or simplified the presence of

HRD in some countries that distribute the load of development to various agencies, which are constantly affected by volatile political changes. This integrative literature review identified government agencies as well as foreign organizations participating actively in the development of human resources in Mexico. Furthermore, it provides a description of the status of HRD in Mexico from the two perspectives mentioned previously.

The first part of the literature review consisted of exploring HRD in Mexico using McLean and McLean (McLean & McLean, 2001) factors that influence the definition of the field in a national development perspective. The National Plan for Development (2007-2012) emphasized the importance of enhancing the skills of the population in order to provide them with opportunities for human development. The Mexican government plays a critical role in facilitating and providing the population with training and development programs. This is visible in the role played by the Secretariat of Employment, which provides all the training and development programs on a national scale. These findings are aligned with the emerging model of Centralized National HRD presented by Cho and McLean (2004), which is characterized by governments that are solely responsible for developing and implementing HRD policies. Also, the social scope of HRD from a national development perspective was visible in the intent of some of the training programs such as the activities listed under life skills. This finding was aligned with what Rangel (2004) concluded from analyzing the two previous (1995-2006) National Development Plans. However, foreign agencies, such as the USAID and the Canadian-Human Resources and Skills Development department, partnered with higher education institutions in the development of training programs aimed towards social development. The major role of these foreign agencies in higher education training provides a glimpse of the incoordination between the federal government and local/state institutions.

From an economic development perspective, HRD programs in Mexico are focused on large-scale training. They enhance the status of organizations by incorporating a big percentage of the population to formal economic activities. This approach is evident in both HRD programs financed by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. HRD practices from an economic development perspective require well established structures that allow the distribution of training and development. In Mexico, the Secretariat of Education provides class infrastructure on a national scale which allowed them to lead the project funded by the IADB. Furthermore, the definition of HRD from an economic development perspective emphasizes the urgency to enhance performance in order to improve the status of organizations. This sense of urgency is captured in the Secretariat of Economy Plan (2007-2012), which emphasize the country's need to optimize resources and improve its global ranking in terms of competitiveness. The importance of improving in this area was also reflected in the dual effort by the World Bank and the Mexican government to optimize the utilization of the productive workforce in the country via the development of a retraining program for adults. However, the scope and functions of the field of HRD in this perspective are limited to programs that have a direct impact in the economic development and ignore others that indirectly can enhance the overall performance of the country.

This literature review provides a brief introduction to the current status of HRD in Mexico. However, the National Development Plans mentioned in this paper provide a glimpse of the government influence in the direction of strategies for socioeconomic enhancement. This influence makes imperative to review the status of HRD in Mexico on a continuous basis. Furthermore, the inconsistent naming of HRD programs in the country suggests that any further analysis should analyze the function of all government agencies that might be aligned with any

national plan related to socioeconomic development. An opportunity for future research could be the mapping of functions of government agencies, domestic institutions and foreign organizations related to the development of human resources. This integrative literature review could provide a better understanding of the interaction between these organizations and the beneficiaries of their programs.

Conclusion

The status and direction of HRD practices in Mexico are highly influenced by the federal government. The differences between the National Development Plans (1995-2012) developed provides a glimpse of the inconsistent approach to developing human resources. The definition of HRD from both perspectives overlaps in terms of economic development. However, HRD from a national development perspective is characterized by an individualistic and social approach, which requires the inclusion of other factors with high socioeconomic impact. The definition of HRD from an economic development perspective emphasizes the urgency to enhance performance in order to improve the status of organization. Nevertheless, this approach is more suitable for countries with higher levels of economic development (upper-level income) which require less work in terms of social progress. The information presented in this paper provides a general picture of the status and common practices related to HRD in Mexico. To recap, Mexico's effort in the field of HRD can be summarized to programs in the domain of technical skills, social equality, life skills, resources management, and middle/higher education.

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