DIVERSITY AND COHERENCE

A STUDY OF CAREERS IN HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

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CERTIFICATE

I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being admitted as part of candidature for any other degree. I also certify that the thesis has been written by me and that any help that I received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This research study is concerned with examining human resource development (HRD) as a career field. In so doing the research study attempts to present a picture of the nature and structure of careers of those who practise in this field in Australian organisations. This line of investigation has been pursued by researchers for other career fields such as teaching and management. Such research has added to the maturation of these occupational fields and provided insights for the ongoing development of practitioners aspiring to or seeking to maintain careers in these fields of practice. This line of research, however, has not been pursued as part of building a more complete understanding of human resource development. The lack of research examining HRD from a career perspective could be seen as needing to be addressed to assist this field of practice attain greater maturity as an occupational field. Such research potentially will provide those who practise or wish to practise in this field with informed insights into the nature and structure of careers that are available to them. Further, such research could be seen also as being timely given the recent attention by governments throughout the developed world to the processes of skill formation as a way of building national capability and increasing competitiveness, and, the increased interest by organisations in employee development and learning initiatives as a way of building organisational capability and improving organizational performance.

This research project therefore attempts to illuminate this field of practice from a career perspective. In so doing it uses the literatures of HRD, careers and changing organisational practice as three disparate yet interrelated lens to examine the dimensions and characteristics of HRD careers and to surface questions that need to be asked to better understand this area as a career field. This research project argues that such sources are relevant given the dearth of direct research about HRD as a career field. The project also draws on findings from two empirical research studies. One of these studies is a survey -based study that was completed by HRD practitioners or their supervisors. The second empirical component comprised a series of in depth interviews with 12 HRD practitioners about their careers in this field of practice.

Findings from these sources allow the research project to argue that the nature of careers in HRD can be explained by the dynamic interplay of forces originating from individual aspiration, capacity and self agency, the shifts in practices which are occurring in contemporary organisations as well as from the diverse and evolving nature of the field of

HRD. These forces and the interplay between them determine the direction and movement within individual HRD careers. They also shape what could be seen as consistent career patterns and common career experiences of practitioners in this field even though it is recognised that there is considerable diversity in the models of practice associated with this occupational area. This research project therefore argues that coherence can be seen in HRD careers even if at times this area as a career field lacks the regularity or orderliness of some other career fields. Findings from studies showed consistency in career structure and some career experiences. Findings also indicated at a very embryonic level a commonly held sense of occupational identity can be seen as existing amongst practitioners who come from this area of organisational practice.

The report of this study concludes with some general implications for ongoing development of practitioners drawn from these findings about careers.