

# Editorial

Human Resource Development (HRD) is nowadays seen as a key factor of the competitiveness of European business and industry. Human talent in organizations is conceived of as an asset of primary importance which enables the flexibility and therefore the continuity of companies. What policies do employers choose in order to provide the necessary learning activities for the workforce? Throughout the European Community they give diverse responses which depend largely on differences in the public Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems[1]. Whereas in Germany the Dual Apprenticeship System is prevalent, in France the vast majority of the population in VET is enrolled in full-time vocational schools and colleges. The situation in the United Kingdom has dramatically changed during the last few years, but historically it also has a strong academic tradition with an emphasis on liberal education. The same holds for The Netherlands, in which most VET students are in vocational schools and colleges, although during the second half of the last decade apprenticeship training was stimulated by employers' organizations, resulting in a considerable growth in its volume.

These differences co-vary with participation in HRD in business and industry. In Germany continuing training and development, for instance, receives less attention as compared with France and The Netherlands. Because of the more general curricula of French and Dutch public VET systems, companies need to introduce novices into their jobs by extensive training and development programmes. Incidentally, employers' organizations collectively, and companies individually, try to establish curriculum change in these public VET systems, so as to improve their market responsiveness. Besides the jurisdictional peculiarities of European countries, all HRD within business and industry is influenced by conditions within the organization and its direct environment: performance requirements which emerge from innovations in production and service processes, clientele characteristics and implementation constraints.

Change in performance requirements can be noticed in many jobs, if not all. New technologies, new products, new machinery, new markets, all create new tasks, whereas other tasks are becoming obsolete. This development is especially visible in technologically advanced companies. Proactive training and development is the main challenge of human resource departments in these organizations. Future-oriented curriculum design and development is part of this, as the mere determination

of the present activities of employees will have a "rallentando" effect on skilling processes. Once these activities are being determined, and their results being transposed into a curriculum, developments in the organization may have overhauled the significance of the curriculum content. Therefore training and development professionals need to be sensitive to the up-front development in the organization, including management responses to these developments, so as to accomplish a high level of curriculum content validity in training and development.

Clientele characteristics are easily overlooked when the focus is on change and performance requirements. It is the training and development target group, however, which has to realize change. Special target groups like ethnic groups, women returners, the long-term unemployed, the elderly, and physically and mentally disabled people, need additional attention in this respect, as they are disproportionately under-represented in HRD programmes.

Although the necessity for long-term HRD policies in organizations is hardly doubted anymore, the implementation of these policies is not always easy; indeed it is sometimes even impossible. What about small and medium-sized enterprises? They often have too little capacity to allow personnel to take courses, as all employees are needed to assure the continuation of production or business itself. But large organizations also face HRD implementation difficulties on the operational and logistical levels, let alone on the strategic level. The contributions in this issue of *JEIT* are all focused on these conditions for HRD.

First of all, Thijssen goes into a special target group of VET: the adult learners. Knowles[2] has already pointed out that this is a neglected species, although since the beginning of the 1980s research on adult learners has grown exponentially. Thijssen goes beyond a mere description of the problem that far too little attention is paid to adult learners; from a human resource management perspective, he builds on the work of major authors in this field, and proposes his experience concentration theory.

Next, de Vries and Warmerdam focus on the sometimes tight practical constraints to realizing HRD policies. They go into the issue of organizational problems that arise when providing training opportunities within governmental

departments, and they point at strategies that are employed for control of training-related absenteeism.

All studies illustrate that HRD within business and industry, or within trade sectors, requires an orchestrated effort by all stakeholders in which careful attention is paid to the persons involved, training design organization and change in the wider system. This is a challenge for HRD management in companies and lead bodies in trade sectors: the establishment of high standard human resources outputs in conjunction with the interventions of other departments within the organization or in conjunction with research, training and development actors who operate in the training market.

Subsequently, Pollet draws our attention to an underprivileged target group of HRD: the (long-term) unemployed. He describes Belgian legislation known as the "0.18 rule", which means that employers are held to contribute 0.18 per cent of their total payroll for employment training, and the policies which were adopted to implement this legislation. Evaluation of the measures showed rather disappointing results, and the challenge for

the social partners will be to establish appropriate links between resources, special target groups and career opportunities for these groups.

Finally, Teurlings and Simons present a study on learning to use a wordprocessor and elaborate on the design strategy which is employed: the so-called Leittext method. This method is based on the training philosophy of active learning. The authors conclude that instruction in word processing should be aimed more at the constructive and integrative part of the learning process.

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#### References

1. Chaplin, A., Hayes, C. and Lemke, H., "Vocational Education across Europe", in Kairamo, K. (Ed.), *Education for Life. A European Strategy*, Butterworths, London, 1989, pp. 103-19.
2. Knowles, M.S., *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, Gulf, Houston, 1978.