



STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES IN ETHIOPIAN PUBLIC SECTOR: THE CASE OF SELECTED BUREAUS

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Abstract

Every organization, whether it is public or private, operates with and through people. Public organizations in particular are judged on the basis of the performance of their human resources. Such competent human resources (employees and managers) become available only through the systematic and planned human resource development practices. Currently, public organizations are under continual pressure from the society to increase their effectiveness and quality with fewer resources while simultaneously being expected to demonstrate greater accountability and transparency in the processes. Hence, public organizations are required to strategically develop their human resources and integrate their knowledge with the new demand of the public to enhance organizational performance. The general objective of this investigation, therefore, is to explore strategic human resource development practices in selected public organizations. With a view to achieving this objective, descriptive research designs were applied. Moreover, the researcher employed mixed research approach, where qualitative approach made to be embedded within the quantitative approach. The data were collected by means of different data gathering instruments, such as questionnaires and individual interviews from a sample of 349 employees working in three regional Public Service and Human Resource Development Bureaus. The data analysis was done using SPSS version 27.0. Accordingly, the study found out that there is good SHRD practice with some areas of improvements. Particularly, the responses indicate a positive result showing the existence of average SHRD practices in the study organizations. Except for top management/leadership commitment towards HRD, with higher standards deviation that shows a wider range of opinions, the remaining responses signals better agreement among respondent. Overall, the data indicates positive HRD practices, while there are areas where perceptions varied.

Keywords: HRD, SHRD Practices, Public Sector.

1. Background and Justification

The human side of an organization is one of the most important organizational assets without which organizations hardly achieve their goals. Different changes to organizations focused on the development of human resources since people have the capacity to solve problems and produces in organizations (Hassan, Hashim and Ismail 2006, Muduli, et al. 2023). It is because of such importance that many public and private sector organizations focus on HRD related large-scale reforms. Gilley and Gilley (2003) explained that HRD has appeared as a significant strategic issue in many organizations as people are important source of sustained competitive advantage. In the present environment, competitors quickly overcome sources of competitive advantage and, thus, the only source of competitive advantage is the ability of an organization to learn more quickly than others. However, changing HRD from activity-based training to SHRD and to adopt a result-driven focus is the most difficult part of the transformation (Ibid).

Human resource development function is considered as a critical function for public sector organizations as the public demands are changing and requiring dynamic and capable workers. Strategically planned HRD practices are important for enhancing learning and performance in the public sector organizations, which in turn will affect citizens' satisfaction. Hence, the human resources of public sector organizations have to be developed in terms of the current and the emergent strategic orientation of public interest (Nguyen 2018). Currently, strategic human

resource management in public organizations is becoming a major focus area as public sector organizations are important institutions that mediate between the state and the public with varying demands (Fahim 2018). Governments identify and serve the public interests through capable public servants in the already established public institutions. However, conventional public sector organizations were claimed, by many, for their poor service delivery and slow response to changing needs of the public (Gebrekidan 2011). Effective human resource development is a critical function in today's private and public sector organizations.

Because of environmental changes and increasing public demands, many developing countries in Africa have been trying to reform and modernize their public services. This was mainly initiated as part of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). Many African countries undergone a major structural reform programs to transform the public service and introduce modern management system in the public service (Debela and Hagos 2012). Currently, globalizations and changing environmental factors made many organizations focus on knowledge-based competitiveness (Varma 2018, Lyons 2016, Kuchinke, et al. 2023). This transition reflects the importance of human capital which in turn built through the application of HRD practices. Many organizations consider their human capital - competence and capabilities - as their core competence. According to Cimen and Atan (2017), organizations investing on human capital development gain strong competitive advantages and higher performance.

Public services essentially require quality service and the extent to which the public servants or service providers are capable and dynamic in-service delivery needs to be empirically investigated by taking critical cases from the sector. Many of the literatures in Ethiopia show that there are attempts by the government to capacitate its public servants via different HRD mechanisms as a means to improve service delivery and enhance organizational performance (Tessema, et al. 2015). For this, there were diffident capacity development programs since 2001 and currently significant wide-ranging changes are taking place. Despite all these efforts, grievance on public service performance inefficiency mounted to its peak in recent time. Witness to this, Zewdie (2020) conducted a study on human resource development practices and challenges in public sector and found out that the sectoral bureaus were not effective in HRD implementation and there were no proper systems. Tessema, et al. (2015) further explained that there were many challenges in implementing HRD in the public sector as there was no strong linkage between HRD and other HRM functions.

Strategic approach to HRD involves treating employees as strategic organizational resource and capacitating to achieve organizational goals in a better way. Strategic HRD scholars argue that organizations success, at least partially, depends on their employee's capacity and performance. Hence, organizations can enhance their performance by investing on HRD efforts (Rama and Chandan 2021). Many of the early works on HRD focused on training as the only HRD mechanism. They emphasize training practices for improving employee skill (Aboyassin and Sultan 2017, Holland, Bartram and Garavan 2022). However, most recent researchers tend to the comprehensive strategic HRD practices and its effect on organizational overall performances (Shin and Konrad 2014). Among the many the scholars who work on theorizing SHRD was Swanson. He emphasized the importance of HRD theory building and argued that HRD, as an emerging and growing discipline, must get strategic attention from practitioners and academia (Swanson, 2001).

Recent studies on human resource development (HRD) emphasize the strategic role of HRD practices to enhance organizational performances (Garavan et.al. 2016; Garavan and Carbery 2014; Garavan 2007). In Ethiopia, the role of public sector organizations is significant as it is the major provider of public services. Hence, for a county like Ethiopia, where the public institutions are the major public service providers, studying public sector SHRD practices that impact performance is required for it significantly affect the overall development of the country. Strategic approach to HRD involves designing and implementing SHRD policies and practices to ensure that a firm's human capital contributes to the achievement of organizational objective (Garavan, et al. 2016). In this regard, the Ethiopian public sector organizations supported by Ministry of Public Service and Human Resource Development put tremendous efforts to reform itself and align the HRD function with performance improvement as many public sector organizations are claimed for weak service provision (Jiru 2020, Debela and Hagos 2012). The adoption of strategic models of HRD has become a relevant issue for public sector organizations in Ethiopia as it is proved to have significant effect on performance. Strategically planned and well-implemented human resource development practices improve organizational performance.

Thus, majority of the different public sector reforms in Ethiopia are geared towards human resource development issues. Despite the increasing importance that the Ethiopian public service sector is giving to HRD, the outcomes of HRD activities are not evaluated effectively to ensure continuous improvements. From preliminary discussions with public sector HR managers, trainers, staff, and officials, the researchers realized that there are good HRD attempts in the public service organizations at federal and regional levels. From the discussions, the researcher further realized that, despite the good start and attempt, many of the public sector

organizations including ministries failed to properly align training to the work place demand and the changing organizational contexts. There are also different studies conducted in strategic human resource development in various organizations, but not adequately explored in the Ethiopian public sector context. Hence, the purpose of this inquiry is to identify and describe the SHRD practices of the selected public institutions.

2. Literature

Human Resource Development (HRD) is an area of professional practice and an emerging interdisciplinary body of academic knowledge (Jacobs 1990). Many of the studies in human resource development (HRD) field focuses comprehensively on a wide range of antecedent variables that have been linked theoretically and empirically to organizational outcomes (Batista 2017). As a very practical field of study, HRD's primary objective was to help people cope effectively with some unsatisfactory state of affairs or problem of everyday life (Watkins and Marsick 2014).

According to Wilson (1999), Leonard Nadler first coined the term Human Resource Development to the 1969 Miami Conference of the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD) and he subsequently provided a definition in 1970. Since then, many scholars used the term HRD and provided different contextual definition (Garavan, Costine and Heraty 1995, Hassan, Hashim and Ismail 2006, Somasundaram and Egan 2004).

In his book, Leonard Nadler defined HRD as those learning experience that are organized for a specific time and designed to bring about the possibility of behavioral change. (L. Nadler 1990). Richard Swanson has defined HRD as a process of developing and unleashing human expertise through training and development and organization development for improving performance (Swanson, 2007). Human Resource Development (HRD) can also be defined as a set of systematic and planned activities designed by an organization to provide its members with the opportunities to learn necessary skills to meet current and future job requirements (Werner and DeSimone 2012).

Traditionally, the field of HRD was defined by practice, not from a theoretical frame or set of research. Garavan is the first to define strategic HRD in 1991. Later, many authors studied about the concept of SHRD (Garavan, Costine and Heraty 1995, Gilley and Gilley 2003, T. Garavan 2007, Lyons 2016). In his definition of SHRD as a coherent, vertically aligned and horizontally integrated set of learning and development activities that contribute to the achievement of strategic goals. Garavan identified a number of the defining features of strategic HRD (T. Garavan 1991). According to him, strategic HRD is concerned with the long-term development of human resources in organizations; it is a shaper of business strategy; it emphasizes learning for the purpose of performance; it utilizes a multiplicity of strategies to facilitate performance, learning and change in individuals and organizations; and it is continuously aligned with the strategic goals of the organization.

According to Gilley and Gilley (2003), strategic HRD involves long-term development of people within the organization that fosters continuous organizational effectiveness. Strategic HRD is different from the traditional HRD in that it proposes a model of HRD that is aligned with the new needs of the organization. In strategic human resource management, the word 'strategic' emphasizes the organizational perspective and seeks to make the link between HRD, organizational goals and objectives (Wognum and Lam 2000). Lyons (2016) argued that the role of SHRD is to ensure the implementation of human resource development strategies to enhance organizational performance. Strategic HRD is geared towards moving HRD from an operational to a strategic activity and link HRD activities to organizational performance in the belief that the greater the investment in SHRD, the greater the likelihood that the organizational will perform better (Huda 2014, Musgrave 2018, Okoye and and Ezejiofor 2013).

Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD) is an approach that aligns HRD practices with an organization's strategic goals to foster continuous learning and improve performance at all levels (Thomasc, et al. 2016). In line with the SHRD discourse, (Gilley and Maycunich 2000) suggested that organizational learning and performance are key criteria for a matured SHRD organization. Swanson and Holton (2009) describe HRD as a process aimed at enhancing human expertise through organizational development and individual training, with the goal of improving performance. Some HRD scholars, like Bierema (1997) and Dirkx (1997), argue that individual development and growth through learning not only boosts organizational performance but also enhances society's economic competitiveness, highlighting the importance of personal development for organizational productivity (L. Bierema 1997). Conversely, other HRD scholars, such as Jacobs and Washington (2003), contend that learning alone does not necessarily increase performance; it is merely one of several interventions that can potentially enhance organizational performance. While it is agreed upon by most that learning is a key aspect of HRD, the underlying principles and theories of the field are not agreed upon. According to Swanson & Holton (2009), two paradigms underlying HR Development are the Learning Theory Paradigm and the Performance Theory Paradigm.

The Resource Based and Competence Based View of HRD

Recent emergent literatures on strategic human resource development and strategic human resource management uses the resource-based view (RBV) as one of their main (Write, Dunford and Snell 2001). The Resource Based View was first founded with the work of Penrose. Penrose, in here book discussed the development of a theory on the growth of the firm. She argued, resources with which a particular firm is accustomed to working would shape the products and services its management is capable of rendering (Pitelis 2009).

As management tries to make the best use of the resources available, a 'dynamic' interacting process occurs which boosts firm growth. Other authors, (Negocios 2017, Lockett, Thompson and Morgenstern 2009, Mahoney and Pandian 1992), are also among many others who have extended the theory. Organization gains competitive advantage by not only acquiring but also developing, putting together, and effectively deploying its physical, human, and organizational resources in techniques that put in unique value and that are difficult for competitors to imitate (Njuguna 2009). This study, therefore, is underpinned by the resource-based theory that is commonly used in studying SHRD effect on organizational performance.

Resource based view (RBV) examine and interpret resources of the organizations to recognize how organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage. RBV claims that this competitive advantage comes from the internal resources that are owned by a firm (Madhani 2009). It is concerned with the connection between internal resources, strategy and organizational performance focusing on the encouragement of sustained competitive advantage through the development of human capital (Rose, Abdullah and Ismad 2010). Rendering to the resource-based view, internal resources can result in better competitive advantage than environments external to the firm (Wayne, et al. 2005).

However, a study conducted by Kraja and Osmani, revealed that both external and internal factors have positive affect in competitive advantages of organizations with external environment having greater impact than internal environment on SME's success (Kraja and Osmani 2015). In all the case, organizational resources including human capability have significant effect on organizational performance.

The RBV provides a theoretical base on how the human resources of an organization can add value to performance and competitive advantage. According to Cardeal and António (2012), resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable lead to competitive advantage. In this sense, it is the human resources of an organization that leads to competitive advantage. In this particular inquiry, the resource-based view will be utilized to support organizations human resource capabilities, which needs to be valuable, rare, inimitable and organized to enhance organizational performance.

The competence-based view has emerged as a distinct theoretical perspective, independent of the resource-based view, despite the latter being its precursor. The competence movement, advanced by scholars such as (Prahalad and Hamel 1994, Sanchez and Thomas 1996, Teece 1997), who presents a compelling theory for maintaining competitive advantage and has become a dominant framework in strategic management (Bresser, Hitt and Nixon 2000, Barney 2002). The resource-based view posits that firm A will outperform firm B if it controls more effective and efficient resources (Barney 2002, Hunt 2000, Bierema, et al. 2023). The competence-based view takes this further, asserting that firm A can only outperform firm B if it is able to utilize its available resources more effectively and efficiently than firm B. This advantage is tied to the possession and application of competencies that cannot be easily imitated or replaced by competitors (Teece 1997).

The resource-based view of HRD emphasizes that superior resources lead to performance differences among firms (Write, Dunford and Snell 2001), while the competence-based view adopts advanced approach (Verlag 2004). The competence-based approach argues that merely possessing these resources does not fully explain performance differences. The firm must be capable of utilizing these resources in a goal and market-oriented manner, which requires action related competences. These competences unlock the potential of resources, allowing the firm to adapt to market demands in a non-random and efficient way (Verlag 2004). (Hunt 2000) further suggests that the competence-based view extends beyond the resource-based view by explaining that competences are necessary to develop resources through asset refinement processes. Overall, the competence-based perspective introduces new conceptual dimensions that better capture the complex and dynamic interactions between assets, resources, and competences (R. H. Sanchez 2021).

Public Sector Strategic HRD

Every organization that hires people to carry out its work needs a human resource development plan in which various phases of SHRD work are tied together into an integrated program. The SHRD document must incorporate information on SHRD philosophy, SHRD sub-system, SHRD objective, SHRD policies and SHRD action plans (Write, Dunford and Snell 2001). Prerequisite to HRD plan is the organization's strategic plan. According to Webb and

Norton (2009), organization's strategic human resource planning must be done within a context where the mission is established, and the strategic and operational plans are developed.

According to Rao (1987), the HRD plan is a living document that sets out how HRD interventions will support the achievement of organizational strategic goals and directions. The plan must be continually reviewed and updated to keep abreast with changes in the organization's strategic priorities. It must also be anchored on the organization's strategic goals and directions to create a significant impact on organizational effectiveness (Rao 1987). To achieve this, the HRD plan must be able to address not only the individual performance and learning needs of the public employees but also the institutional and environmental needs as well (Debela and Hagos 2012, Zewdie 2020).

Many public organizations today design their own HRD programs. In Ethiopia, FDRE Civil Service Commission and Regional Civil Service Commissions or Regional Public Service Bureaus do these programs. The Federal Civil Service Commission of Ethiopia was legally established with the objective of realizing a meritorious, efficient, and productive civil service, in accordance with the law. The power and duties of the commission includes issuing the general criteria on education and work experience necessary for civil service positions; ensuring that the recruitment, placement, promotion, transfer, training and observance of discipline of employees in accordance with the law (Proclamation No. 8/1995 1995).

Public sector SHRD practices and Research Variables

Many authors identified various variables measuring the SHRD practices of public sector organizations (T. Garavan 1991, McCracken and Wallace 2000, Holland, Bartram and Garavan 2022). These variables can be used as a guideline to determine whether the nature and scope of human resource development can truly be regarded as strategic as McCracken and Wallace (2000: 427) explain: "...there has been relatively little work on the characteristics which an organization with a strategic approach to human resource development should have." McCracken and Wallace (2000) further explained that supportive national policy in the area of HRD, a flexible and merit-based civil service system, senior management leadership, a supportive learning environment, HRD integration and partnership with HRM, and strategic partnerships are among the important SHRD attributes.

Sthapit (2021) identified seven essential characteristics of SHRD: proactive planning with long term vision for HRD, through environmental analysis, integration with organization mission/ goals, HRD's ability to recognize/influence organization culture, top management leadership/commitment in HRD, strategic partnerships with line management for HRD implementation, strategic partnerships with HRM strategy/goals, trainers' role as change consultants for results-oriented competitive competency, professional intervention on HRD, and emphasis on effective (periodic, regular) evaluation of HRD. Each of these characteristics was reported to aid the integration of SHRD within an organization. Garavan (1991) further emphasized the need for HRD professionals to understand these barriers in order to facilitate the adoption of SHRD practices.

3. Methods

This part of the article will address the methodological settings and arrangements of the research. Accordingly, in order to suit the problem statement, this study utilized descriptive research design with a mixed research approach where qualitative method is embedded within the quantitative method. The research population of this study are employees working in Addis Ababa City Administration Public Service and Human Resource Development Bureau, Oromia Regional State Public Service and Human Resource Development Bureau, and Benishangul Gumuz Regional State Public Service and Human Resource Development Bureau. The main reason for the deliberate inclusion of these organizations is largely attributed to the very fact that the selected organizations have a lot to do with SHRD activities at regional level better than other public sector organizations, and thus worthy for the study. In a sample of 349 study participants, HRD/HRM directorate directors, experts, and employees were included. In light of the research topic and target study populations, the researcher used purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling technique was used to include team/unit leaders, department heads/managers and directors as they are assumed to have detail and overall understanding about their units SHRD practices and deal with planning, executing and following of the HRD practices of their respective units.

For this study, the data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were gathered through structured questionnaire. Personal interview (both structured and semi-structured) was also utilized in order to understand and interpret insights and opinions of the study participants deeply and balance the merits and demerits of each of these primary data collection tools, and thereby ensure the collection of ample data and the validity of the data through triangulation.

Regarding the data analysis, descriptive and inferential data analysis for quantitative data and description or thematic data analysis was used for qualitative data. The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative analysis tools and techniques. Therefore, the quantitative data were analyzed by means of SPSS 21.0 and Microsoft Excel spread sheet programs so as to produce various measures such as frequency counts and percentages that would be displayed through tables and charts. The qualitative data were analyzed through theory-based analysis approaches and content analysis techniques namely discussions, explanations, and narrations.

4. Discussions

Robust capacity development for human resources plays a strategic role in building high performing public employees and strong public sector. Creating HRD structures with sufficient positions and clearly defined decision-making authority at national, regional, and local levels is a critical first step to building capacity, but those positions must be filled with competent staff who possess sufficient knowledge, skills, and experience to capably perform their respective functions. In Ethiopia, weak HRM capacity has posed a challenge to strengthening public service delivery. The government has been engaged in several reform programs, including HRD programs, to improve the delivery of services within the public sector.

In this part of the paper, the strategic HRD practices of the study organizations was described and explained. Data collected from a sample 349 respondents regarding the practices of SHRD in the selected public service bureaus is presented and analyzed. The strategic HRD practices was measured by seven variables identified by different authors in the field. The variables identified are: proactive planning with long term vision for HRD, through environmental analysis, integration with organization mission/ goals, HRD’s ability to recognize/ influence organization culture, top management leadership/commitment in HRD, strategic partnerships with line management for HRD implementation, strategic partnerships with HRM strategy/goals, trainers’ role as change consultants for results-oriented competitive competency, professional intervention on HRD, and emphasis on effective (periodic, regular) evaluation of HRD (Sthapit 2021).

Proactive Planning with Long Term Vision through Environmental Analysis

Strategic human resource development must align with the company’s mission and its strategic orientation (Mitsakis 2019). However, McCracken and Wallace (2000) argue that strategic human resource development should not only be aligned with the company’s strategic orientation but also play a role in shaping how its mission and objectives are defined and executed. It requires the active participation of top managers and those responsible for human resource development in assessing the company's strategic environment. They must consistently monitor both internal and external factors to identify opportunities and threats that may affect the organization in general and its SHRD initiatives in particular (Garavan and Carbery 2014).

HRD initiatives require proactive and long-term planning to make noticeable contributions towards the achievement of key business strategies in any organization. It also requires a thorough analysis of external opportunities and threats facing the business in designing and implementing HRD initiatives. To this end, a long-term HRD vision and top management commitment plays pivotal role. Proactive planning for human resources development is the primary aspects of strategic HRD. By systematically analyzing the external environment and aligning HRD initiatives with a long-term vision, organizations can create a robust framework that not only addresses current challenges but also prepares for future demands. This proactive approach ensures that HRD remains relevant and impactful in driving organizational success (Carbery and Cross 2017).

Table 1: Proactive Planning with Long Term Vision through Environmental Analysis

Item	Frequency (%)					Mean	Std
	SD	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	SA		
HRD/ training is well planned in our organization by proactively considering the future needs of employees.	57 (16.3%)	73 (20.9%)	68 (19.5%)	91 (26.1%)	60 (17.2%)	3.07	1.346
A long-term vision is set as a main guideline while planning HRD programs in our organization.	36 (10.3%)	73 (20.9%)	65 (18.6%)	121 (34.7%)	54 (15.5%)	3.24	1.238

External opportunities and threats facing our business are analyzed in the HRD terms for organizing HRD/training programs.	25 (7.2%)	62 (17.8%)	96 (27.5%)	103 (29.5%)	63 (18.1%)	3.34	1.172
Our top management/top HR managers analyze external business environment (political, macro-economic, technological, socio-cultural and global factors) for planning HRD/training activities.	21 (6.0%)	80 (22.9%)	74 (21.2%)	103 (29.5%)	71 (21.3%)	3.35	1.208

As seen from table 1 above, a question was posed if the study organizations had well planned HRD programs by proactively considering the future needs of their employees. As shown in the table, 43.3% agreed and strongly agreed to the statement while 37.2% disagreed and strongly disagreed. This shows that the opinions were divided though those agree/strongly agree to the statement holds higher percentage. There were also a significant number of neutral responses (19.5%) regarding the proactive planning aspect that suggests uncertainty or mixed feelings about how well HRD is planned. For this reason, the researcher went to key informants' interview posing similar question. According to the responses from the three regional bureaus, there is a national and regional five years plan for HRD programs. But they feel that it lacks flexibility amid the changing needs and technological advancements. Other groups of the interviews expressed that they don't have much to say for the planning didn't involve them. Yet, they acknowledge the existence of long-term HRD plan which is the direction from the ministry with little contextualization. They further attributed this to poor communication and engagement from the management side. According to Tadesse (2019), many of the reform programs, including HRD initiatives, are top down lacking the required ownership from the side of lower-level leadership and employees. As a result, the reform programs were not popular and did not enjoy a reasonable level of commitment at the bottom of the hierarchy where the reform efforts were to be brought down on the ground for implementation and institutionalization (Tadesse 2019). Hence, we can conclude that, there exist long-term (5 years) HRD plans within the respective bureaus with some limitation in involving staff concerned in the process and communicating same.

The second item was if a long-term vision is set as a main guideline while planning HRD programs in the study organizations. Organizations need a long-term vision, a new way to conceptualize and guide the role of HRD functions within the organization (Marjorie and Wallace 2016). In this case, a significant number of respondents (50.2%) agreed or strongly agreed to the existence of HRD programs in the long-term vision of the bureau. While 18.6% remain neutral and 31.2% disagree or strongly disagree to the statement. This indicates that HRD long-term vision is set and recognized by many. Regarding analyzing external opportunities and threats in terms of organizing HRD programs, there is very small variation in responses with 1.172 standard deviation 47.6% agreeing and strongly agreeing on the existence of the practices of analyzing external opportunities and threats. It seems that there is general agreement that the organization does consider external factors in its HRD planning while 25% of the respondents choose to disagree.

Another key aspect of SHRD approaches is the clear acknowledgment of environmental scanning as a crucial function. This involves recognizing that changes in the external environment can significantly affect the organization and its operations. Given the increasing pace of change and staff awareness of external factors, this function is vital and may be managed by senior staff. The rapid advancement of information technology, globalization, and industrialization has also transformed international business into a complex structure, requiring individuals to be aware and prepared to engage with diverse global players (Manelle 2010, Chun 2001). Consequently, current HRD practices should align with corporate strategies and respond to market trends. For the last item asked if top management/top HR managers analyze external business environment for planning HRD activities, majority of the respondents (50.8%) agree and strongly agree. While 28.9% choose to disagree/strongly disagree and 21.2% choose to remain neutral. The data indicates that there is a belief that top management is engaged in analyzing external factors, which is vital for an effective HRD strategy.

Overall, there is respondents' agreement on proactive planning and long-term visioning to enhance overall HRD effectiveness though there also observed limitations. This was also triangulated with key informants and confirmed the existence of proactive and long-term human resource development in the study organizations. The offices sampled conduct long term planning – mostly top down, and need assessments are made before conducting any training/developments activities and puts the need in the annual staff development plan. Regarding assessing/analyzing external business environment it was reported that, when designing HRD program,

there is analysis of political, macro-economic, and socio-cultural environments, while the global factors and technological factors are less studied.

Integration with Organization Mission and Culture

Strategic HRD involves with establishing a connection amongst the general strategic objectives of the organization and the strategy for human resource development and performance (Suman, Dipak and Deepak, 2023). As many of the HRD initiatives emanate from the federal government and regional government directions, there is better alignment of the HRD practices with the organization’s goals. Regarding the work culture, there is a learning culture recently introduced and staff share their experiences and speak up when they have to.

Table 2: Integration with Organization Mission and Culture

Item	Frequency (%)					Mean	Std
	SD	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	SA		
HRD/ training activities currently make noticeable/ significant contribution towards the achievement of key business strategies/ goals in our organization.	20 (5.7%)	63 (18.1%)	90 (25.8%)	108 (30.9%)	68 (19.5%)	3.40	1.157
HRD/training is inter-linked with our organization’s overall organizational mission, goals and plans (written or unwritten).	25 (7.2%)	79 (22.6%)	79 (22.6%)	111 (31.8%)	55 (15.8%)	3.26	1.181
Our organization’s culture and goals are matched with HRD strategies and programs.	21 (6.0%)	60 (17.2%)	92 (26.4%)	115 (33.0%)	61 (17.5%)	3.39	1.138
HRD in our organization adequately recognizes and influences our organization’s corporate culture/ organization culture.	25 (7.2%)	61 (17.5%)	92 (26.4%)	103 (29.5%)	68 (19.5%)	3.37	1.185

The above table assesses the integration of Human Resource Development (HRD) activities with organizational mission and goals, as well as HRD’s ability to recognize and influence organizational culture. Four items related to HRD integration with organization mission/goals and organization were presented to the participants with five levels of agreement. Those four question items were used to measure the existence of HRD integration with organization mission and organizational culture. The first question was if the respondents perceive that HRD/ training activities currently make noticeable contribution towards the achievement of key business strategies/ goals in the organization. More than half (50.4%) of the respondents replied that they do agree or strongly agree with the statement while 25.8% and 25.8% prefer to be neutral and disagree/strongly disagree. From this, it can be inferred that most respondents feel that the existing HRD activities make a noticeable contribution to the achievement of key business strategies.

To the second item, 47.6% of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed that HRD/training is inter-linked with their organization’s overall organizational mission, goals and plans while 22.6% and 7.2% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. On the other hand, another 22.6% remained neutral. As the number of disagreements and neutral take the majority, it can be concluded that there seem to be a problem in either communicating how HRD is linked to organizations overall mission/goals or there is loose alignment. To validate this finding, it was important to go for further interview with the respondents. Accordingly, it was found out that there is poor communication – the head of departments were not sharing the information on how their organization aligned the HRD activities with the federal, regional and departmental priorities. As one of the key informants explained, there is information hording practices in their department when it comes to strategic issues. They are told to execute things without being involved or at least well informed about things happening at a higher level.

The third item was if the study organizations culture and goals match with HRD strategies and programs. Per the table above, there is a perception regarding the better alignment of organizational culture with the HRD strategies and programs. About 50.5% agreed/strongly agreed with the statement, while less number (23.2%) disagreed on the point. Based on the data and the mean value of 3.39, which incline to agree scale, it is

summarized that there exist an alignment of organizational culture and HRD strategies/programs. And for the last item, if HRD adequately recognizes and influences our organization’s corporate culture/ organization culture, responses also inclined to agree with mean value of 3.37 while the number of respondents who remain neutral (26.4%) were not ignorable. The number of staff responding agree/strongly agree were 49% and that disagree/strongly disagree were 24.7%. Furthermore, the responses show that respondents generally agree that there is HRD integration with organization mission/goals and HRD influences organization culture with standard deviations ranging from 1.138 to 1.185 that reflect moderate variability in responses. Overall, there is a positive perception of HRD’s integration with organizational goals and influencing culture among respondents. Finding by Anil attempted to examine the effect of HRD practices on organization culture of some leading private and public sector organizations in India. The study revealed that the human resource development practices are a strong predictor of organizational culture both in private sector and public sector organizations in India (Anil 2009). Osibanjo and Adeniji, who did statistical analysis based on two hundred and thirty-seven respondents in the selected private universities, found that there exist a close relationship exists between organizational culture and training programs (Osibanjo and Adeniji 2013).

Top Management Leadership/Commitment

Leadership commitment is one of the most important aspects of SHRD. They set the tone for the organization fostering a culture of continuous learning and development. According to Daoud & Tarek (2023) it is the responsibility of the leadership to commit and drive that connect employee development with organizational objectives, ensuring the workforce possesses the necessary skills for future challenges. Their involvement not only inspires employees but also emphasizes the significance of strategic development across the organization.

Leadership plays a crucial role in executing HRD initiatives. Leaders establish the organization's priorities and lend credibility to strategic HRD activities, anticipating that these initiatives will drive organizational growth through increased profits, improved human capital, and the development of a dedicated and loyal workforce (Collins and Clark 2003). However, in many organizations, expenditure on training does not reflect investment in a financial sense but is instead perceived as a cost. Brown, Peccei, Sandberg, and Welchman (1989) illustrated from their research that when management training is considered it is concentrated towards the bottom end of the management hierarchy. Senior level managers were often not included in training strategies. It is obvious that increased investment in organizational learning requires the active participation of top management.

Table 3: Top management leadership/commitment in HRD

Item	Frequency (%)					Mean	Std
	SD	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	SA		
Our organization’s top managers and senior executives take leadership in conducting effective, proactive HRD/ training programs.	24 (6.9%)	59 (16.9%)	95 (27.2%)	123 (35.2%)	48 (13.8%)	3.32	1.117
Our organization’s top managers are fully committed to conducting effective, proactive HRD/ training programs.	21 (6.0%)	70 (20.1%)	76 (21.8%)	111 (31.8%)	71 (20.3%)	3.40	3.40
Our organization’s top managers and senior executives take interest and spend time (get involved) in HRD/ training by encouraging other managers/other workers to discuss HRD issues.	27 (7.7%)	64 (18.3%)	88 (25.2%)	101 (28.9%)	69 (19.8%)	3.35	1.207

Data were collected from the study organizations regarding top management’s commitment towards the SHRD activities. In the above table there were three questions if leaders take leadership in conducting effective and proactive HRD programs, if they are fully committed to conducting effective and proactive HRD programs, and if leaders have interest and get involved in HRD activities by encouraging other managers to discuss HRD issues. The analysis of perceptions regarding leadership commitment to Human Resource Development (HRD) programs reveals a generally positive sentiment among employees. For the first item if organization’s top managers take

leadership in conducting effective, proactive HRD/ training programs, 49% agreed/strongly agreed, 23.8% disagreed/strongly disagreed, and 27.2% choose to be neutral. This indicates a positive implication that the leadership is committed to HRD initiative with only 23.8% disagreement to the statement. Responding to top managers’ commitment to conducting effective, proactive HRD/ training programs, a majority of (52.1%) believe that top management is committed to effective HRD initiatives, with the highest mean scores of 3.40. However, a notable percentage of respondents (21.8%), expressed neutral feelings, indicating uncertainty about the commitment of leadership in HRD initiatives. Finally, the question about the organization’s top managers and senior executives’ interest in getting involved in HRD by encouraging other managers to discuss HRD issues got 48.7% agreement and 26% disagreement. Hence, it can be argued that there is still leadership support to the HRD initiative though there still exist some limitations.

Finding out the details on the limitations associated with leadership commitment, one of the key informants replied the following:

“HRD practices depends on the top management/leadership. It largely depends on the attention managers/leaders give to staff development. In my organization, because of the frequent change of politically appointed leaders, the HRD practices are changing from time to time – there will be good HRD practices when the leaders focus on HRD and poor practices when leaders deprioritize HRD and cut the budgets. For such problems, there must be a policy regarding the amount of budget to be allocated for this and there must be one performance indicator related to staff development.”

It was also noted that HRD in any organization can’t be effective without the involvement and support of top management or leadership. And in the study organizations, as put by informants, there is a will and support from the management. But they are not playing the role model in proactively designing HRD programs to their team. Most are reactive and supportive when the initiation is coming from HR or other unit of the organization.

Strategic Partnerships with Line Management

Line or functional managers are best placed to assess, on an ongoing basis, the training and development needs of subordinates and can facilitate identifying development routes for subordinates and is ideally placed to provide advice, direction, and counseling to subordinates (Sthapit 2021). Therefore, the competence of line managers is vital to the successful implementation of strategic HRD.

Table 4: Strategic partnerships with line management

Item	Frequency (%)					Mean	Std
	SD	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	SA		
Line managers in our organization are supportive and committed towards really developing organization’s human resources.	19 (5.4%)	78 (22.3%)	75 (21.5%)	101 (28.9%)	76 (21.8%)	3.39	1.205
Line managers in our organization establish strategic partnership with top management in really developing organization’s human resources.	26 (7.4%)	57 (16.3%)	93 (26.6%)	113 (32.4%)	60 (17.2%)	3.24	1.201
Line managers and supervisors feel that HRD/training makes their job easier and more efficient after training and encourage employees to undergo training/HRD.	28 (8.0%)	76 (21.8%)	87 (24.9%)	99 (28.4%)	59 (16.9%)	3.36	1.162
I think most of the supervisors and line managers feel that they do not lose/ risk their supervisory status and competitiveness, if they train/develop their junior staff.	22 (6.3%)	63 (18.1%)	95 (27.2%)	98 (28.1%)	71 (20.3%)	3.38	1.177

The analysis of Table 4, which addresses strategic partnerships with line management for HRD (Human Resource Development) implementation, highlights mixed perceptions among employees regarding the role of

line managers in developing organizational human resources. Regarding the support from line managers, the majority (50.7%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that line managers are supportive and committed to developing the organization’s human resources. However, a significant portion (27.7%) disagree and strongly disagree, indicating potential gaps in perceived commitment or support.

Assessed perception about strategic partnerships with top management in developing organization’s human resources shows relatively a lower mean score, with 49.6% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that line managers establish strategic partnerships with top management regarding HRD. The higher neutral (26.6%) and disagreement percentages (23.7%) suggest that employees may not fully perceive strong collaboration between line and top management in HRD efforts.

Perceived efficiency of employees after receiving HRD intervention or training by line managers and supervisors show that 45.3% of the managers/supervisors agreeing/strongly agreeing that HRD/training benefitted employees’ efficiency and encourage participation. However, non-negligible numbers of supervisors/managers (29.8%) disagreed and strongly disagreed to the statement. Hence, it is clear that some line managers/supervisors did not perceive that HRD interventions/training has impacted their supervises or employees work efficiency. With the key informant interview this was further questioned, and the interviewee’s view was that they are not quite sure whether efficiency has increased overall, or unit performance is not measured objectively. However, they do feel that there is a change in terms of effectiveness and efficiency resulting from training in general. The perception that supervisors do not risk their status by developing junior staff is moderately positive, with 48.4% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Nonetheless, the presence of neutral (27.2%) and 24.4% disagreement responses suggests some apprehension about the feeling that most supervisors do feel that they do lose their supervisory status and competitiveness if they train/develop their junior staff. This could create knowledge hoarding behavior among supervisors and impact staff development negatively.

As per the information from serious interview, HRD is considered the sole role of HR department and line managers don’t play proactive role in initiating HRD interventions and but are collaborative when requested. Overall, there is a favorable view of line managers' roles in HRD, particularly regarding their support and perceived efficiency gains from training. The neutral and dissenting responses across items indicate opportunities for enhancing perceptions of collaboration between line and top management and clarifying the value of HRD for supervisors. While there is a generally positive outlook on the role of line managers in HRD implementation, addressing the areas of uncertainty and enhancing strategic partnerships could further strengthen organizational effectiveness in human resource development.

Strategic Partnerships with HRM strategy

HRD should be integrated into a broader set of HRM strategies, and it is necessary to establish strong partnerships between HRM and HRD professionals. Regarding the strategic partnership, Garavan and Carbery (2014) emphasized the importance of aligning HRD strategy with overarching HRM strategies to help achieve organizational goals. Without a genuine alliance and integration between HRM and HRD, there is little chance of either having a significant impact on corporate objectives (Sthapit 2021). Therefore, HRD must form strategic partnerships with HRM strategies and goals to enhance its strategic role. To most writers, HRD is the part of HRM which deals with developing employees so that they have the skills and knowledge they need to perform their jobs creating strong link and alignment between the two (Reed 2017).

Table 5: Strategic partnerships with HRM strategy

Item	Frequency (%)					Mean	Std
	SD	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	SA		
HRD/training in our organization is interlinked and matched with HRM activities [like HR planning, recruitment, selection, wage-management and performance appraisal] for implementing HRD programs.	15 (4.3%)	73 (20.9%)	98 (28.1%)	116 (33.2%)	47 (13.5%)	3.31	1.078
In our organization, HRD/training is strategically based on such HR/ personnel activities as performance appraisal and HRD need-assessment.	16 (4.6%)	65 (18.6%)	78 (22.3%)	118 (33.8%)	72 (20.6%)	3.47	1.146

HR-development (HRD) strategies, goals and programs (written or unwritten) largely influence those of HR-Management (HRM) and vice versa.	26 (7.4%)	63 (18.1%)	73 (20.9%)	119 (34.1%)	68 (19.5%)	3.40	1.201
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The fifth measure for SHRD practices was the interlinked between HRD and HRM activities for implementing HRD programs. According to the data obtained, 46.7% and 25.2% agreed/strongly agreed and disagreed/strongly disagreed regarding the existence of interlink between HRD and other HRM activities respectively with standard deviation of 1.078. From this, it can be inferred that there is an interlink between HRM and HRD but not without limitations as some disagreed to the existence of a link. Concerning the basis for HRD activities if it was based on performance appraisal and HRD need-assessment, the majority of the respondents (54.4%) replied that HRD is based on the results of performance appraisal and HRD need assessment. Another group of respondents accounting for 23.2% disagreed or perceived that the HRD is not based on need assessment or performance appraisal. Hence, there exists a perception that HRD initiatives are based on performance appraisal results and need assessment. The last question here was whether the respondents agree or not regarding if the HRD strategies, goals and programs largely influence those of HR-Management and vice versa. Here, 53.6% of respondents agree or strongly agree that HRD strategies and goals significantly influence HRM practices and HRM practices also affect HRD while 25.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. This reflects the overall positive perception of the mutual influence among HRD and HRM. Apparently, the neutral responses indicate that some employees may be unclear about the existence or extent of the practices. This was also confirmed from interviews where one of the interviewees replied aligning HRD initiatives with HR strategy is something the bureau, in collaboration with the ministry, performs despite some challenges on its implementation.

Trainers’ Role as Change Consultants

Trainers have a special implementation role in relation to HRD and the role of trainers in training/HRD activities has been the subject of many academic debates and discussions (Farhad 2014). The trainer in the position of change agent is one who has a totally different approach to training, trainees and the organization, for or with which, he or she works. The trainer is more concerned with the process of development than with being involved in the mechanics of the learning process (Scott 1993). Such a trainer views his or her role as that of preparing the trainees to initiate change and to develop the organization so that it is able to cope with internal as well as external change.

Experience shows that trainers, in their capacity as change agents, are concerned with the wellbeing and progress of the trainees and their organization (Leduchowicz 1982, Bramely 1991, Bierema, et al. 2023, Shirmohammadi, Hedayati and McLean 2021). The change agent, in the extreme sense of the word, is more concerned with people and people-related knowledge, skills and values, than with task-related aspects. He or she is competent in interpersonal communication and uses skills, energy and enthusiasm with the aim of integrating the individual trainees and organizational change (L. Nadler 1969). According to Bierema, et al. (2023), the active trainer is one who shows more or less equal concern for, on the one hand, the maintenance of the trainee’s role within the organization and, on the other hand, the need for adapting to or bringing about change.

Table 6: Trainers’ Role as Change Consultants

Item	Frequency (%)					Mean	Std
	SD	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	SA		
Role of trainers/ HRD professionals in our organization has been expanded and transformed into organizational change consultants.	23 (6.6%)	56 (16.0%)	99 (28.4%)	120 (34.4%)	51 (14.6%)	3.34	1.113
Competent trainers/faculty members and HRD professionals handle the HRD/ training programs in our organization.	17 (4.9%)	58 (16.6%)	76 (21.8%)	112 (32.1%)	86 (24.6%)	3.55	1.170

HRD in our organization emphasizes on developing result-oriented competitive competency of employees, so that they develop competitive knowledge, skills, abilities and positive attitude, and improve performance.	19 (5.4%)	72 (20.6%)	79 (22.6%)	103 (29.5%)	76 (21.8%)	3.42	1.192
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Table 6 above evaluates the role of trainers as change consultants. To this query, 49% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the role of trainers and HRD professionals has expanded into that of organizational change consultants. However, a significant portion (28.4%) remains neutral, suggesting some uncertainty about this transformation and its implications. Whereas 22.6% disagree/strongly disagree to this statement. Pertinent to perception of respondents regarding trainers/faculty members and HRD professionals handling the HRD/ training programs in study organization, majority (56.7%) agreed or strongly agreed assuring that there exist trainers or HRD professionals handling training programs while 21.5% disagreed/strongly disagreed. Respondents also showed a positive perception with 51.3% agreeing or strongly agreeing that HRD emphasizes developing competitive competencies in employees, which encompasses knowledge, skills, abilities, and a positive attitude to improve performance. However, the presence of disagree or strongly disagree (26%) indicates that there are some disagreements regarding the emphasis on developing result-oriented competitive competency and the effectiveness of these initiatives in improving performance.

For trainers’ role is as change consultants and emphasis on effective periodic and regular evaluation of HRD, responses were almost similar showing that there exists a practice of using trainers as change consultants and emphasis on effective evaluation of HRD with slight difference in the mean scores. However, there still exist respondents who remain neutral, disagree and strongly disagree on both questions. As to one of the key informants, there is a shortage of dedicated trainers in the organization and some offices don’t have well skilled people who provide training for the staff and leaders on different training including leadership development programs. In many cases, they send their staff to federal and regional Management Institutes or Universities for training and other times, they are bringing trainers from those organizations. Those trainers do support the organization post training depending on the terms of reference, but it is not as productive as having a dedicated trainer within the organization. Further, they mentioned that the bureau doesn’t have a well skilled person who provides training for the staff and leaders on different training including leadership development programs. Since the office lacks dedicated trainers, they send staff who need training to other institutions which provide trainings. However, the trainers from universities and regional management/leadership institutes help the organization a lot with change initiatives like BSC and KAIZEN. Regarding the trainer’s role as change consultant, there is a team of professionals in the institutional change and innovation team who act as change consultants.

Emphasis on Effective Evaluation

As the importance of evaluation in organizations has increased, there have been academic endeavors that suggest alternative approaches to evaluation of HRD programs. Strategically oriented HRD functions spend time evaluating their activities and use measures that seem most relevant to the management of their own organization (Bramely 1991, T. Garavan 2007, Holland, Bartram and Garavan 2022). The most used way of evaluating HRD investments is to count the level of investment in money terms (financial indicator) and the number of people that participate in HRD activities. However, result indicators only analyze costs and participants and are not related with benefits (Mitsakis 2019). It is quite interesting to note that in the public administrators’ perspective the best way of evaluating a program is to use basic result methods. Quite crucially, the public administrators are concerned with the execution of the program and the correctness of the planning. To execute means to spend the money that is available and to support many people and organizations. If the operation was received by many persons and organizations, this should mean it was a success.

Table 7: Emphasis on effective evaluation

Item	Frequency (%)					Mean	Std
	SD	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	SA		

Our organization periodically and regularly evaluates its HRD, and training programs and improves them.	23 (6.6%)	67 (19.2%)	74 (21.2%)	124 (35.5%)	61 (17.5%)	3.38	1.170
The evaluation and review of HRD/training programs is mainly performed as cost-effectiveness evaluation in our organization.	26 (7.4%)	68 (19.5%)	98 (28.1%)	101 (28.9%)	56 (16.0%)	3.27	1.165
Benchmarking and other modified techniques are used to evaluate the effectiveness of HRD activities in our organization.	18 (5.2%)	61 (17.5%)	93 (26.6%)	115 (33.0%)	62 (17.8%)	3.41	1.122

The analysis of Table 7 examines the emphasis on effective periodic and regular evaluation of HRD initiatives and reveals a generally positive view regarding the periodic evaluation of training programs, though there are areas of uncertainty. Specifically, for item one, if the organizations periodically and regularly evaluate their HRD and training programs and improve them, majority (53%) agreed or strongly agreed while 25.8% disagreed/strongly disagreed. Regarding the perceived cost effectiveness of the HRD evaluations, 44.9% and 26.9% of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed and disagreed/strongly disagreed respectively. Whereas 28.1% were neutral. In this case, though respondents agreeing with statement did not account for the significant majority, there is an evaluation which seems to be cost effective as perceived by many yet there was a question of the cost effectiveness of the measurement. For benchmarking and other modified techniques used to evaluate the effectiveness of HRD activities in the organizations, respondents' show a positive view with 50.8% agreeing or strongly agreeing that benchmarking and other modified techniques are utilized to evaluate HRD activities. On the other hand, 22.7% made their choice not to agree and replied disagree or strongly disagree. As this was a measure of perception, it is not expected to have a consensus but the responses from the majority showed a recognition of diverse evaluation methods beyond basic assessments, although the neutral responses (26.6%) suggest some uncertainty about the extent of their application. Similarly, interview result showed that the organization under study periodically and regularly evaluates their HRD and training programs and perform benchmarking by learning lessons from similar organizations in other regions in order to improve their HRD practices.

5. Conclusion

In Ethiopian public sector organizations, strategic human resource development (SHRD) plays a crucial role in improving the performance of the sector organizations. This study examines how selected bureaus in Ethiopia implement SHRD in terms proactive planning with long term vision, integration with organization mission/ goals, top management/leadership is commitment, strategic partnerships with line management, strategic partnerships with HRM strategy/goals, trainers' role is as change consultants, and emphasis on effective periodic and regular evaluation of HRD. Based on the findings presented above, it can be concluded that there are SHRD practices with some area of improvements. Particularly, the responses indicate a positive result showing the existence of average SHRD practices in the study organizations. Except for top management/leadership commitment towards HRD, with higher standards deviation that shows a wider range of opinions, the remaining responses signals better agreement among respondent. Overall, the data indicates positive HRD practices, while there are areas where perceptions varied. Hence, it is recommended to work on improving the implementation of the SHRD activities, which is average at the moment, to help organizations benefit from the results – employee commitment, performance improvement, and much more.

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