


# Organisational Manoeuvres to Manage Human Resource Development Strategically: *A Review of Strategic HRD Factors*

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**Abstract:** *In managing the rapidly changing environment context, human resources and talents are probably the only organisational resource that managers can resort to, in their pursuit of sustainably steering the organisation through the turbulent course, including the one of the COVID-19 pandemic now. Managers should push forward organisational manoeuvres to manage their human resource development (HRD) function by embodying strategic factors in a commensurate manner. It requires them to strategize the way they train and develop their human resources and talents; that is, the process of strategic HRD. Therefore, this paper reviewed the past literature to identify the strategic HRD factors, which are the organisational manoeuvres essential to manage HRD strategically. Based on the critical deliberations on the previous literature, it infers that there are seven key strategic factors that strategize HRD in an organisation. It helps build an agile, resilient organisation that can sustain in both normal and crisis times.*

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**Key words:** Human resource development, organisational manoeuvres, strategic factors, strategic human resource development, training and development

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## I. INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OBJECTIVE

The external environmental changes including the growing threats from the persisting coronavirus pandemic and its ensuing crises have already put a great many businesses in jeopardy. Of late, the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has come heavily on managers' competency to steer their organisations through one of the most turbulent times that humankind has ever witnessed (WEF, 2021 May 7; Sthapit, 2021). It has become a Herculean task for managers to make their organisations and businesses sustainable; as the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic and its ensuing crisis are not only huge and unpredictable, but also multifaceted and far-reaching. For making the organisation and its business sustainable, managers should make the organisation agile and resilient from the crisis. In the substantially changed context, human resources and talents are probably the only organisational resource that managers can resort to, in their pursuit of sustainably steering the organisation through the turbulent course. Managers should push forward organisational manoeuvres to manage their human resource development (HRD) function by embodying strategic factors in a commensurate manner. It requires them to strategize the way they train and develop their human resources and talents; that is, the process of strategic human resource development (HRD).

Being strategic also entails HRD management to analyse and consider externalities or external environmental forces. The changes in the environment forces require the organisation to prepare and develop its human resources adequately so that they are capable of responding to those environment forces proactively (Sthapit, 2019b; Sthapit, 2019c). It holds much true today as we have been grappling with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another imperative need in this context is to ruminate what components or programmes of HRD the organisation should encompass. In recent times, the key components or programmes of HRD have gone beyond a traditional view that identified only employee training and management development as the key HRD components (Sthapit, 2019a). In today's changing organisational contexts, the HRD function needs not only limit itself to these two traditionally recognised constituents but also encompass other interrelated and interdependent components (Fig 1).

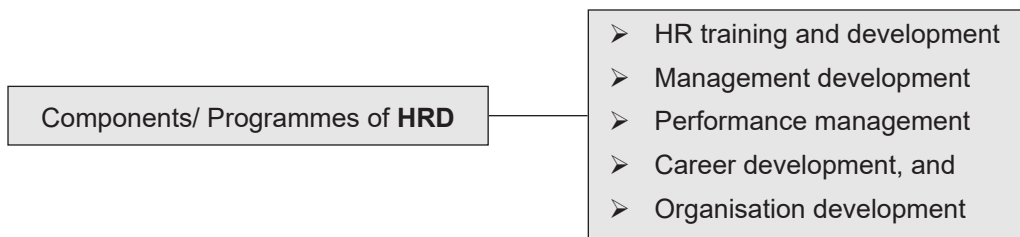


Figure 1: HRD components / programmes

By analysing and synthesising the past literature published from different countries, Sthapit (2019a; 2020b) identified the five key components or programmes of HRD, which are emergent and imperative in today's organisations; they are presented in Figure 1.

As a matter of fact posited by Garavan (1991, 2007), strategic HRD basically focuses on integrating HRD activities with organisational goals and values to develop core capabilities that enhance a firm's competitive advantage. HRD— embedded in the five essential components shown in Fig 1— can contribute to strategic formulation and implementation (Sthapit, 2008; 2012; and 2013). Therefore, this paper has aimed at identifying the strategic factors that help strategize the HRD management for building an agile, resilient organisation that can sustain in both normal and crisis times.

## II. STUDY METHODOLOGY

The study basically has made use of review of related literature as well as its analysis followed by its synthesis. The method used for the literature search involved accessing scholarly literature available in the printed form as well as on electronic databases — mostly those acceptable and popular in the contemporary Management research domain. The online databases surveyed during this present review included electronic journals on Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Emerald, ORCID, SSRN, InderScience, Springer Nature, JSTOR, ScienceDirect and Catchword. It has applied the 'keyword and keyphrase search' technique for collecting sought information.

These research articles and papers were subsequently screened according to relevance for the study purpose. Only articles, with explicit reference to strategic HRD and its strategic aspects were encompassed and analysed. The articles that resulted from these screenings were examined in detail and given a limited number of relevant articles; each was reviewed in some detail as the basis of this literature review.

### *Limitations*

It is acknowledged that the review paper contains limitations, for several reasons. One, the study is based on research that examines the notion of integrating HRD and organisation strategy labelled as such. It might not involuntarily include some specific aspects of strategic HRD factors that the methodology—mostly based on electronic searches— has failed to recognise. Such write-ups implicitly describing strategic HRD factors could remain beyond the purview of the study. A further limitation is acknowledged for not empirically testing the strategic HRD factors, as only literature—based on empirical studies and else— on the topic has been reviewed. These limitations would indicate the areas that HRD researchers, scholars and practitioners are required to incorporate in their future research works.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following paragraphs shall first make a critical assessment of the strategic dimensions to HRD by analysing the discourse and discussions on the strategic factors essentially embedded with human resource development. It churns out and identifies the strategic factors that help strategize HRD management.

Table 1  
1: What Characterise Strategic HRD?

Garavan (1991, 2007)	McCracken & Wallace (2000a)	Horwitz (1999)	Tseng & McLean (2008)	Sthapit (2013; 2020, July)	Modified framework*
Integration with organisational missions and goals	Shaping organisational missions and goals	Integration into a human resource strategy, aligned with an organisational or corporate strategy	Shaping organizational missions and goals	HRD's integration with organisation mission/ goals	HRD's integration with organisation mission/ goals and ability to recognise/ influence organisation/ corporate culture
Recognition of organisation culture	Ability to influence corporate culture	Creating an organisational culture of continuous learning and transfer of learning between units	Ability to influence corporate culture	Ability to influence corporate culture	
Top management support	Top management leadership		Top management leadership	Top management leadership in HRD	Top management leadership and commitment in HRD
Environmental scanning	Environmental scanning by senior management, specifically in HRD terms		Environmental scanning by senior HRD management	Proactive planning through continuous environmental analysis, in HRD terms	Proactive planning with a long-term HRD vision through continuous environmental analysis in HRD terms
HRD plans and policies	HRD strategies, plans and policies	Competency-based HRD derived from structural, systemic, technological and work reorganisation needs	HRD strategies, policies and plans	Strategic partnerships with line management to implement HRD strategies and plans	Strategic partnerships with line management for implementation of HRD strategies, plans and policies
Line manager commitment, involvement	Strategic partnerships with line management	Business and work process integration: learning to work collaboratively across traditional functional disciplines in multifunctional/ disciplinary teams	Strategic partnerships with line management		
		Partnership between HRD specialists and line managers in developing HR competencies to achieve organisational goals			
		Line management responsibility for developing people as a key performance area in the appraisal and reward			

Garavan (1991, 2007)	McCracken & Wallace (2000a)	Horwitz (1999)	Tseng & McLean (2008)	Sthapit (2013; 2020July)	Modified framework*
Existence of HRM activities	Strategic partnerships with HRM	Targeting value-adding performance areas for specific development initiatives which potentially enhance competitive advantage	Strategic partnerships with HRM	Strategic partnerships of HRD with HRM activities	HRD's strategic partnerships with HRM activities
Expanded trainer role	Trainers as organisational change consultants		Trainers as organizational change consultants	Emphasis on HRD/trainers' role as organisational change consultants for competitive competency	Emphasis on HRD/trainers' role as organisational change consultants for result-oriented competitive competency through professional intervention
Emphasis on evaluation	Emphasis on cost effectiveness evaluation	Measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of HRD practices on individual, team, and work unit performance	Emphasis on individual productivity & participation	Emphasis on effective (regular, periodic) evaluation of HRD	Emphasis on effective evaluation of HRD

*Note: Author's tabulation based on past literature*

### *Strategizing HRD: The organisational manoeuvre to attain corporate goals*

For making HRD function veritably strategic, the management should make sure that the elements as exhibited in Table 1 embody their HRD management. This section discusses the strategic HRD factors identified based on the key literature in this body of knowledge, and presents the modified version of the factors that strategize HRD in organisations.

Garavan (1991) identified nine major elements or factors that characterise strategic HRD; namely, HRD's integration with organisational missions and goals; Recognition of organisation culture; Top management support; Environmental scanning; HRD plans and policies; Line manager commitment, involvement, Existence of HRM activities, Expanded trainer role, and Emphasis on evaluation. To bolster up the theoretical recognition of the same, more substantiated conceptual arguments were presented in another work of Garavan (2007).

Meanwhile, Horwitz (1999) posited a framework comprising 11 elements or factors—albeit based largely on Garavan's (1991) proposition. However, Horwitz (1999) shifted the focus from 'top-management leadership in HRD' and 'environmental scanning' to systemic intervention and reorganisation in compliance with the job requirements and work systems (ref. *Table 1*). Amid the lack of consensus in the HRD fraternity, McCracken and Wallace (2000a) took a recourse to Garavan's (1991) model and slightly modified it with a few plausible changes. Like the work of McCracken and Wallace (2000a), an empirical study carried out by Maxwell et al. (2004) founded on the theoretical framework of Garavan (1991), whereas the latter re-categorised those strategic HRD factors or elements into 'Enabling' and 'Implementation' factors.

There are similarities between indicators or factors of Harrison (2002) and those of Garavan (1991) and McCracken and Wallace (2000a), as far as the SHRD factors are concerned; viz., the strategic involvement, role of line managers, coherency with HRM policies, establishment of business partnerships and the importance of measuring the contribution of learning and development. These strategic factors have been considered during the present study, as exhibited in *Table 1*.

In their review paper, Tseng and McLean (2008) again endorsed the SHRD framework of Garavan (1991) by putting forth again a nine-factor model with a few modifications. The paper argued that the nine-factors or characteristics of Garavan (1991) should be treated as inputs that would be put to the process of organisational learning or 'transformation'; it would all bring about nine-outcomes of strategic HRD that are how to strategize the HRD programmes in an organisation.

In the context of evaluation of induction training effectiveness in Nepalese development bank managers, Sthapit (2012a) recognised only four strategic HRD factors; namely, Proactive planning with long-term vision for training programmes— through continuous environmental analysis, Top management commitment to and involvement in training, Periodic review/ evaluation of training programmes, and Results-oriented competitive competency and professional intervention on training. The empirical study

based on Nepalese banks found that the four strategic HRD factors did impact training effectiveness. Since the study dealt only with the single component of induction training effectiveness, it had considered only four strategic factors; yet they would be insufficient as the study would go beyond the single component and, instead, encompass the entire HRD function.

Hence, Sthapit (2013; 2020 July) analysed and synthesised the typical nine strategic factors or elements into seven by combining some of the inextricably intertwined elements. The studies based on the modified strategic factors made the endeavours to build a strategic HRD model for the banking institutions in Nepal. The strategic HRD factors modified from various previous works have been exhibited in *Table 1* (far right column).

*HRD's integration with organisation mission/goals and ability to recognise/ influence organisation/ corporate culture*

Garavan (1991) stressed the point that the need for integrating HRD into business planning is critical for SHRD, as is a contribution to corporate goals and an awareness of the mission of the organisation. Garavan et al. (1998) also emphasised that HRD is viewed as a strategic lever in organisations because it is viewed as a means of helping the organisation to implement its business strategies. Mintzberg (1978) and Mintzberg and Waters (1985) stresses HRD can also play a role in either implementing and/or formulating corporate and organisational strategy. Sthapit (2008a) also stressed the role of HRD in successful implementation of organisational and business strategy.

Truly strategic HRD should also shape and influence organisational missions and goals (Legnick-Hall & Legnick-Hall, 1988; Butler, 1988). Maxwell et al. (2004) emphasised the HRD integration with organisation mission and goals as an enabling element of SHRD.

Garavan (1991) linked HRD to business strategy by emphasising that HRD be concerned with the management of employee development learning for the long term, keeping in mind the explicit corporate and business strategies. Beer and Spector (1989) stressed the strategic HRD as being linked not only to strategic planning but also to cultural change of the organisation as it operates as a proactive, system-wide intervention.

To be strategic, HRD should play an integral role in the organisation's mission by collaborating with line managers to design and develop HRD interventions and aligning HRD policies with the organisation culture and values (Hutchins & Wang (2008). HRD has a crucial, challenging role to play in successfully 'orchestrating' strategic culture change (Burack, 1991; cited in McCracken & Wallace, 2000b).

Organisation culture is a complex concept and difficult to pin down or clarify. The influence which SHRD might have in changing corporate culture could, therefore, be even more difficult to isolate and clarify. It has been addressed in some of the literature on the learning organisation (West, 1994). Learning can be both a product of culture as well as a means of transmitting and changing culture, although the interrelationships are complex and poorly understood. Certainly, the existence of a learning culture would be crucial to the existence of SHRD and likewise any organisation where HRD has a role in influencing culture probably already has a learning culture in place. Therefore, to make

HRD function truly strategic, HRD should be so designed as to develop and influence organisational culture.

#### *Top management leadership and commitment in HRD*

Sthapit (2020b) argues that in the realm of strategic management, the leadership and commitment of the top management is always the sine qua non, or the pre-requisite. It holds true with strategic HRD. Garavan (1991) advocates that top management is the key stakeholders in SHRD, and their support and active participation is vital for the development of SHRD. Top management support is one of the most important factors for HRD to ensure organisational learning success (McCracken & Wallace, 2000a). Harrison (1997) also suggests that HRD should be led, rather than simply supported, by top management.

The role of HRD managers as 'key actors' in HRD (Garavan et al., 1998) suggested that their active leadership of HRD (rather than their passive compliance) is critical. The top management support is the key SHRD factor: it, therefore, should be redefined as top management leadership, and commitment and even involvement— in terms of time, energy, efforts, and interest in the organisation.

#### *Proactive planning with a long-term vision for HRD through continuous environment analysis in HRD terms*

A strategically managed organisation should win the war, not just battles. It may lose a few battles, but it must win the war. This is the 'management mantra', as the organisation goes strategic. Going strategic, HRD should also envision winning the war. It works with a vision and long-term goals and programmes in developing human resources through well-devised HRD programmes.

In lieu of limiting it to reactive personnel function, the HR managers should value humans as extremely important organisation resources and adopt proactive HRD (Sthapit, 2007 Nov 7). As they say prevention is better than cure, being proactive is far better than being just reactive.

Beer and Spector (1989) describe strategic HRD as a proactive, system-wide intervention, with it linked to strategic planning and cultural change of the organisation. It implies then that, for HRD to be strategic in nature, it should proactively work with a long-term vision integrated with the organisation's corporate vision and plan. Rothwell and Kazanas (1994) also highlight a strategic perspective containing a *long-term vision*, as one of the three the key strategic factors required for the HRD. Armstrong (2009) also contends that SHRD takes a broad, long-term view about how HRD policies and practices can support the achievement of business/organisational strategies.

Emphasis is duly placed on the need for formulating a proactive, long-term plan for HRD. In this very context, Torraco and Swanson (1995) observe that business environmental factors assume a pivotal role in the shaping of business strategy and planning for HRD. More particularly, Garavan (1991) stressed that continuous knowledge of the external environment— in terms of opportunities and threats for the business and for HRD specifically— is vital for SHRD to flourish. However, it is crucial that other senior



managers, and not just HRD professionals (Torraco & Swanson, 1995; Sloman, 1994), should be gathering such information.

Top/senior, middle or low-level management in the organisation should perform the environmental analysis based on which to develop their HRD plans. Truly strategic HRD operates where senior management automatically considers the HRD implications of any changes in the internal or external environment, rather than seeing this as the job of the HRD specialists (Rainbird, 1995; Peery & Salem, 1993). In this way, HRD can become properly integrated into the organisation and into the strategic planning process. Then, environmental scanning and analysis should be performed by senior management and specifically in the HRD terms. As such, strategic HRD needs to be characterised by a proactive plan guided by a long-term vision, which, in turn, is based on continuous analysis of business environmental factors by the senior management.

In the rapidly changing external environment, there is a need to consider external environment forces influencing the HRD management in Nepalese organisations (Singh & Sthapit, 2008; Sthapit, 2018b). Such an environment comprises labour market and labour economics, socio-cultural and economic factors, technological forces (Sthapit, 2019c), politico-legal conditions, ethical/ecological and global factors (Sthapit, 2018b). The emergent HRM stresses that managers consciously consider them in their decisions and actions (Sthapit, 2012b). It is ironic, yet important for the managers to understand that such environmental factors — though not controllable by the organisation management— are most crucial and critical to the organisation's survival and success.

*Strategic partnerships with line management for implementation of HRD strategies, plans and policies, along with line management's commitment*

The enthusiastic involvement of the line manager (Zenger, 1985) is critical for SHRD, since line managers are key stakeholders and 'actors' in HRD (Garavan, 1991; Garavan et al., 1998). Maxwell et al. (2004) stress that line managers and HRD managers work in partnership on both operational and strategic issues, so that HRD becomes truly strategic. Apart from HRD's strategic partnership with line management, Lee (1996b) and Harrison (1997) also emphasise on the need for shared ownership of HRD, where line managers and HRD employees work in partnership with each other over HRD issues. Wognum (1998) referred to this as 'strategic HRD aligning'— the process of integrating stakeholder interests in HRD.

It is, however, likely that the role of line managers in HRD is underdeveloped for a variety of complex attitudinal and cultural reasons (Harrison, 1992; Sinclair & Collins, 1992); and training and HRD specialists exclude line managers because of concerns over the threat of substitution (Grace & Straub, 1991).

Instead, there should be strategic partnerships between HRD with line management, which is essentially aimed at implementing HRD strategies, policies, and plans. Involvement and commitment of line management in HRD management is highly imperative for strategizing HRD in the organisation, so that it can effectively execute and implement HRD strategies, policies and plans.

*HRD's strategic partnerships with HRM activities and other functional areas*

Garavan (1991) recommends that HRD be integrated as an invariable part of a wider package of HRM strategies while Garavan et al. (1995) posits HRD as central to HRM as 'a vital if not the pivotal component.' Making HRD strategic requires forging the strategic partnerships between HRM and HRD professionals of the kind implied by O'Donnell and Garavan (1997) where there should be an alliance between HRD strategy and a global-arching HRM strategies; it helps achieve overall organisational goals. Without such real alliance and integration between HRM and HRD, to the extent that they are seen as one and the same, there is probably little hope of either having much impact on the achievement of corporate objectives. Hence, HRD should forge strategic partnerships with HRM strategies and goals to make it more strategic in nature.

There should also be strategic partnership of HRD with other functional areas of management harmoniously integrating HRD plans and programmes with the organisation's *Marketing, Finance, Production-operations and Research and Development (R&D)*. Doing so is essential to develop human resources with more focused specialisation in some specific functions and sub-functions in these management functional areas in conjunction with the HRD programmes.

*Emphasis on HRD/ trainers' role as organisational change consultants for result-oriented competitive competency through professional intervention*

Another strategic factor required to strategize HRD is to require the trainers and HRD professionals to play an organisation-change consultant's role in promoting result-oriented competitive competency of employees. The role should include professional intervention by trainers and HRD professionals (on HRD) to generate results-oriented competitive competency of human resources.

McLagan & Suhadolnik (1989, cited in Wilson, 2005) proposed organisational change agent role as one of the key HRD roles, while Nijhof and de Rijk (1997) explained the organisational change agent role of HRD as the one that would influence and support changes in organisation behaviour. Likewise, Garavan (1991) suggested that a strategic HRD function would require trainers who— according to Sloman (1994), Pettigrew et al. (1988) and Harrison (1997)— could be innovators and consultants, rather than simply providers or managers of training. Philips and Shaw (1989) contended that the consultancy role could involve training, learning, or organisational change issues that concentrate on meeting the strategic needs of the organisation. Talbot (1993) required that the trainer's roles should be:

- (i) Adaptive;
- (ii) Adoptive; and
- (iii) Innovative

The *Adaptive* role lies in adapting to the skills and knowledge of staff to fit existing systems while the *Adoptive* role encompasses getting employees to adopt new values or attitudes. And the *Innovative* role contains in informing and influencing organisational change processes.

It is in this latter role and in the organisational change consultant role (Philips & Shaw, 1989) that HRD professionals/ specialists can flourish and make a strategic contribution (McCracken & Wallace, 2000a). They need to be proactive rather than simply reactive, and to see themselves in a central and strategic, rather than peripheral and operational, role (Garavan et al., 1998).

In the rapidly changing business and organisational context, HRD professionals and trainers should, therefore, work for developing results-oriented competitive competency of human resources. In their role as a strategic change consultant, they are also required to make professional intervention into the HRD function.

### *Emphasis on effective evaluation of HRD*

For strategizing itself, the HRD function must evaluate its activities (Garavan, 1991). Philips (1991), Torraco and Swanson (1995) and Harrison (1997) all strongly argued that not only training and HRD should be results-oriented, but evaluation should take place at what Hamblin (1974) called the ultimate level (addressing whether business needs have been met). This— as McCracken and Wallace (2000a) argued— inevitably involved some degree of cost-effectiveness evaluation, difficult though it can be to carry out. It may be that the lack of such investment calculations simply helps to perpetuate a culture in which training is seen as a luxury rather than a serious investment in the long-term future of the organisation. Therefore, McCracken and Wallace (2000a) stressed cost-effectiveness evaluation in the development of SHRD. Harrison (1997) also observed that the importance of cost-effectiveness evaluation should not be underestimated. Paradoxically, however, this emphasis on pay-back calculations can lead to a concentration on achieving quantifiable results within a short timeframe and it is vital not to undermine the importance of HRD as an investment with long-term and less tangible benefits (such as organisation culture change).

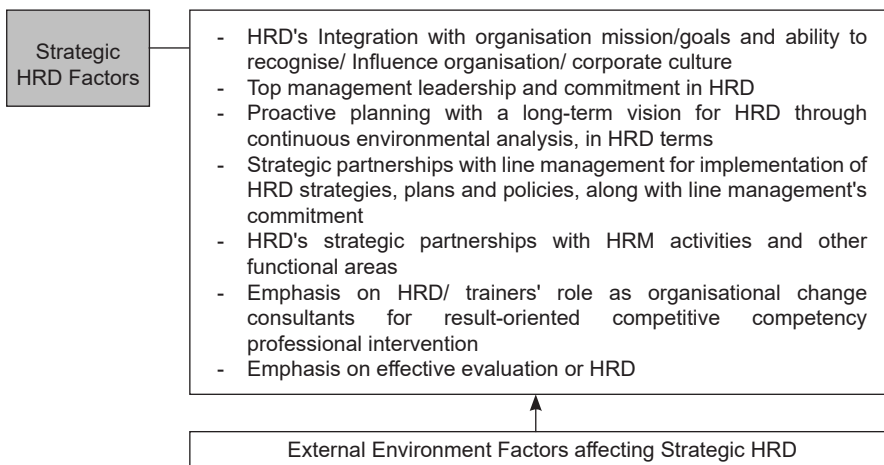


Figure 2: *Strategizing HRD: The organisational manoeuvre to attain corporate goals*

However, despite their own emphasis, McCracken and Wallace's (2000a) research on 86 Scottish-based companies found little empirical evidence on cost effectiveness evaluation (McCracken & Wallace, 2000b). Therefore, emphasis should be placed on effective (esp., periodic, regular) evaluation of HRD management, instead of making it more focussed on cost-effectiveness alone.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In order to build an agile, resilient organisation that can sustain in both normal and crisis times, organisations should keep in perspective the imperative value of human resources and talents while managing their organisations. It leads them to recognise that human resources should be developed by enshrining the strategic factors or elements with HRD.

Based on the review of past literature works, this paper aimed to identify and thrash out the strategic HRD factors, which are the organisational manoeuvres essential to manage HRD strategically. Based on the critical deliberations in the previous sections, it infers that there are seven key strategic factors that strategize human resource development (HRD) in an organisation.

*One*, HRD should be integrated with the organisation's mission and goals and promote its ability to recognise and influence organisational or corporate culture for which, *two*, there must be proactive planning compounded with a long-term vision for HRD through a continuous environmental analysis in HRD terms. *Three*, HRD also should forge strategic partnerships with line management for implementing HRD strategies, plans and policies.

*Four*, HRD should also establish strategic partnerships with HRM activities and other functional areas of management including Marketing, Operations, Finance and R&D. *Five*, these all require the top management's leadership and commitment in steering the HRD activities strategically in the organisation.

*Six*, for effective implementation of strategic HRD, the role of HRD professionals and trainers should be that of organisational change consultants who work with professional intervention for promoting result-oriented competitive competency. *Finally*, evaluation of HRD policies and programmes should be made regular and periodic, and hence an effective evaluation system should be in place.

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