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Postmodernism and HRD Theory: Current Status and Prospects

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With posttraditionalism and postmodern frames of reference firmly established in social theory and many of the applied social sciences, including management, the question of the role of postmodernism in human resource development (HRD) theory needs to be asked. The purpose of the article is to explicate the contribution of postmodernism to HRD, distinguish posttraditionalism from the recently emerged stream of critical perspectives on HRD, and to argue for the contribution of postmodern readings of HRD theory to better understand the complex landscape of contemporary organizations, employees, and learning and development functions. Starting with a historical analysis of the meaning of the Enlightenment, and various modernist perspectives, the article describes the central tenets of postmodern theory and their implications for the theory and practice of HRD and argue for its important role in broadening and enriching the field of HRD.

Keywords: postmodernism; social theory; posttraditionalism

Contemporary organizations and the organization of work are characterized by high degrees of complexity and ambiguity and a multiplicity of competing values and frameworks (Giddens, 1991). In the absence of traditional sign posts of meaning and certainty, a plurality of choices and concurrent meaning exist. The conflict between profits and meaning caused by the rise of globalization, for example, has been described as creating a dualism in society (Friedman, 2005; McMichael, 2004). In no better place is this conflict identified than in the growing research and practitioner focus on work–life balance. Human resource development (HRD) interventions, though clearly defined
with their intended consequences, may still produce unintended consequences. These unintended consequences and conflicts are at once a result of and result in uncertainty, contingency, and even chaos. These conflicts and consequences are further challenging the HRD field to examine phenomena from multidimensional perspectives. Indeed, these conflicts may be something to be addressed, embraced, and accepted in the HRD field. This suggests the need for more holistic views in pursuit of HRD in a multicultural and multifaceted society.

As an attempt to embrace such chaos, uncertainty, and contingency, critical and interpretive paradigms have been introduced to the field as attempts to broaden HRD theoretical perspectives from a functionalist paradigm that has dominated the field (Garavan, O’Donnell, McGuire, & Watson, 2007). Whereas critical and interpretive paradigms have had limited engagement in the field’s theoretical debate, postmodernism has had nearly no attention. It has even been suggested that postmodernism is an idea ready for a scholarly garage sale (Swanson, 2002).

One reason for the limited understanding toward postmodernism may likely be found in its contradictory nature. Postmodernism has been described as a self-defeating perspective in higher education, as it rejects a metanarrative that has been believed to be a logical foundation of higher education (Bloland, 1995; Osterud, 1996). In a similar vein, postmodernism may be a problematic perspective for HRD, since HRD also adheres to its own traditions and foundations of knowledge. Indeed, there has been misinterpretation of postmodernism by saying that anything goes or everything is an interpretation and, therefore, may be dangerous and useless for scholarly knowledge (Swanson, 2002).

Postmodernism, even with its paradoxes, can be a useful alternative perspective when considering that the traditional forms of rationality may be insufficient to understand consequences of HRD given the complexities of society (Kuchinke, 2003). The purpose of this article is to provide a clearer understanding of postmodernism as an alternative perspective and to explore its implications for the HRD field. The authors look at the origin of postmodernism by tracing the history of modernism, as modernism is the social context where the postmodern paradigm derives. Modernism represents a strong foundation of the HRD field. More concrete concepts of postmodernism are examined through several postmodernists’ thoughts. Finally, several implications of postmodernism for the field are discussed.

**Modernity**

The origins of the modernist and postmodernist paradigms can be traced to the historical and social contradictions of modernity during the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was the intense intellectual activity and movement that occurred in Europe throughout the mid-17th and 18th centuries (Kant, 1991). Hollinger (1994) wrote the Enlightenment “broached a set of doctrines stating that the source of all human misery is ignorance, especially superstition. Only
knowledge, reason, and science can destroy ignorance and superstition and help improve the human condition” (p. 2). However, this characterization of the Enlightenment is too basic. Instead, the Enlightenment is complex so that both modernists and postmodernists have subscribed their own interpretations of the Enlightenment.

Foucault provided an insightful description into the nature of the Enlightenment by dividing its notions into ethos and dogma (Hollinger, 1994). The Enlightenment’s dogma was interpreted through doctrinal elements, developed into the belief that rational universal values, scientific knowledge, human progress, and happiness were based on human rationality. The Enlightenment reflected a “confidence in the ability of human reason to provide an understanding of the world, and faith in the ability of human beings to use this understanding subsequently to improve it” (Hancock & Tyler, 2001, p. 12). Modern philosophers adopted this dogma of the Enlightenment to become a foundation of modernity. But these doctrinal elements appeared to be deeply rooted in a blind belief. It is this blind belief that postmodernists challenged (Hollinger, 1994).

Foucault posited that the ethos of the Enlightenment pursued a deconstruction due to the rejection of traditions, customs, and myths that had been taken for granted by human reason (Hollinger, 1994). In fact, the Enlightenment deconstructed what people had previously thought and done thus releasing them from the oppressions of the time. This core ethos from the Enlightenment continues to be subscribed to by postmodernists.

The modernist perspective has been historically and philosophically rooted in the dogma of the Enlightenment (Hancock & Tyler, 2001; Hollinger, 1994). Universal knowledge, scientific methods, human reason, and human progress are the core attributes of modernity. The rapid development of science and technology brought about remarkable economic growth through increased material production. This growth built the Western economic system described as capitalism. By the mid-19th century, rapid economic growth instigated a social and cultural movement causing social and cultural conflicts to arise within modernism (Hollinger, 1994).

Positivists viewed modernism with general optimism toward a lifestyle advanced by scientific methods, technology, and capitalistic principles. As society has become industrialized and urbanized the expectation to experience a better life continued to grow. However, these same pressures from science, technology, and capitalism also created contradictions. As much as some people became empowered in modernity, others have been easily exploited and disenfranchised. Therefore, modernism has been inherently characterized as tension and contradiction (Hancock & Tyler, 2001).

Paradigms of Modernism

Although social science has sought to explain these societal contradictions, six primary paradigms have emerged. These paradigms are functionalist,
interpretive, radical humanist, radical structuralist, critical modernism, and late modernity. Each is based on distinctly different ontological and epistemological assumptions toward society and the nature of social science (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Cooper & Burrell, 1988; Giddens, 1991).

The functionalist way of understanding social situations is based on methodological positivism that assumes social facts can be objective and independent from the human mind just like natural science fields separate scientific facts from mere conjecture. The interpretive paradigm rejects positivism and adopts a methodological subjectivist or constructivist position. Weber (1964), a theorist of this paradigm, argued that modern society should be understood as an archetype of a bureaucratic system that degrades individual human spirit and creativity for the sake of efficiency. In this view, the individual’s perspective should be the basis on which to build our understanding of society.

Unlike the functionalist and interpretive paradigms, the radical humanist paradigm rejects the assumption about the nature of society as tending toward order and integration, and proposes that society is not static, rather is in constant flux and subject to radical change. While also subscribing to the interpretivist paradigm in its emphasis on human consciousness and subjectivity, the radical humanist paradigm views radical change as a necessary release for human consciousness that has been dominated by ideological superstructures. Release from these dominant constraints can lead to achieving an individual’s full potential. From this paradigm, changes in modes of cognition and consciousness will change the social world.

The radical structuralist paradigm focuses on the change of the structural and power relationships rather than changes to the individual subjective consciousness proposed by the radical humanist paradigm. Even though this paradigm maintains the social world is rooted in conflict, domination, and radical change, the radical structuralist believes there is a better social structure and radical social changes can be achieved through change of structure and power relationship.

These four paradigms have been characterized as systemic modernism (Cooper & Burrell, 1988). The systemic modernist view gives a big credence to scientific knowledge and methodological and instrumental rationality to achieve desired performance and outcome. In addition, the paradigms are viewed as mutually exclusive and there exists the assumption that a single worldview is possible or, at minimum, desirable. Two other paradigms have extended beyond the views of systemic modernism. They are critical modernism and late modernity. In critical modernism, individuals should be emancipated from a control of systemic modernist logic but go toward critical reason which can be achieved through the ordinary life-world (Cooper & Burrell, 1988; Valentin, 2006).

Late modernity rejects following one dominant tradition as a code of behavior and living (Giddens, 1998). According to this view, beliefs and rules become
adaptable and changeable, and a number of traditions become contextualized and localized, which drives our society to late modernity (Giddens, 1991). Late modernity is characterized as contradictory and complex with radical change and disorganization from the prior social forms (Hey, 2005).

For example, placing money in a bank account is generally regarded as safe. But, if trust is lacking in the bank or government, the safety and value of money is at great risk. Therefore, the meaning of safety assumes notions of established trust. Furthermore, risk is not only a negative because money placed in a bank can also generate interest and other benefits. Such circumstances create a paradox of potential threats and promises that is described as late modernity (Giddens & Pierson, 1998). The promises for our developed life can become the major threats. Therefore, we cannot simply say that life in the current modern society is much safer than the previous traditional society. Interestingly, trust and risk are intertwined with each other so that the very idea and belief that we can control the danger would become the risk.

Although these six paradigms, the functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist, and radical structuralist, critical modernist, and late modernist, offer different worldviews, they still share a core belief that world operates through human reason and a universal foundation of knowledge. Even though critical modernism and late modernity show an emancipatory variation to understand the tensions of modernism, they do not fully embody the ethos of Enlightenment due to a failure to fully reject a modernist belief that man invented himself (Cooper & Burrell, 1988). Therefore, despite their questioning of the foundations of modernity, the foundations of their views were still based in modernist beliefs.

**Rise of Postmodernism**

More than a hundred years ago, Nietzsche (1887/1989) criticized the modernists’ faith in human rationality and argued that modernity is prone to drive humanity toward a nihilistic condition (Hancock & Tyler, 2001). A nihilistic philosophy is an extreme form of skepticism that denies the possibility of an objective truth. Nihilism derives from necessary moments in which we can deeply self-reflect on our values and being. Therefore, there is no grand value or metalevel structure of a knowledge base in a nihilistic world. However, nihilism does not infer a denial of values rather a revaluation of all our values. This is because a state of being is always a state of becoming (Hart, 2004).

The nihilistic condition can find its origins in the duality of Western philosophy (Drolet, 2003). This dualism can be traced back to a distinction in the Greek arts between Apollonian Platonic and Dionysian beauty. Apollonian Platonic beauty is distinct and observable, whereas Dionysian beauty is characterized as formless with a lack of clarity. As Apollonian views came to dominate the Dionysian views in society, there arose a misconception that only distinct and observable beauty is a true form of beauty (Drolet, 2003). Therefore,
from this perspective, human beings transform formless and changeable nature into something measurable and predictable.

In addition to a limited subscription to one side of this duality, Nietzsche (Hart, 2004) pointed out the nature of knowledge and values are short lived or transitory. Nietzsche’s oft-referred notion that God is dead refers to the notion that individuals believe in their own distinct and observable reason so much that they eventually reject God (Hart, 2004). In other words, even though people say that God drives their lives, they actually create a god based on science and knowledge created by knowledge of the time. Moreover, according to Nietzsche, individuals believed that their god drives themselves to liberty of thought. However, because individual reason and knowledge is myopic and malleable, a god based in science and knowledge is also changeable eventually causing individuals to be driven to emptiness and panic. What Nietzsche rejected are gods built on science, knowledge, and human reason of the time (Hart, 2004). Nietzsche further argued a need to reject gods built on science and knowledge because acceptance of a god built on human logic creates the nihilistic condition (Hart, 2004).

These criticisms suggest a gap in the modernist paradigms caused by a fallacy of human logic. Nietzsche criticized a blind belief in human reason and knowledge that creates the conditions of panic and emptiness brought about by the nihilistic state.

This worldview differs significantly from modernist paradigms. Indeed, Nietzsche’s arguments are rather radical and deconstructive by rejecting human rationality and proposing the eventuality of a nihilistic state. Nietzsche asserted the need for more revaluation of all values to address a nihilistic condition (Nietzsche, 1990). This suggests that values and beliefs that are marginalized in modernism paradigms should emerge into the societal conversation. However, this view creates its own contradictions.

In a nihilistic condition, departures from a belief in human reason suggest there are no answers to why questions and creates tremendous uncertainty (Hart, 2004). This creates potential frustrations and appearances of a never-ending reevaluation of human rationality that writers like Swanson (2002) have ridiculed as fanciful intellectual nonsense but which are, upon deeper evaluation, an adequate reflection on the ongoing process of meaning making and reflexive construction of identity and reality.

Paradoxically, this condition of uncertainty opens the door to escape from power relationships that are imposed by existing values and rationality. Therefore, uncertainty becomes an arena for freedom of thinking not constrained by existing science and knowledge, acknowledging and valuing multiple parallel modes of interpretation and understanding in a given situation, and urging to adopt a stance of humility, tolerance, and appreciation in light of an open-ended and ultimately indecipherable social and human world. It is the basis of these views that led to the formulation of postmodern perspectives in the 1960s and to the current age.
Postmodern Perspectives

Jean-Francois Lyotard adopted Nietzsche’s ideas to further postmodern thought. Lyotard (1984) characterized knowledge as *a narrative*. He argued that the absolute frameworks or paradigms of modernity, such as the belief in human progress, the fairness of the market, or the objectivity of science should be called into question as the foundation of human reasoning and thought. Grand narratives or metanarratives as universal and all-inclusive truths have been based on a tacit and optimistic assumption in human rationality that cannot be justified when taking into account all the facts and viewpoints in a given situation. Grand narratives do not represent the totality of valid knowledge and, therefore, cannot be justified (Lyotard, 1984). The grand narrative does not have any credibility as a truth, because it is based on what is accepted as valid knowledge but excludes other valuable perspectives and forecloses the opportunity to become aware of other voices.

Wittgenstein introduced the notion of a language game resulting from a lack of credibility in truth (Lyotard, 1984). People learn and know mainly through dialogue. Therefore, dialogue becomes a critically important aspect in knowing. Language becomes the basis of knowing and knowledge. In talking, there are common rules that speakers should follow to express themselves and that listeners should follow to understand. People are prone to believe the language they use represents knowledge and truth. However, knowledge is represented by the words and statements based on a series of rules and conventions. Therefore, social phenomena and behaviors can be understood as different kinds of language games. Terminology that is used in an organization will represent specific meanings and representations of those dominant groups. For example, the use of empowerment practices in organizations may represent a language game apparently focused on front-line employee control of their work setting when, on closer examination, empowerment remains an expression of existing management control.

Related to the role of language games, Foucault (1983) challenged the notion of a dualistic and independent view of power and knowledge and stressed instead a strong interrelationship. The interrelationship between power and knowledge is not static, independent, or distinct but fluid and blended (Hancock & Tyler, 2001; Townley, 1993). Adopting Foucault’s perspective on power and knowledge, Townley furthered the association between power and knowledge by identifying that the relationships cannot be neutral but becomes mechanisms in which knowledge and power are created by each other. Hence, knowledge is strongly associated with the exercise of power relationships.

Considering both the rejection of a grand narrative and the relationship of power and knowledge suggests that local procedures and practices represent the location where knowing happens and knowledge is created. Therefore, power can neither be defined nor detached from context, but is created as outcomes of various situations. From this perspective it is hard to claim generalizations
about power relationships in a given context. Interestingly, this does not suggest that power is a negative concept, but can be creative and positive, because power is the desire to know (Townley, 1993).

Rorty (1979) pointed to the inherent flaws in the assumptions of a fundamental framework between knower and knowledge determined by the nature of a neutral relation. Furthermore, he suggested liberating ourselves from the notion that knowledge requires an underlying theory. Rather, knowledge should be perceived as an agreement about a group’s values and beliefs and not as a true universal reality rooted in a specific theory. Knowledge can be justified only within a certain context, and the interpretation of this context should be the main topic in a conversation to create knowledge. Also, languages are inherently incommensurable so that seemingly strange and different views can occur quite naturally. Therefore, it is necessary to uncover meaning, particularly meanings that may have been marginalized.

Deconstruction, another important aspect of postmodern thought, is frequently misunderstood as breaking up what is stated. But, the main point in deconstruction is to uncover the other meanings that have been denied and concealed by the dominating language game to explore the complete meaning of what we are saying. Deconstructive analysis focuses on identifying the marginalized and opposite views that are concealed and ignored by a privileged view. Deconstruction can serve as a methodological strategy for identifying those meanings that have been hidden and denied in a text (Derrida, 1976). In this situation, text does not represent a static and simple form of communication, but what we constantly create in our ordinary life and what have been spoken and written in our material world. The text is not fixed or stable. In other words, the margin, or those marginalized, become the center of attention (Calas & Smircich, 1999). Thus, meaning does not remain fixed or stable but is an ongoing process of negotiation and construction.

**Implications for Human Resource Development**

As most other applied social science fields, HRD has a long tradition rooted in the modernist paradigm. For example, one oft-stated goal, to “unleash human expertise in order to improve performance is based on a functionalist perspective” (Swanson & Holton, 2001, p. 4) can clearly be seen as an expression of a functionalist reading of the purpose of the field. McLean and McLean (2001) defined the field of HRD as

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

Their definition has been seen and valued as the current definition of HRD by most serious scholars in the field because the definition portrays a greater
set of stakeholders and processes and suggest the desirability of diversity and plurality of goals and purposes. Yet here too a modernist understanding appears to prevail. Though some critical research has been presented at conferences and in journals, this paradigm has been still in the minority view. Postmodern perspectives have been notably absent from the field’s journals and conference presentations.

Human resource development should not be seen with a single lens. Society is suffused with intensifying complexities brought on by advancing globalization and technology thus creating paradoxes and uncertainties (Friedman, 2005; McMichael, 2004). Therefore, scholars should be willing to pursue new approaches to theorizing that may provide a more holistic understanding of the global complexities by the HRD field (Giddens, 1998).

Understandably, given perceptions and views of human reason, postmodern approaches to theorizing are often viewed with caution from the traditional paradigms of scholarship. Postmodernism may represent a radical and irritating perspective that continuously challenges existing dominant perspectives approved tacitly and without resistance (Lyotard, 1984). Postmodernism “insists on presenting what we cannot conceptualize, what we cannot find in our experience” (Hart, 2004, p. 2) and thus offers the potential for novel perspectives and innovative points of view that remain hidden in the prevailing mode of framing the field.

The postmodernist paradigm may seem to be a paradox because it questions the utility of reason and rationality. However, it does not mean that reason is not necessary, but that alternative forms of reason that challenge core beliefs and assumptions are required (Racevskis, 1993). This paradigm provides great potential for HRD research as society experiences the increased frequency of changing social patterns. Alternative descriptions and explanations should be pursued to explore the complexity, diversity, and paradox of the real work, learning practice, and experience within the context of organizations.

The postmodernist paradigm cannot be seen as simply another way of thinking and an alternative theoretical perspective. Rather, gradual acceptance and transition to the postmodernist paradigm is necessary for political and institutional reasons. Simply positioning the postmodernist paradigm as another way of thinking might take away from its power that would contribute to the field. Through the notion of deconstructing hidden assumptions, the postmodernist paradigm can foster intellectual humility. By using the theoretical foundations of the three-legged stool and definitional aspects of unleashing expertise for organizational effectiveness, our field has constructed and followed a set of beliefs and theories. However, under which terms and whose perspectives have we achieved organizational effectiveness? The improved performance of a large multinational organization through HRD interventions may directly or indirectly affect employees who lose their jobs due to improved organizational efficiencies, as well as small business competitors in developing nations who are unable to compete (McMichael, 2004). We may have defined effectiveness
in a form of dichotomy that underpins the modernist paradigms. How do we know we are going toward a better world? A line of postmodern questioning can lead to broadening perspectives and research questions to understand the complete implications of HRD.

Postmodernist thinking suggests that our traditional perspectives can be liberated from any metanarrative, whether it is based on the modernist dichotomy, reflective, or emancipatory views. Even critical HRD cannot generalize who is marginalized and what should be emancipated. It is important to liberate ourselves from this limited dichotomous understanding of power. Otherwise, emancipation will bring about another marginalization and alienation in their critical logic. Power is not a tool used for identifying marginalized individuals or groups and emancipating them in organizations, but a mechanism through which constant knowing process is occurring and a local knowledge is created. This encourages us to reflect on our language game, to deconstruct the HRD field, and to liberate ourselves from narrow paradigms that may limit our ability to broaden our understanding.

This does not imply that the existing knowledge in the HRD field is not useful or important (Racevskis, 1993). Rather, it should be perceived as an insufficient part of a whole, and potentially unknown, knowledge.

Given the theoretical flexibility of postmodernist views, broader perspectives including those that are marginalized can be embraced in understanding the effectiveness of HRD. In HRD, there is a strong tendency to follow and live with the established normal structures and consensus rather than to encourage abnormal discourses. As a HRD practitioner, we tend to prepare a set of golden solutions and answers even before we closely identify a problem or question in an organization, a group, or an individual, in what we call intervention.

Even though one grand narrative is useful in understanding HRD practices broadly (Swanson, 2002), the grand story may not explain the other marginalized stories created in a local context and thus may be counterproductive in finding local solutions to existing problems. Departing from the normal can provide a greater opportunity for understanding the incommensurable complexities of the world (Rorty, 1979).

Departure from the commonly accepted paradigm can be facilitated through the deconstruction of the HRD field. Research can revisit what the field has refused to say and what has been unconsciously hidden. When trying to revalue our primary paradigms in the HRD field, we can look beyond these paradigms to further expand our knowledge. Three examples provide insight into the potential for the field: feelings, leadership, and power.

First of all, love, caring, or sorrow have been topics generally excluded in the HRD field. Why haven’t we included these aspects of human nature in our research and practice? Human beings are not created as mere resources or materials to be measured, controlled, or exploited, but as beings to be loved and cared for. Then, should not care be one of the important competencies that we need to consider in developing HRD practitioners (Kuchinke & Han, 2005)?
Second, leadership has been a generally accepted attribute necessary for organizational effectiveness. Traditional research approaches examining leadership as a behavioral trait of individuals may limit research that examines leadership as an interactive process among group members, providing the potential of a greater understanding of the complexity of leadership (Boulay & Ernest, 2006; Rost, 1993). How can we assume that every employee wants, for example, charismatic leadership, which would not only lead to organizational effectiveness, but also might lead to severe control and dependency under a bureaucratic system? How can we assume that leaders should lead the employees under them strictly on behalf of employers? Servant leaders might instead lead the employers or executive managers on behalf of employees. Leadership can be represented differently in that context. These questions might appear to undermine the rationale of leadership in the HRD field. However, this deconstructive process can be useful in uncovering the otherwise concealed meanings that should be shared when exploring and learning about the term leadership, thus increasing our understanding of leadership beyond a behavioral trait.

Finally, a limited notion of the power relationship in the HRD field can be broadened by a Foucauldian perspective that views power as a function for knowing. Power should not be perceived as only something repressive or negative in HRD practice (Trehan, 2004). “Technologies of power and control in the workplace are no longer conceived simply as the means for regulating and directing the subjective aspirations of individual employees, but rather, as the media through which such categories of meaning are generated” (Hancock & Tyler, 2001, p. 79). This power analysis, as the media for meaning making or knowledge generation, can start with the deconstruction of the dichotomy between meaning maker and meaning receiver. For example, there has been simple dichotomy between writers and readers in meaning making in the field of online learning (Han, 2007). Such narrow notion of the power relationship with knowledge creation has been taken for granted in the field of HRD as well. There are trainers, instructional designers, and organization development consultants, who serve as meaning makers at one end of the continuum. On the other are trainees, learners, users, and employees as meaning receivers.

As a HRD practitioner, we might assume our identities as a provider or meaning maker and set a distinct boundary of their practices. However, in the dynamic context of organizational process, HRD practices are ubiquitous at the micro level in an organization so that it is not so easy to identify who should be the meaning maker and meaning receiver. Suppose that knowledge management systems are introduced in an organization. It might seem that employers gain the power to control employees’ learning and knowledge. But, power can be transmitted to the employees to regulate their learning and knowledge and locally redefined so that they could influence an organization. In fact, power exists in a network, a relationship, and process so that it is not easy to say who has power. Moreover, subjectivity and objectivity cannot be defined in advance, but rather are defined interchangeably within a local situation. In this context,
the focus of HRD should be on how meanings are dynamically generated and changed through HRD practices in the power relationship, not on the power itself (Townley, 1993). This broader and fluid understanding of power can enrich HRD theory and practice to become even more holistic.

**Conclusion**

As argued above, there are significant contributions of postmodernism as an alternative perspective in theorizing and practicing in the HRD field. Postmodernism might seem to be difficult, complex, and even self-contradictory. However, it is those paradoxes that provide the fundamental understanding of what we are saying and doing in HRD. Given the dynamics, complexities, and impact of change at societal, organizational, and individual levels, these paradoxes are essential for a broader understanding of HRD. Rejection of paradoxes has been taken for granted in the field, but they may come from the dominant thoughts that legitimate our material world and power relationship. Paradox determined by human rationality may be the only tool to reverse human misunderstanding of the world.

Academic modesty, based on the belief that any theory of human beings cannot be truth, is one of the fruits of postmodernism. This does not mean that we should be pessimistic and stop pursuing a theory for truth, but that we need to liberate ourselves from dominant thoughts so that we continuously explore and search for truth. We might not be able to fully answer the various and complex questions in HRD, which might frustrate academic attempts in the field to do so. However, if we view HRD as a state of being rather than an act of becoming, we will fail to come even close to understanding reality.

**References**


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