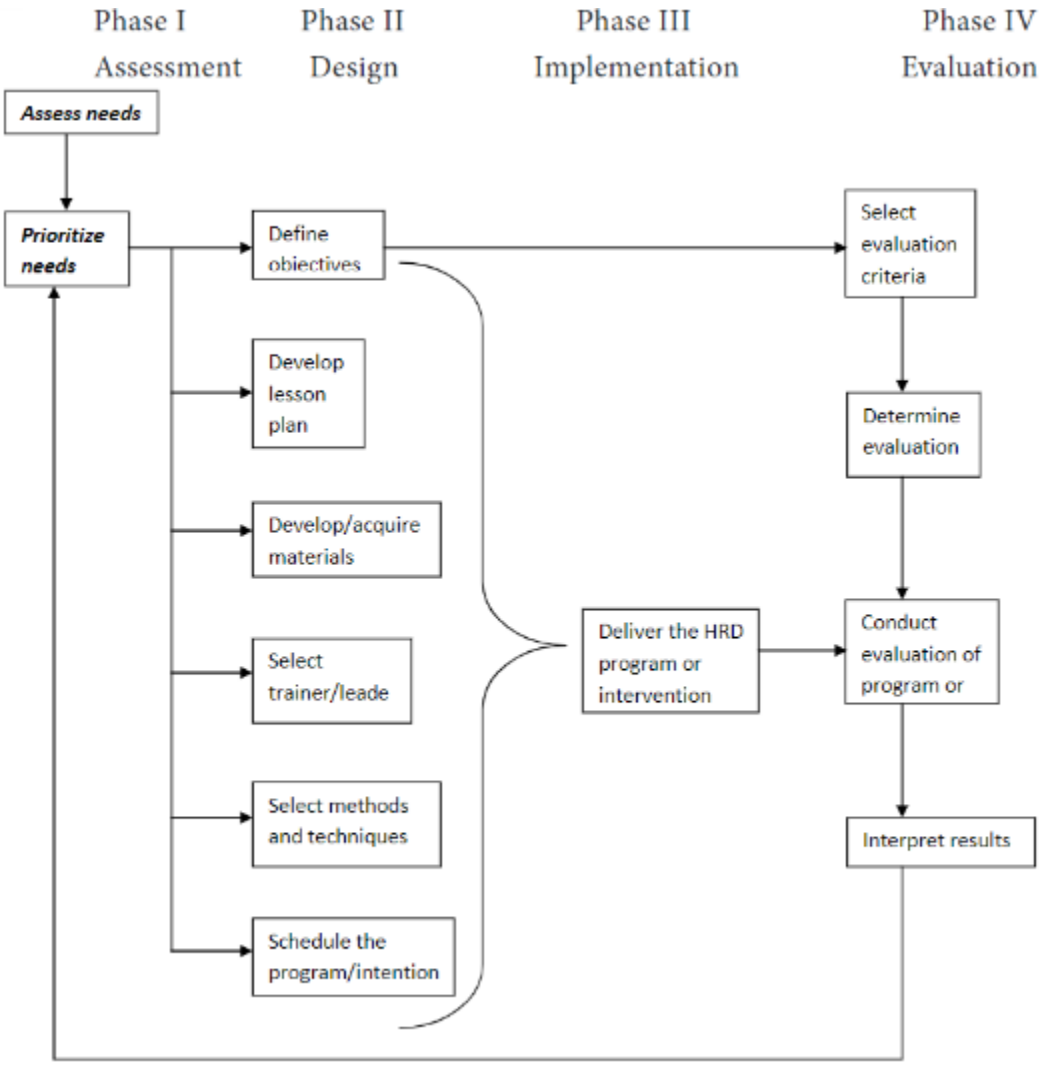
HRD Needs Assessment

HRD is effective if it successfully addresses some organizational needs through conducting needs assessments. Designing HRD interventions involves a process, which includes a four-step sequence: needs assessment, design, implementation, and evaluation.



Training and HRD process model

Needs Assessment Phase

HRD interventions are used to address some need or "gap" within the organization. A need can be either a current deficiency, such as poor employee performance, or a new challenge that demands a change in the way the organization operates (new legislation or increased competition). Identifying needs involves examining the organization, its environment, job tasks, and employee performance. This information can be used to:

- Establish priorities for expanding HRD efforts
- Define specific training and HRD objectives
- Establish evaluation criteria

Design phase

The second phase of the training and HRD process involves designing the HRD program or intervention. If the intervention involves some type of training or development program, the following activities are typically carried out during this phase:

- Selecting the specific objectives of the program
- Developing the appropriate lesson plan for the program
- Developing or acquiring the appropriate materials for the trainees to use
- Determining who will deliver the program
- Selecting the most appropriate method or methods to conduct the program
- Scheduling the program

The assessment phase is completed, it is important to translate the issues identified in that phase into clear objectives for HRD programs. This should also facilitate the development of clear lesson plans concerning what should be done in the HRD program.

Selecting the proper person to deliver the HRD program is also an important decision, and it can be difficult, depending on the resources available. If the organization employs a group of full-time HRD professionals, the choice will depend largely on the expertise and work schedules of those professionals.

If the organization does not have the HRD staff, it will have to rely upon other people, including managers, supervisors, coworkers, or outside consultants. Using such individuals raises a host of issues, including their willingness, ability, and availability to train, as well as cost issues.

The design phase also involves selecting and developing the content of the program. This means choosing the most appropriate setting for the program (e.g., on the job, in a classroom, online, or some combination), the techniques used to facilitate learning (such as lecture, discussion, role play, simulation), and the materials to be used in delivering the program (such as workbooks, job aids,

web-based or web-enhanced materials, films, videos, Microsoft PowerPoint® presentations, etc.). Inherent in these decisions is the issue of whether to develop the program in-house or purchase it (or parts of it) from an outside vendor.

The needs assessment reveal that training is not the ideal solution for the issues or problems facing the organization. It may be that some management practice needs to be changed, or that changes need to be made in another human resource practice (such as staffing or compensation). It may also be the case that a different type of HRD intervention is called for besides training, for example, a change in the organization of work, or a change in the focus on total quality or process reengineering. Such HRD interventions would not require a "lesson plan."

Implementation phase

The goal of the assessment and design phases is to implement effective HRD programs or interventions. This means that the program or intervention must be delivered or implemented, using the most appropriate means or methods (as determined in the design phase). Delivering any HRD program generally presents numerous challenges, such as executing the program as planned; creating an environment that enhances learning, and resolving problems that may arise (missing equipment, conflicts between participants, etc.).

Evaluation phase

Program evaluation is the final phase in the training and HRD process. This is where the effectiveness of the HRD intervention is measured. This is an important but often underemphasized activity. Careful evaluation provides information on participants' reaction to the program, how much they learned, whether they use what they have learned on the job, and whether the program improved the organization's effectiveness.

HRD professionals are increasingly asked to provide evidence of the success of their efforts using a variety of "hard" and "soft" measures, that is, both bottom line impact, as well as employee reaction. This information allows managers to make better decisions about various aspects of the HRD effort, such as:

- Continuing to use a particular technique or vendor in future programs
- Offering a particular program in the future
- Budgeting and resource allocation
- Using some other HR or managerial approach (like employee selection or changing work rules) to solve the problem

It is important that HRD professionals provide evidence that HRD programs improve individual and organizational effectiveness. Armed with this information, HRD managers can better compete with managers from other areas of the organization when discussing the effectiveness of their actions and competing for organizational resources

Assessing HRD Needs

HRD interventions should be designed and conducted using a four-phase approach: needs assessment, design, implementation, and evaluation . The framework laid out is often described as the instructional systems design (ISD) approach. To discuss the first phase of this approach, namely needs assessment, and how various assessment efforts are used to design, implement, and evaluate HRD programs and activities.

Definition and Purposes of Needs Assessment

Needs assessment is a process by which an organization's HRD needs are identified and articulated. It is the starting point of the HRD and training process. A need assessment can identify:

➢An organization's goals and its effectiveness in reaching these goals

➢Discrepancies or gaps between employees' skills and the skills required for effective current job performance

➢Discrepancies (gaps) between the current skills and the skills needed to perform the job successfully in the future

➢The conditions under which the HRD activity will occur

The competitive pressures currently facing organizations made it more difficult than ever to carry out a needs assessment. Needs assessments are not conducted for a number of reasons, such as:

- A needs assessment can be a difficult, time-consuming process. A complete needs analysis involves measuring a variety of factors at multiple levels of the organization.
- Action is valued over research. Managers often decide to use their limited resources to develop, acquire, and deliver HRD programs rather than to do something they see as a preliminary activity.
- Incorrect assumptions are made as that a needs assessment is unnecessary because available already information specifies what an organization's needs are. As indicated earlier, factors such as fads, demands from senior managers, and the temptation to

copy the HRD programs of widely admired organizations or competitors often lead to such conclusions.

- There is a lack of support for needs assessment. This can be caused by a lack of bottom-line justification, or by the HRD professional's inability to sell needs assessment to management. Documenting the assessment and its benefits, and using analogies from respected fields (e.g., medical diagnosis, engineering scoping) are two ways to build support for doing needs assessment.

- These factors should be considered when promoting needs assessment. Although it is possible to improve the organization's effectiveness without accurate needs assessment information, the results are by no means guaranteed. Before discussing different approaches for needs analysis, it is useful to examine what is meant by the term "need".