In search of the *critical* in the concept of engagement: Implications for HRD professionals

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Introduction

This paper elucidates the connections between the evolving concepts of *Critical* HRD (CHRD) and engagement to consider their implications for HRD professionals. To do this, we begin with a critical analysis of the evolution of CHRD since its emergence as a distinctive stream within the HRD field, leading to a distillation of its key tenets. We then turn our attention to the engagement literature to identify three key trends arising from it before registering the latest developments in the conceptualisation of the phenomenon. We proceed to 'draw a line of sight' between the concepts of CHRD and engagement, showing in the process how CHRD can cast a critical light on the concept of engagement and serve to both enlarge its conceptual dimensions and foreground its emancipatory potential. Finally, drawing on evidence from our recent research, we consider the implications of this exercise for HRD professionals, leading to the identification of a set of critical roles and responsibilities and to the development of a conceptual framework that can effectively guide critically-oriented lines of inquiry into the process of engagement and inform the deployment of effective CHRD-enabled engagement strategies. We conclude with some final remarks highlighting the contribution of this paper.

The Emergence of CHRD

A Critical Turn or a Wild Curve?

The recent emergence of CHRD has been referred to as the *critical turn* within the field (Rigg *et al.*, 2007) and its main function is to challenge the predominantly performative orientation and taken-for-granted assumptions of mainstream HRD and frame change strategies towards more democratic, egalitarian and emancipatory working conditions (Elliott and Turnbull, 2005; Fenwick, 2005).

However, there is still some uncertainly among HRD professionals about the *raison d'être* of CHRD. Perhaps more worryingly, because of its inherent radicalism and emancipatory ideals, the legitimacy of CHRD can be called into question across organisations which are typically undemocratic and hardly the domain of human emancipation (Hatcher and Lee, 2005). Moreover, CHRD is an easy target for scepticism within the higher spheres of management where the normalisation of a one-sided focus on strategy and performance is hard to displace.

The critical turn may after all be dismissed as nothing more than a 'wild curve' that can only serve to tarnish the corporate image and sap the credibility of HRD professionals and that is bound to lead to a road block or, even worse, the dreaded cul-de-sac. While, as aptly remarked by Sambrook (2009), CHRD remains ambiguous and potentially alienating, there is need for more clarity and consistency around its meaning and purpose.

Meaning and Purpose of CHRD

Although CHRD could still be seen as in its embryonic stage of development, sustained efforts have been made since the 'critical turn' to clarify its key drivers, meaning and purpose. For example, in advocating a critical turn in the HRD field, Rigg *et al*. (2007) identify the main drivers of CHRD as the predominance of performative values, the perpetuation of an instrumental view of personhood, an 'impoverished' HRD research hinged on positivism, and pedagogical methods that pay scant attention to issues of power and emotion in the workplace.

While Francis (2007) has drawn attention to CHRD as a bundle of negotiated and contingent discursive practices, both Fenwick (2005) and Callahan (2007) have attached 'early meanings' to the concept and articulated its key precepts and principles including: (i) [non]-performativity (a particular stance which resists a narrow focus on performance, (ii) denaturalisation (a commitment to 'de-normalise' potentially exploitive and oppressive workplace relations), (iii) reflexivity (an emphasis on critical reflection and qualitative methodologies to expose modes of domination), and (iv) workplace reform (an approach to workplace change aligned with the democratic principles of inclusivity, social justice and equity).

Recognising the complex and ambiguous nature of CHRD as an emerging concept, Sambrook (2009, pp.61-62) has provided a 'first-ever concept analysis' of CHRD – where she adroitly explains the meaning of the critical in CHRD (thereby signalling its iconoclastic posture, non-positivist outlook and emancipatory ideals) and even more importantly, identifies its key attributes, antecedents, consequences and empirical referents that provide the epistemological and methodological bases for effectively connecting CHRD to the field of practice. Building on the work of Sambrook (2009), Ramdhony (2011; 2012) has attempted to expand the conceptual dimensions of CHRD by grounding it in critical theory to enhance its emancipatory potential and develop a qualitative, meaning-rich and polymathic agenda for CHRD research and practice, and explore its links to organisational effectiveness.

Key Tenets of CHRD

It is important at this point to extract and expound the key tenets of CHRD arising from the preceding discussion, which include:

A non-exclusive focus on performance – while recognising the necessity for sustainable organisational performance, CHRD endorses a form of 'critical performativity' (Spicer *et al.*, 2009) that resists instrumentalised, calculating forms of action that entail a one-sided focus on performance objectives that are all too often achieved at the expense of employees' well-being and 'true' needs and interests (Elliott and Turnbull, 2005).

 A concern for denaturalisation – refers to the iconoclastic posture of CHRD and aims to promote a tradition of non-conformity and challenge in order to detect and de-normalise modes of workplace domination and organisational practices that are potentially exploitive and oppressive (Sambrook, 2009).

A commitment to reflexivity – where, as the promoter of a critical pedagogy, CHRD aims to develop a faculty of the mind that can penetrate the deeper layers of organisational reality to uncover internal inconsistencies, repressive ideologies and deep-seated modes of domination that frustrate the possibility for self-development and radical change. Reflexivity also refers to the capacity of the mind to envision alternative, more enabling organisational realities (Ramdhony, 2012).

An agent of workplace democracy – involves a reformulation of workplace reform as a shift from an instrumental approach to personhood and work to a form of workplace democracy in which alignment of organisational practices with the broader principles of inclusivity, social justice and equity can become a real possibility. As explained by Ramdhony (2012), this anticipates a form of participatoy,

deliberative democracy that offers a unique take on dialogue and participation as the key drivers of CHRD practice.

An emancipatory intent – CHRD upholds a special interest in developing a qualitative, meaning-rich and context-sensitive type of knowledge that can serve as a catalyst for the removal of 'unwanted and unnecessary barriers' that stand in the way of employee emancipation and that can frame change geared towards a more productive and mutually-rewarding employment relationship (Bhaskar, 1986; Habermas, 1987).

Overview of Employee Engagement

We now turn our attention to the engagement literature. We start with a cursory analysis of the concept of engagement since its inception in the early 1900s. We proceed to identify three key trends arising from the engagement literature before considering the latest developments in the conceptualisation of the phenomenon.

An Evolving yet Contested Concept

While the Gallup Organisation is generally believed to have coined the term 'engagement' at some point in the 1990s, it is at the beginning of the same decade that the concept caught the attention of both business and academia with the publication of Kahn's (1990) seminal paper in the Academy of Management Journal (Little and Little, 2006; Schaufeli, 2014). In it, he first proposed the view that employees could become 'personally engaged' and 'highly absorbed' in the discharge of their responsibilities at work; and importantly, outlined the

now ubiquitous definition of engagement as a case where 'people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during their role performance' (Kahn, 1990, p.694).

Since then, the concept of engagement has consistently evolved, lending itself to a plethora of definitions (MacLeod and Clarke, 2009), and debates about its meaning and purpose have opened up within both academic and practitioner worlds (Albrecht, 2010; Truss *et al*., 2014; Wefald and Downey, 2009). However, while engagement is now a 'discursive driver' in both worlds, it remains a contested and problematic concept and is seen by some critical analysts as ill-defined, difficult to operationalise into clear antecedents and consequents, and to disentangle from closely-related notions such as job commitment and satisfaction, perceived organisational support and the psychological contract (Francis *et al.,* 2013; Saks, 2008; Truss *et al*., 2014).

Some have gone so far as to claim that engagement is nothing more than yet another short-lived craze in which well-established theories of motivation and commitment have been adroitly repackaged but which owes little to academic research, and which could soon bear all the hallmarks of a passing fad (Bakker and Leiter, 2010; Wefald and Downey, 2009). While a more thorough account of the evolution of engagement and the key debates surrounding it is beyond the scope of this paper, three key trends in the development of the concept are worthy of consideration here.

Key Trends in the Engagement Literature

The first key trend revolves around the 'psychologisation' of engagement in certain academic quarters, where attention became increasingly focused on the 'psychological state' of individuals at work and on their 'psychological capabilities' to adapt and thrive within the rapidly-changing and increasingly-demanding business contexts across 21st century organisations (Schaufeli, 2014).

Much has been made of the psychological traits or dispositions of the engaged employee as somebody who is physically energized, emotionally connected, and mentally focused (Loehr and Schwartz, 2003), possesses a 'positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption' (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001), and displays a willingness to perform better in advancing the interests of their employer (CIPD, 2013). The unintended consequence but all too obvious flaw of this rather 'narrow focus' on the psychological dimension of engagement is the obfuscation of the context and complex social relationships in which it unravels across particular organisational settings (Kahn and Heaphy, 2014).

The second key trend relates to the 'instrumentalisation' of engagement whereby it is confined to a form of cold and calculating means-ends rationality in which it is 'extracted from' or 'done to' employees through so-called effective leadership (Keenoy, 2014, p.203; Purcell, 2010) and is singularly used by dominant groups as a mere vehicle for the pursuit of management interests and the maximisation of performance, productivity and profit (Francis *et al.*, 2013).

Such an instrumental approach is typical of the more practitioner/business-oriented engagement literature (e.g. see Cooke, 2008; Kusluvan, 2003) and has been characterised as 'hard' or 'narrow' engagement in the more scholarly literature (Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Roberston and Cooper, 2010). It is underpinned by predominantly unitarist assumptions and designed as a management tool – where the modelling of engagement typically positions employees in a passive role and treats them as consumers simply buying into their employer's corporate vision and goals rather than proactively shaping and producing such vision and goals (Francis and Reddington, 2012).

The instrumentalisation of engagement, one has to remember, is tacitly reliant on the mental resilience, persistent dedication and ongoing discretionary behaviours of employees – which, if left unrecognised and unrewarded, can be potentially alienating in effect and lead to heightened stress levels, burnout, feelings of helplessness and depletion, a loss of employee voice, a 'trust deficit' between employees and management and the psychological uncoupling of the former from their work (Alfes *et al.*, 2010; Francis *et al.*, 2013; Kahn, 1990). In short, instrumentalised forms of engagement can potentially lead to its very opposite – *disengagement* or the outcome of what has been referred to as the much under-researched and misunderstood 'dark side' of employee engagement (George, 2011; Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013).

The third key trend concerns the 'positivisation' of engagement and could arguably be seen as the corollary of the other two trends identified above. It refers to the way the concept of engagement has been 'pressed into the quantitative mould' and, some might argue, has succumbed to the positivist hegemony – where attempts have been made to systematically

operationalise engagement, pin down its key antecedents and consequents, correlate it with performance and quantify its impact on the organisational bottom line (e.g. refer to Buckingham and Coffman, 1999; Harter *et al.*, 2002; Macey and Schneider, 2008).

As aptly remarked by Eccles (1991, cited in Fletcher and Robinson, 2014, p.273) 'what gets measured gets attention' – and what gets measured is what is of value to management: performance indicators contributing to organisational success (such as customer satisfaction, operational efficiency and financial indices) (Fletcher and Robinson, 2014) with scant attention paid to the need for a qualitative, meaning-rich and intelligible understanding of employees' actual experiences of engagement, to the social and relational dimensions of the phenomenon, and to its contingent, contextually-specific nature (Delbridge and Jenkins, 2013; Kahn and Heaphy, 2014).

Towards a Context-Sensitive and Relational Understanding of Engagement

The recent work by Kahn and Heaphy (2014) is of particular significance here as it not only presents a powerful counterpoint to the key trends in the engagement literature discussed above, but also displays strong affinities with the key tenets of CHRD. It is therefore appropriate to consider this timely development in some detail before considering its links with CHRD in more explicit terms in the following section.

While revisiting Kahn's (1990) original conceptualisation of 'personal engagement', Kahn and Heaphy (2014, p.8) propose a shift away from a construction of engagement as an instumentalised/positivist work strategy, harnessed to the performance principle to one that takes stock of the 'relational contexts' that have a bearing on the 'psychological

conditions' for personal engagement as an *expression of self* 'during role performances' at work.

They identify three key psychological conditions borne out of contextual relations in the workplace: (i) *meaningfulness* which is achieved through high-quality connections and social identification with key 'significant others' (team, leader and beneficiaries), whereby the individual can develop a heightened sense of belongingness, affirm their 'preferred identities' and jointly pursue certain courses of action that 'deepen purposes' and 'give their own individual efforts larger meaning' and enhances value congruence between the individual and their organisation (pp.84-5); (ii) *safety,* where individuals feel psychologically safe in 'taking the risks of self-expression … [and] use their authentic voices' to freely express themselves' notwithstanding the 'vulnerability and exposure that self-expression implies' – and which calls for a 'holding environment' which is a function of trusting and caring relationships and 'in which people floundering in anxiety are caught up and secured by others' (pp.86-7); and (iii) *availability* which refers to the 'physical, emotional or psychological' resources that enable individuals to 'personally engage at particular points in time' and are dependent on the 'nature of the relationships that organizational members create and maintain' (p.89).

As can be seen above, Kahn and Heaphy's (1990) 'rethinking' of personal engagement liberates it from its instrumental and positivist anchors to focus attention on the actual employee experiences of engagement *in situ*; and even more importantly, raises the concept of engagement to a new level of understanding – by bringing to the fore its contingent, situated nature and by providing rich insights into the complex web of

relationships within which it pans out and which account for its differentiated outcomes across particular organisational settings (which explains why 'engagement thrives in the context of some relationships and wilts in others') (*ibid*., p7).

Drawing a Line of Sight between CHRD and Engagement

It is now appropriate to 'draw a line of sight' between CHRD and engagement and explore the connections between them. To do this, we apply the key tenets of CHRD to the current conceptualisation of engagement. We show how CHRD can cast a critical light on the concept of engagement in an attempt to both enlarge its conceptual dimensions and foreground its emancipatory potential. The outcomes of this exercise is highlighted in Table 1 below and expounded in the discussion that follows.

CHRD: Key Tenets	Key Issues and Concerns	Application to Engagement
A non-exclusive focus on performance	Endorses *critical performativity*: Recognizes the legitimacy of strategic and performance objectives. Calls for a symmetry between organisational and individual needs and interests.	Promotes an engagement agenda that continuously interrogates the employment relationship to achieve a balance between performance and learning and maintain a mutuality of gains and interests between employee and employer.
A concern for denaturalisation	Adopts an *iconoclastic stance*: Challenges taken-for-granted assumptions and modes of operation that are misleading and potentially exploitive, oppressive and alienating.	Provides the conceptual tools to denaturalise the alienating effects of certain aspects of workplace engagement and enable a qualitative and meaning-rich understanding of its nature and enactment across organisational settings.
A commitment to reflexivity	Promotes a *critical pedagogy*: Aims to develop a faculty of the mind to expose internal inconsistencies	Aims to develop the reflective skills that are crucial to the possibility of personal engagement and the relational context in

	and contradictions and frame change towards more enabling working conditions and possibilities for self-development.	which it is enacted.
An agent of workplace democracy	Upholds a model of *deliberative workplace democracy*: Facilitates dialogic conversational practice rooted in free discourse, reciprocal exchange relationships, and accommodating of independent voices and perspectives.	Provides the *communicative architecture* that can hold together the enabling web of contextual relations as a necessary condition for personal engagement.
An emancipatory intent	Entertains *an emancipatory cognitive interest*: Aims to develop a special kind of qualitative knowledge that can serve as a catalyst for emancipatory change and a productive and mutually-rewarding employment relationship.	Promotes an engagement research agenda that can distance the concept from its 'statistical signifiers' and generate the type of knowledge that can effectively de-instrumentalise it and redeem its *emancipatory potential.*

Table 1: Application of CHRD to the Concept of Engagement

A non-exclusive focus on performance

In endorsing the notion of 'critical performativity' (Spicer *et al.*, 2009), CHRD would recognise the legitimacy of strategic and performance objectives (without which organisations would hardly be able to grow, let alone survive in increasingly competitive markets); but would also call for a recalibration of the employment relationship in which a better symmetry can be achieved between organisational and individual needs and interests (Francis *et al.*, 2013).

As such, CHRD would resist an engagement agenda that favours a narrow focus on performance or one that collapses the 'soft' into its 'hard' aspects, but would promote an

approach to engagement that consistently and continuously seeks to 'interrogate the employment relationship' to find ways to maintain a balance between performance and learning and a mutuality of gains between employer and employee as a precondition for both long-term employee engagement and organisational performance (Arrowsmith and Parker, 2013, p.269).

A concern for denaturalisation

The iconoclastic posture of CHRD means that it is driven by a concern to denaturalise (or treat as unnatural) taken-for-granted assumptions and modes of thought and operation that are misleading and potentially exploitive and oppressive (Sambrook, 2009). In the context of engagement, CHRD would provide the conceptual and analytical tools to denaturalise the alienating effects of certain aspects of workplace engagement and enable a more complete and complex understanding of its nature and enactment across organisational settings – for example, to challenge the exploitive nature of 'narrow' employment agendas harnessed to the principle of performance; de-normalise discretionary behaviours 'as a given' whilst exposing their alienating effects if not properly managed; or even debunk the positivist hegemony that has up to now held the concept of engagement captive and treated it as inseparable from its 'statistical signifiers'.

The recent work of Kahn and Heaphy (2014) reviewed above is, in our view, a step in the right direction as it shows how an intelligible and meaning-rich approach to engagement 'in context' can throw up insights into the employee experience of the phenomenon – which would have otherwise remained obscure and removed from scrutiny.

As the promoter of a critical pedagogy, CHRD aims to develop a faculty of the mind that can help organisational members to go beyond surface understandings to penetrate the deeper layers of organisational reality to expose internal inconsistencies and contradictions that frustrate the possibility for radical change towards more enabling working conditions and greater opportunities for self-development (Ramdhony, 2012). With regard to engagement, CHRD can help organisational members develop the reflective skills that are crucial to a sound understanding of 'self' and of the relational context in which personal engagement is enacted.

For example if, following Kahn and Heaphy (2014), employees are to constructively express their *selves* in the performance of their work roles, they need to be able to critically reflect on the 'nature' of the psychological conditions upon which successful self-expression is dependent; and to do so they need to develop the critically reflective skills to both objectively and introspectively address the 'bottom line' questions around the conditions and relational context of meaningfulness (*How meaningful is it for me to bring myself into this performance?*), safety (*How safe is it to do so?*), and availability (*How available am I to do so?*) (*Ibid.*, p.91).

An agent of workplace democracy

Following Ramdhony (2012), CHRD upholds a form of participatory–deliberative democracy in which free discourse counts as the 'genuine and irreplaceable medium for reaching understanding and coordinating action' (Habermas, 1984, p.342; Held, 1996) – and which, we argue, is conducive to the type of democratic workplace reforms envisaged by Fenwick

(2005) and a move towards more enabling and flourishing working conditions (Bhaskar, 1986).

In a recent paper, we pushed further the notion of deliberative workplace democracy to propose a non-episodic and plurivocal model of 'dialogic conversational practice' (dialogic CP) (Francis *et al*., 2013). Drawing on Habermas (1984; 1987a) and Bakhtin (1984), our model views free discourse as an expression of our ontological status as human beings ('to be is to communicate' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.287)) and offers a unique take on deliberative democracy as a never-ending, 'continuous process of communication brought under the binding principle of free discourse and reciprocal exchange relationships, accommodating of independent voices and perspectives, and geared towards shared understanding and mutually beneficial action-in-context' (Francis *et al*., 2013, p.2720).

It now becomes clear how dialogic CP 'fits into' Kahn and Heaphy's (2014) conceptualisation of personal engagement as unravelling within a context-specific web of relationships. As underlined by the authors themselves, the degree to which individuals can express their *selves* in a relational context of engagement is very much dependent on the quality of communication among organisational actors operating within that context.

We therefore argue that dialogic CP can provide the *communicative architecture* that can hold together the enabling web of contextual relations of engagement – where the employee can develop and maintain high-quality connections, empathic interactions and social exchange relationships with their 'significant others', satisfy the psychological conditions (of meaningfulness, safety and availability) for 'harness[ing] their *selves* to their

work role' (*ibid.*, p.8), and learn to 'use their authentic voice' to ensure that engagement strategies reflect their own needs and interests.

An emancipatory intent

CHRD is driven by an emancipatory cognitive interest and aims to develop a special kind of qualitative, meaning-rich and context-sensitive type of knowledge that can serve as a catalyst for employee emancipation and change geared towards a more productive and mutually-rewarding employment relationship (Bhaskar, 1986; Habermas, 1987b). Therefore, CHRD aims to promote an engagement research agenda that can generate knowledge of the type described above – whereby it can distance engagement from its 'statistical signifiers' and help develop primarily qualitative, deep-probing modes of inquiry that can effectively de-instrumentalise the concept and redeem its *emancipatory potential* – a possibility which is firming up following Kahn and Heaphy's (2014) recent rethinking of personal engagement.

Implications for HRD Professionals

The intersection between CHRD and engagement throws up a range of critical roles and responsibilities for HRD professionals. Table 2 below shows how these critical roles and responsibilities complement the application of the key tenets of CHRD to the concept of engagement carried out in this paper – leading to the development of a conceptual framework that can guide effective CHRD-enabled engagement strategies. Once again, Table 2 only highlights these critical roles and responsibilities which are then explained in more detail in the following discussion.

CHRD: Key Tenets	Key Issues and Concerns	Application to Engagement	Implications for HRD professionals: Critical Roles & Responsibilities
A non-exclusive focus on performance	Endorses *critical performativity*: Recognises the legitimacy of strategic and performance objectives. Calls for a symmetry between organisational and individual needs and interests.	Promotes an engagement agenda that continuously interrogates the employment relationship to achieve a balance between performance and learning and maintain a mutuality of gains and interests between employee and employer.	HRD professionals as *promoters of critical performativity*. Responsibility to shape the engagement agenda towards a symmetry between individual and organisational needs and interests.
A concern for denaturalisation	Adopts an *iconoclastic stance*: Challenges taken-for-granted assumptions and modes of operation that are misleading and potentially exploitive, oppressive and alienating.	Provides the conceptual tools to denaturalise the alienating effects of certain aspects of workplace engagement and enable a qualitative and meaning-rich understanding of its nature and enactment across organisational settings.	HRD professionals as *detectors of modes of domination.* Responsibility to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and schemes of behavior that legitimate potentially exploitive, oppressive and alienating engagement strategies.
A commitment to reflexivity	Promotes a *critical pedagogy*: Aims to develop a faculty of the mind to expose internal inconsistencies and contradictions and frame change towards more enabling working conditions and possibilities for self-development.	Aims to develop the reflective skills that are crucial to the possibility of personal engagement and the relational context in which it is enacted.	HRD professionals as *critical educators.* Responsibility to critically educate employees and develop in them the reflective skills for personal engagement.

An agent of workplace democracy	Upholds a model of *deliberative workplace democracy*: Facilitates dialogic CP rooted in free discourse, reciprocal exchange relationships, and accommodating of independent voices and perspectives.	Provides the *communicative architecture* that can hold together the enabling web of contextual relations as a necessary condition for personal engagement.	HRD professionals as *agents of workplace democracy*. Responsibility to build partnerships with line managers and sustain the communicative structure that can hold together relational contexts of personal engagement.
An emancipatory intent	Entertains *an emancipatory cognitive interest*: Aims to develop a special kind of qualitative knowledge that can serve as a catalyst for emancipatory change and a productive and mutually-rewarding employment relationship.	Promotes an engagement research agenda that can distance the concept from its 'statistical signifiers' and generate the type of knowledge that can effectively de-instrumentalise it and redeem its *emancipatory potential.*	HRD professionals as *custodians of employee emancipation.* Responsibility to safeguard and augment the emancipatory potential of engagement strategies.

Table 2: A Conceptual Framework for CHRD-Enabled Engagement Strategies

Critical HRD Roles and Responsibilities

HRD professionals as promoters of critical performativity

While the role of HRD professionals as supporters and shapers of corporate strategy is well established in the literature (e.g. see Garavan, 1991; 2007; MacCracken and Wallace, 2000), this first role qualifies the influence they so wish to have at board level – enjoining them to promote an engagement agenda in which a much-desired symmetry can be achieved between performance and learning, strategic and moral imperatives, and employer and employee needs and interests.

Our recent research in two local councils in the UK reveals how this can be a major challenge against the backdrop of spending cuts, work intensification and the normalisation of job pressure, leading to engagement strategies that tend to consistently cycle back to a singular focus on performance and strategy (Francis *et al.*, 2013). However, we contend that this particular role is one which HRD professionals will need to defend (and fight for) if they are to remain true to their calling which is the development and well-being of employees in the workplace.

HRD professionals as detectors of modes of domination.

This particular role emphasises the iconoclastic posture of HRD professionals 'pitted against their uncritical other' (Sambrook, 2009, p.64) and willing to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and well-entrenched value-systems and schemes of behaviour that serve to legitimate approaches to engagement that are potentially exploitive and oppressive and alienating in effect. Again, the role of detector of domination is a risky one, which few would be willing to step into. Ramdhony's (2011) longitudinal research in a large healthcare organisation reveals how the faltering auditing system for the removal of sources of domination in the workplace was the result of a conflux of influences including unitarist assumptions around what could be defined as acceptable (although potentially oppressive) behaviours, a clear lack of political commitment to rid the organisation of sources of domination, and the fear of reprisal by those in charge of the auditing system.

HRD professionals as critical educators

This role confers upon HRD professionals the responsibility to critically educate employees. This entails embedding in the HRD curriculum methods, tools and techniques through which

employees can develop the reflective skills crucial to personal engagement. For example, following Kahn and Heaphy (2014), employees will need to develop a critical understanding of the psychological conditions and the relational contexts for personal engagement; and perhaps more importantly they will need to become increasingly self-reflective in understanding the 'nature' of their own engagement – for the dividing line between engagement and workaholism, discretionary and induced behaviours, mental resilience and resignation, dedication and compulsion, absorption in work and absorption into the work apparatus, is a very fine one – and employees need to be able to continuously reflect on their own 'psychological state' and walk this fine line if they are to remain engaged in a healthy and positive way in the longer term.

HRD professionals as agents of workplace democracy

The above role calls upon HRD professionals to uphold a model of deliberative workplace democracy and to develop capacity for dialogic CP as a means of building and sustaining the communicative architecture that can hold together enabling relational contexts of engagement. This requires close partnerships with line managers whose role in leading dialogic CP and sustaining relational contexts of engagement is key. Our own research in the public sector in the UK reveals how enabling communication between line managers and their direct reports can positively moderate the employment relationship and maintain levels of personal engagement, and offers a glimpse of how a collaborative approach to dialogic CP can become a real possibility (Francis *et al.*, 2013).

HRD professionals as custodians of employee emancipation

HRD professionals are encouraged to take a leading role in conducting deep-probing and meaning-rich investigations into engagement strategies – to generate the type of knowledge that can both effectively address their inconsistencies and contradictions that stand in the way of employee emancipatory needs. There is also much to be gained from micro-emancipatory projects (in the form of critical action learning sets, appreciative inquiries, feminist projects, etc.) that can at the same time serve as localised, situated platforms for personal engagement and secure valuable gains in the move towards an organisation-wide type of relational context that is necessary for personal engagement (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Kahn and Heaphy, 2014). Ramdhony's (2012) investigation into action learning sets in a healthcare organisation shows how such projects can yield valuable gains for employee engagement, but also how they can easily be 'put out of play' due to a lack of political commitment and an inability to manage the tensions and dilemmas that surround them.

Final Remarks

While the nascent literature on HRD and engagement has already provided valuable frameworks for applying engagement within the HRD field (e.g. Berry and Morris, 2008; Bonebright, 2009; Shuck, Wollard and Reio, 2009), the connections between CHRD and engagement has yet to be made explicit. Our paper attempts to address this loophole by exploring the intersection between the two concepts, enabling a novel way of conceptualising engagement in HRD terms whilst foregrounding its emancipatory potential.

Second, we have made a speedy response to the latest developments in the conceptualisation of engagement. We believe that the 'rethinking' of the concept of engagement by Kahn and Heaphy (2104) is of particular significance and provides a valuable (albeit early) insight into its emancipatory potential – which we have been prompt to register and reinforce by filtering it through the key tenets of CHRD.

Third, we feel that much of the literature on CHRD remains rather esoteric and removed from the 'material world of work'. We argue that CHRD would remain impotent as a radical paradigm if no attempt is made to effectively connect it to the field of practice. We have here to some extent 'operationalised' CHRD and connected it to engagement as a concrete dimension of organisational functioning and developed a conceptual framework that can serve as a springboard for critically-oriented lines of inquiry into processes of engagement, which can be of considerable value to HRD professionals and their key stakeholders.

Fourth, in designing a set of critical roles and responsibilities for HRD professionals with a view to enhancing the emancipatory potential of engagement strategies, we are all too conscious of the barriers that lie in the way – as evidenced by our own recent research. However, we contend that HRD professionals operating within the critical paradigm cannot (and based on our experience, would not want to) give up on their calling to bring about workplace conditions in which employee emancipation and positive and rewarding employee engagement can become a real possibility.

As a concluding reflection, we remain hopeful that, in time, CHRD will reach a node in its process of becoming when it will not be viewed as suspect or as in need of constant

justification, but as a key paradigm within the HRD field vital to both positive employee engagement and enhanced organisational performance in the longer term.

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