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# Is Mauritius ready to become the HRD leader in Africa?

## An assessment of strategic human resource development in Mauritius

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to explore the applicability of Strategic HRD in Mauritius. Additionally, it assesses if Mauritius, with a high HDI factor, can take the lead on Strategic HRD in Africa.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper used a mixed-approach questionnaire. A sample of 21 managers was contacted and received a response rate of 67 per cent.

**Findings** – Most organisations in Mauritius do not practice human capital development at a strategic level but rather at a tactical one. Strategic HRD is mostly practiced at the implementation level of the business strategy rather than at the formulation stage of the mission, vision and strategy itself. However, the practice of strategic human resource development stays a minority within some very few organisations, as they acknowledge the benefits that Strategic HRD brings along.

**Research limitations/implications** – The limitation of the sample considered for this research is a relatively small one to be representative of the Strategic HRD practices in Mauritius as a whole. It identifies implication for improving the current Strategic HRD state in the island.

**Practical implications** – The paper directly impacts on the Strategic HRD practices of organisations and reveals loopholes to be remedied within the present HRD systems.

**Originality/value** – This paper not only proposes a first research in terms of Strategic HRD in Mauritius but also assesses the island's position as being an HRD leader in Africa. Simultaneously, it provides a tailor-made conceptual framework for Strategic HRD in Mauritius.

**Keywords** Africa, Mauritius, Sub-Saharan Africa, Conceptual framework, High HDI, Strategic HRD

**Paper type** Research paper

### 1. Introduction

As stated by Welch (2005) "In real life, strategy is very straightforward. You pick a general direction and implement it like hell" in Garavan and Carbery (2012). This metaphor of real-life strategy and its implementation also occurs in organisations. Similarly, as our lives would be baseless without a strategy, that is our reason for living, organisations too would have no direction to pursue without a strategy. Porter (1996) describes strategy as the creation of a unique and valuable position involving a different set of activities. Garavan (1991) links Human Resource Development (HRD) to business strategy, and states that it is concerned with the management of employee learning for the long-term keeping in mind the explicit corporate and business strategies. In recent



years, the concept of Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD) has superseded HRD (Prayag and Hosany, 2013). Though the concepts of SHRD is well entrenched in general management literatures in the USA and the UK, fewer research exist on SHRD in African countries and small island states. Unfortunately, with the exception of under-development and poverty, very little has been written on Africa, including Mauritius which in HRM terms has been largely unexplored (Kamoche, 2002; Cunha *et al.*, 2004). Similar to developed countries, small island destinations and developing countries also invest in staff training and development (T&D) as part of their HRD initiatives (Davidson *et al.*, 2011; Fortanier and Van Wijk, 2010; Ramos *et al.*, 2004). Despite increasing globalisation in such states leading to novice HRD practices, there is still dearth of research on the subject in developing and small island states (Prayag and Hosany, 2013; Chand and Katou, 2007; Cho *et al.*, 2006; Esichaikul and Baum, 1998). In fact, research on HRD in Small Island Developing States countries is very scanty.

Amazingly Mauritius, a tiny island lost in the vast Indian Ocean, has steadily carved its place through world's best performances. The Human Development Index (HDI) progressed from 0.558 in 1980 to 0.771 in 2014 (UNDP, 2014) and the island was ranked 63rd out of 187 countries in terms of HDI. Mauritius supersedes many African countries including South Africa in global metrics such as HDI, competitiveness index and information technology. As described by Stiglitz (2011), Mauritius lacked natural resources and faced many constraints, isolated and small as it was. Yet, it has been able to transform its economy and improve the quality of life of its people. Management gurus Prahalad, Stiglitz, Peters, Porter and Kotler, among others, have appreciated the level of economic development of Mauritius stepping from a monocrop agricultural economy to an industrial one and actually going through the phase of service and knowledge-based economy (Betchoo, 2014). While comparing Fiji, a small island state with similar history and demographics as Mauritius, Prasad (2014) mentions that the Mauritian success story lies in its human capital, as the island saw its human capital as its strengths. As such, Mauritius stands as a model for many other developing countries especially small island states from which similar economies can replicate or tailor-made their HRD practices. The well-documented success of the island urges for research needs in promising areas such as HRD. In view of bridging the research gap in small island state, specifically forming part of Africa where there is a dearth of HRD research, this paper seeks to assess the HRD practices in Mauritius, one of the top ranked country in Africa. *Per se*, the research objectives are as follows:

- to evaluate organisational engagement towards Strategic HRD;
- to assess the contribution of HRD strategy to Human Capital Development; and
- to identify priorities leading to Strategic Human Capital Development and from there to develop a Strategic HRD model applicable to the Mauritian context.

### *1.1 The context of the research*

Amidst the tropical Indian Ocean, Mauritius is the biggest of the trio Mascarene island with the two other smaller islands being Rodrigues and Réunion. With 1.2 million inhabitants and an ex-colony of Britain, Mauritius is conventionally considered to be part of the Sub-Saharan Africa. It is Sub-Saharan Africa's most successful economy (The Economist, 1996) and plays an active role in numerous regional, political and economic grouping and have attained the status of an upper-middle income economy

(McCourt and Ramgooty-Wong, 2003; The World Bank, 2015; Sambajee and Dhomun 2015). This position is reinforced by its geographical situation and in particular by its population mix. As an ex-colony of The Netherlands, France and lastly Britain, it retains a small but economically still important francophone community alongside a multi-cultural population drawn originally from Africa as slaves and Asia, especially India as indentured labourers and China as traders. Eventually, this leads to Mauritius being not only multicultural and multi-religious but also multilingual. Most adult Mauritians may be effectively at least quadric-lingual with English and French as official languages and Creole as a basis for their mother tongue (Boolakay *et al.*, 2007) and Hindi, Tamil, Urdu or Mandarin as oriental subjects officially taught in schools. A total of 15 languages are spoken among the multicultural population of the island. As ironically as it might seem, Mauritius is traditionally considered as part of the Sub-Saharan Africa but shows very few glimpses of the latter but more of Asia. The island is entrenched in dependence since 1968, but despite that the island has in less than two decade diversified its economic structures (Bunwaree, 2001) in progressing sectors such as textile, agro-industry, world class eco-tourism, international financial services, offshoring, business process outsourcing and information and technology. Very recently, innovative industries such as cultivation of algae, recycling industry, medical tourism, integrated resort schemes, lucrative wedding-destinations, fisheries as well as marine-culture and aqua-culture have joined the emerging list of new developments on the island.

*1.1.1 Human capital development.* In line with economic developments, Mauritius consolidated its welfare state by providing free health and free education to all its citizens. Students and the elderly also benefit from free transport and the system provides old age pensions to all its elderly citizens. Education is compulsory till the age of 16 with Mathematics, English and French being compulsory subjects for secondary education at the level of School Certificate. Examinations are carried out by the Mauritius Examination Syndicate in conjunction with the University of Cambridge. The educational system also provides for vocational streams through the Mauritius Institute of T&D for academic dropouts or for those preferring the vocational route rather than the academic one. Tertiary education is provided by public funded universities well as privately owned business schools with limited awarding authority. The University of Mauritius has recently started innovative courses on oil and gas in collaboration with Mauritius Research Council, UK-based universities and European Union. It has, over time, developed international affiliations with UK, French, Australian and Indian universities across various disciplines. Mauritius, as a small island state, recognised that without natural resources, its people were its only asset. On the other hand, the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) is responsible for creating and developing a competent and responsive human base in line with the requirements of the fast evolving growing economy. At a micro level, the HRDC supports organisational training by providing training incentive schemes, training funds and training refund schemes to companies. At a macro level, the HRDC seeks at assessing the national skills and competency needs to sustain national manpower development, as well as developing talented human capital to overcome sectoral skills mismatch. Such initiatives have supported the HDI to rise steadily since decades (UNDP, 2014), and the island is now known as the knowledge hub of the Indian Ocean (Boolakay *et al.*, 2007).

## 2. Literature

A majority of today's HRD that purports to be of a strategic value may provide the workforce with important expertise, but does so after the formulation and adoption of strategy; HRD cannot add value to the shaping of strategy if the strategy is already fully formulated. Being performance based, also, will not demonstrate fully the strategic importance of HRD. HRD will solely be perceived to have strategic value if it also demonstrates genuine strategic capability. As HRD demonstrate strategic capability, it earns respect and credibility as a full partner in forging the organisation's future direction (Torraco and Swanson, 1995). Investment not geared toward the organisational objectives and directly to the country's strategic vision in terms of strategic development would constitute a cost.

### 2.1 Models of SHRD

The resource-based view of the firm postulates that internal knowledge and skill represent important sources of competitive advantage (Hendry and Pettigrew, 1990; Leonard-Barton, 1995). Human capital theory argues that firms should protect core competencies through investment in T&D (Lepak and Snell, 1999). As such, competencies and skills are the most valuable assets of an organisation because of its uniqueness and its inimitability. Garavan (2007) states that HRD is best achieved through a strategic approach, a position consistent with resource-based and human capital theories. SHRD contributes to the creation of firm-specific knowledge and skill when it is aligned with the strategic goals of the organization. SHRD enables an organization to combine different knowledge elements, connect prior and new knowledge, and combine internal and external knowledge, to ensure sustained competitive advantage (Davenport *et al.*, 2003; Pfeffer, 1994). SHRD is a multi-level concept whose contribution to the organization is to enhance its performance in the long term (Garavan, 2007).

Organisations must recognise that the work site is the centre for both work and learning. Workplace learning integrates both and must be planned and given enough resources to flourish and managers have the choice to arrange learning experiences both on-site and off-site. Hence, managers should focus on making the right choice of learning and have a structured approach instead of doing same in a random manner (Delahaye, 2005, p. 412).

In developing this theme further, Garavan (1991) identifies some nine key characteristics of SHRD that have been redefined by McCracken and Wallace (2000). These included the integration of HRD activities with organization mission and goals, the involvement of line managers in the design and delivery of HRD, the implementation of complementary HRD activities that reinforce the contribution of HRD and the alignment of HRD with organization culture and values (Garavan, 2007). In a similar vein, Harrison (2002, p. 85) provides six critical indicators to show that learning and development are strategically focused. These include the existence of a learning and development vision and strategy in line with the organisational objectives and management support, learning and development activities supporting organisational goals, activities supported by other HR activities that help to drive down cost and increase the organisation's human assets.

Garavan (2007) states that SHRD should focus on the interplay between HRD practices and the broader context within which these practices play out. He suggests

four inter-related context which are the global environment; the organization's strategy, structure, culture and leadership; the value and uniqueness that the firm attaches to particular jobs; and individual expectations, employability and careers. Semler (1997) state that it is imperative to be congruent with the external environment and to control the external factors such as local, national and multinational. The firm's internal context such as focus, strategic orientation, organisation structure, culture and leadership impacts on the internal context of organisations that supports the development of integrated and coherent SHRD systems and SHRD practices (Garavan, 2007). Wood and De Menzes (1998) found that differences in the application of HRD practices were intended, and more sophisticated SHRD practices were applied to jobs with higher value and uniqueness. SHRD focus, orientation, systems, strategies, policies and practices should be designed in such a way that it supports the SHRD strategy which in turn supports the organisational objectives.

### *2.2 HRD in organisations in Mauritius*

In the 1990s, research carried out by Vencatachellum and Ramrakha showed that leadership development in Mauritius is concentrated at the senior management level. Organisations investing massive share of their budget in T&D were doing so mainly for senior management level training. However, in the same research, it was observed that the training budget was more evenly spread in organisations having smaller proportion of their budget allocation to T&D. As part of career path of managers in the hospitality sector, Ladkin and Juwaheer (2000) suggest that the career development of senior management is based on three main path routes; self-directed career path, internal and external career moves and development of competencies such as international exposure. As such, career development of senior management in Mauritius does not only rest within the hands of the organisations but also within that of the individual. Career development trends for leaders seem to have much evolved from an organisational decision based one to a more self-managed one. For new hires, orientation is the preferred concept rather than on-boarding which is very short term rather than strategic one especially at the public sector level (Betchoo, 2014). While researching the global business sector, Vencatachellum and Soniah (2013) state the use of informal network, intranet, discussion platforms, knowledge forums, e-learning tools and knowledge forums, video-conferencing and portals were quite rare as part of learning and development practices in global companies. However, they observed that employees were using the knowledge repository and the internal discussion platform on a daily basis that fostered social capital through social networks. Staffs were keen to participate in teamwork learning sessions. Socialisation factors such as trust, openness, commitment, motivation and rewards acted as supporters favouring learning in the global context. Managerial support has a pivotal role in supporting and sustaining a learning climate within the organisation. In view of promoting continuous learning within the organisation, managers held regular meetings, prepared dissemination notes, organised brainstorm sessions within interactive environment and shared their own experience to the employees. Hotel manager associate human development practices with the provision of staff on the job training at a more individual and operational level rather than organisational level. On-the-job training reveals to be more time effective, applied and fosters team work and trust. Practice tends to be more toward HRD rather than SHRD in Mauritius (Prayag and Hosany, 2013). Vencatachellum and Dusoye (2014)



state that not all four- and five star-hotels cover similar training areas though they are the most highly rated ones. Some hotels still practices traditional learning techniques like classroom methods, very few have innovative learning methods and team-sharing. Moreover, some hotels do not have the possibility of customising their learning programs to the local context, as they have to follow international norms. The few innovative hotels provide training through e-learning system, the enterprise resource planning SAP (Systems and Applications Products in data processing), Lobster-Ink online platform, virtual repositories and virtual universities. Though T&D programs exist, not all four- and five-star hotels operate according to a strategic capability building calendar and strategic training needs analysis framework. As part of small and medium enterprises, the commonest training method is informal and on the job for family owned business. It seems that some of the small and medium enterprise owners do not contribute to the levy system and are unaware of same. Most of the small and medium enterprises state that external business forces and the demand for quality triggered the need for T&D. However, training in small organisations is normally very formal, as they are in most instances *ad hoc*. Padachi and Lukea-Bhiwajee (2013) reveal a lack of appropriate trainers and shortage of qualified resource person in specific area of training required within the business.

### 3. Research design

#### 3.1 Sample characteristics

Given that line managers are central to the process of workplace learning and in supporting both individual and organisational learning processes (Garavan *et al.*, 2002), it is reasonable to investigate their perceptions of HRD. The sample characteristics consisted of human resource management (HRM)/HRD practitioners. As such, the questionnaire was designed to be administered with HRD specialists, but as there were very few organisations with dedicated HRD specialist or HRD department, the option was to administer the questionnaire to those in charge of HRD activities in the organisations, in many cases the HR specialist. The sample population consisted of 21 managers across the industry with a response rate of 67 per cent (14 respondents). The respondents' profiles are showed in Table I.

These respondents were reached through our personal contacts. Some respondents were reached by my co-author, a practitioner in a conglomerate group. Whilst other respondents were within my reach as my previous colleagues, as I have been a past practitioner by profession. Most of the respondents within my reach met each other last Thursday of the month within community of practice to share trending issues and practices of the HRM/HRD profession.

#### 3.2 The research instrument

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) defines mixed methods as “a type of research design in which qualitative and quantitative methods are used in types of questions, research methods, data collection and analysis procedures and/or inferences” by advocating the use of whatever methodological tools are required to answer the research questions under study (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). The research instrument, a survey was designed with a mixed of qualitative open-ended questions to gauge the in-depth narrations of the participants, few quantitative close-ended questions and Likert scaling to rate the most impactful priorities. There was no particular order for asking the

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**Table I.**  
Response rate

Industry sector	Designated respondent	Respondent	No. of employees
Conglomerate	Group HR Director	1	1,300
	HR director	1	2,100
Telecoms	Senior executive, human resources	1	1,850
	Managing director	1	137
	HR manager	1	253
ITES/BPO	Training executive	2	540
	HR manager	1	126
Construction	HR manager	1	240
Financial services	HR manager	1	62
	HR officer	2	62
Call/Service centre	HR team leader	1	435
	T&D executive	1	368
Hotel	HR manager	1	380
Total		14	

qualitative or quantitative questions in two different sections. Rather the open-ended questions and the Likert scaling concerning the same focus area were asked one after the other just to keep the flow of the conversation. In fact, this technique kept the participants' mind focused on the subject that was being discussed providing a more in-depth qualitative answer and more efficient Likert scaling.

### 3.3 Data collection and analysis

We deemed rational to collect data for the survey industry wide rather than focussed on one specific industry, as this will limit the findings of HRD practices in Mauritius. There was no restriction about surveying only large or small organisations. Some of the participants agreed to meet at their office to fill in the survey and respond to the qualitative questions. Those who could not dedicate a specific time from their busy working schedule requested us to send the survey by email so they could fill in at their pace. They very kindly agreed to be reachable by phone after working hours to clarify points where we needed more light. The open-ended qualitative data were manually coded and developed into themes aligned with the research objectives. Likert scaling data were analysed using Microsoft Excel tools.

## 4. Findings

The findings have been developed in themes under the following headings; existence and engagement toward HRD strategy, contribution of HRD Strategy to human capital development and priorities leading to Strategic Human Capital Development. Finally, a conceptual framework was built from the findings derived from the survey. The themes have been derived and aligned with the research objectives.

### 4.1 Organisational engagement toward strategic HRD

Most organisations revealed to have a well-defined mission statement with the exception of ITES/BPO organisation representing 7 per cent of total respondents. Conglomerates, telecoms, call centres and hotels have well defined, mission statement, business strategy, HRM strategy and HRD strategy. Most organisations have an HR strategy, which is common across organisations, with 28 per cent stating not having an



HRD strategy stating that HRD practices do not form part of organisational actuality. Furthermore, none of the organisations had a dedicated Strategic Human Resource Manager/Director nor Strategic Human Resource Development Manager/Director within the organisations. Within the few organisations where SHRD was practiced, it was done adjunctly with the HR Director/Manager as a shared responsibility. Only two organisations had dedicated resources in T&D with no strategic role in decision-making.

In view of assessing if HRD has a significant role in devising the business strategy, participants were asked to pick from the following three options:

- (1) from the beginning, participates in strategy formulation;
- (2) through subsequent consultation, as and when the business strategy is being devised; and
- (3) at the implementation stage.

After which, the open-ended questions followed depending on the options they have picked.

Though HRD values and principles are not present within the mission statement, as *per se* the survey, quantitative data showed that most organisations engage HRD in the development of the business strategy through subsequent consultation (36 per cent). The HRD specialists are contacted as and when the business strategy is being devised and do not have such an active part in devising the business strategy. HRD intervention, though not strategic, is called upon as and when needed. Another group of participants (29 per cent) state engaging in HRD strategy at the implementation stage. However, 28 per cent of the respondents state that they integrate the HRD function within the business strategy from the very beginning at the moment that the strategy is being formulated. Shaping mission statement, business strategy, HR strategy and HRD strategy is done with the consultation of all the senior management members of the organisations and decisions are finalised on mutual agreement and consentment after understanding how each strategy will help support the organisation as a whole as well as other departments. The senior executive from the telecoms sector state that they have undergone several complexities to have an integrative HRD strategy, as the organisation went through change of management recently:

We were already established since years as an organisation and operating on an existing mission statement. However, some time back, we have undergone a big management change as we had a new Managing Director who had a completely different perspective of business which impacted on existing mission, HR and HRD strategies. Though his focus was still to maintain customer satisfaction, his point of view was different from the previous Managing Director. We are encouraged to think in a new direction as now onwards the organisation was looking from a different perspective [...] and so had the employees. The way to support this was to design new trainings embedded in the new business, HR and HRD strategy [...] which has been beneficial in the long term. He has also been very supportive in creating a new learning culture.

On the other extreme end, another group of respondents (7 per cent) does not include HRD strategy in the business strategy at all. Unfortunate truths concerning such situations are narrated by the HR Manager, who admits doing a very administrative job, from the construction sector reveals as follows:

Unfortunately, there is no training offered to the technical staffs, the level of turnover and disciplinary committees are very high. Some administrative staff often have trainings but mostly related to excel and Sicorax trainings.

One of the Training Executive from the ITES/BPO state that:

I normally look into the planning of training calendar for two years ahead, check if we have all the materials and request same if need be. I have a budget to manage to ensure that the training fits in the training budget we have as the biggest chunk of the training is normally allocated to senior management and technical specialist.

When asked about whether he had the choice of changing the training programme because of external environmental factors and customer's request, he responded as follows:

I do have the option of changing, updating or proposing new training programmes. I propose it to our HR Manager and the latter considers my proposal to take it up the next Management Meeting.

However, the T&D executive from the call centre stated having full access to the budget scheduling, the ability to update and propose new training programmes on her own. She is herself the representative of the T&D Department of the call centre and has direct access to the director, is present on management meetings and in charge for the entire T&D of the organisation from strategic point of view. A strong HRD strategy exists which is linked to the organisational strategy. This organisation gives exclusive status to the T&D role, as they invest massively in T&D program which is a need to survive in customer service sector. The training executive has developed rigorous training, as it is a pre-requisite for the organisation strategy to be in line with customer delivery requirements. Senior management, line managers and technical staffs decide their career path and mutually agree on their developmental needs. As they invest massively in developing human resource rather than other HR-related activities, the T&D is more valued in this organisation which eventually, with time, turned out being a "learning organisation" as stated by the training executive. In fact, in that organisation, HR activities are basically administrative and act as a support in the organisation rather than being the dominant role between HRD and HRM.

#### *4.2 Contribution of HRD strategy to human capital development*

Human capital is key in improving an organisation's assets and employees competencies to increase productivity and sustain competitive advantage. The theory of human capital originated from the discipline of macroeconomic development and have since then been increasingly been applicable in corporate value creation, competitive advantage and sustainable organisational growth and success. Participants were asked as to how the business strategy supported human capital development for competitive edge for their organisations. Though very few dedicated organisations (28 per cent) state engaging HRD from the formulation stage, they have shared their experience as to how they supported the development of human capital.

One of the senior executive from the telecoms sector state that business strategy sets the backbone of the business and supports the growth of same. The HRD strategies devised are goal congruent and strongly support the business strategy. The policies and practices derived from the business strategy and HRD Strategy embeds learning within the organisational culture thus laying the foundations of human capital development

and continuous learning for a more competitive talent base. Participants stated that employees are always on the move to “learn new softwares” and attend training, as it supports better customer service. At the same time, it boosts employees performance. Employees have shown particular interest in learning and development when it is linked with self-development, career advancement and remuneration.

An HR executive mentioned that the learning culture is so strong that employees sometimes “have quiz and games about what they have learnt. Learning becomes part of yourself and you keep learning and evolving alongside the organisation” As such, skills, knowledge and competencies are being constantly renewed to have a more talented human capital. As learning and development is linked to the business strategy, the organisation is continuously developing its human capital to sustain the ever-changing business strategy. The organisation is thus constantly learning and developing new talents to continuously improve in view of “meeting the ever changing demands of clients”. As the nature of business is very dynamic, skills are very quickly outdated. To be able to meet their expectations, human capital has to be “redefined through intellectual capital” to sustain competitive advantage *vis-à-vis* their competitors and gain competitive edge. At the same time, SHRD practices have led to the acquisition of greater market reputation, as participants perform better than competitors in the industry. One of the participant mentions that T&D acts as “employer brand and attract candidates to their organisations in search of employment”. T&D does not only promote competitive advantage but also acts as an employer branding strategy projecting a positive image to the labour market. Others mentioned that the integration of HRD within the strategy formulation fosters the search for excellence within the service delivery to customers (both internal and external), maintaining highly knowledgeable workforce with inimitable cutting edge to survive competition. Training its human capital is not only at the centre of its HR strategy but vital to the committed development of the company and its profitability. Thus, the talent pool increases the viability, profitability and lifetime of the organisation.

#### *4.3 Priorities leading to strategic human capital development*

As participants stated earlier, Strategic HRD alignment to Business Strategy is primordial to gain competitive edge. They were asked about what are the organisational priorities that were leading to the implementation of Strategic Human Capital Development within the organisations and their answers have been presented through the conceptual framework below.

The process of Strategic HRD within the respondents’ organisations have basically followed similar trends; first, defining the Business Strategy from which the HRD Strategy is drawn, followed by the four sequential steps of design, alignment, implementation and continuous evaluation. In contrast to traditional Strategic HRD processes in organisations, the senior executive, HR of the telecoms company state that they perform continuous evaluation of the HRD strategy at all the stages as they operate in highly dynamic environment. They very often have new projects and hence are continuously redesigning the HRD Strategy, in case they cannot recruit before the project kick-off date, to meet the clients’ demands. As such, they need to evaluate the process at all the stages and include necessary changes as and when required. The process of design, alignment, implementation and evaluation happens within the three levels of the organisation:

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(1) Micro level – the individual;

At this stage, HRM/HRD practitioners acknowledge that human resources play a significant role in driving the HRD Strategy in the organisation. They highlight the fact that the HRD Strategy should be shared and embedded within the three levels of the organisation; strategic, tactical and operational. Employees should have strategic insight to transform the HRD Strategy into reality by inculcating the strategy in their routine jobs. They are key resources to competitive advantage and development of human capital. Respondents stated that though senior management have a say in employees' competencies development, innovation and career progression, employees should take in hand their own self-development and career path. Some respondents stated that they had to include developmental needs, particularly technical and information technology-related ones, within the key performance indicators of their staff, as clients requested that employees working on their project should possess such specific qualifications on long-term basis.

(2) Meso level – the organisation; and

At the meso level, the HRD Strategy should address organisational context such as organisational learning culture, supportive systems and processes, management support and leadership, strategic commitment and evaluation tools leadership, and stakeholder's relationships. The T&D executive from the call centre states that to ensure learning and development is directed toward organisational objectives, it is imperative that there are supportive structures in terms of systems and processes that facilitate learning organisational. HRM/HRD specialist states that management and leadership support, learning organisation and developmental initiatives support the achievement of the HRD Strategy and competitive advantage.

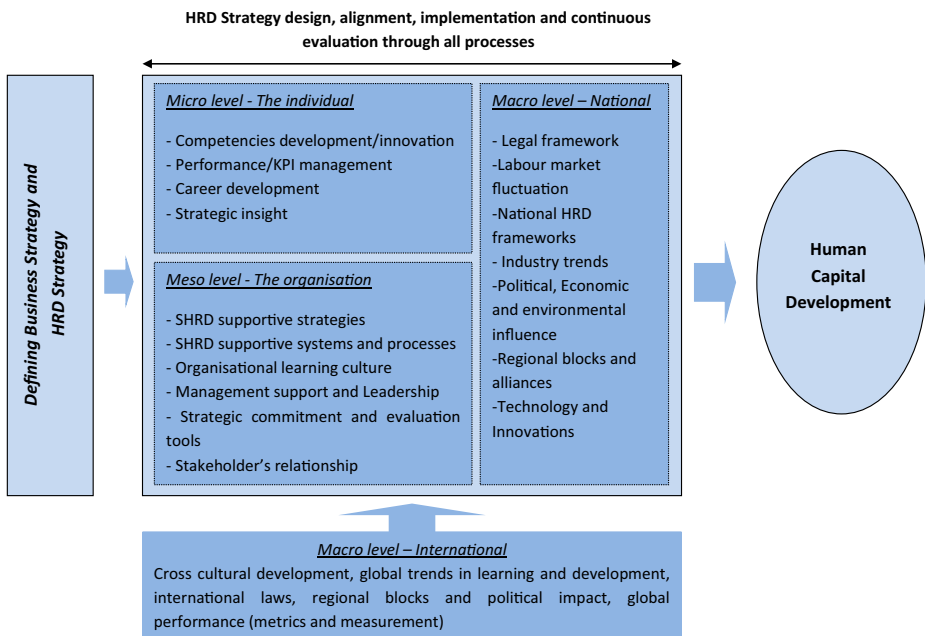
(3) Macro level – the country (national) and international.

The third level consists of national and international dimensions impacting Strategic HRD. National factors such as legal framework, labour market fluctuations, national HRD policy and frameworks, industry trends, political/economic/environmental influence, regional blocks and alliances and technology and innovations have a pivotal role in determining HRD Strategy. These dynamic factors continuously impacts on the defined HRD strategy and should be "continuously updated and aligned to the dynamics of the business environment" says the HR manager, financial services. On, the other hand, international forces also have to be considered while designing, implementing and evaluating the HRD Strategy. The T&D executive of the ITES/BPO company states that cross cultural training is imperative to operate in the international context. As employees deal with international clients on an everyday basis, they need to be properly equipped with the necessary skills to respond to the demands of customers. As such, they follow global trends in learning and development and offer new opportunities such as learning from home, coffee libraries and virtual learning stimulation through Cisco telepresence and virtual university. As a means of evaluating the effectiveness of the training methods, they have developed global performance measurements (number of cases solved after training, time taken to solve a problem after training and complaints registered from clients after training) as a means of ensuring that HRD Strategy is efficient and being implemented.

When the HRD strategy is derived from the Business Strategy and designed, aligned, implemented and continuously evaluated by considering three levels (micro, meso and macro), Strategic HRD supports the development of human capital by shaping and linking the mission and vision of the organisation for competitive edge. Participants stated that outcomes are endless from developing a continuously learning organisation, value-added talented human resources, dynamic agility and adaptability from staff, intelligent workforce highly independent and responsive to the fast-changing urges of clients, stakeholders' satisfaction and hence gaining competitive edge over competitors (Figure 1).

### 5. Discussion

The findings of this research support Prayag and Hosany (2013) statement that HRD practices in Mauritius are mostly administrative and not strategic. Though some organisations embed Strategic HRD from the identification and design phase, they represent the minority compared to most organisations doing do so at the implementation stage. SHRD practices in Mauritian organisations do not demonstrate strategic capabilities and as such do not earn respect and credibility as a full business partner in forging the organisation's future direction as purported by Torraco and Swanson (1995). On the other hand, HRM/HRD specialists agree with Harrison's (2002) and Vencatachellum and Soniah's (2014) statement that management support and leadership foster learning culture and development initiative. Such findings also converge with Garavan' (2007) statement that organisational structure and learning culture, as well as leadership support, is essential to foster Strategic HRD. However, Vencatachellum and Ramrakha (1990)



**Figure 1.** HRD Strategy design, alignment, implementation and continuous evaluation through all processes

state that larger proportion of the training budget is allocated to the development of senior executives and same has been revealed through the findings. Nonetheless, 25 years after this research has been carried out, findings show that organisations have moved a step further by not only investing in their senior management but also their technical talent base in view of improving customer service. Similar conclusions have been reached for dynamic and fast-evolving organisations, specially call centres, where T&D has become a pivotal role in the organisational survival. Such findings support [Garavan \*et al.\* \(2008\)](#) statement that clients' demands are likely to be significant in triggering T&D in call centres. In such organisations, Strategic HRD is driven from the stakeholder's demands. HRM/HRD specialists state that stakeholder's relationship, adaptation to change and crisis management also change and determine the new course of the HRD Strategy. Such practices are more applicable to private companies rather than public ones as stated by [McCourt and Ramgutty-Wong \(2003\)](#) that HRD in the civil service remains unstrategic, unreformed and fragmented. HRM/MRD specialists agree that T&D should not only be aligned with organisational objectives but also through mutual agreement converging to [Ladkin and Juwaheer \(2000\)](#) statement that career development should be self-directed. Some of the organisations valuing Strategic HRD state that they invest in developing and transforming their organisation into a learning one, as they believe in continuous learning with the view of developing skills and capabilities of their staff to gain competitive edge. Such findings support [Peterson's \(2008\)](#) statement about learning organisations supporting the development of competencies, and [Barney and Wright's \(1997\)](#), [Leonard-Barton's \(1995\)](#) view that they are key resources to competitive advantage. At macro level, HRM/HRD specialists state national and international forces impacts on the HRD Strategy, supporting [Garavan \(2007\)](#), [Davenport \*et al.\* \(2003\)](#), [Garavan and Carbery \(2012\)](#), who propose similar statements.

## 6. Conclusion and recommendation

In a nutshell, there is still progress to do at organisational, institutional level to achieve the ambitiousness of leading Africa in terms of SHRD. Some organisations have good practices though they do not have a dedicated SHRD role, whilst some do not have any SHRD practice as such. It is not only the duty of organisations, institutions and universities to inculcate a learning culture in organisations but it is also the role of each individual to be responsible for his/her self-development and be committed toward the betterment of the organisation. SHRD does not stand alone but operate the context of the working environment, organisational culture, management support, learning and development support, career motives and many others. All of these supporters must be provided to shift from a tactical HRD implementer to an SHRD level.

Some organisations mentioned about facing barriers to implementing proper SHRD because of various reasons. The identification of the Training Needs Analysis methodology poses a problem for organisations, as they are in some cases unsure of the practices and methods to adopt to do the skills evaluation in their organisation. Thus, it becomes challenging to revamp the existing in-house training programs and the development of a competency framework for the organisation. Similarly, the measurement of return on investment on T&D is not a common practice within



organisations, and thus, HRD tenets cannot conclude if the investment on T&D is being practiced in the right direction.

Implications for practice for organisations would consist of embedding Strategic HRD at the initiation of the core values, mission and vision of the organisation. As seen, SHRD is not a very popular practice in local organisations. Though they may represent high profitability; the application of human capital development is still at tactical and operational level. Organisations should carry out in-depth analysis of organisational strategy and be more rigorously engaged with the Strategic HRD implementation ensuring that the individual, organisational, national and international factors well scrutinised to ensure strategic implementation. The primordial step is to embed a strong learning culture within the organisation to reach full acceptance of SHRD holistically throughout the organisation. Investment on T&D should be assessed and HRD tenets should more proactively be engaged in devising these approaches. As long as measurement of T&D efforts in terms of time, money and intellect are not made as a common practice within organisations, it will not be embedded within the Mauritian HRD culture and efforts might not be geared in the right direction.

Simultaneously, local authorities and universities also have a role to play into assuring that SHRD reaches to its fullest in organisations in Mauritius. There is a need to re-educate the HRD practices within organisations in Mauritius. This calls for a new schooling and HR practices to those who are gearing the human resources of many organisations. Cross sectorial workshops or training sessions can be organised on a more frequent basis so that information can be shared and updated. The HRDC can organise Communities of Practice where self-organising communities in a specialised field will be meeting for round tables over a specific HRD phenomenon and provide incentive for pilots to not only learn continuously throughout their career, but also to grow within the organisation. Incentives such as more than 90 per cent refunds on courses can also be implemented. The implementation of a refundable scale according to the degree of SHRD practiced by the organisation can be devised. As such, those not really being strategic within the human capital development practice will be motivated to do so, as they will be benefitting from higher training refunds.

As for research implications, more studies should be done in Mauritius concerning SHRD and HRD. It is a booming high-middle transitioning small island state with high potential of research on HRD in various sectors. Unfortunately, its remoteness in the vast ocean has till now not aroused the curiosity of many researchers though it is one of the most successful small island state and strong economy with high HDI. Further research can be conducted in understanding why some companies do not devise proper HRD Strategy, the hurdles they encounter, the competencies to possess to do so and the existence of supportive organisational and national framework. As such, there is opportunity for much research that can be conducted there.

Concluding on the main headline of the paper as to whether Mauritius is ready to become the leader in Africa, miles have to be achieved to be the leader in Africa despite possessing a high HDI. The island still has a long way to go, slowly but surely.

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