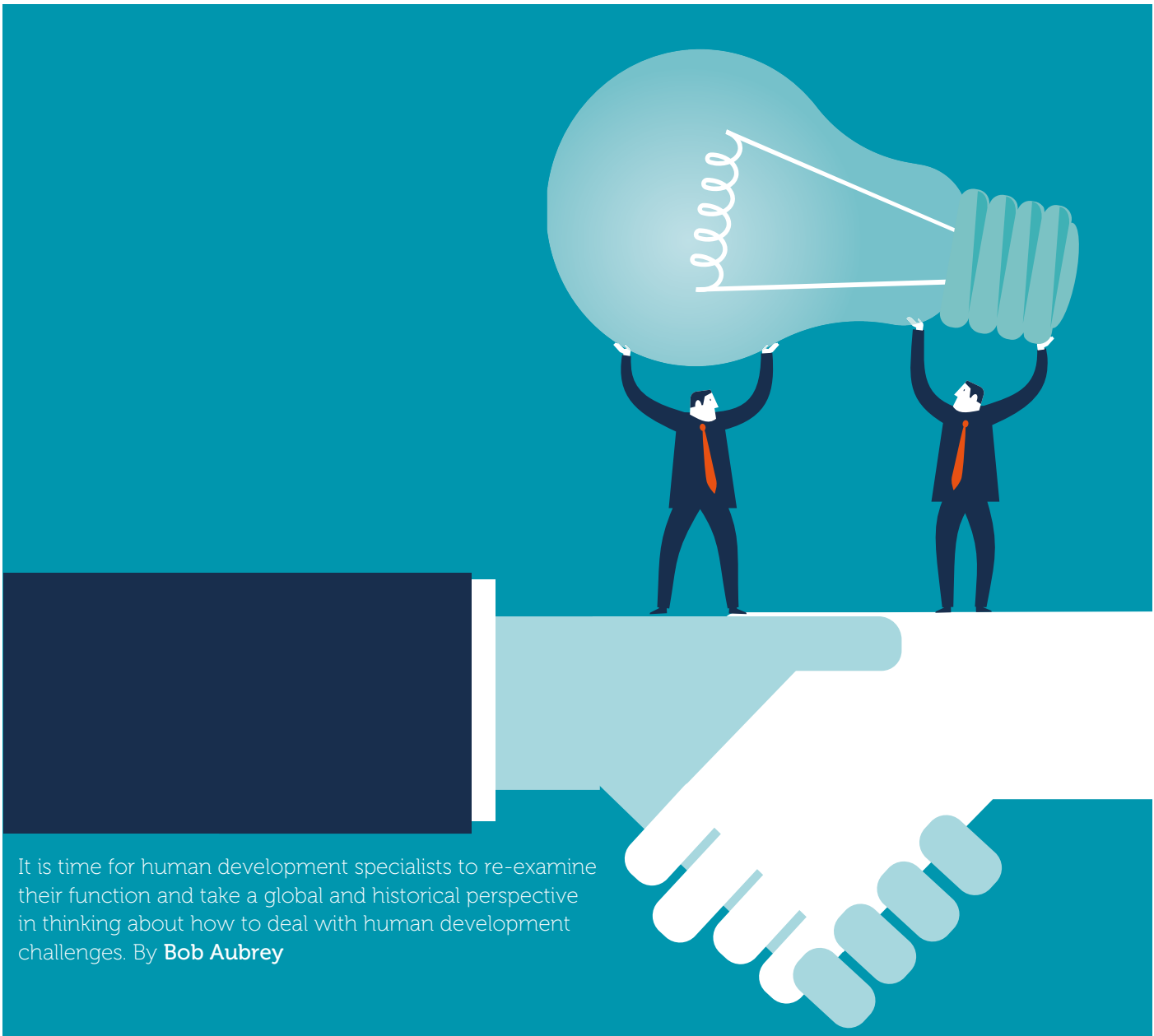

It is time for human development specialists to re-examine their function and take a global and historical perspective in thinking about how to deal with human development challenges. By **Bob Aubrey**

Why tomorrow's HR professionals must reinvent their role

There is no doubt that human development is important to companies. Whether baptised as "talent" or "human capital", the sourcing and development of employees is at the top of CEO priorities.

But talk to human resources (HR) professionals and you will hear a different story: their work goes unrecognised; they don't have a seat at the table when leaders create strategies; they are cast in a support and service relationship as HR business partners where they are considered neither as business leaders nor as partners.

Learning and development (L&D) professionals are part of a widely spread people function whose identity is mostly defined by its administrative and process work. That is about to change.

Human development professionals are going to find themselves on the front line, dealing with a host of unprecedented known-unknowns – things we know that we don't know – but which will have a huge impact on work and the global workforce by the middle of the century.

- For example, we do not know if robotics and artificial intelligence and automation will make workers obsolete. It is already starting but who will be impacted and will new jobs replace the ones that are eliminated? Can today's workers be retrained for this new world of work?
- Another is whether the example of China's extraordinary human development progress will be repeated by the rest of the developing world – India, Southeast Asia, South America and especially those at the bottom of the income pyramid. Will we see improved health, learning, longevity and self-determination extended to most of humanity? As new middle classes arise, will we have the right talent where we need it and will we be able to increase productivity at the same pace as the cost of work?
- A third is whether work itself will necessarily include development and self-determination. The mission of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) already includes aspiration as part of human development.

In addition to providing income, the ILO says, work can pave the way for broader social and economic advancement, strengthening individuals, their families and communities. Such progress, however, hinges on work that is decent. Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives.

"In addition to providing income, the ILO says, work can pave the way for broader social and economic advancement, strengthening individuals, their families and communities. Such progress, however, hinges on work that is decent

SHIFT	INDICATORS
1. The concept of development will become a mainstream management concept	• Development becomes a measurable, actionable and a mainstream concept • Development as an end in itself and having its own indicators makes the concept distinct from performance • Need for compliance to development standards such as decent work frameworks
2. Leaders will have specific development responsibilities if they are responsible for people	• Leadership includes people development for most positions • Capability to create development strategies becomes part of the leadership skillset • Leaders are measured according to Key Development Indicators (KDIs)
3. Professionals in HR, Learning, and Development will become more highly valued and require more education	• Development becomes more important than administration • Changing roles and organisation of HR will support a higher level of human development management • Learning and development will accelerate due to massive tertiary education of the workforce
4. Business strategy will set development goals as well as performance goals	• Includes development as well as performance • KDIs for stakeholder development • Strategic development objectives cascaded into operations and work objectives
5. Workers will be expected to set their own development goals; work will have a development dimension	• KDIs become part of work development along with Key Performance Indicators • Development goals and tracking are no longer based on the short-term job cycle but on career stages; career development becomes more measurable
6. New institutions will be created to support and enhance development; current institutions will rethink human development	• New development needs, such as for seniors, drive the creation of new institutions and change existing institutions • Global institutions will adopt development policies and create compliance standards • National governments and regional trade agreements will provide development policies through targets and measurements
7. Research on development will increase; new models and processes will be created	• Scientific research in areas such as neuroscience, genetics and medicine continue to enhance human development • Applied research and development in areas such as robotics and artificial intelligence create accelerated human development • Economic and political sciences as well as business schools will focus more on development

7

Current challenges will result in a shift in focus on people by business leaders and human development professionals – seven shifts will affect companies in the near term, you can already see them starting to happen

> *The difference between the day-to-day work of HR professionals and the need to have professionals who can anticipate, strategise and invent creative solutions for fundamental social changes constitutes one of the most important gaps in management development today*

(See the ILO website on the decent work agenda http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/decent-work-agenda/lang--en/index.htm.)

Will the ILO take the decent work agenda even further into laws and compliance systems that make these lofty goals a requirement for companies?

By the middle of this century, we will have answers to these fundamental questions but today's business leaders and human development professionals are not preparing themselves to deal with the challenges that these known-unknowns are creating for companies.

The difference between the day-to-day work of HR professionals and the need to have professionals who can anticipate, strategise and invent creative solutions for fundamental social changes, constitutes one of the most important gaps in management development today.

This opens up great opportunities for business schools to educate strategic human development professionals, just as it clears the way for today's practising professionals to take the lead and innovate with new strategies.

How will these challenges result in a shift in focus on people by business leaders and human development professionals? Seven shifts will, I believe, affect companies in the near term (see opposite page). Look closely and you can already see them starting to happen.

We still have a long way to go – we are only at the beginning of the journey. Very soon we are likely to see innovations and globalisation speed up the way we manage human development but the larger known-unknowns such as brain science, genetics and the redefinition of work are not short-term issues.

It is daunting to think that none of the leadership gurus of the past provide us with answers to questions raised by our ability to influence human development on today's scale. To really think again about development and take responsibility for it seems so difficult that it is tempting not to begin.

Leaders cannot delegate their responsibility to the experts but they need experts to bring ideas to the table and improve the management of human development in work.

For human development professionals the future holds a new level of responsibility – indeed new respect for professionals has already started in fast-developing economies where companies such as Alibaba have to learn quickly how to manage a global workforce but do not want to take a Western framework off the shelf.

Leaders in these companies are asking professionals to help them take their own philosophies and values into the world and make them universally aspirational.

So what does this mean for EFMD members? If you are a practising L&D professional, whatever part of the world you find yourself in, it is time to re-examine your function and take a global and historical perspective in thinking about how to deal with human development challenges.

If you are on the business school side of EFMD, you should take a critical look at how strategic your programmes that deal with managing people are.

You should also take advantage of the need to educate young professionals and re-educate practising professionals to deal with fundamental social, political and economic changes. It is a chance to reframe subjects such as philosophy and the humanities for business.

Development is defined as getting results that make something better. Ultimately we are the ones who decide how to define what better is and for whom. We will need to create a new "measure of man".

And we need institutions like the EFMD to do it together.

gf

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bob Aubrey is EFMD Senior Advisor for Asia and Chairman of the European Chamber of Commerce HR Committee in Singapore. This article reflects ideas developed in his book Measure of Man: Leading Human Development *published by McGraw Hill Education.*