

FROM HUMAN CAPITAL TO INSTITUTIONAL IMPACT: RETHINKING HRD PRACTICES FOR PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Human Resource Development (HRD) encompasses a set of strategic practices—observation, planning, action, and review—designed to enhance cognitive capacities, capabilities, and behaviors within organizations. This study investigates the impact of HRD practices on organizational performance within the Burundian Ministry of External Relations and International Cooperation. Using both primary and secondary data, 168 Likert-scale questionnaires were distributed across three strata, with a return rate of 83.92% (141 responses). Stratified probability sampling was employed. Findings reveal that intellectual development (via leadership, training, and education) and social development (through empowerment and

team building) significantly enhance employee productivity and overall organizational performance. While compensation and reward practices show correlation with performance, their statistical significance remains low. The study recommends reinforcing empowerment, awareness, and team-building strategies, and suggests revisiting compensation mechanisms to support broader HRD goals. These insights contribute to strengthening public sector performance in Burundi.

Keywords: Human Resource Development, Organizational Performance, Public Sector, Burundi.

INTRODUCTION

Human Resource Development is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of organizational success. It fosters competencies that enable employees to meet current demands and adapt to future challenges (Anyim et al., 2011). HRD aligns individual growth with institutional objectives, ensuring that development programs translate into workplace effectiveness (Stephen, 2005). Learning organizations, as described by Andersen (2007), represent strategic efforts to harmonize employee competencies with institutional evolution. Bertucci (2006) emphasizes the role of governments in cultivating such organizations to accelerate service.

Burundian Public Administration and Human Resource Development

Burundi, as a post-conflict nation, faces the imperative of building an efficient and responsive public administration to meet its development challenges and align with regional and international governance standards. In response, the Government and its partners have initiated reforms aimed at strengthening administrative capacity. A notable milestone is the National Program of Administrative Reform, developed by the Ministry of Public Service and Social

Security in January 2012 (Ministère de la Fonction Publique, du Travail et de la Sécurité Sociale, 2012).

Historically, Burundian human resources evolved from colonial-era national assistants who succeeded Belgian administrators at independence in 1962. Following the transition to a republic in 1966, these cadres remained in place, later joined by foreign-trained academics. This blend of inherited and acquired expertise shaped the administrative culture. According to the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Security, Burundi's public administration was once considered among the most effective in Francophone Africa (Ministère de la Fonction Publique, du Travail et de la Sécurité Sociale, op.cit.). However, the civil conflict from 1993 to 2005 severely disrupted institutional continuity, resulting in the loss and displacement of skilled personnel and a decline in HRD capacity.

This historical trajectory raises a critical question: How can HRD strategies be revitalized to enhance intellectual and social development, as well as compensation systems, particularly within the Ministry of External Relations and International Cooperation?

Problem Statement

Human Resource Development has emerged as a strategic necessity for organizational survival and competitiveness (Armstrong, 2013). Early performance-based pay and appraisal systems failed to deliver expected outcomes, underscoring the need for holistic HRD approaches (Okumu, 2014). Over the past two decades, empirical studies have demonstrated the link between HRD practices—recruitment, training, career development, and compensation—and organizational performance (Njoroge & Kwasira, 2015).

For instance, Gamage (2007) found that HRD initiatives in Japanese manufacturing SMEs significantly improved employee skills, motivation, and attitudes, translating into enhanced financial performance. Similarly, Njoroge and Kwasira (2015) reported that compensation and reward systems positively influenced employee performance in Kenya's Nakuru County Government.

Despite this growing body of evidence, the Burundian public sector lacks sufficient research on the relationship between HRD practices and organizational performance, particularly within ministries such as External Relations and International Cooperation.

The scarcity of HRD-focused studies in Burundi's public sector presents a critical gap. Muda and Rafiki (2014) highlight that career development, job rotation, promotion, and compensation are key HRD factors influencing employee performance and governance quality. However, technological limitations, skill shortages, and weak institutional capacity continue to hinder HRD progress across African public administrations.

In Burundi, these challenges manifest as low employee engagement, weak employer-employee relationships, and limited ownership of institutional goals. Such deficits compromise service

delivery, delay goal attainment, and damage the public sector's external image (Okoye & Ezejiofor, 2013).

Research Objectives and Questions

General Objective

To determine the impact of Human Resource Development (HRD) practices on organizational performance within the Burundian Ministry of External Relations and International Cooperation.

Specific Objectives

- i. To assess the current HRD practices in the Burundian civil service.
- ii. To identify the major challenges affecting HRD implementation in Burundi's public sector.
- iii. To examine how these challenges, influence organizational performance.
- iv. To evaluate the direct and indirect impact of HRD practices on organizational performance.

Research questions

- i. What are the prevailing human resource development practices in the Burundian civil service?
- ii. What are the major challenges affecting HRD implementation in Burundi's public sector?
- iii. How do these challenges influence organizational performance?
- iv. What is the measurable impact of HRD practices on performance within the Ministry of External Relations and International Cooperation?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on HRD and organizational performance in post-conflict public administrations. It offers empirical insights into the Burundian civil service, providing a foundation for future research and policy formulation. The findings and recommendations are intended to guide decision-makers in enhancing HRD strategies to improve institutional effectiveness. Moreover, the study serves as a reference for scholars exploring HRD dynamics in similar governance contexts.

This study was conducted in Bujumbura, the economic capital of Burundi, with an institutional focus on the Central Administration of the Ministry of External Relations and International Cooperation. The temporal scope covers HRD practices implemented between 2012 and 2016, a period marked by organizational reforms and capacity-building initiatives. Thematically, the study examines the relationship between selected HRD practices—awareness, empowerment, team building, and compensation—and key organizational performance indicators, including employee productivity, goal achievement, and institutional development. By situating the analysis within this specific institutional and temporal context, the study provides insights into how HRD practices shape organizational effectiveness in public administration settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Perspectives on Human Resource Development

Human resource development (HRD) has been conceptualized in diverse ways, reflecting its multidimensional nature. Early definitions emphasized HRD as a set of organized activities designed to produce behavioral change (Nadler & Nadler, 1970; Khan & Priyanka, 2014). Lee (1997, 2001) identified four perspectives: development as maturation, shaping, voyage, and emergence. These perspectives highlight HRD as both a structured organizational process and a personal journey of learning. Riasudeen (2014) further described HRD as a system of continuously developing competencies at the individual, dyadic, team, and organizational levels, thereby aligning employee and organizational goals.

From a strategic standpoint, HRD is also viewed as a source of competitive advantage. Bartlett (2001) and Okumu (2014) argued that organizations must design and retain human resources that are unique, durable, and difficult to imitate. This aligns with the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991), which positions human capital as a critical intangible asset. Rao (1995) extended the scope of HRD to include both competency development and the creation of enabling conditions through policy and organizational interventions.

Importance of HRD

HRD plays a central role in enhancing employee well-being, satisfaction, and motivation. Riasudeen (2014) emphasized that HRD fosters organizational cultures characterized by collaboration, pride, and strong superior-subordinate relationships. Employee well-being is closely linked to performance, as stress and poor working conditions can undermine productivity, morale, and organizational reputation (Young, 2011). Engagement literature similarly highlights motivation, satisfaction, and commitment as key drivers of discretionary effort and organizational success (Scottish Government, 2007).

Job satisfaction, involvement, and organizational commitment are interconnected attitudes that influence performance. Blau and Boal (1987) defined job involvement as the degree to which individuals identify with their work, while organizational commitment reflects identification with organizational goals. Studies consistently show that satisfied and engaged employees contribute positively to organizational outcomes (Tsai et al., 2007; Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, 2004).

Strategic HRD planning is therefore essential. Barney and Wright (1998) and Delaney and Huselid (1995) argued that HR practices are strategic resources that enhance competitiveness. Winnipeg (2001) and Schermerhorn (2002) emphasized that HRD must be aligned with organizational vision and objectives to maximize effectiveness.

Organizational Performance

Organizational performance encompasses both behavioral and outcome dimensions. Campbell et al. (1993) distinguished between actions relevant to organizational goals and measurable outcomes. Performance is thus defined not only by what employees do but by evaluative judgments of their contributions (Ilgen & Schneider, 1991; Sonnentag & Frese, 2001). Elger's

(2007) Theory of Performance conceptualizes performance as the integration of skills and knowledge to produce valuable results, whether at the individual or collective level.

High performance benefits both organizations and individuals, fostering satisfaction, pride, and career advancement (VanScotter, Motowidlo, & Cross, 2000). Conversely, poor performance threatens organizational viability and employee job security.

Linking HRD and Organizational Performance

HRD is widely recognized as a driver of organizational effectiveness. Gilley et al. (2002) defined HRD as a dynamic practice aimed at enhancing organizational outcomes, while Walgenbach, Kabst, and Beck (2009) emphasized HRD's role in managing cognitive capacities and behaviors to improve performance. Empirical studies confirm this relationship. For example, Njoroge and Kwasira (2015) found that compensation and reward significantly influenced employee performance in Kenyan county government, while Nassazi (2013) demonstrated that training improved performance in Uganda's telecommunications sector.

More recent studies reinforce these findings. Dwivedi et al. (2024) showed that HRD strategies focusing on empowerment, awareness, and team building significantly improved organizational performance in diverse workplaces. Aduma et al. (2025) highlighted HRD investments as critical for sustaining institutional success in developing economies. Figueiredo et al. (2025) concluded that reward systems alone are insufficient to drive performance unless integrated with broader HRD practices.

Empirical Evidence on HRD Effectiveness

Empirical research consistently demonstrates HRD's impact on performance. Yap et al. (2010) found that effective diversity training enhanced organizational commitment and career satisfaction in Canadian firms. Bingilar and Etale (2014) reported positive relationships between HRD effectiveness and academic staff performance in Nigerian universities. Ozigbo, Idegbesor, and Ngige (2020) emphasized the role of team building in overcoming organizational barriers and improving performance in African institutions.

Capacity building through training remains a cornerstone of HRD. Khan, Khan, and Khan (2011) argued that training enhances efficiency and effectiveness by aligning organizational and employee interests. Drucker (1978) prophetically noted that making knowledge work productive would be the defining management task of the 21st century, underscoring the enduring importance of HRD in knowledge-based economies.

Research Method and Design

This study employed a descriptive research design to examine human resource development (HRD) practices and challenges within the Ministry of External Relations and International Cooperation in Burundi. The descriptive approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to portray the current situation without manipulating variables, thereby providing a clear picture of HRD realities in the central administration.

A quantitative framework was applied, generating numerical data that were subjected to systematic statistical analysis. Following Kothari (2004), the study adopted an inferential quantitative approach, using survey data from a sample of ministry staff to draw conclusions about the broader population.

Data Types and Sources

Primary data were collected through questionnaires administered to Directors General, Directors, Advisors, and Secretaries of the Ministry. These responses provided direct insights into HRD practices and challenges.

Secondary data were drawn from manuals on HRD, organizational behavior, and adult learning, as well as government reports, publications from the International Labour Organization, and annual reports of the Ministry—particularly those produced by the Human Resources Department.

Sampling Design

The study population consisted of 194 staff members in the central administration of the Ministry of External Relations and International Cooperation, of which 168 were permanent civil servants and 26 subcontractors. The research focused exclusively on the 168 civil servants, divided into three strata: Directors and Directors-General (22), Advisors (101), and Secretaries (45). Each group received tailored questionnaires with some overlapping questions.

A stratified probability sampling technique was employed to ensure representativeness and allow generalization to the wider population of civil servants. Stratification was based on work level and educational attainment: senior executives (Bachelor's degree and above), managers/advisors (Bachelor's degree and above), and secretaries (without a Bachelor's degree). This approach reduced variability within subgroups and increased statistical precision. The sample size covered the entire target population ($n = 168$), representing 100% of the civil servants under study. Accordingly, the distribution was: 22 Directors/Directors-General, 101 Advisors, and 45 Secretaries.

Analysis and Interpretation of Results

This study examined the impact of human resource development (HRD) practices on organizational performance within the Ministry of External Relations and International Cooperation in Burundi. Data were collected from civil servants in the central administration through questionnaires, complemented by secondary sources such as HRD manuals, organizational behavior literature, government reports, and ministry records. The period under review covered 2012–2016.

Out of 168 questionnaires distributed, 141 were returned, representing an overall response rate of 83.9%. Specifically, 14 responses were obtained from Directors and Directors-General (63.6%), 90 from Advisors (89.1%), and 37 from Secretaries (82.2%). This strong participation ensured reliable representation across staff categories.

Results are presented by strata to highlight differences among leaders, advisors, and secretaries. The analysis employed descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and Pearson correlation tests, processed using SPSS (version 20). This approach enabled the study to describe HRD practices, assess organizational performance, and evaluate the extent to which HRD initiatives influence organizational outcomes.

Demographic Information of Respondents

Leaders

Among the 14 leaders surveyed, 57.1% were male and 42.9% female, indicating limited female representation at senior levels. Most respondents (85.7%) were aged 35–44, with only two above 45. Positions were divided between Directors (64.3%) and Directors-General (35.7%), reflecting the hierarchical structure of leadership. Educational attainment was relatively high, with 71.4% holding a bachelor's degree and 28.6% a master's degree. In terms of service experience, the majority (57.1%) had worked 6–10 years, while smaller proportions reported shorter or longer tenures. These results suggest that leadership is concentrated among mid-career professionals with solid educational backgrounds, though opportunities for advanced training remain important for strengthening HRD capacity.

Table 1. Leaders (Stratum 1)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	8	57.1
	Female	6	42.9
Age	35–44	12	85.7
	45–54	1	7.1
	55+	1	7.1
Education	Bachelor's	10	71.4
	Master's	4	28.6
Years of Service	6–10	8	57.1
	11–15	3	21.4
	1–5	2	14.3
	15+	1	7.1

Advisors

Of the 90 advisors, gender distribution was nearly balanced (48.9% male, 51.1% female). The majority (55.6%) were aged 35–44, followed by 25.5% aged 25–34, with smaller groups above 45. Educational qualifications were dominated by bachelor's degrees (91.1%), with only 8.9% holding master's degrees. Service experience varied: 40% had 1–5 years, 30% had 6–10 years, and 30% had more than 10 years. This mix of younger and mid-career staff highlights both the

potential for growth and the need for continuous training. The predominance of bachelor's degree holders underscores the importance of partnerships with higher education institutions to enhance skills and align HRD with evolving organizational needs.

Table 2. Advisors (Stratum 2)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	44	48.9
	Female	46	51.1
Age	25–34	23	25.5
	35–44	50	55.6
	45–54	10	11.1
	55+	7	7.8
Education	Bachelor's	82	91.1
	Master's	8	8.9
Years of Service	1–5	36	40.0
	6–10	27	30.0
	11–15	15	16.7
	15+	12	13.3

Secretaries

The secretarial stratum (n=37) was overwhelmingly female (89.2%), with only 10.8% male. Most respondents (70.3%) were aged 35–44, while smaller proportions fell into younger or older categories. Positions were evenly split between secretaries of directions (48.6%) and general secretaries (51.4%). Educational attainment was modest: 54.1% held an A2 diploma, 43.2% a humanities diploma, and only one respondent (2.7%) had a bachelor's degree. Nearly half (48.6%) had 6–10 years of service, while others reported shorter or longer tenures. These findings reveal both the gendered nature of secretarial roles and the need for investment in education and competency development to enhance productivity and organizational performance.

Table 3. Secretaries (Stratum 3)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	4	10.8
	Female	33	89.2
Age	25–34	4	10.8
	35–44	26	70.3
	45–54	5	13.5
	55+	2	5.4
Education	Humanities Diploma	16	43.2
	A2 Diploma	20	54.1
	Bachelor's	1	2.7
Years of Service	6–10	18	48.6
	1–5	7	18.9
	11–15	6	16.2
	15+	6	16.2

Leadership positions are predominantly male and concentrated among mid-career professionals aged 35–44. Advisors show near gender parity, with most holding bachelor's degrees and 1–10 years of service. Secretarial roles are overwhelmingly female, with lower educational attainment and mid-level service experience.

Correlation Analysis

Table 4. Pearson Correlations – Leaders (N=14)

	HRD1	HRD2	HRD3	HRD4	OP1
HRD1 Pearson Correlation	1				
HRD2 Pearson Correlation	.943 **	1			
HRD3 Pearson Correlation	.978 **	.955 **	1		
HRD4 Pearson Correlation	.218	.303	.253	1	
OP1 Pearson Correlation	.986 **	.971 **	.992 **	.268	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Author's Computation

HRD1: Empowerment

HRD2: Awareness

HRD3: Team Building

HRD4: Compensation and Reward

OP1: Organizational Performance

Among leaders, empowerment, awareness, and team building (HRD1–HRD3) were all very strongly and positively correlated with organizational performance (OP1) at the 0.01 significance level. In contrast, compensation and reward (HRD4) showed weak and non-significant associations with the other HRD variables and with performance.

Table 5. Pearson Correlations – Advisors (N=90)

		HRD1	HRD2	HRD3	HRD4	OP1
HRD1	Pearson Correlation	1				
HRD2	Pearson Correlation	.847**	1			
HRD3	Pearson Correlation	.911**	.869**	1		
HRD4	Pearson Correlation	.031	.128	.082	1	
	Pearson Correlation	.910**	.904**	.920**	.076	1
OP1						

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

(Source: Author's Computation)

For advisors, empowerment, awareness, and team building were all strongly correlated with organizational performance ($p < .01$). Compensation and reward again showed weak and statistically insignificant associations.

Table 6. Pearson Correlations – Secretaries (N=37)

		HRD1	HRD2	HRD3	HRD4	OP1
HRD1	Pearson Correlation	1				
HRD2	Pearson Correlation	.377*	1			
HRD3	Pearson Correlation	.508**	.551**	1		
HRD4	Pearson Correlation	-.032	.134	-.152	1	
	Pearson Correlation	.627**	.675**	.726**	.064	1
OP1						

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

(*Source: Author's Computation*)

Among secretaries, empowerment, awareness, and team building demonstrated moderate but significant correlations with organizational performance ($p < .05$ or $p < .01$). Compensation and reward remained unrelated to performance.

In the results above, empowerment, awareness, and team building (HRD1–HRD3) consistently show strong positive correlations with organizational performance across all strata, whereas compensation and reward (HRD4) show no significant linear correlation with performance.

RESEARCH DISCUSSION

The demographic results reveal important structural characteristics of the Ministry's workforce. Leadership positions remain male-dominated, with most leaders concentrated in the 35–44 age group and holding bachelor's degrees. This reflects a relatively young but moderately educated leadership cadre, underscoring the need for continued investment in advanced training to strengthen strategic HRD capacity. Human Capital Theory emphasizes that education and skill development are central to organizational productivity (Becker, 1993). Recent studies confirm this: Dwivedi et al. (2024) found that HRD strategies focusing on education and digital skills significantly improved organizational performance in diverse workplaces, while Aduma et al. (2025) highlighted that HRD investments in developing economies are critical for sustaining institutional success.

Advisors, by contrast, show near gender parity and a broader age distribution, but their educational attainment is overwhelmingly limited to bachelor's degrees. This pattern highlights the importance of strengthening links between higher education institutions and public administration to ensure that advisors acquire advanced competencies. The Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) argues that knowledge and skills are intangible resources that provide sustainable competitive advantage. OECD (2012) similarly emphasizes collaboration between

universities and government institutions. More recent evidence supports this: Dwivedi et al. (2024) demonstrated that HRD strategies integrating awareness and knowledge dissemination fostered innovation and adaptability in organizations.

Secretarial roles are almost exclusively female, with lower levels of formal education, underscoring the gendered nature of administrative work and the need for targeted capacity-building initiatives. Gendered division of labor theories suggest that occupational segregation often limits women's access to higher-level positions and training opportunities (Reskin & Roos, 1990). Current empirical work shows similar patterns : Ozigbo, Idegbesor, and Ngige (2020) found that team-building initiatives can help overcome gendered barriers by fostering inclusive collaboration, while Jocelyne and Kariuki (2020) emphasized that empowerment practices are particularly effective in enhancing women's contributions to organizational performance.

The correlation analysis provides further insight into the relationship between HRD practices and organizational performance. Across all strata, empowerment, awareness, and team building (HRD1–HRD3) consistently exhibited strong positive correlations with organizational performance. This finding aligns with empowerment theory (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which emphasize intrinsic motivators as key drivers of performance. Recent empirical studies reinforce this: Dwivedi et al. (2024) showed that empowerment and team-building strategies significantly improved organizational outcomes in digitalized workplaces, while Ozigbo et al. (2020) confirmed that team cohesion and collaboration are critical for performance in African institutions.

By contrast, compensation and reward (HRD4) did not show significant linear correlations with performance in any stratum. This suggests that, within the Ministry, financial or material incentives may not be the primary determinant of performance. Recent reviews support this interpretation: Figueiredo et al. (2025) concluded that reward systems alone are insufficient to drive performance unless integrated with broader HRD practices, while Akuffo-Aduamah (2025) found that compensation impacts performance only when aligned with organizational culture and employee motivation. These findings reinforce the argument that HRD strategies should prioritize empowerment, awareness, and team building over compensation alone.

Taken together, the results highlight both strengths and challenges in the Ministry's HRD framework. The strong link between empowerment, awareness, and team building with performance points to areas where HRD practices are effective. However, the weak role of compensation and the limited educational attainment among secretaries suggest gaps that require policy attention. Strengthening training opportunities, promoting equitable career development, and aligning reward systems with performance objectives could enhance the overall impact of HRD on organizational outcomes.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between human resource development (HRD) practices and organizational performance within the Central Administration of the Ministry of External

Relations and International Cooperation in Bujumbura, Burundi. Grounded in Human Capital Theory, the Resource-Based View, and Self-Determination Theory, the findings demonstrate that empowerment, awareness, and team building are the most influential HRD practices in enhancing employee productivity, goal achievement, and institutional development. In contrast, compensation and reward showed weaker associations with performance outcomes, underscoring the limitations of relying solely on extrinsic incentives. Structural challenges such as gender imbalances, limited educational attainment among advisors, and concentration of women in secretarial roles further constrain the full potential of HRD. These insights highlight the need for targeted capacity-building initiatives, equitable career development opportunities, and strategic alignment of HRD practices with organizational objectives.

While the study offers valuable insights, its scope is limited to one ministry within Burundi and to HRD practices implemented between 2012 and 2016. The scope of HRD practices was restricted to four indicators—awareness, empowerment, team building, and compensation and reward—due to resource constraints. Other relevant dimensions such as work environment, job satisfaction, and external stakeholder perceptions were excluded, which may have limited the comprehensiveness of the analysis. Although the Ministry of External Relations and International Cooperation plays a pivotal role in Burundi's international engagement, the study did not assess its external image among diplomatic missions, international organizations, or political institutions because of time and funding limitations. The findings are context-specific and should be considered within the institutional and temporal boundaries of the study. Future research could expand the sample to multiple institutions, adopt longitudinal designs, and integrate qualitative perspectives to deepen understanding of HRD–performance dynamics.

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