Perceptions of Oppression, Emancipation, Empathy, and Participation in the Workforce

Matthew Smith
matthewsmithbr@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF OPPRESSION, EMANCIPATION, EMPATHY, AND PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Matthew Smith, Ed.D.
Department of Counseling and Higher Education
Northern Illinois University, 2022
Dr. Katy Jaekel, Director

Human resource development (HRD) is no longer about simply acquiring the skills needed to perform a task and is now a tool which can shape society and the ways in which we interact with one another. At the forefront of this transition are new ways of imagining HRD, including critical human resource development (CHRD) and critical management studies (CMS). This article examines the preconceptions learners bring with them into critical HRD programs. The study presented is an exploratory case study at an international organization with offices in the United States and Canada. Semi-structured interviews with six participants and a document analysis are the primary methods. The findings indicate a lack of understanding about core CHRD and CMS concepts (oppression, emancipation, empathy, and democratic participation) negatively impacts intended learning outcomes. This study has important implications for the future of HRD research and practice.
I would like to acknowledge everyone who supported me through what has been my goal for the last 20 years. Family, friends, colleagues, thought leaders throughout history, and people I have run across have all played a role in shaping me into the person I am today. Without their influences (whether perceived to be positive or negative), my view of us and what we are capable of would be different. And because of who I am as a result of these interactions, I am in a place where I see the world for what I believe it to be … capable of better.

Special thanks to my mentors at each step of the way. To Dr. Margaret Rung, who served as a role model and honors thesis advisor at Roosevelt University, thank you for helping me find a way to synthesize critical thought into the written word. I have used your lessons in every facet of my life. To Dr. Eric Gellman, currently an associate professor of history at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, thank you for challenging me to think about issues through a lens different than my own. I am of better service to my community because of you. To Dr. Marjorie Treff, who served as my graduate mentor and guide while at Indiana University, thank you for supporting me in finding my voice as an adult education practitioner. And to Dr. Katy Jaekel, my dissertation chair at Northern Illinois University and example of what we can be as educators and people, thank you for supporting my thought, encouraging my decisions, and providing guidance on how to be bring this all together.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Erminia.
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CHAPTER I – DISSERTATION OF PRACTICE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Introduction

From ideologically positioning material acquisition as a requirement for happiness to defining worth in terms of economic success rather than one’s compassion and empathy, capitalism is alienating and inequitable (Brookfield, 2005; Marcuse, 1969). To serve capital’s interest, the dominant class oppresses those with less financial means (Fromm, 1956). The effectiveness of this oppression is so complete that corporations large and small create environments in which individuals routinely engage in activities that directly undermine their own self-interests, minimize opportunities to participate, and maintain an oppressive status quo (Brookfield, 2005). Within capitalist ideology, alienation is unrecognizable and those who seek to participate in transformative change through emancipatory action, or actions dedicated to overcoming oppression and redefining the status quo, are considered agitators who threaten established social order (Brookfield, 2005).

Within corporate spaces, adult education primarily takes the form of human resource development (HRD), which involves the acquisition of skills intended to reduce costs and increase profits (Foster & Wiebe, 2010; McGovern, 2014; Porres, et al., 2013; Smith, 2014; Zanetti, 1997). The primary recipients of this development work (more skill/less attitudes and beliefs) are non-managerial staff, who are largely responsible for creating the revenues which drive profit. This is also known as “learning for earning,” or the construction of a system
designed to perpetuate income inequality (Cunningham, 1996). Alienation and inequity are reinforced through these practices. Put another way, the primary tenet of HRD within the capitalist ideology is to create shareholder and/or ownership wealth (Fenwick, 2004; Harvey, et al., 2001; Monaghan & Cervero, 2006). In practice, focusing learning and development outcomes toward profit perpetuates social and economic inequity while simultaneously preventing the type of dialogue needed to overcome alienation and create transformative change (Foster & Wiebe, 2010).

Research conducted in Europe and Australia offers some guidance on how to overcome the problem of adult education focusing on profit, including the intentional inclusion of emancipatory dialogue within human resource structures using critical human resource development (CHRD) and critical management studies (CMS) (Fenwick, 2004; Foster & Wiebe, 2010). As a matter of practice, CHRD is a process of learning and development within professional spaces which is intended to promote critical reflection among workers and increase engagement (Monaghan & Cervero, 2006). Critical management studies (CMS) attempt to reorganize human resource practice away from traditionally recognized methods toward ones focused on unmasking power, empowering workers, overcoming oppression, and increasing democratic participation (Fenwick, 2004). Each are intended to include aspects of emancipatory dialogue, or dialogue meant to expose power and foster transformative praxis through the empowerment of learners (Freire, 1970). We, however, do not yet know if these approaches are effective in encouraging transformative change.
Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand North American non-exempt employee perceptions of oppression, emancipation, empathy, and participation along with any preferred paths to transformative change within their workplace. These individuals will be known as workers throughout the study. This effort represents the first step in understanding the potential impact of emancipatory dialogue on organizational structures. Specifically, this study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What, if any, are the current understandings of oppression, emancipation, empathy, and participation exist within the hourly workforce at Company A?
2. How, if at all, do participants’ perceptions inform their understanding of intended learning and development outcomes?

The findings from this study aim to inform researchers and practitioners on pre-existing understandings of oppression, emancipation, empathy, and participation within and if these understanding impact learning outcomes. In seeking to understand this, this study intends to open directions for future research and knowledge generation related to empowering workers through dialogue such that they are able to transform their personal and professional environments through emancipatory praxis. With power relationships being questioned across North America (and elsewhere), this study is well-positioned to add insights in how to better address inequality in corporate spaces, which is perpetuated by human resource practice.
Literature Review

Before reviewing the literature on CHRD and CMS, it is important to define terms within the context of this proposal, specifically transformation, oppression, emancipation, empathy, and democratic participation. In this study, transformation is defined as a material difference in one’s attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors such that one’s self, their world, and the status quo change (Freire, 1970). Oppression refers to those structures which reinforce a culture of positivism in which the present is emphasized over what might be and individuals are taught to believe “society has a life of its own” rather than individual will shaping reality (Giroux, 2011, p. 29). Emancipation within this study is understood as the ability to overcome this oppression and redefining the status quo through active engagement in change (Brookfield, 2005). Empathy refers to developing dialogue-based relationships with others such that true understanding is achieved (Kasl & Yorks, 2016). Democratic participation will also be referred to as workplace democracy is defined as the ability to participate in the decision-making processes within the professional sphere (Pateman, 1970).

Adult Education as Oppressive Practice

With gaps in understanding dialogue’s impact on power and voice and a structural barrier to investigating/investing in emancipatory outcomes, adult education is, at times, co-opted as a tool of the oppressor (Brookfield, 1993; Grace & Rocco, 2009; Hill, 1995; Newman, 1994). Hill (1995) establishes adult education as a forceful tool in maintaining a decidedly heterocentric
view of socially acceptable mores, preventing the advancement of non-conforming practice in adult education. Grace and Rocco (2009) rely on the work of John Ohliger in positing lifelong adult education is detached from dialogue and prevents, rather than enabling, upward mobility within the working class. Perhaps most strikingly, Brookfield (1993) argues prominent components of adult education, such as self-directed learning, are merely cloaked forms of oppressive practice designed to accommodate a bend-but-do-not-break hegemony rather than foster political engagement and critical reflection. Adult education is, in a sum view, a tool used to perpetuate inequity among marginalized groups.

This, then, leads into the topics of power, reciprocity, and the conditions for increased participation as adult education outcomes. Power relates to the force (or lack thereof) involved parties have over the other (Foucault, 1990). While potentially negative, acknowledging, and articulating power within an organization can help define a mutually beneficial relationship workers and learning, though most organizations do not use adult education to facilitate such understanding (Davis & Kliwer, 2017). Effective power mapping can lead to thicker, or more collaborative, levels of knowledge and perspective sharing, per Janke and Clayton (2012). While these are not easy constructs to put into practice, understanding the relationship between power and reciprocity can allow organizations to engage in the work of deliberative engagement in which dialogue forms the bedrock of work toward fair and consensus driven understanding (Ehrlich, 2000; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Himmelman, 2001; Nabatchi, 2012). As research to this point indicates, however, practical applications of adult education fail to adequately address issues of power within the workplace.
Emancipatory Dialogue

Making emancipatory dialogue an imperative topic to understand are its implications on exploitative capitalist ideology (Brookfield, 2005; Foucault, 1980; Gramsci, 1971; Horkheimer, 1972; Marcuse, 2002; Marx & Engels, 1970). Emancipatory dialogue is rooted in social relations and endeavors to upend adult education practices which perpetuate the status quo (Brookfield, 2005). Such forms of dialogue can be problematic for those in power as they lead to what Lindeman (1961) describes as a collective advance toward democracy in which decision-making is shared and those formerly in power are displaced by the most radical version of democratic participation.

As an emancipatory enterprise, adult education creates awareness, drives empathic understanding, and is best understood as a process in which dialogue plays a dominant role in transformational change (Freire, 1970; Gadotti, 2011; Gramsci, 2007; Habermas, 1971; Kasl & Yorks, 2016; Merriam & Brockett, 2007; Mezirow, 1981; Stromquist, 2002). More specifically, per Kasl and Yorks (2016), emancipatory adult education is based in reflection, involves multiple ways of knowing, extends beyond quantitative measurements, and is based in a critically reflective practice which follows an individual’s exposure to other points of view. Each of these areas are supposed to be incorporated into CHRD and CMS, which is an adult education process.

Research on emancipatory adult education indicates it should be conducted in spaces open to all (Blaszczyk, 2013; Freire, 1974; Galloway, 2015; Kasl & Yorks, 2016; Stromquist, 2014). Unfortunately, opportunities for the realization of emancipatory dialogue are under attack
due to class politics and economic segregation (Stromquist, 2014). And if adult education is to be truly emancipatory, it must break away from transactional truths and toward an equality in the relationship between individuals (Galloway, 2015). Through this equality in relationships, heightened levels of empathy and understanding are achieved, resulting in what Kasl and Yorks (2016) term “whole-person dialogue,” or individuals arriving at empathic understandings of one another. It is through whole-person dialogue (intra- and inter-personal) that emancipatory practice is achieved and the intended outcomes of CHRD and CMS, including criticality and participant empowerment, are achieved.

It is important here to discuss the use of the word “critical” in CHRD and CMS as it presents a problem. When using critical theory in a study, for example, research might center on Habermas’ position regarding the power relations between technical, practical (communicative), and emancipatory knowledge domains (Benhabib, 1986; Brookfield, 2005; Habermas, 1971; Jones, et al., 2003; Mezirow, 1981). Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2003) argue critical theory is driven by researcher participation, the uncertainty of knowledge, and is centrally positioned as a liberatory effort. Critical theory is normatively grounded and aims to create a more democratic and less alienating society (Benhabib, 1986; Brookfield, 2005). Finally, the outcomes of critical theory are unknowable until they are created as they involve the restructuring of our lifeworld (Horkheimer, 1972). In sum, critical theory exposes power and oppression while aiming to fundamentally change the nature of society. CHRD and CMS are not fully aligned with any of the above, making the use of the word “critical” a practical perversion of what it intends to convey.
Current State of CHRD and CMS Research

The primary research outcomes of CHRD and CMS relate to improvements or potential improvements in employee engagement and an increased focus on social considerations which are both emancipatory and transformational in nature (Alvesson, & Deetz, 1996; Fenwick, 2004; Foster & Wiebe, 2010; Fournier & Grey, 2000; Hassard, et al., 2001; Prasad & Mills, 2010; Smith, 2014). In one of the more influential research efforts related to CHRD, Fenwick (2004) lays out a compelling case for it as the model of learning and development. Offering four primary principles of CHRD, she argues critically structuring HRD will: (a) account for the intersections which make up each of our lives, (b) recognize the socio-political processes which impact cognition and agency, (c) advance social transformation through the explicit naming of power, and (d) situate pedagogy within a critical framework which questions not only exploitative practice but emancipatory practices to ensure they are not being co-opted for profit (Fenwick, 2004, p. 198). Fenwick (2004) also notes the weaving of criticality into HRD will allow the practice to remain above ideological power relations (p. 197). Most notably, infusing critical concepts into traditional HRD is the avenue through which social action is embedded into the developmental needs of an organization (Fenwick, 2004; Alvesson, & Deetz, 1996). This is the conceptual power of CHRD and CMS.

Writing on the implications of neoliberal economies on training and development, Smith (2014) notes CHRD and CMS techniques which include literacy education have the potential to shift workplace learning toward more socially situated outcomes, rather than strictly financial ones. While not something which can simply be inserted into organizational functions, using
critical theory as a foundation in learning and development, or CMS by definition, allows leaders to break free from scientifically managing their workforce, instead focusing on the socio-cultural components of personhood through dialogue (Alvesson and Deetz, 2006). In doing so, individuals gain power and voice. Further, the reflexive and performative aspects of CMS offer natural pathways into an expanded focus on business ethics, which has immense impacts on executive-level behaviors, which, in turn, benefits those toward the lower end of the socio-economic ladder (Prasad & Mills, 2010). What existing research to this point tells us is that reorganizing human resource practice away from profit and toward the emancipatory actions associated with CHRD and CMS can push organizational strategy away from profit and into more just spaces which empower workers through emancipatory dialogue and directly confront oppressive practice.
Existing Understandings of Research Questions

There is no available research which directly examines worker perceptions of oppression, emancipation, empathy, and democratic participation within the context of CHRD or CMS. Researchers and practitioners lack an understanding of what workers believe in relation to these topics prior to instituting CHRD or CMS strategies. There is research, however, which looks at perceptions and behavioral changes after a critically structured training protocol is implemented, which can help professionals and scholars understand (to a marginal degree) how participants feel about the concepts.

While looking at management attitude changes at two locations following a course on critical perspectives, Monaghan and Cervero (2006) note two distinct takeaways. First, CMS structures do not inherently or naturally promote emancipatory dialogue, nor do they have the desired effect of perspective transformation as they will typically reinforce existing attitudes and behaviors (Monaghan & Cervero, 2006). In practice, this means perceptions and behaviors do not change following CMS coursework because existing oppressive understandings are ideologically engrained into participant belief systems. From this, it is reasonable to assume perceptions prior to a training program were such that participants did not understand oppression, emancipation, empathy, or democratic participation in the critical sense. Second, organizations bend cultural expectations to organizational needs rather than to the needs of their employees. Since each learner comes in with different experiences, which in turn informs content and meaning-making, the emancipatory takeaways from critical learning and development are limited (Dessel, et al., 2006; Monaghan & Cervero, 2006; Schneid, et al., 2015).
As these studies looked at single cases, however, the results from this line of inquiry are incomplete. Establishing continuing education pieces to reinforce messages delivered, while simultaneously measuring resultant attitude changes, is another area in which further research can and should be conducted (Schneid et al., 2014). This indicates CHRD and CMS processes are not foundational components of organizational learning and development, and learner perceptions are not informed through mission-driven activities.

Tying a direct link between CMS and critical theory, one examination notes praxis is the direct path toward emancipation (reflecting the words of Freire) but is hardly realized in professional settings (Foster & Wiebe, 2011). The process of emancipatory learning then, is truncated to the point learning serves only capital and offers little in the way of transformative practice (Foster & Wiebe, 2011). Others share this sentiment (Hassard et al., 2001; Zanetti, 1997; Orosz, 1998). Implementing emancipatory dialogue within the professional spaces is problematic, however (Bills, et al., 2015; Esau, 2013; Galloway, 2012; Garvey, et al., 2017; Gert, 2017; Nouri & Sajjadi, 2014; van Hek, et al, 2016).

Two things of note are missing from most of the research offerings: First, no study contains directly measured emancipatory outcomes. Mohaghan and Cervero (2006) found participant beliefs did not change after taking part in a CMS course the authors created, though the researchers did not articulate what those beliefs were going into the study. Other efforts in studying dialogue in CMS and CHRD focus on performance and not oppression, continuing a trend in which dialogue is directed toward fiscal outcomes and not toward emancipatory ends (Fenwick, 2004; Foster & Wiebe, 2010; Fournier & Grey, 2000; Porres, et al., 2013). This will impact perceptions as learners are wise enough to spot the juxtaposition between stated intent
and expected outcomes. Second, there is hardly any mention of how emancipatory exercises in CMS or CHRD impact participatory behaviors inside the workplace.

CMS and CHRD Compatibility with Emancipatory Dialogue

Research on CMS and CHRD suggests they do not realize their goals (Fenwick, 2004; Foster & Wiebe, 2010; Fournier & Grey, 2000; Porres, et al., 2013; Prasad & Mills, 2010). Fenwick (2004) notes that several critics question the efficacy of emancipatory dialogue within CHRD and CMS due to a perceived faithfulness to exploitive corporate practice and a general drive toward profit over people. Another critique argues a focus on critical pedagogy and participatory research within training and development is not fully effective without more robust praxis opportunities (Foster & Wiebe, 2010). Further, little research has been conducted in the applications of CMS toward business ethics, which calls into questions the outcomes of past studies (Prasad & Mills, 2010). American interpretations of CHRD and CMS differ vastly from the Marxist applications offered in European organizations and, therefore, fail to realize potential emancipatory impacts for workers (Fournier & Grey, 2000; Hassard, et al., 2001).

While CHRD and CMS have not fully embraced emancipatory dialogue, each have space for such efforts as they are multi-positional endeavors, embracing a vision in which oppression is identified and emancipatory dialogue is actualized in places of business (Fenwick, 2004). Opportunities include focusing on social justice and worker participation, recognizing diversity as a source of strength rather than a cost, encouraging worker participation as the path to increased stakeholder development, and fostering reflexive dialogue as the method to develop
Democratic Participation (Workplace Democracy)

Beginning with Pateman (1970), who argued a non-hierarchal structure would create autonomy and increase the likelihood individuals would participate in decision-making processes, numerous studies and scholarly efforts have been devoted to democratic practices and applications in workplace settings (Adman, 2008; Ahmed, et al., 2018; Fenton, 2012; Felicetti, 2018; Fisk, 2016; Harnecker, 2007; McKeown, et al., 2018; Pateman, 1970; Timming and Summer, 2018). The research attempts to answer the question of how democratic participation in the workplace, or shared decision-making and collective governance within communities of practice, impacts worker participation in and out of the workplace (Harnecker, 2007; Timming and Summer, 2018). To varying degrees, each looks at dialogue’s role in the process, though some consider dialogue through a profit lens, while others view dialogue through emancipatory vantage points. As a result, findings are not aligned.

Timming and Summer (2018), for example, conducted research which seems to clearly show a relationship between dialogue, employee participation in decision-making, and participation in external democratic efforts. In his quantitative study, however, Adman (2008) found no correlation between increased engagement at work and increased levels of participation in community-based action. Harnecker’s (2007) study on cooperative participation found economic structures outside the workplace negatively impacted a worker’s ability to transfer
learnings into community engagement, going so far as to note workplace lessons informed by emancipatory dialogue need to be enforced with constructive community practices. This indicates no amount of democratic participation in the workplace will, on its own, lead to increases in civic engagement. Relatedly, Fisk (2016) found non-union worker organizations had a potentially negative relationship to democratic participation within the community, especially amongst minority workers.

As with emancipatory dialogue, there are barriers to expanding democratic participation in the workplace (Brookfield, 2005; Budgeon, 2011; Budgeon, 2014; Farndale, et al., 2015; Foster & Wiebe, 2010; Roychowdhury, 2014). Hegemonic and ideologic forces, for example, prevent learners and organizations from being open to emancipatory learning, while traditionally prescriptive management pedagogies oftentimes find more support than critically reflexive offerings (Brookfield, 2005; Foster & Wiebe, 2010). Meanwhile, masculine conceptualizations of feminism and idealized forms of gender identity limit access to power for women and nonconforming individuals (Budgeon, 2014). In a separate effort, Budgeon (2011) notes that legitimate professional and social discourse around gender identity falters in meritocratic systems and through a continued focus on individualism. This potentially prevents emancipatory learning from taking root within organizations. The unsteady, fluid and/or contested nature of gender and race identity present challenges to dialogue in professional settings (Roychowdhury, 2014).

Presenting location-based challenges to CHRD and CMS are the varying definitions of what is considered an appropriate level of inclusion in the workplace. This means cultural variations in comportment expectations differ in urban and rural settings (Farndale, et al., 2015).
These contextual differences result in social categorizations based on established conceptions of gender and identity, which negatively impact dialogue efforts. Further, if learning outcomes are not visible represented in an organization’s leadership structure, learner buy-in may be impacted (Schneid et al., 2015). What is not answered in any of the above is whether workers recognize oppression in the workplace, if they desire greater levels of intentional work in understanding how to participate, or if they feel as though their work-life impacts their civic engagement. These questions represent distinct opportunities for further research.

Gaps in Existing Research

In looking at existing research on CHRD and CMS, a gap emerges. Some efforts to understand emancipatory dialogue in the workplace have to be undertaken, though most of these relate to the impact on profit or employee turnover and are thus not truly emancipatory. Likewise, some scholarship exists which attempts to tie workplace participation to civic engagement, yet this work does not adequately address how emancipatory dialogue fosters either. Further, research suggests current manifestations of CHRD and CMS are more aligned with maintaining the status quo, rather than encouraging emancipatory dialogue and challenging power. Simply, research presents conflicting outcomes and does not validate the efficacy of CHRD or CMS as emancipatory practice (Adman, 2008; Foster & Wiebe, 2010; Timming & Summer, 2018).

Current research on CHRD and CMS lacks insight into worker perceptions of what exactly oppression, emancipation, and democratic participation mean to the individuals they are
supposed to serve. This simultaneously prevents stakeholders in academic, professional, and research spaces from being able to create impactful learning and development programs and effectively gauging CHRD and CMS efficacy as an emancipatory endeavor. In Timming and Summer (2018), as an example, survey questions ranked participant attitudes on the emancipatory outcomes of a critically structured training and development programs. The findings are limited, however, because the study did not first look at what the underlying perceptions on what constitutes an emancipatory outcome. At minimum, not having insight into participant perceptions prevents researchers such as Timming and Summer from understanding the result’s situated context. This is problematic when considering how to use results to inform practice or where to next take research. In understanding existing perceptions, researchers will have more informed positions at the onset of research design, and practitioners will be better positioned to foundationally inform workers prior to beginning a critically structured training and development program.
Research Design

To examine worker perceptions of oppression, emancipation, empathy, and demographic participation, I will use an exploratory case study, which is an inquiry design that allows for in-depth analysis of a case, which is bounded by time and space, and allows for the gathering of detailed information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Case studies utilizing an exploratory approach are particularly applicable when the topic being researched does not have a solid foundation in already completed empirical analysis as is the case for this study (Mayer & Greenwood, 1980).

Further, exploratory case study research allows scholars, “to conduct a fairly comprehensive, open-ended search for relevant information … and refine questions and/or suggest conceptual perspectives that might serve as fruitful guides for subsequent investigations” (Ogawa & Malen, 1991, p. 271). They are the first step to “more focused investigations” and are “employed to inductively generate, rather than deductively confirm, insights regarding the phenomenon of interest” (Ogawa & Malen, 1991, p. 271). My intention in completing this research is to create a baseline understanding which will inform future research efforts that lead to changes in practice intended to produce transformative change in and out of the workplace.

Theoretical Framework

I approach this study through a critical paradigm, or a framework which advances that reality is oppressive and alterable by human actions and critical practitioners dedicated to emancipatory research dialogue (Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Scotland, 2012). A critical framework
allows for research questions which contest dominant ideology and those structures designed to maintain an oppressive status quo (Brookfield, 2005). Research outcomes, then, are intended to result in social transformation. Each of these align well with the perceptions this study seeks to understand. It is for these reasons the critical paradigm is an appropriate framework within which to conduct this study.

This study will function with the understanding critical paradigms are epistemologically subjective in that knowledge is both informed by society and influenced through the application of power (Scotland, 2012). Some scholars argue the critical paradigm is constructivist since meaning through such lenses is understood to have its genesis in individual experiences (Burkholder & Burbank, 2016). For the purposes of this study, such understandings are inadequate as constructivists are not engaged in the work of emancipation nor implicitly focused on concepts directly related to increases in democratic participation within professional spaces (Scotland, 2012).

Within the critical postmodern framework of this study, critical theoretical perspectives will be utilized in data collection, data analysis, and findings. Here, critical perspectives are defined as advancing reflexively positioned criticality as a means to challenge the status quo. It focuses on ideology critique, which involves disengaging from implied assumptions on the nature of things along with power relations in order to take conscious control of our lifeworld (Brookfield, 2005). Criticality, then, recognizes power and voice are not bestowed upon individuals. Rather, these are earned through dialogue and engagement with others in empathically seeking to understand different perspectives and then applying those perspectives in search of new forms of meaning.
Another reason critical paradigm and related perspectives are used is that they provide space to account for an array of experiences and meaning-making. Using one critical theoretical model such as Marxism, for example, will surely accommodate criticality as it relates to economic class and the oppressive structures inherent in capitalist systems. It will not, however, allow my research to fully embrace and account for gender, race, or any other intersection, sans economic class. As an example, Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2014) argue the nature of gendered behavior must be considered when analyzing the data as the hegemon is white and male and influences the perceptions of everything around us (p. 58). This influence creates “hidden agendas of knowledge,” which ultimately pervert how individuals understand the world around them (Goldberger, 1996, p. 7). To overcome male-dominated ideology and meaning-making, this study will actively recognize that gender discrimination is “the practice of domination most people are socialized to accept before they even know what other forms of…oppression exist” (hooks, 1989, p. 35). This is what Brookfield (2005) would refer to as gendering criticality, or reframing Marxist interpretations of critical theory away from patriarchal structures and towards ones which are not male or heteronormative. It is omni-racial, omni-sexual, and omni-gender.

Similarly, critically related perspectives allow for the insertion of into overarching conversations on oppression, emancipation, and democratic participation. Racializing criticality extracts critical traditions from white, Euro-centric understandings toward ones recognizing the roles, class, race, and power play in all facets of existence (Brookfield, 2005). This is important to my study as racial identity directly informs the way individuals understand and organize meaning, which is an important facet to consider when analyzing what people believe (Outlaw, 1996). Applications of race-centered critical perspectives allow for individual responses to be
viewed through these lenses which will, in turn, allow for deeper understandings of participant response. It must also be noted critical theory allows for transformative change. It is what Brookfield (2005) defines as learning liberation, which presupposes individuals learn servitude and can therefore learn emancipation through dialogue. Analyzing participant responses through this lens allows me to consider ways in which experiences might inform understanding. Taken together, the inclusion of multiple perspectives in a critical postmodern approach is intended to inform robust analysis and outcomes. Without such attention paid to the many influences on participant understanding and response, a study on perceptions will not be able to adequately present findings which further current and future research in the field.

Overview of the Case

The department of online learning services within a multinational corporation, Company A (a pseudonym), with offices in the Chicagoland area will serve as the bounded system for the case study. Company A has a robust training program for its more than 20,000 associates around the world, incorporates several tenets of both CHRD and CMS, and, as I occupy a leadership position within Company A, it is ideal for the case study as there is ready access to hundreds of potential participants within my department. Another reason this is an ideal case is that while I will only be considering participants within this organization, it not an atypical corporate entity. There are numerous other multinational corporations with robust training and development programs which focus on empowering learners using some pieces of CHRD and CMS. So, while
not being able to directly discuss these in my findings, Company A can serve as an information-rich launching point for further research in similar organizations.

As an organization, Company A focuses training in areas related to co-creating development plans and attempts to engage individuals in democratic processes to increase ownership and adoption. There are associate councils, which seek to provide an associate-level voice in strategic direction, diversity and inclusion seminars, and professional development plans in which employees chart their own professional development path. It is an organization which has stated objectives related to engaging workers in equity-based activities.

In current state, however, Company A does not seek to understand employee insight prior to beginning a formal development program. Ideas come from the associate level, but perceptions on topics to be covered are not measured during design. Solicited feedback on training and development courses seeks to only understand resultant outcomes. For example, a recent program’s post-completion survey asked questions which situated understanding around knowledge gained from the content delivered and not if existing perceptions had changed. This makes Company A well-suited for the purposes of the research.
Participants

With regards to criteria for participant inclusion, non-exempt full-time employees of Company A located within North America are eligible to participate. I chose this subset of employees as this study is keenly concerned with perceptions of domestic, non-managerial personnel. Human resource development and CMS is primarily focused on increasing shareholder and ownership/managerial wealth, meaning the perceptions of the working class are of particular concern. Furthermore, what research does exist within this space is largely focused within the European context, making the decision to only interview North American workers appropriate to develop new insights into worker perceptions of oppression, emancipation, empathy, and democratic participation.

A convenience sample, or a sample in which “respondents are chosen based on their convenience and availability,” will be used as the interviews are voluntary and there is no direct way to ensure proportional representation or forced compliance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 150). Convenience samples do not ensure researchers have data collected from across the potential demographics (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It will, however, allow me to drive to robust (albeit initial) insights which can then be used to direct future research. Participants will be recruited through an open call to eligible employees and will be recruited using the corporate intranet and newsletter as well as using the professional networking site, LinkedIn. The targeted number of interviews is 25. Interviewee identities will be kept confidential during the analysis, findings, and interpretation processes through the use of pseudonyms. This will aid in participants willingness to share openly.
Data Collection

Interviews will serve as the primary type of data collected. In all, each interview will take around an hour over 25-50 hours and be completed while participant associates are not engaged in work activities. I will conduct interviews over the phone, in person, or using video conferencing software such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Given the limitations of meeting face-to-face due to COVID-19 and work-from-home restrictions, having multiple modalities to conduct the interviews is critical. Further, allowing participants to utilize several forms of remote interaction will ease stressors which might otherwise prevent participant willingness to participate. Interviews will be recorded, and I will transcribe these by hand to ensure closeness to the narrative, which will aid in coding.

Prior to starting the interview, participants will complete a short questionnaire (see appendix) intended to help add context during the discussion on findings and interpretations. Seeking such information will ensure I do not misidentify an individual based on outward appearance and help shape interpretation efforts using the various lenses within critical theory. Additionally, understanding demographic information will help identify future areas of research. For example, if there are no women of color or non-conforming persons in the interviewee pool, this may be identified as a potential focus for a subsequent study. The interview protocol (see appendix) is semi-structured and consists of 10 question sets. The question sets allow me to have an authentic conversation while simultaneously gathering responses to the same groups of questions. Semi-structured interview protocols allow for breadth in participant responses, have embedded within them the opportunity for follow-up questions and clarity-seeking from both the
interviewer and interviewee, and allow participants to help shape the direction of an interview (Jones, et al., 2014, pp. 133-135). This is true even if the topic and general direction are already pre-established (Jones, et al., 2014, p. 135). The questions will be a mix of knowledge, feeling, and probing questions, which will inform direct understanding and allow me to gain insights into perceptions based on interviewee experiences. Such diversity in type of question is critical to my ability to interpret findings (Jones, et al., 2014, p. 136).

Data Analysis

Data analysis will follow the five steps for qualitative research outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018). These steps include, organizing and preparing data through transcription and arranging by interview date, reading through all content to understand sense of scope and content, coding interviews into expected, surprising, and unusual in order to better understand interview content, identifying descriptions and themes from the generation of codes to connect content to findings, and building a narrative through these connections.

All data and notes will be in a space which is easily searchable and provides opportunity for note taking. I will use folders in One Note to initially house and sort interviews by date and individual. The management and organization of data in this way allows the specific nature of each individual interview to be analyzed to inform general understandings and meaning when brought into the larger context of a study (Jones, et al., 2014). This, then, is the second step in the data analysis process as once interviews are organized and transcribed, I begin the work of forming understandings of tone, impression, and meaning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 192).
will take general notes in the margins while reading through each interview and will refer to them during the next step of data analysis.

The third step is to code the data. In coding qualitative information, researchers “categorize segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarized and accounts for each piece” of information (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). These labels should be, if possible, in vivo terms, which are labels based on the language of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 192). Codes will be developed through detailed analysis of each interview so as to maintain an intimate relationship with the narrative. I will break them into three distinct groups (expected, surprising, and unusual) in order to better prepare for the fourth step. Expected codes are those labels one would “expect to find, based on literature and common sense” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 194). Surprising codes represent codes that are entirely unexpected and could not have been anticipated when the research began (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 194). Unusual codes comprise those things which are individually interesting to readers, such as topical concepts, which can end up becoming primary components of theme generation and interpretation of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 192). These three groups of codes will be used as supporting data during narrative interpretation. Breaking codes into these groups will help ensure I do not only find codes which I already expect to be evident in the data.

The penultimate step in data analysis is to identify descriptions and themes based off code generation. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) note, “description involves a detailed rendering of information about people, places, or events in a setting” (p. 192). Themes, while developed simultaneously to the descriptions, appear as findings and are used to “build layers” in the analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 193). While future research may end up developing
into a theoretical model on truly emancipatory human resource praxis, the themes in this study will be used to develop robust and nuanced understanding of individual perceptions and how they both inform and stand in contrast to one another.

Finally, the themes and descriptions will be brought together into a narrative analysis. This will include passages and excerpts from multiple interviews along with a tie-back to critical research efforts in other spaces. The narrative will include personal insights as well as where participant responses offer conflicting perceptions, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

Quality

To begin, this study will attend to quality though consistency in research questions, data collection, data analysis, and presentation of findings. As noted in Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2014), each must be interrelated. Simply, framing research questions through a critical lens and then collecting data through a constructivist lens is not aligned and will skew data to the point analysis is rendered questionable. I will clearly articulate my philosophical stance and theoretic perspective in order to ensure the reader can make a distinction as to whether or not intended consistency is applied. Doing so offers the “grounding, direction, and insight necessary to implement a study” and allows readers to develop trust in content (Jones, et al., 2014, p. 34).

While the previously mentioned areas are foundational to quality in research, perhaps the most important factor related to quality occurs during the analysis process and consists of three primary tactics. The first is using rich, descriptive narrative building which take into
consideration taking multiple accounts when discussing themes. Creswell and Creswell (2018) offer that robust descriptive analysis with multiple insights from multiple participants allows the reader into the data and better positions them to track the claims to the research (p. 168). This will, of course, be written for a specific audience and certain levels of understanding are presupposed. Ensuring as many readers as possible can fully consume the narrative, however, supports future application within the professional space. I will also incorporate what Lather (1986) defines as systematized reflexivity or indicating how prior theory on CHRD and CMS is changed as the result of the data (p. 67).

As a last note on quality, I will ensure to advance my relational and inquiry competence along with my positionality to inform reader confidence in my ability to responsibly carry out the study and interpret results. One strategy will be to send themes and initial findings out to study participants via email for member checking. If misaligned or requested by the participant, I will conduct a follow-up interview. Lather (1986) includes member checking as part of face validity while expressing the importance of this as part of any emancipatory research effort (p. 67). Through a robust literature review, reflexively positioning myself, calling out power relationships, and actively refusing to colonize another’s experiences, researchers drive toward the relational competence needed to create quality inquiry (Jones, et al., 2014, pp.34-39).

Positionality

There are three things to note regarding my positionality. First, I am an executive-level leader at Company A. This means I am an insider looking to fracture common conceptualizations
on how HRD and CMS are perceived and what effective praxis looks like. For example, I believe in explicitly stating how development work related to taking on stretch assignments can be co-opted for use in community spaces. Setting time aside to develop professional skills in areas outside a learner’s expertise is no different than learning how to engage in community activism if there is no participant experience in this space. Development programs structured in such a way create intentionality in critical outcomes and encourage structural critique. From my position, this creates beneficial outcomes for all parties as meaning-making is informed in multiple areas. As Company A is not explicit in tying these connections together, learner perceptions are only influenced by the business aspects of training and development and have no footing in the community.

There is both power and danger in my position within Company A. For example, using a critical framework to explore topics such as oppression, emancipation, empathy, and democratic participation from the inside provides meaning to outcomes as the situated nature of my experiences grants access to things outsiders do not have privilege to. There is a risk in bias seeping into the process, however, as I have very real internal perceptions of how things should be structured. Stating this early in the process and being sure to intentionally reference it throughout my study will be critical to ensure readers are able to contextualize resultant findings.

Another thing to consider from a positionality perspective is how I am perceived as a leader within the organization. I have a reputation within my department as someone who values workers and seeks to engage individuals in decision-making processes. I am, essentially, practicing emancipatory practice in my professional space. And with over 300 individuals reporting to people who report to me, I am a well-known figure. This does lead to the risk of
unreliable data being gathered due to participants providing answers they think I want to hear in order to curry favor or future professional considerations. This risk is recognized. To counter, I worked with my human resource colleagues and arrived at a solution in which the participants eligible to take part in my study will not report to anyone who directly or indirectly reports up through me. In practice, then, no one in my department is eligible. Instead, participants will be recruited from other departments within Company A such that there is no risk or potential for answer bias. Simply, whatever they say has no potential implication on future station within Company A.

Part of this process is to consider how my paradigmatic perspective accommodates (or does not accommodate) the fluidity of my being. I am not simply a Marxist, for example, heavily entrenched in a feminist and critical race theoretical worldview. I am other things as well. Intentionally leaving these pieces of my lifeworld out of the research process and hidden from view will do the study a disservice. Like my position within Company A and potential for bias, this will be explicitly stated in my proposal to ensure readers understand I approach the work from a reflexive position, always aware of the grey areas my worldview may not immediately recognize. This will allow the interpretation to focus on participant responses through their experiences rather than fusing them with my own, essentially colonizing perceptions which do not belong to me.

Finally, and as Cousin (2010) notes, getting too caught up in the “isms” of it all can minimize research takeaways and limits the credibility of my study. Recognizing myself as multi-dimensional allows for a “negotiated view of positional space” in which dynamic identities allow for uncertainty during the research process (Cousins, 2010, p. 17). I will resist presupposed
outcomes, being sure to call out unexpected codes through the development of themes which might not align with what I expected. When this occurs, I will be sure to recognize in the narrative, which will add layers of credibility and increase perceived quality.

Significance

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it will provide direction to scholars and practitioners on how to better situate learning and development through critical lenses, which is, of course, the intention of CHRD and CMS. As outlined earlier, however, critical manifestations of human resource development fall short in realizing critical aims. From Monaghan and Cervero’s (2006) study, which found CMS is not intrinsically emancipatory nor naturally aligned to perspective transformation, to Foster and Wiebe (2011) noting praxis opportunities in ostensibly liberating training efforts are insufficient to achieve stated learning outcomes, research widely indicates CHRD and CMS fail to realize potential.

This study will help inform stakeholders in academic and professional settings on some of the “why” behind the failings. This is especially true in the context of emancipatory dialogue, which requires empathic understanding. Simply, one cannot attempt to understand why an outcome is not met without first understanding the situated nature of the participant. In doing so, training design will improve. This also informs the second area in which this study finds significance: it will help inform gaps in past research. In the research analyzed to this point, suggestions for improvement are made, including deeper dialogue and more robust praxis. They
do not explore learner perceptions. Adding this layer to existing studies will deepen the field’s understanding of where CHRD and CMS miss the mark.

This study is also significant given the renewed focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. As social and civic unrest is manifest across the country, the call to better account for the experiences of marginalized groups is growing. This is especially evident in Black Lives Matter. Unfortunately, corporations across North America (where this study is situated) are ill-prepared to support oppressed groups and often find themselves publicly espousing equity as a way to align their brand to broader social realities (Gelles, 2020). In doing so, these organizations simply perpetuate oppression in service to capital. As Gelles (2020) notes, most companies are loathe to actually do something about oppressive practice and seek to walk the line between platitudes to people of color and not offending white consumers.

Further, a focus on hiring people of color (which is broadly in action) does not do anything to address equity or inclusion. The problem, as it is, is not fully understood at any level in corporations across North America (Miller, 2020). This is, as with the failures of CHRD and CMS, due to not understanding the perceptions of the workforce at a meaningful level. In understanding what the associate level feels in relation to oppression, emancipation, empathy and participation, organizations can begin to craft instances of CHRD and CMS which actually account for the needs of their people and lead to meaningful changes in the way individuals are developed through innovative human resource practice. In doing so, the entirety of the workforce is lifted into a space in which transformative change is possible. For emancipation from oppressive practice to occur, organizations must be tuned into the perceptions of their people. In
this, individuals develop the self-efficacy needed to participate in a radical redefinition of society.
CHAPTER II – PERCEPTIONS OF EMANCIPATION, OPPRESSION, EMPATHY, AND PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Abstract

Human resource development (HRD) is no longer about simply acquiring the skills needed to perform a task and is now a tool which can shape society and the ways in which we interact with one another. At the forefront of this transition are new ways of imagining HRD, including critical human resource development (CHRD) and critical management studies (CMS). This article examines the preconceptions learners bring with them into critical HRD programs. The study presented is an exploratory case study at an international organization with offices in the United States and Canada. Semi-structured interviews with six participants and a document analysis are the primary methods. The findings indicate a lack of understanding about core CHRD and CMS key terms (oppression, emancipation, empathy, and democratic participation) negatively impacts intended learning outcomes. This study has important implications for the future of HRD research and practice.

Key Words: Human resource development, critical human resource development (CHRD), critical management studies (CMS), transformation, emancipation, oppression, empathy, participation
Introduction

Human resource development (HRD), or the acquisition of professional skills meant to drive profit margins through reduced cost and increased productivity, is the primary form of adult education in corporations of all sizes (Foster & Wiebe, 2010; McGovern, 2014; Porres, et al., 2013; Smith, 2014; Zanetti, 1997). The drivers of this profit (exempt, full-time associates) are the principal recipients of this development work, which focuses heavily on developing behaviors best suited to produce positive business outcomes rather than supporting more socially situated forms of learning and development. Sometimes referred to as “learning for earning,” it is a development structure that perpetuates income inequality and reinforces divisions within society and personal alienation (Cunningham, 1996). In this state, HRD perpetuates capitalist ideology through the creation of shareholder and/or ownership wealth while effectively eliminating forms of dialogue more aligned with overcoming alienation and creating transformative change (Fenwick, 2004; Foster & Wiebe, 2010; Harvey, et al., 2001; Monaghan & Cervero, 2006).

Critical human resource development (CHRD) and critical management studies (CMS) have recently emerged as potential solutions for this oppressive practice. Critical human resource development (CHRD) is a process of learning and development within professional spaces intended to promote critical reflection among workers and increase engagement and critical management studies (Fenwick, 2004). Critical management studies (CMS) is an HRD framework intended to reorient human resource practice away from exploitation and toward
empowerment by equipping “learners to apply a sociological, political and historical framework to the underlying values and assumptions” of their organization (Mohaghan & Cervero, 2006).

Intended to improve associate participation through the intentional inclusion of critical themes (oppression, emancipation, empathy, participation), CHRD and CMS are both transformational in nature (Alvesson, & Deetz, 1996; Fenwick, 2004; Foster & Wiebe, 2010; Fournier & Grey, 2000; Hassard, et al., 2001; Prasad & Mills, 2010; Smith, 2014). Articulating the breadth of implications, Fenwick (2004) suggests an HRD program structured around critical themes: (a) account for the intersectional nature of our existence (we cannot ignore the self and society in professional development), (b) recognizes agency and cognition are impacted by professional and the socio-political processes, (c) explicitly names power in the advancement of transformative action, and (d) situates within a critical framework a pedagogy that not only questions alienation and exploitation but imbues in learners emancipatory praxis (Fenwick, 2004, p. 198). Further, embedding critical processes into HRD ensures development in professional spaces is structured around the needs of the worker rather than profit while serving as a means of ensuring social action is embedded into the developmental needs of an organization (Fenwick, 2004; Alvesson, & Deetz, 1996).

Foundationally, CHRD and CMS are built around dialogue, specifically, emancipatory dialogue, a type of dialogue meant to expose power and foster transformative praxis through the empowerment of learners (Freire, 1970). Given the transformational expectations of CHRD and CMS, an important question concerns how preexisting perceptions or oppression, emancipation, empathy, and participation impact outcomes for learning and development programs situated within a CHRD or CMS framework. This is important for two reasons. First, it informs what
learners already believe to be true or understand about a topic and how these perceptions might influence their ability to achieve intended learning outcomes, especially if these learning outcomes challenge learners to reconsider the status quo (Brookfield, 2005). Second, companies around the world are engaging in work ostensibly focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is, arguably, a prerequisite in current forms of organizational positioning to have a strong social stance and advance a transformative position to the public. If the outcomes of CHRD and CMS are negatively impacted by existing perceptions or not fully supported by learning and development, then the work becomes somewhat performative in nature. This has implications that stretch beyond local levels, impacting social structures more broadly.

With the transformational potential of CHRD and CMS defined and recognizing the relationship between perceptions and learning, this study endeavors to see if there is a gap between the understanding of key terms and the realization of intended learning outcomes. The following research questions are addressed:

(1) what are the current understandings of oppression, emancipation, empathy, and participation existing within the hourly workforce at Company A; and

(2) how do their perceptions inform their understanding of intended learning and development outcomes?

The importance of this study is that through understanding preexisting perceptions of oppression, emancipation, empathy, and participation, practitioners and researchers can better understand why critical HRD largely fails to realize intended outcomes. Findings from this study indicate participant perceptions of key terms are situated within common understandings or
social settings, rather than a professional context. This, in turn, prevents learners from realizing the intended outcomes of CHRD and/or CMS protocols at Company A.

**Literature Review**

The following literature review will first explore research on existing perceptions of key words in human resource is examined. The current state of research in CHRD and CMS is next explore. Then, CHRD and CMS compatibility with emancipatory dialogue is reviewed through the lens of academics and practitioners. Finally, key words will be defined to better frame the ensuing conversation.

**Understanding Preconceptions of Key Words**

Research directly examining workers’ preexisting perceptions of oppression, emancipation, empathy, and democratic participation within the context of CHRD or CMS is lacking. This creates a gap in understanding for both practitioners and theorists in relation to these topics prior to instituting CHRD or CMS strategies and prevents stakeholders from determining with any degree of effectiveness the efficacy of CHRD and CMS as an emancipatory undertaking. There is, however, some research which looks at changes in behaviors and perceptions after a critically structured training program is undertaken, which can help all parties understand (even if to limited degrees) learner perceptions. In Timming and Summer (2018), as an example, survey ranked participant attitudes on the emancipatory
outcomes of a critically structured training and development program. The findings of the study are incomplete, however, because it did not first look at perceptions of learners on emancipatory matters, rendering outcomes inconclusive.

In another effort that examined management attitude changes at two locations following a course on critical perspectives, Monaghan and Cervero (2006) note two distinct takeaways. First, CMS structures do not inherently or naturally promote emancipatory dialogue, nor do they have the desired effect of perspective transformation as they will typically reinforce existing attitudes and behaviors (Monaghan & Cervero, 2006). In practice, this means perceptions and behaviors do not change following CMS coursework because existing understandings are ideologically engrained into participant belief systems. From this, then, perceptions prior to the critical HRD program were such that learners lacked an understanding of oppression, emancipation, empathy, or democratic participation. The second takeaway from Monaghan and Cervero (2006) is that organizations “have an opportunity to open up the spaces of power and privilege for learners who have experiences and view the world from a critical perspective” (p. 394). Restated, organizations do not create pathways for the type of dialogue needed to effectuate meaningful outcomes. Without a space for such dialogue, perceptions of key topics are not sufficient to support a change in attitudes and beliefs.

Since each learner comes in with different experiences, which in turn informs content and meaning-making, other research reinforces those emancipatory takeaways from critical learning and development are limited (Dessel, et al., 2006; Monaghan & Cervero, 2006; Schneid, et al., 2015). As these studies noted look at single cases, however, the results from this line of inquiry are incomplete. At minimum, however, not having insight into participant perceptions prior to a
learning and development event prevents from understanding how effective CHRD and CMS programs are in accomplishing their objectives. This is problematic for practitioners and researchers who use the results to inform learning and development practice or what’s next in the line of study.

Current State of CHRD and CMS Research

While not a simple thing to embed in learning and development, CHRD and CMS empowers leaders to manage their workforce differently, focusing less on the profit and loss and more on the socio-cultural components through dialogue (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006). In the process, individuals gain power and voice. Further, the reflexive (not reflective) and performative (not performance) characteristics of CMS create organic paths to a broadened focus on business ethics. (Prasad & Mills, 2010), This directly impacts executive-level behaviors, which benefits the entirety of the socio-economic hierarchy (Prasad & Mills, 2010). Existing research also posits that reorganizing human resource practice away from profit and toward the emancipatory actions associated with CHRD and CMS can push organizational strategy in those same directions.

Directly coupling CMS and critical theory, one research effort postulates praxis is a direct path toward emancipation (embodying the words of Freire) but is rarely executed in professional settings (Foster & Wiebe, 2011). This results in a truncated emancipatory learning process such that the program reinforces oppressive practice and offers little in the way of transformative outcomes (Foster & Wiebe, 2011; Hassard et al., 2001; Zanetti, 1997; Orosz, 1998).
Implementing emancipatory dialogue within the organizations of any size is troublesome, however, as it will always result in a changed status quo, which likely does not serve the same profit ends as current HRD (Bills, et al., 2015; Esau, 2013; Galloway, 2012; Garvey, et al., 2017; Gert, 2017; Nouri & Sajjadi, 2014; van Hek, et al, 2016).

Even when implementing CHRD and CMS learning and development protocols, some organizations intentionally ensure profit-motive takes precedence by aligning outcomes with the status quo, rather than challenging power and promoting dialogue, creating conflicting outcomes, and invalidating CHRD and/or CMS as emancipatory practice (Adman, 2008; Foster & Wiebe, 2010; Timming & Summer, 2018). Other efforts wrapped around observing dialogic methods in CMS and CHRD focus on key performance indicators and not emancipatory action, continuing a trend in which dialogue is situated around margin and not emancipatory ends (Fenwick, 2004; Foster & Wiebe, 2010; Fournier & Grey, 2000; Porres, et al., 2013).

CMS and CHRD Compatibility with Emancipatory Dialogue

Research on CMS and CHRD efforts to this point indicate the emancipatory outcomes tied to their implementation are not being realized (Fenwick, 2004; Foster & Wiebe, 2010; Fournier & Grey, 2000; Porres, et al., 2013; Prasad & Mills, 2010). Citing a perceived fealty to oppressive practice and a faithfulness to profit over people, Fenwick (2004) notes critical questions around the efficacy of emancipatory dialogue within CHRD and CMS. Other critiques rest on an argument that without robust opportunities for praxis, any effort intended to action a critical pedagogy within HRD is bound to failure (Foster & Wiebe, 2010). Further, scant
research is available on the impact of CMS toward business ethics, which puts in question the findings of past research (Prasad & Mills, 2010).

While CHRD and CMS have not fully embraced emancipatory dialogue, each have space for such efforts as they are multi-positional endeavors, embracing a vision in which oppression is identified and emancipatory dialogue is actualized in places of business (Fenwick, 2004). Opportunities include focusing on social justice and worker participation, recognizing diversity as a source of strength rather than a cost, encouraging worker participation as the path to increased stakeholder development, and fostering reflexive dialogue as the method to develop each (Fenwick, 2004; MacNamara, et al., 1990; Stewart, et al., 2014). It is transformative work, as Fenwick (2004) notes.

Definition of Terms

In this study, transformation is defined as a material difference in one’s attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors such that one’s self, their world, and the status quo change (Freire, 1970). Oppression refers to those structures which reinforce a culture of positivism, or the present being emphasized over what might be, and imbue in individuals the idea that organizations are not subject to the will of the individual and are, therefore, not capable of being influenced at the person level (Giroux, 2011). Emancipation within this study is understood as the ability to overcome this oppression while redefining the status quo through active engagement in dialogue and change (Brookfield, 2005). Empathy refers to developing dialogue-based relationships with others such that mutual understanding is achieved (Kasl & Yorks, 2016). Democratic
participation, which will also be referred to as workplace democracy, is defined as the ability to participate in the decision-making processes within the professional sphere (Pateman, 1970).

Theoretical Framework

This study was conducted using a critical paradigm, or a framework that advances reality is fundamentally oppressive and can be altered through human actions dedicated to emancipatory outcomes (Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Scotland, 2012). Using this framework allowed me to build questions which inform an understanding on four critical themes (Brookfield, 2005). A critical framework allows for research outcomes with the potential to result in social transformation. Each aligns well with the perceptions this study seeks to understand. This study functions with the understanding critical paradigms are epistemologically subjective, or knowledge is both informed by society and influenced through power (Scotland, 2012). Critical theoretical perspectives were used in data collection, data analysis, and the presentation of findings. In this, criticality focused on ideology critique, which involves disengaging from implied assumptions on the nature of things along with the removal of power relations (Brookfield, 2005). During the entire process, then, I recognized power and voice are not bestowed upon participants as a matter of course. Rather, these are earned through dialogue and engagement with others while seeking to understand various perspectives and then articulating those perspectives in the form of new insights, which is something a critical framework allowed me to account for. Taken together, the decision to use a critical approach informed robust analysis and outcomes. Without such
attention paid to the many influences on participant understanding, a study on perceptions would not be able to adequately present findings which further current and future research in the field.

Purpose and Methodology

A qualitative exploratory case study was utilized to understand preexisting perceptions and their impact on learning outcomes. Exploratory case study was appropriate for several reasons. First, it is a case study, which is a design of inquiry which allows detailed analysis of a specific research topic while also being bounded by time with in-depth data gathering (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Second, exploratory case study research allows scholars, “to conduct a fairly comprehensive, open-ended search for relevant information” while simultaneously seeking to expand concepts in an area which does not have an adequate base of existing research (Ogawa & Malen, 1991, p. 271). As noted in literature review, there is a gap in understanding existing perceptions of key topics in CHRD and CMS.

Case Site

With offices in the Chicago, Illinois area, a multinational corporation, Company A (a pseudonym) will serve as the case study. Further defining the bounded system, the department servicing higher education accounts is the pool from which participants were drawn. Company A has a robust training program for its more than 20,000 associates around the world and incorporates several tenets of both CHRD and CMS in its learning and development programs.
Additionally, Company A focuses training in areas related to co-creating development plans and attempts to engage individuals in democratic processes to increase ownership and adoption. There are associate councils, which seek to provide an associate-level voice in strategic direction, diversity and inclusion seminars, and professional development plans in which employees chart their own professional development path. It is an organization which has publicly stated their objectives related to engaging workers in equity-based activities.

Data Collection

I used two primary sources of data. First was a semi-structured interview protocol. This protocol consisting of a one-time, one-hour virtual interview which was recorded and transcribed following each session. Each interview consisted of a set of 10 questions, which allowed me to have an authentic conversation while simultaneously gathering responses to the same groups of questions from each participant. The questions were a mix of knowledge, feeling, and probing questions, which informed direct understanding of participant perception and followed a set pattern to ensure the same type of data was captured for each participant. For each of the four terms, I first asked a baseline question which sought to understand their initial perceptions. Next, I asked for an example of their understanding in the community and then at work. This allowed me insight into whether participants saw a difference in definition based on the situated nature of the question. I then applied the definition to an interaction with their leader at work to understand if they were able to apply their definition to an interpersonal interaction. Finally, I posed a hypothetical around learning and development programs which aligned a CHRD and CMS
outcome to each terms definition to gauge their comfort with critical HRD practice while also gathering understanding on their original definitions impact on this answer.

The other source of data is a document analysis. While maintaining the confidentiality of the site, this study used publicly available documents which articulate both alignment with CHRD/CMS and socially forward ways of leading in a global environment. This is important for two reasons. First, the document analysis aligns Company A with CHRD and CMS, which was required for Company A to be used as the exploratory case study’s site. Since the outcomes of CHRD and CMS wrap around their socially-just impacts on people and society, it was imperative to align external documents to socially just ends as a proxy to their learning and development program. Without the ability to share internal training documents, an external document analysis proved most applicable. Second, qualitatively measuring perceptions of oppression, emancipation, empathy, and participation among participants not employed at an organization promoting critical manifestation of learning and development would have produced unusable data as there would be no reason for participants at Company A to have a foundational understanding of each topic.

Participants

Participant selection was limited to front-line associates (also referred to as workers) who have directly participated in CHRD or CMS related learning and development. This ensures each person interviewed is of the same station with like experiences related to training at Company A. Each worker at Company A has some college with most have at least a bachelor’s degree.
Recruitment for this study consisted of a call to participate on LinkedIn, which is a professional networking site. Company A did not agree to direct recruitment through an internal call to participate, nor to sharing the study with potential participants via work email. Approximately 400 eligible individuals viewed the call to participate on LinkedIn with eight positive responses. Two participants were unable to make an interview time work in their schedules, leaving the total participant count at six.

All six participants (Table 1) identified as cisgender with two women and four men in the group. Education backgrounds ranged from some college to some doctoral work, which allowed me to balance responses against academic background. Each participant volunteered to take part in the study. As part of the interview process, participants answered a series of demographic questions to both inform responses and to ensure I accounted for participant diversity and to inform future lines of inquiry.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years at Company A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>Some Doctoral</td>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>Cis Woman</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>Cis Man</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>5-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>45-55</td>
<td>Cis Man</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>5-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerald</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>Cis Man</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>Cis Woman</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>Cis Man</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the five steps for qualitative research outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018). All data and notes were stored in a space which is easily searchable and provides opportunity for note taking as the data was coded using in vivo terms, which are labels based on the language of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 192). The handling of data in this way allowed individual interviews to be analyzed in relationship with the whole and in their own voice. After initial coding, the data was then segmented into three distinct groups (expected, surprising, and unusual) to better prepare for theme and description generation, which then led to the creation of a narrative of findings. The narrative includes individual responses and calls out conflicting points of view in order to support balance and ensure participant voices are expressed appropriately.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include overall representation and sample size. With only six participants, it is hard to derive scale in how pervasive the findings are in relation to the rest of Company A’s workforce. Expanding the scope of available participants is something to consider for future research. The sample is also not representative with four men and two women of
whom none identified as non-cisgender. A non-conforming perspective limits the results. As noted earlier, I am a senior leader at Company A, which is another potential limitation. While not directly managing nor having any influence of the career trajectory of the participants, my status within the organization is noteworthy and has the potential to influence participant responses.

Findings

While there are differences in responses to each of the protocol questions, all six participants can be described as uncomfortable with the nature of the interview questions, finding them challenging to answer, and seemingly at odds with critical HRD. Throughout the research process, two primary finding emerged: (1) while varied, participant understanding of key words was generally limited and not aligned to professional settings, and (2) the ability to recognize or even welcome CHRD and CMS outcomes was influenced by participant perceptions of key words. In the following sections, this article will look at each of the key terms, articulating participant perceptions of each while discussing how their perception impact, if at all, CHRD and CMS outcomes.

Participant Understandings of Key Terms

*Oppression:* Refers to those structures which reinforce a culture of positivism, or the present being emphasized over what might be, and imbue in individuals the idea that organizations are not subject to the will of the individual and are, therefore, not capable of being influenced at the person level ~ Giroux, 2011
In response to the baseline question, all six participants described oppression through a racial lens and seemed to understand it outside the professional space even though Company A positions oppression in the workplace. During follow-up questions, none of the participants were able to articulate oppression as a process in which individuals are prevented from exercising power and voice or influencing the future of the organization, though Mark was able to provide an example of this in the community.

Anthony, a 34-year-old cisgender man who earned a bachelor’s degree in sociology right out of high school and considered himself someone willing to take risks, stated oppression was an “instability or prejudice due to someone’s racial, ethnic, or sexual identity that causes them to be neglected, harassed, or made to feel different than anyone else.” When asked to provide an example of this in the community, Anthony brought up George Floyd’s murder. In doing so, he articulated a “dichotomy” between how Black and white Americans were treated when it came to crime and how protests from the Black community were vilified as rioters rather than demonstrators. When the conversation shifted to a workplace setting, however, Anthony initially said he did not “know if I have seen it in the workplace” before positing a lack of diversity is one way in which oppression manifests.

While discussing diversity, he did note Company A said the right things but often failed to take the appropriate actions or did not equip leaders to effectively deliver on the organization’s commitment to diversity. Importantly, Company A had stated in publicly facing documents that diversity and a commitment to ensuring leaders can support associates from differing backgrounds is part of their mission as an education company. In both yearly earnings reports and on-site pages dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion, Company A unequivocally
states all forms of discrimination, social inequality, and racism run against organizational values and that a sense of belonging is fostered through effective and inclusive leadership. In order to accomplish this, Company A had partnered with expert authors and industry/education leaders with diverse practical and theoretic backgrounds. When asked about this, Anthony believed Company A fell short of providing a workplace which encourages diversity, despite the company’s messaging of their partnerships and commitment to inclusive leadership. Anthony was able to tie his understanding of oppression to the workplace though this understanding is not aligned with a definition centered on an individual being able to influence the structures keeping the organization in station and focused on profit.

Robin, Robert, Mark, Amanda, and Gerald provided initial responses similar to Anthony’s, equating oppression to prejudice based on race, ethnicity, and/or sexuality. Unlike Anthony, however, none of the remaining five participants were able to eventually provide examples in the workplace. Mark, a 42-year-old high school graduate with some college, noted that as a Black man who grew up in an urban area, he had experienced the impact of structures preventing people of color from changing their communities through the withholding academic opportunity. Mark shared:

*I remember when being in high school, you learned a vocational skill. You could graduate high school and you could graduate with, you know, some type of a carpenter license or, you know, or whether it was sewing or something. They had vocational programs in school, but you know they removed all of them. And you saw a lot of black people in the neighborhoods graduating with those skills, and they were able to, you know, make a living for themselves, and help their community, and it’s almost like that opportunity was taken away, which kind of feeds into that feeling of being oppressed, so it’s systemic and structural.*
For Mark, oppression within the community was a dedicated effort to force a group of people to only be able to think about the present by making it impossible to think about what might be. When asked if he saw this same behavior manifest in at Company A, however, he said it “is difficult to say as a matter of fact that it happens” while noting associates did not have the skillset to move forward and that “negative self-talk” from their life experiences prevent them from seeking empowerment at work.

Following the conversation on perceptions and how they saw their understanding manifest in the community and workspace, a question was posed seeking to understand if participants agreed with the idea that new initiatives and ways of envisioning the future of Company A should be met with openness from leadership. The response from most of the participants expressed hesitation, unease, or outright resistance. Only Robin fully aligned with the concept.

Robert, for example, noted that while Company A does not prepare leaders well to think innovatively, charting the future of the organization is a function of management, and not necessarily associates. Gerald agreed to a degree, stating “it depends on the situation and what the thing is,” adding that some things may not be appropriate for associates and that strategic thinking was better suited for leadership. Mark noted that while it sounds nice, he did not feel he knew enough to “be as vocal as I otherwise might be.” While this will be discussed further in this study’s findings and implications, the misalignment with being able to influence the direction of Company A’s future was a telling finding.

*Emancipation*: Refers to an ability to overcome oppression while redefining the status quo through active engagement in dialogue and change ~ Brookfield, 2005
The responses to the baseline question on emancipation were interesting in their variety, rather than uniform, which is the intended outcome of Company A’s learning and development. One participant, Gerald, aligned his response to his definition of oppression and was, unlike with his definition of oppression, able to tie it to Company A. Three, Anthony, Robert, and Mark, equated emancipation with freedom from restriction, though their responses were not aligned with their understanding of oppression. One, Robin, was not able to provide a definition at all, seemingly taken aback by the question.

Gerald, a 36-year-old white cisgender man with some vocational education and a desire to advance at Company A, stated emancipation was the “alleviation of oppression” and equated it to the women’s rights movement and Black Lives Matter. To him, emancipation was the outcome of a process meant to address a limiting status quo through the changing of structures that oppress. When asked about applying this definition at work, Gerald stated that by empowering people “from multiple backgrounds,” Company A fostered representation from its workforce and promoted change. Further, he noted, he has seen leadership seek to position conversations around “legitimate” change and had witnessed several instances of workers engaging in conversations which resulted in new ways of working. While processes remained the same, he felt as though he and his colleagues were lifted from feeling overlooked, noting “the openness to explain why or how something came about” increased their willingness to engage in future activities. Gerald had the most closely aligned understanding of the six participants and was best able to identify with the intended outcomes of CHRD and CMS, though he did not explicitly say as much.
While noting “emancipation can present a positive feeling along with fear and anxiety” and that trust must be established, Mark was also able to articulate an understanding of what emancipatory practice at work looked like in a professional setting. As he described it, Company A had employee groups that serve as the voice for their peers. These peer-nominated positions had time with senior leaders, engaging in dialogue and making recommendations and participating in co-creating solutions meant to change the way the organization provides for the people. While he did note a feeling of unease when he attended his first meeting and has “questions about how far he can push the envelope” because he was Black, he saw the willingness of senior leadership to engage in transformational activities as an outcome of leadership’s professional development. This supported his understanding of emancipation in the workplace which allowed him to recognize the critical components of Company A’s learning and development program. In Mark, we see an understanding of the key term directly influencing his ability to recognize the outcome at Company A.

Four of the six participants’ responses were fundamentally not aligned with such outcomes. Robin and Anthony felt dialogue wrapped around dialogue and impacting the status quo is potentially unrealistic with Robin stating, “it is not always possible” and that when in a corporate setting, one has to “put on a work-face” and cannot have the types of dialogue envisioned. While agreeing dialogue was important, Robert believed the polarity of society made its way into the workplace, preventing him from engaging in those types of conversations. Amanda thought there needed to be a line that is not crossed between the associates and managers and did not see emancipatory practice at work. She could talk about shared interests with her leader but cannot have truly meaningful conversations on change.
Two participants, Mark and Gerald, were able to articulate relatively aligned understanding of the key terms and shared that they saw CHRD and CMS outcomes present at Company A. Gerald went so far as to say he both “expects” this out of his leader, and was something he should expect, so it was not a personal preference to engage in dialogue, it is meant to be structurally enabled. Mark expressed alignment in understanding and even recognizing critical outcomes at Company A while qualifying that, as a Black man, he has questions about “how far I can push the envelope.”

Taken together, the data from the document review indicated that even though Company A claimed to focus upon learning and development around dialogic methods and was dedicated to empowering the workforce. Yet, participants whose preexisting understanding of the key terms did not align with and engagement in change through dialogue were not able to distinguish when CHRD and CMS outcomes were present. Those with better understanding were able to recognize these outcomes, indicating perceptions are a key component of CHRD and CMS processes.

**Empathy:** Refers to developing dialogue-based relationships with others such that true understanding is achieved ~ Kasl & Yorks, 2016

Empathy proved the most generically understood term of the four as each had answers which involved identifying with a situation another person is dealing with, though this understanding was not rooted in dialogue, which is a focus of Company A and a stated outcome in publicly facing documents. Robin, who was a cis-gender Asian woman with some doctoral work in her academic background, for example, equated empathy to buying lunch for someone
who does not have money because she has been in that position before. After stating he struggles with empathy, Anthony related empathy to understanding based on shared experiences. Gerald also noted experiences drive empathy from one person to another. Amanda, Robert, and Mark all spoke about feelings driving the empathic process with understanding as the outcome. None of the six, however, mentioned the process by which one engages in empathetic action, namely dialogue. It more closely related to hearing about an event or situation another person was going through and then showing compassion through a verbal process wherein they informed the other person that they, too, have gone through something similar. If no shared experience is present, they are not able to empathize, per their definitions. Further, none of the six were able to articulate critical empathic outcomes at work. Their descriptions, when asked to share an example at work, firmly rested in either identifying with a colleague about a thing going on in their life or lamenting not being able to speak with their leader due to either capacity or personal reasons. This indicates a clear disconnect between how they see empathy practice and how they feel empathy as individuals.

When presented with a scenario in which learning and development actively instills dialogic methods (a process of open and honest communication between two people with mutual understanding as the goal), the responses indicated a great deal of receptiveness, running counter to overall sentiments for oppression and emancipation, which each had pervasive overtones of resistance founded in exploitive capitalist practice. Each of the six felt structuring learning and development to instill dialogue was an admirable goal and one worth pursuing. The only qualifications to pursing CHRD and CMS outcomes related to empathy came from Robert, who noted “business should supersede relationships,” and Amanda, who suggested there “can be too
much” understanding. Robert did immediately add, however, that “while culture eats strategy,” Company A should “train people to interact, value, and learn from one another.”

Of the four areas studied, empathy was the most striking example of how perceptions impact CHRD and CMS learning outcomes as Company A touts the existence of employee relation groups (ERG) in publicly facing documents, specifically attaching them to spaces meant to deliver on empathic outcomes and drive dialogue amongst individual actors. The ERG at Company A, per language on a diversity and equity page, are intended to increase awareness, create a supportive environment, empower Black employees, develop advocacy for LGBTQIA persons, and drive change at the associate level. The ERG are so well-known at Company A that two of the participants, Anthony, Amanda, and Robert, cited them at some point in the research process or when specifically asked about examples of their understanding in the workplace.

*Participation*: Refers to the ability to participate in the decision-making processes within the professional sphere (Pateman, 1970).

Most of what participants articulated in relationship to participation centered on engagement or activity in something rather than actual participation in decision-making, which runs contrary to what Company A espouses on its website. Four individuals, Robin, Anthony, Mark, and Robert initially provided surface-level answers on engaging in an activity that had applicability in the general sense. Robin, a 40-year-old, cis-gender Asian woman who was in her second time of employment with Company A, defined it merely as “actively engaging in something” before adding social outings and secret Santa events are the types of engagement she was referring to. When asked about how he sees his understanding in practice at Company A,
Anthony discussed change management feedback sessions before noting even this limited participation does not seem to mean anything. Mark also noted participation was active engagement before adding oppression, or an oppressive mindset, negatively impacts individual willingness to participate as there is an overwhelming sense that it “does not matter, as things will not change.” As a Black American, he equated his experiences in the community directly with past or future professional ones.

Unlike the others mentioned thus far, Gerald situated his responses regarding perceptions of participation within a group environment and was more specific about participating in the decision-making process. As an example, he noted participation was to “be an equal part of whatever is being developed.” As evidence, Gerald discussed being in a working group which looked at process improvements and solutions within team environments (Company A has very few individual contributors), articulating a clear understanding of what participation means within the study’s context. Amanda took participation a different direction, defining it as the act of working together or collaborating on something, though not in a decision-making sense. Rather, she positioned participation within ERG and expanding the types of groups one associates with, “no matter what group you come from.” While a seemingly beneficial perspective, it is not aligned with Company A’s public position that the voice of the associate matters in how it goes about its business and the types of policies or practices it follows.

This public position is most noted in 2021’s end of year financial statement and direction to shareholders. In this document, Company A advances a position that employee engagement in change processes and in new ways of thinking about the nature of work are central to sustainable business practices, and that such foci allow Company A to deliver social and environmental
benefits. As demonstrated in this same document, there is quite a bit of participatory activity taking place at Company A, as evidenced by the many relationships it has established with community groups all over the world and survey feedback from communities in which Company A has a presence. There is good work seemingly being done at the corporate level. Based on research responses, however, these sentiments and the realization of transformation outcomes does not make it to the workers.

Like empathy, however, there was a near universal desire to be a part of the decision-making process. When asked how they would respond to a suggestion that learning and development should actively inspire worker participation in activities designed to engage them and improve the levels at which solutions are co-created, five of the six immediately responded favorably. From Robin stating she “100% agrees” to Amanda saying she “likes the idea,” the majority thought co-creating change would benefit them and Company A. It needs to be noted that while Mark instantly agreed that learning and development actively inspiring participation was worthwhile, he specifically termed participation a “two-way street, noting “people are responsible for their own actions in how they participate,” indicating it is less about inspiration and more about self-motivation. He also added he believed Company A certainly had the capabilities to do it but does not have a leadership team capable of putting it into practice. This indicates (from Mark’s perspective, anyway) leaders were not realizing the impacts of critically structured management training.

Robert’s response was quite interesting. As with most of the others, he equated participation to engaging in something but qualified throughout his responses most of the examples he can think of relate to the community, interpersonal, or social sphere. When asked
about how Company A fostered participation, he first stated he thought there was space, but the Company does not create the capacity or provide guidance to support such processes before adding he does not take the time to ask the right questions when opportunities arise. Essentially, he expressed criticality toward both himself and Company A on why he could not articulate participation in professional settings. Several minutes, later, however, he posited the inspiration for democratic participation should not come from learning and development. Rather, it was a leader-driven activity. These two sets of statements articulated within minutes of one another seemed to be at odds. If leaders do not have the guidance to foster participation and if that leader is responsible for helping him see past his own inability or unwillingness to seek to understand, then Robert appeared to be in a position where participation was not possible. This stood out as an example of perceptions creating conflict in recognizing learning outcomes.

Discussion and Implications

Each of the participants was employed with the same organization, worked within the same department, underwent the same critically based learning and development program, and possessed limited pre-existing understanding of key terms espoused as critical to Company A’s purported commitment to these terms. This is of no fault of their own. Key terms were not defined or reinforced through Company A’s learning and development programs. The impact of this limited understanding is a general misalignment between intended and realized learning outcomes. This is significant for two reasons. First, individual perceptions influence outcomes of any learning activity, especially if those outcomes require participants to challenge or change
existing beliefs and understandings (Brookfield, 2005). Second, Fenwick (2004) holds that critical HRD accounts for intersections, recognizes cognitive processes are impacted by our surroundings, names power to advance transformative practice, and embeds emancipatory praxis in learning and development. In sum, the outcomes of CHRD and CMS are at risk prior to implementation because learner understandings of key terms are insufficient to support outcomes not aligned to traditional HRD, which support profit rather than the more radical outcomes of CHRD and CMS. Again, the lack of alignment is not the result of the individual learner. Company A does not support understanding and, therefore, puts CHRD and CMS learning outcomes at risk.

This statement is supported by the data gathered during this exploratory case study. For example, when existing perceptions of key terms are not aligned with the definitions of each within a CHRD or CMS context, participants generally stated critical outcomes would be beneficial to them and the organization rather than discussing the degree to which Company A delivers on the intended outcomes of CHRD and CMS, which is the HRD structure currently in place. Further, the generalized understanding of key terms seems to confuse participants when asked questions which situate those terms within their professional community of practice. Contrary to when understandings are aligned to key terms within a critical HRD context, participant responses centered around critical reflection and focus attention to how Company A does or does not deliver on organizational priorities. It is a marked shift in discourse.

Perceptions influence understanding to a degree learning and development programs must consider in advance of implementing protocols which stand juxtaposed to traditional programs. Put another way, if an organization is to deliver on the outcomes of CHRD or CMS, it
is imperative participants understand the foundation on which learning and development is built. If they do not, training and development will either reinforce existing understandings or fail to resonate in any meaningful way (Mohaghan & Cervero, 2006). We see examples of this throughout the findings. In each of the sections detailing research responses, participants either demonstrated resistance to critical outcomes or did not recognize when these outcomes manifest following training sessions. This is not unexpected as adults become so accustomed to the status quo, anything which attempts to subvert this understanding will be met with prejudice (Brookfield, 2005). Even in those situations where resistance to critical outcomes is not overtly present, we find there is not enough awareness to effectively process new understandings. This, in turn, prevents learners from effectively processing the emotions, thoughts, and needed actions to put these new ideas into practice or assimilate into their knowledge structures. Associates at Company A are, as a matter of practice, not put in a position where real change is possible because they are not given the foundational understandings to incorporate new information into the process of meaning-making.

The results of this study also bring to mind the performative nature of organizational behavior. From espousing climate neutral positions to socially aware initiatives broadcast as benefitting society at large, companies are aligning themselves to positions vastly different than they were 20 years ago. The connected nature of our world through tools like Twitter and Facebook have put diversity, equity, and inclusion at the top of a list of organizational buzzwords. In failing to support learners through a transformational HR process, Company A is not actually empowering its workforce to be a part of the solution it is advancing. In a changed world with rapidly changing expectations on how organizations are to engage with their people
and their communities, there is an expectation that key terms are clearly defined so that workers can properly apply these lessons in the workplace and then, in their communities. This requires intentionality is design and reinforcement through continuing education.

**Recommendations**

Based on the outcomes of this study, several recommendations are suggested. First, Company A needs to introduce within learning and development protocols a process in which key terms are defined within the context of a critical HRD structure. Commonly understood definitions are insufficient in training programs with such transformational capabilities. As such, the Company needs to create a separate training protocol to educate associates on key words and how they are applied or understood within a professional context.

Second, learning and development practitioners at Company A must explicitly state how these newly defined understandings manifest as outcomes. If we consider the phrase, begin with the end in mind, then each step on the journey should include reinforcement. To this, Company A needs to install at the beginning of each training program a section which explicitly links key words to intended learning outcomes, directly referencing the definitions detailed in the separate protocol meant to educate workers on definitions and applications/understandings in a professional context.

Finally, core outcomes should be regularly revisited with leadership to support retention of emancipatory concepts at the associate level. On several occasions in research study (as noted
above), participants cited leadership as a blocker in their development. Fully supporting leaders to better deliver critical outcomes is a core need.

Limitations

There are several limitations in the finding presented here. First, the number of participants is small and may not serve as a representative sample of the workforce. None of the participants, for example, identified as socially non-conforming. Likewise, not every ethnicity was represented in this study. Further, the participants are all from the same department within an organization that has dozens. Socio-economic data was not collected, leaving a large gap in understanding background and access to education other than highest grade completed. This leaves the study with several unaccounted intersections. My position as a senior leader at Company A was also a limitation as there is no real way to ensure responses were not influenced by my position. While I have no direct control over their advancement and the research is confidential in nature with no data being shared with Company A, responses could have been impacted or not fully answered for fear of retribution.

Future Research

With CHRD and CMS having the potential to radically change the relationship between worker and organization from profit-driven to emancipatory, future research is suggested. The next step should be to complete a study with a larger participant pool that is representative of the
population. Demographic understandings should also increase to better account for those factors which influence participant perceptions. Gender and sexual identity, for example, have a very real impact on how one perceives the world around them and the relationships they are engaged in, whether personal or professional. The same can be said for economic and academic backgrounds. Without more insight into these and other areas, we cannot better understand how perceptions influence learning outcomes.

Once more detail and representation are gathered, future research can also seek to expand upon the critical framework employed in this study. A study utilizing critical race or feminist perspective, for example, may provide deeper levels of understanding from a more acutely situated point of view, furthering our understanding of the question beyond what is presented here. An intersectional approach could benefit future research, as well, providing deeper levels of meaning than what even participants might recognize. Again, however, each of these avenues for future research require a more complete data set from which to base findings.

Finally, future research might include a longitudinal component. As CHRD and CMS are meant to be transformative and are a form emancipatory learning and development practice, they should have an impact on participants outside the workplace. Therefore, a research study which measures long-term outcomes from a program with defined key terms against one without might provide insight into the efficacy of CHRD and CMS. How do learners with more complete understanding of key terms prior to a learning and development program feel they seek to mutually understand others outside the office? How do they feel participation within the community is impacted by increased participation in the workplace?
As an idea, CHRD and CMS have the power to change the essence of work. From one driven to deliver contribution margins and stakeholder profit to one centered on exposing power and providing voice to the marginalized, it is nothing short of radical. It is, unfortunately, not given the dedication it needs to be impactful. There are gaps in clearly articulating how outcomes are supposed to look in practice. They are muted and unrealized because organizations do not take the time to educate participants on what key terms mean. The implications are far-reaching and serve to perpetuate systems of oppression rather than alleviate them.

Conclusion

The potential impacts of CHRD and CMS are transformational. Breaking from profit-driven HRD practice toward a system focused on the empowerment of learners and emancipatory action is exciting to consider. From a social perspective, it is a step toward a more participatory society in which the person is central to success and not money. Unfortunately, ensuring CRHD and CMS outcomes requires learning and development practitioners to augment current processes to better support new meaning. Relying on participants to already understand the meaning of key terms within decidedly different contexts puts critical HRD manifestations on the path to not realizing intended learning outcomes before the protocol even begins. Resetting perceptions, reinforcing meaning within a business environment, and ensuring leaders are prepared to support critical outcomes must become central to organizational processes. If these are not put into practice, CHRD programs run the risk of merely reinforcing existing
understandings or not providing learners with enough support to see intended transformation outcomes become reality.
CHAPTER III – SCHOLARLY REFLECTION

As my research efforts come to a close with findings articulated, next steps proposed, and future research efforts suggested, it is important to spend time in a reflective exercise. This period of reflection allows researchers such as myself to consider the process from ideation through defense, keying in on areas which can be used to inform understandings and future research. In the following sections, I will first reflect on the dissertation process before discussing applications to my own professional practice.

Reflections on the Dissertation Process

As with most scholarly activities, periods of reflection help deeper connections and provide individuals with a chance to consider things through a critical lens. This criticality is central to my learning and continued development as a scholarly practitioner. What follows in the next section will first look at what I intended to do at the onset of my research study, then examine what went well and what did not, and finish with a brief discussion on what, if anything, I would have done differently if I knew then what I know now.
What Did I Set Out to Do?

When this research process began, my intention was to examine the ways in which worker (non-exempt, full-time) perceptions influenced intended learning and development outcomes within critically structured human resource development (HRD) programs. The genesis for this was rooted in two areas. First, I am a critically oriented individual, deeply invested in emancipatory forms of praxis. This includes individually, socially, professionally, and politically situated emancipation. As critical human resource development (CHRD) and critical management studies (CMS) intend to deliver outcomes in each of these spaces, they became areas of keen interest following my introduction to them during my graduate program at Indiana University. As my organization (Company A) began using CHRD and CMS theory in the delivery of learning and development programs and as the company included core concepts in its mission, purpose, and values, my interest in them grew. As a matter of personal concern, then, understanding how perceptions of oppression, emancipation, empathy, and participation impact learning outcomes grew in importance.

The second reason I wished to examine worker perceptions is to understand the depth organizations will go to deliver on outcomes benefitting people over profit. In essence, do organizations who employ critical HRD processes put in the time, effort, and resources needed to achieve goals or is this performative in nature with the company not putting in the time to see outcomes achieved. Based on my experiences and research conducted to that point, I posited organizations such as my own did not put in the needed work to ensure participants understood core terms and, thus, failed to realize intended learning and development outcomes.
In order to understand the topic further, I proposed an exploratory case study at the company I currently work at with research questions wrapped around perceptions of key CHRD and CMS terms and the impact those perceptions had on learning outcomes. Do learners understand key terms within professional contexts and does this understanding (or lack thereof) impact intended outcomes from critically structured HRD training programs. This site was chosen due to the fact it uses CHRD and CMS are primary HRD practice and because my proximity to potential study participants provided an ideal opportunity to study the research questions up close. In the study, I intended to virtually interview up to 25 participants for an hour each using a 10-question interview protocol and use these interviews as the data for my case study. Given my access to potential participants at the company, I fully thought I would be able to secure interviews with more than enough individuals, gathering a rich data source to use in my analysis.

What Happened or Didn’t Go Well?

What ended up happening was decidedly different. After a relatively promising start with human resource leadership at Company A, obstacles began to arise. At the beginning, for example, I intended to use the company’s intranet and newsletter along with LinkedIn to recruit participants. My first several meetings with HR indicated no opposition to this course of action. In fact, there existed an expressed willingness to both open this up to eligible participants and to use the results to inform changes (if warranted) to how the organization delivered learning and development programs. This receptiveness proved short-lived.
Once the actual proposal was presented for final approval, the ability to use internal channels to recruit was not allowed. While I was never fully informed as to how this change occurred, the company did state they would not prevent me from using personnel currently employed, but those individuals would have to commit to participate through external avenues. This left LinkedIn as the only available path to participant recruitment, dramatically reducing my ability to find individuals willing to sit for study interviews. The result is that only six people ended up being a part of my study. While the resultant data was rich in narrative and insight, having access to the company intranet and newsletter would likely have led to a more representative group of study participants. That the group was not more diverse ended up being called out as a limitation.

The dearth of participants also necessitated a shift in sources of data. Rather than using only participant interviews, I ended up using a document review to buttress my data set. In some capacity, I always needed to tie research questions to the organization in a meaningful way. The analysis of publicly facing documents did, however, become a larger part of the study than anticipated. That said, the study is more complete and comprehensive with multiple points of reference from the organization. It added contextual weight to arguments about the juxtaposition of associate experience with company objectives. In future research efforts, I will make document analysis an embedded part of the proposal process.

The timing of interviews also proved difficult to manage. As an example, one participant had to reschedule their interview five times due to unforeseen circumstances. Given the lack of avenues to recruitment, I was in a position where I needed each and every interested individual to participate so that the resultant data set was as robust as possible. This significantly extended
the time it took to gather data. While not a detriment to the overall outcomes or veracity of the
data collected, it was a barrier to synthesizing the data on my original timeline. One benefit of
extended interview timelines is that I was able to do a more meaningful document review,
pouring over earnings and stockholder statements, the company website, and partner
communications. This allowed me to attach more depth in stated organizational intentions to
participant feedback than I might have otherwise.

What Went Well?

Among the things that went well during this research study, the interviews themselves
stand out. From the first to the last, participant engagement was high. The investment of time and
depth in response was better than I initially anticipated. As an example, I had a concern at the
beginning of the study there would be a lack of commonly understood definitions of key terms.
Emancipation, for example, is not something I fully expected individuals to identify with outside
the topic of slavery in the United States. After carefully considering their responses, not one of
the participants defined emancipation through the lens of slavery, instead focusing their
responses on restriction and oppression. While not aligned within the context of CHRD and
CMS, the understandings went deeper than anticipated.

Each interview also matured within the hour we spent with each other. After settling into
the structured format of the interview (each key term had identical question flows), participants
grew more comfortable in adding details potentially lacking in the first set of responses. The
result was an open and honest articulation of feelings around perceptions and learning and
development efficacy. It also led to critical reflections on the work being done at Company A, which in turn opened pathways to dialogue that went beyond merely questions and answers. In some cases, participants added commentary on the effectiveness of leadership rather than simply confining answers to those individuals responsible for learning and development. While not included in findings and perhaps an avenue for future research, this indicated to me a desire on the part of workers to be more aware, more engaged, and more supportive of critically structured outcomes.

Another thing that went well was the coding and theme creation process. This is due to two things in my opinion. First, the structure of the interview protocol allowed me to organize the data in a way which aligned well to defining codes and articulating themes. As each key term had the same set of questions, the location of codes and ability to connect them proved efficient. I was also able to connect codes within different key terms due to how the questions were organized. The questions were also structured in such a way that participants had the chance to critically reflect within each key term before answering a final question on the nature of learning and development responsibilities. Had this question been more toward the front of each question subset, participants may have felt caught off guard or otherwise unsure how to respond. The last thing this study needed was a sense of being set up with a “gotcha” question. It would have negatively impacted both the data and participant willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue or in asking clarifying questions.

The other reason the coding and theme process went well related to the expanded document analysis. Specifically, the themes that emerged in the data were reflected in the public documents analyzed. This is to say the themes from the data stood in opposition to publicly
stated intentions. I think this proved beneficial to the study in that participants were talking about the same things the company was, just from a position of non-delivery. The data might have been rendered different findings and implications had there not been this alignment between themes across both data sources.

What Would I Do Differently?

As I consider what I would do differently if I were to complete the same study again, issues related to the data pool stand out. First, the pool of potential participants would need to be expanded. As detailed in the research proposal, each of the individuals who were asked to take part in this study were from the same department within Company A. While intended to ensure data congruity and further define the case, having individuals from only one department limited participation. Getting a cross-set of responses from workers in different parts of Company A, for example, might provide more depth to the data set in the form of greater representation, which could have provided additional findings and perhaps differentiated implications and future research suggestions. What if, perhaps, individuals in one segment of the organization had perceptions of key terms which differed from workers in another part of the company? The next research study might include understanding why these departments have different perceptions of key terms going into learning and development programs. What about their backgrounds or departmental practices led to more or less key term understanding within the context of CHRD and CMS? Is there a difference in support from leadership? In fact, the suggestion for future research includes an expanded participant pool. If this was already completed as part of this
exploratory case study, my research would be further along in understanding how to better situate learning and development to better deliver against intended outcomes.

I would also begin with a proposal that heavily included the use of publicly facing documents and sought to position this study without the use of a company pseudonym. As noted earlier, the expanded use of a document analysis proved valuable to the overall interpretation of results. It connected participant responses to the stated objectives of the organization in ways that interviews could not do on their own. Without this connectivity, Company A’s opportunities in the CHRD and CMS space would not have been as clearly articulate. I think I would also seek an organization willing to go deep into their processes in the name of getting better. Not being able to openly discuss Company A in a more direct context prevented me from being able to directly quote earnings statements and websites. This in turn limited how the conversation progressed during the findings section. To be sure, this study is critically situated, likely limiting the number of organizations willing to participate. I did not spend the time verifying this, however, leaving me wondering what might have been had an organization been willing to be more open.

Applications to My Professional Practice

As I reflect on the process and how it went, take time to understand what the data indicates, and consider what the future of research looks like for CHRD and CMS, I must pause to consider how this impacts my scholarly and professional practices. The following section will examine how I might use or implement the findings in my work, how the study changed my understanding of the problem, and what’s next given what I now know.
How Can I Use/Implement the Findings in My Current Role?

I am quite excited by this question given my position within Company A. As a senior leader over a rather significant pool of non-exempt associates, I am in a role with the capability to implement local changes without delay. I can take the findings and be more explicit in how the outcomes of a training on professional development are meant to create paths to mutual understanding through dialogue. I can articulate how outcomes are not just the last thing listed in a syllabus before the schedule is detailed or how Company A is dedicated to empowerment and that our interactions either support this or maintain an oppressive status quo. I can also use my position to ensure leaders are provided the support they need to see these outcomes stick. Better definition of how their work supports change and accountability to ensuring we live company values is within my charge as a leader. I can create local working groups dedicated to putting critical outcomes into practice at the local level without waiting for changes to organizational HR practices from global personnel.

I can also use my current position to work toward making broader changes. Conversations with North American leadership in other departments and with course development personnel will better inform the problem for them. Having an executive voice provides me a platform to work toward the type of changes needed to better support CHRD and CMS outcomes. I can also attempt to directly influence other leaders to act locally. Modeling dialogue which seeks to understand can provide examples to others on our path toward emancipatory outcomes. As this is, indeed, the goal of Company A, these conversations should be met openly and with interest. If they are not, I need only point to internal and external
documents to support the conversation. There are also mechanisms for me to report individuals actively refusing to deliver against the mission and purpose of Company A. I can reinforce these options for all workers and leaders who witness others not living our values.

Local implementation and leader influence are only part of how I intend to use the findings in my professional role. I will share these with corporate leaders and global human resources such that the findings can be applied outside North America. This will take time and likely require implementation within my department. Using the findings of a survey of my team after I have more clearly defined key terms and workers have had the chance to realize intended outcomes will support the power of better learner perceptions and the impact on the associate’s connection to Company A’s mission and purpose. There is no better way to frame a problem in my organization than through the use of data. In this, I am excited as our opportunities to be better are great and who we aspire to be as an organization is worthy of the time and effort.

Impact of Research on My Future in Higher Education

As I consider my future in higher education following this study, I will say my plans are now different than they once were. Going into this study, I envisioned using my doctorate to help solidify a place within higher education as both an admissions leader and as an adjunct/lecturer. As an administrator, my goal is to lead an admissions and retention team at a four-year university or for a university system. Having been in this space for the better part of 12 years and currently holding an executive role in support of both public and private universities for a global online program management organization, I am well positioned from an experience perspective. This
doctorate has provided me the background to approach problem-solving from a research position rather than simply using internal or market data to inform direction. This will be invaluable as I continue moving forward in my career.

As it relates to teaching, my plan has always been to teach at the college level. As the other part of my future (at least as it stands today) involves a full-time position in admissions, teaching for me is assumed to be as an adjunct or lecturer. Courses I have considered fits involve critical theory and adult education pedagogy as well as seminars on the philosophy of higher education, among others. I have expanded my view to now include human resource practice. There is clearly a need in the profession to bring critical perspectives more directly into the education of future and current practitioners. As social forces continue to move toward more inclusion and increased equity and diversity in all facets of life, the need for critical HRD practice to move from performative spaces into those areas which actually lead to transformative outcomes is an imperative. I believe I can provide a bridge between adult education theory and practice in human resource spaces, including instructional systems design. Full-time professorship is also something I am now considering given the impact educators have on practitioners. Simply, I can do more good teaching than doing.

What’s Next?

My immediate next step is to apply research findings at work. It is the most immediate and, arguably, most impactful next step I can take. Given my status within Company A, I can make immediate progress toward better articulating the meaning of key terms such that outcomes
embedded within existing learning and development at Company A are achieved. It will not be easy, and as the results of my study indicate, there will be resistance to some of the ideas from workers given what they already believe to be true. As a transformational exercise, I will be effectively asking people to change the ways in which they view the relationships between work, society, and themselves. It is, however, an effort worth making.

I am also going to set on a course to initiate the next step in research, which this exploratory case study confirms is needed. To restate, the next step in research is the expansion of the participant population to better account for groups of people not present in this first study. Once findings have been furthered, I can look at these same questions through a different theoretical framework, including one that accounts for intersections at a more meaningful level. Understanding why perceptions exist as they do will inform practice and research much earlier in a learner’s lifecycle. What needs to be done at the K-12 level to ensure key word understandings are deeper than they currently are? How can we contextualize meaning in spaces like the workplace that are perhaps considered unconventional at first glance? After all, connecting oppression, emancipation, empathy, and participation to the professional world is clearly needed if the outcomes of a more critical application of HRD are to be achieved.
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Scotland, J. (2012). Exploring the philosophical underpinnings of research: Relating ontology and epistemology to the methodology and methods of the scientific, interpretive, and critical research paradigms. English Language Teaching 5(9), 9-16.


APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: Perceptions of Oppression, Emancipation, Empathy, and Participation in the Workplace

Investigators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Dept</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Smith</td>
<td>HESA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
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Key Information

- This is a voluntary research study on the perceptions of oppression, emancipation, empathy, and participation in workplace settings. The findings from this study aim to inform researchers and practitioners on pre-existing understandings of oppression, emancipation, empathy, and participation within and if these understanding impact learning outcomes. In seeking to understand this, this study intends to open directions for future research and knowledge generation related to empowering workers through dialogue such that they are able to transform their personal and professional environments through emancipatory praxis.

- This three-month study involves a one-hour primary interview and potential member-checking for participants.

- The benefits include the potential creation of a baseline understanding on oppression, emancipation, empathy, and participation in workplace settings which will inform future research efforts that lead to changes in human resource practice intended to produce transformative change in and out of the workplace.

Description of the Study

The purpose of the study is better understand what non-exempt associates in corporate settings understand about oppression, emancipation, empathy, and participation going into learning and development sessions. This data will help determine if expected outcomes related to emerging theories in human resource development (critical human resource development and critical management studies, specifically) are achievable. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: complete a one-hour session which seeks to gather demographic information and complete a primary interview protocol and respond to member-checking activities via email as needed. This interview will be conducted via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or any other convenient method.
Risks and Benefits
There are no reasonably foreseeable (or expected) risks for while demographic information is sought, there is no requirement to share.

The are no direct benefits of participation in this study, though the data gathered may end up influencing future research in the field.

Confidentiality
- This study is confidential. We will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity. Participants will be assigned a unique identification number and will be referred to using pseudonyms in findings.
- The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. The primary researcher will be the only one who has access to interview notes, audio, video. The file will be deleted one-year from interview completion. The primary researcher will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

Your Rights
The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to skip any question or research activity, as well as to withdraw completely from participation at any point during the process.

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered before, during, or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact the researcher, Matthew Smith at oeddpresearchstudy@gmail.com. Additionally, you may contact Katy Jaekel, Ph.D., Associate Professor at Northern Illinois University’s College of Education at kjaekel@niu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigators or if you have any problems or concerns that occur as a result of your participation, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance, Integrity, and Safety at (815) 753-8588.

[For research involving more than minimal risk, or involving risk of physical harms, the following statement should be included:] Northern Illinois University policy does not provide medical treatment or compensation for treatment of injuries that may occur as a result of participation in research activities. The preceding information shall not be construed as a waiver of any legal rights or redress which the participants may have.

Future Use of the Research Data
The research data collected will be used only for this study.

Disclosure of Research Results to Participants
If requested, research results will be shared with participants.
Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigators.

Participant’s Signature  Date

[If audio or videotaping will occur, add a second signature and date line preceded by a sentence such as I give my consent to be audio recorded (or video recorded, as appropriate) during the (insert a description of the research activities that will be recorded)]

Participant’s Signature  Date
Participant #:
Participant Title:
Date:
Time:
Location:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Research Question/Purpose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro: The purpose of this interview is to better understand your perceptions of oppression, emancipation, empathy, and participation. You signed our consent form to be interviewed. Do you have any questions about what we will cover today? You agreed to have this interview recorded. Is this still agreeable? Great. Let me turn on the recording device.</td>
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<td>Before beginning the interview process, I would like to ask some demographic-based questions. You are free to decline to state/identify wherever you wish.</td>
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1. How old are you?
   - Under 18
   - 18-25
   - 25-35
   - 35-45
   - 45-55
   - Over 55
   - Prefer not to answer

2. Please indicate:
   - Cisgender Woman
   - Cisgender Man
   - Transgender
   - Gender non-conforming/non-binary
   - Prefer not to answer

3. Which best describes your highest level of academic achievement?
   - No high school diploma/GED
   - High school diploma/GED
   - Vocational degree
   - Some college
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<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>Associate degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
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<td>□</td>
<td>Some graduate work</td>
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<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
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<td>□</td>
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<td>□</td>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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4. My current role is in:
   - Recruitment services
   - Marketing
   - Consultative services
   - Training and development
   - Student support
   - Records evaluation
   - Administrative support
   - Facilities
   - Partner relations
   - Other

5. How long have you been with Company A?
   - 0-1 year
   - 1-5 years
   - 5-10 years
   - 10 or more years

6. Are you foreign-born?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Prefer not to answer

7. Are you a citizen of the United States?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Prefer not to answer

8. Please indicate your racial/ethnic background. (mark all that apply)
   - Native American or Alaska Native
   - Asian
   - Black or African American
   - Latinx
   - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   - Arab/Middle Eastern
9. Do you participate in or are a member of any community organizations?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Prefer not to answer

10. Do you participate in or are a member of any work communities?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Prefer not to answer

Transition

Thank you for that. We will now begin the formal interview. Do you have any questions before we start?

1

Can you tell me more about your personal, academic, and professional background?
- Tell me more about that? (Choose one reply to set tone for follow-up questions seeking deeper levels of insight)

Build Rapport / Introduce second-tier questions

2

How would you define or describe the term oppression?
- Can you describe for me an instance of this understanding in your community or on the news?
- What about in the workplace?

R1 – Understanding preconceptions of oppression

3

Tell me about any innovative ideas you feel would help improve the process at work or help with morale or team-building? Have you shared this with anyone? If so, were you allowed to develop your idea into a working model?
- Tell me about the support you received during the process?
  - How, if at all, does being able to try new things out impact your desire or ability to perform your role?
  - If not: Why do you think that is?
    - How, if at all, does not being able to try new things out impact your desire or ability to perform your role?
- How do you feel management supports you in role?
  - Can you share with me a specific example of a time when a manager made you feel valued and one in which you felt overlooked or ignored?

R1 – Continued understanding of participant’s understanding of oppression
R2 – Understanding how FTE would go about transforming workplace
• If I were to suggest you should be able to initiate new ideas with the full support of management, how would you respond?
• What type(s) of suggestions would you make to leadership to make the workplace more open to ideas from hourly staff?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4</th>
<th>How would you define or describe the term emancipation?</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can you describe for me an instance of this understanding in your community or on the news?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What about in the workplace?</td>
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R1 – Understanding preconceptions of emancipation

<table>
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<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>Can you think of a time when you or a colleague was treated, in your opinion, unjustly? If so, can you share with me an example?</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Were you or your colleague able to discuss with leadership the feeling the situation evoked?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o If so: Tell me the process and outcome?</td>
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<td>o If not: Why do you think that is?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Do you feel as though you can openly speak with your manager?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o If so: Does this provide you a sense of investment in them as an individual? As a leader?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ How, if at all, might this impact your ability or desire to see things from their point of view?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o If not: How does this impact your feelings and attitudes toward your manager?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ How, if at all, might this impact your ability or desire to see things from their point of view?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• If able to detail an instance of unjust behavior: How do you feel the way you are treated in the workplace manifest in your personal and/or community sphere(s)?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• If I were to say to you should be able to engage in dialogue with your manager wherein each side were able to openly share their understanding of the events and frame them around individual experiences, how would you respond?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What type(s) of suggestions would you make to leadership to make the workplace fairer and more equitable in the treatment of all employees?</td>
</tr>
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| 6 | How would you define or describe the term empathy? |

R1 – Understanding
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Can you describe for me an instance of this understanding in your community or on the news? What about in the workplace?</th>
<th>preconceptions of empathy</th>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Can you think of a time when you found yourself identifying with a situation facing a colleague? If so, can you share with me an example?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• If an example is provided: How did that make you feel?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Can you think of a time when someone empathized with you during a difficult period and share with me that experience?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If an example is not provided: Why do you think this is?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Can you think of a time when you wish someone were able to identify with your situation and how it would have impacted you?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Do you feel as though you can openly cultivate relationships with your leadership team?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o If so: How, if at all, does this provide you a sense of investment in them as an individual? As a leader?</td>
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<td>▪ How, if at all, might this impact your ability or desire to come to know them better?</td>
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<td>o If not: How does this impact your feelings and attitudes toward your manager?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ How might this impact your ability or desire to come to know them better?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• If I were to suggest to you training and development programs can and should instill dialogic methods (or open and honest communication between two people with mutual understanding as the goal), how would you respond?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What type(s) of suggestions would you make to leadership to make the workplace more conducive to mutual understandings of one another?</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>How would you define or describe the term participation?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Can you describe for me an instance of this understanding in your community or on the news?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What about in the workplace?</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Can you think of a time when you found yourself stepping outside your comfort zone and participating in something</td>
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<td>R1 – Continued understanding of participant’s understanding of empathy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R2 – Understanding how FTE would go about generating empathic dialogue</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Discussion Points

- **Which improved someone else’s station? If so, can you share with me an example?**
  - If an example is provided: Tell me how this made you feel?
    - Can you think of a time when someone participated in an action which impacted you directly?
  - If an example is not provided: Tell me how this made you feel?
  - Do you feel as though your workplace in one which fosters worker participation?
    - If so: How, if at all, does this provide you a sense of investment in your peers? In your leadership team?
      - How might this impact your ability or desire to be more engaged?
    - If not: How, if at all, does this impact your sense of investment in your peers? In your leadership team?
      - How might this impact your ability or desire to be more engaged?
  - If I were to suggest to you participation in activities designed to engage workers and improve the levels at which you co-create solutions is something training and development programs should inspire, how would you respond?

### Additional Notes

- **What type(s) of suggestions would you make to leadership to make the workplace more conducive to mutual understandings of one another?**

### Questions

| 10 | What else would you like to share with me about what we have discussed here today? | All |