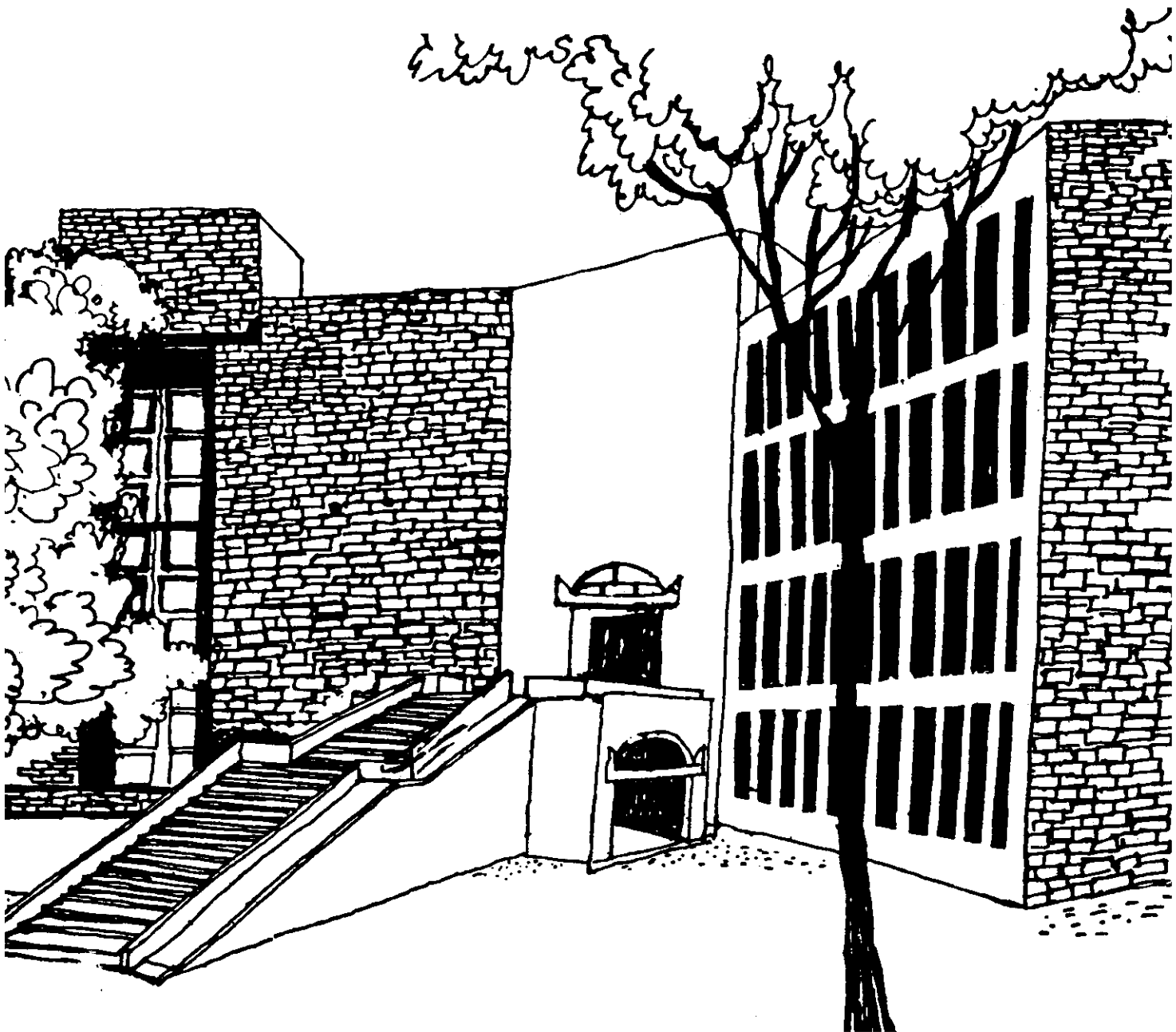




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# Working Paper



DEVELOPING H.R.D. PROFESSIONALS THROUGH  
DISTANCE EDUCATION: AN EXPERIMENT

By

T.V. Rao

WP1012



WP

1992

(1012)

W P No. 1012  
March 1992

The main objective of the working paper series of the IDMA is to help faculty members to test out their research findings at the pre-publication stage.

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## **Developing H.R.D. Professionals Through Distance Education: An Experiment**

### **Abstract**

This paper describes a diploma programme in HRD being offered by the Academy of Human Resource Development in distance education mode to prepare HRD professionals for the HRD function. This diploma ranging over an 18 month period has been started recently. Application oriented assignments, mentors, organisational sponsorship and support to candidates, and the accreditation system are some interesting characteristics of the distance education. Although expensive due to small number, lack of subsidy and high involvement of professional experts, this diploma programme has thrown up a few lessons for making distance learning involving and useful. The paper highlights the characteristics of the programme and presents lessons for distance education.

**T.V. Rao  
Professor  
Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad**

### **The HRD Function**

Human Resource Development as a separate and important function has taken roots in Indian organisations in the last 10 years. Most organisations have either established new HRD departments or at least have appointed HRD managers. A few of them recognising the importance of HRD have redesignated their personnel or training managers as HRD managers and added new responsibilities to these staff. Thus today there are several hundreds of managers that have formally assigned HRD responsibilities and thousands of others who are required to carry out HRD tasks but have not been assigned formal roles.

The HRD function deals with continuous development of employee competencies and motivation as well as organisational culture. The HRD function uses instruments like performance planning, performance analysis and reviews, potential appraisals, career planning and career development strategies, feedback and counselling, team-building and other OD interventions, communications, job rotation, process groups etc., to achieve HRD goals. With the use of these and other instruments an attempt is made to create a learning environment or learning culture in organisations.

HRD managers are required to design mechanisms and instruments to develop employee competencies and motivation on a continuous basis and implement the same. Thus HRD has become a specialised function requiring a high degree of knowledge about HRD instruments, skills in their implementation and attitudes and values to manage the same. The traditional personnel function and the training function are the two functions that have some relationship with the HRD function but both these functions and those who manage these functions have limitations in the successful handling of the HRD function. Those who handle the traditional personnel function have not been trained in learning theories and development skills. Those who handle training very rarely have any professional preparation and the professional preparation available for others is limited to training technologies and ignores several other mechanisms of development.

### **Academic Preparation for HRD Function**

The knowledge base in HRD has grown to a great extent in our country in the last 10 years. For example at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad when the first course in HRD was offered in the year 1980, there was hardly any text book available for the course. Today there are at least two dozen books available constituting learning material for several HRD courses. However, none of the existing institutions offer exclusive course packages in HRD. The only two institutions that offers some HRD inputs are XLRI, Jamshedpur and TISS, Bombay. The Advanced Diploma in Human Resource Management offered by IGNOU also comes somewhat closer to this. Even these programmes do not aim at preparing "HRD" professionals but aim broadly at HR professionals.

As HRD has emerged as a separate function with distinct competencies required to handle it, a need is felt increasingly by organisations for competent HRD professionals to handle this function (Rao, T.V., 1990; Nair, M.R.R., and Rao, T.V., 1990). In the absence of any distinct educational programmes to prepare HRD professionals, most organisations have resorted to the use of personnel and training managers to manage the function. A few organisations have even resorted to the use of untrained line managers to handle the HRD function creating even a poor image of the function. With the emergence of the new professional body called National HRD Network, the professional preparation of staff to handle HRD roles has begun. The National HRD Network established in 1985

started offering short term programmes to develop HRD Facilitators. However, the short duration programmes fulfilled only a part of the need by training some senior level managers but preparation of junior and middle level managers through long-term education programmes continued to be neglected.

### **Academy of Human Resource Development**

Recognising this need the Academy of Human Resource Development started a Post-Graduate Diploma through distance education in early 1991. The Academy of Human Resource Development is an Institute started by the National HRD Network which is a Society registered under Societies Registration Act. It is a professional body devoted to promote the Human Resource Development movement in the country. The Network and its Academy are not funded by any government or non-governmental agencies. The Network earns its income through its conferences and seminars and make the surplus income on these conferences available for research and educational activities. The Academy of HRD was started with such a surplus fund of the HRD Network. After getting a small initial building fund from the HRD Network, the Academy of HRD was required to raise its own finances. The Academy of HRD was required to raise its finances through its own programmes and use any surplus from its programmes for research purposes as well as for education and training of those who cannot afford to pay for themselves.

The Academy of HRD started the following activities in pursuance of its mission and objectives:

1. A HRD facilitators through a two phased training and development programme.
2. A one-year diploma in HRD through distance education with contact workshops, project work and mentor system. Each student in this diploma is required to go through eight courses over 18 months period. Initially it was started as a one-year diploma but was extended subsequently to 18 months.
3. Round-tables on themes of contemporary importance where select groups of people are invited for a round-table discussion. Issues are discussed and recommendations made improving select aspects of HRD in future.
4. Research studies on HRD needs of different sectors and effective implementation of HRD in different sectors.
5. Documentation of HRD experiences generated by different organisations.
6. Promoting doctoral level research and studies in the field of HRD.

### **Diploma Programme**

As stated earlier the Diploma Programme was started in response to a need felt by various HRD managers and senior executives in the corporate sector. Such a need also exists in the development services sector and in the unorganised sector. But such a need has not been articulated by the institutions involved in education, research, rural development, health, population control and such other development sectors. It was assumed that after the Diploma is started for the corporate sector it should be extended to the other sectors as the HRD movement gains momentum.

Those who expressed such a need in the corporate sector stated that a number of personnel people and line managers are being increasingly required to perform HRD roles. There are only two educational institutions in the country (XLRI, Jamshedpur and TISS, Bombay) that seem to offer a comprehensive package in developing HRD competencies in Personnel Management students. Both of them together turnout less than 100 personnel managers every year. A large number of Social Work students also

take up HRD positions but with very inadequate preparation in HRD. It is in this context, a diploma in HRD was thought of as a good mechanism for strengthening the academic preparation of those who are already performing HRD roles without adequate academic preparation.

The Diploma was announced with the following characteristics:

1. It was announced as a Diploma with minimum entry requirements of graduation and atleast two years of experience.
2. The student is required to go through two courses in each term of about four months duration. Thus a total of eight courses had to be gone through by the students in four terms.
3. The student is also required to prepare a project report on a project he would undertake in the third and fourth terms.
4. The student has option to choose courses of relevance to his sector in the last term.
5. Each student will have a mentor who will be a senior professional to guide him during the Diploma.
6. The Diploma includes a good number of books and other material to be mailed to the student by the Academy.
7. The Diploma also includes two contact workshops of 2-3 days duration each in which the student will have an opportunity to interact with and learn from well-known HRD professionals. Such contact workshops are to be conducted in those cities where the size of the participants is more than 15.

#### **The Administration of the Diploma**

The National HRD Network and its Academy were started by HRD professionals who donate their time for the development of their profession. At the time of starting this Diploma by the Academy there were no full time staff to look after any aspect of this programme. The Diploma therefore, needed full time staff, building and other infrastructural facilities. It was hoped that the HRD Network members will provide the necessary support to various candidates. It was also decided to recruit one or two full time staff for the Diploma. Thus the diploma had to be started with a zero base with no funding, no staff, no building, and the only resource of HRD Network membership and their goodwill. A Diploma Committee was constituted to provide academic guidance and support to the programme. The members of this Committee were drawn from XLRI, ISTD, NIPM, IIMA, IGNOU, HRD Network and such other professional bodies and institutions. An Academic Council consisting of a larger number of HRD practitioners and academicians was constituted to provide a larger base as mentors and guides to the programme.

It is now nearly a year since the time the Diploma idea was initiated and planning and implementation started. The Diploma was announced in February, 1991 and begun in July 1991.

The Diploma by now has completed two terms. The Diploma has provided rich experiences for those who organise it. A number of lessons could be drawn from the Diploma experiences so far. This paper intends to highlight these experiences and particularly the economics part of it.

### 1. *Assignments*

For this Diploma programme, students are required to do a number of assignments. In some of the courses each chapter/article/unit they read is followed by an assignment. The assignment requires them to apply what they have learnt in the reading to examine the realities that exist in his organisation or in a neighbouring organisation or in a sub-section in his organisation. Thus for example, when a participant reads about performance appraisal he is required to examine his own organisation's appraisal system and write a critical review of it in the context of the theory he learnt. Similarly after learning about the role of self-appraisal he is expected to write a self-appraisal about his own performance for the last six months using the characterisation suggested in the reading. Similarly after going through an article on In-basket Exercises the candidate is required to develop an in-basket exercise for any given role in his organisation. A sample of the assignments that are given to students is presented in Appendix I. The assignments require the participants to provide data about the existing situation as it is applicable to him, his section or his organisation or critically examine the existing status of HRD.

These assignments are found to be highly involving and require a good deal of time to be spent by the participants. Feedback is provided on each of these assignments in the form of letter grade as well as qualitative statements.

### 2. *Mentoring*

Each student is required to have a mentor who will be a senior HRD professional in his own organisation or in another organisation close to him. The candidate is expected to be in touch with the mentor and get guidance from the mentor on a variety of things. As the assignments require constant guidance mentors are expected to play an important role. The mentors are mostly drawn from the Academic Council of the Academy and they treat their time investment as their contribution to the development of the profession and young professionals.

### 3. *Contact Programmes*

Wherever there are more than 15 students, contact workshops are being organised. These are of two to three days duration each. In the contact workshop more conceptual and experience based inputs are given to the participants. The contact workshops are full day workshops on all the two or three days requiring the total involvement of participants. Two such contact sessions are expected to be conducted every year. Leading HRD professionals in the country have been teaching in these programmes. The candidates draw a lot of inspiration interacting with such leading professionals.

### 4. *Examination System*

This diploma minimises the weightage given to examinations for qualifying the students for the diploma. If all the assignments are of high quality and the student is regular and gets reasonably good letter grades, it may be possible for a student to pass the Diploma without appearing for the examinations. Those who are not able to do all the assignments will have to appear for the final examination. Those who have not submitted some minimum assignments will not qualify to appear even for the final examination.

### 5. *Project Work*

Each student is expected to undertake a project in his own organisation. In this project, which starts in the third term, a student is expected to take more of action oriented projects rather than research projects. By action-oriented it is meant that the student should initiate some change in his own



organisation with respect to HRD. This project also may take the form of integrating all that is learnt during the diploma. The project work is also guided by the mentor.

## 6. *Sponsorship*

An important characteristic of the diploma is its admission process. This diploma is being offered only to the employed persons. Candidates sponsored by their organisation are only admitted. The sponsoring organisation should be willing to release a part of the time of the candidate for studies and completion of assignments. As most assignments require access to HRD information, and other forms of support by their organisations, organisational sponsorship was considered essential. It is estimated that every candidate requires to spend about six to eight hours a week on reading the material and completing the assignments. Such time investment does require some organisational support. Some other assignments require interviews and discussions with senior executives. A few other assignments require presentation of reports by the candidate to his senior executives and top management.

Besides these as the diploma is being run without any subsidy from the government, the high fee to be paid requires organisational sponsorship. Appendix II gives the estimated expenses in running the diploma programme and the consequent fee structure.

### **Experience So Far**

This Diploma has already completed about eight months of life. The following have been experienced so far:

1. Most participants report that the Diploma has a good learning value as it makes them think. They also feel that it is different than the diplomas that they are aware of. Appendix III presents some reactions.
2. The assignments have been found to be very useful and have provided data about the HRD practices of various organisations.
3. The contact sessions are very well attended by most of the participants (above 90 per cent of the participants).
4. With large number of assignments involved finding the right kind of people to correct the assignments and give feedback to the students has become a major problem. For example the first term courses involve 30 assignments to be submitted by each candidate. With 100 students there are 3,000 assignments to correct.
5. Sometimes the feedback on assignments is delayed as much as by two months. For a 18 month diploma, two months delay in receiving feedback seems to be pretty long.
6. Those who go through the assignments have found them professionally very enriching as they get to know the HRD practices of various companies/organisations.

### **Some Innovations**

#### 1. *Assignments*

A major innovation in this programme is the nature of assignments. Each assignment is different. The candidate cannot complete the assignment unless he reads the conceptual article. The candidate enjoys doing the assignment as it normally relates to the function he is currently handling or is expected to handle soon. The variety also keeps the monotony down. The motivation level is also

kept high as the candidate could make innovations or changes in his workplace through the assignments.

## 2. *Data Bank*

The assignments done by the students also add to the data bank on HRD practices being maintained at the Academy. The Research Fellows at the Academy found the assignments as useful secondary sources of data for compiling profiles and disseminating information. For example on the basis of the assignments on "Induction Training" a trend paper was written highlighting the induction practices of organisations (Dixit and Ghosh, 1992). A few other papers are being prepared. Such a facility is provided for those who assist the students as assignment evaluators or as mentors.

## 3. *Networking*

The Academy facilitates learning from each other. Thus the names and addresses of all diploma students was mailed to each candidate in the beginning. This was intended to help each candidate to know the others in his city and network with each other.

Another way in which the networking is done is through sending well written assignments of some of the students to others as illustrations. The monthly Diploma News published by the Academy also includes sample assignments for use by all students.

A third form of networking is developed through contact workshops. In one of the contact programmes some of the candidates invited the other students to visit their companies and learn about their HRD practices.

A fourth form of networking is through the complimentary membership offered to all candidates by the National HRD Network. By virtue of this all candidates get the HRD Newsletter and other publications of the National HRD Network.

## 4. *Flexibility*

Another important characteristic of the diploma is its flexibility. For example, when groups of candidates were enrolled from some organisations candidates were encouraged to form into teams and submit group assignments. It was felt that group learning is better in some of the assignments. In case where candidates suggested changes in assignments so that they can do more useful work, they were encouraged to do so without sacrificing the rigour of the assignment. One company instituted awards for best performing teams in the assignments.

## 5. *Professional Development*

A most important characteristic in this distance education programme is the opportunity provided to the candidates to get in touch with Indian realities, Indian HRD practices and Indian HRD practitioners. A result of this is the confidence building and a feeling of professional development taking place in the students.

## Lessons

The experience of this diploma indicates that distance education can be made more enriching and involving through imaginatively designed learning experiences. The principles behind these may not be new, but the applications are not widely used yet in the distance education programmes. Some of the lessons that could be drawn for distance education from this experience are as follows:

1. Professional development programmes offer good opportunities for distance education to innovate as compared to general education programmes.
2. Design the learning in such a way that the learner is actively involved not only while reading but also after reading. Learning by doing should extend beyond the reading material to activities following reading.
3. Keep providing a variety of learning activities so that monotony is reduced. Learning activities can be so designed that the learner in a distance education programme gets highly involved and enjoys learning. Such involvement and enjoyment comes if the learner is able to apply what he is learning to the immediate tasks and surroundings.
4. Provide other forms of feedback from the place of application (e.g., presentations to ones own seniors/top management). Organisations where candidates are employed offer ample learning spaces and learning opportunities. Often the learner himself may not be aware of these. Those who organise distance education could identify these and design the learning activities in such a way that the learner may be able to use these.
5. The institution conducting distance education could be in touch with the sponsoring organisations to create learning support systems for the learner and thus facilitate learning.
6. Get active support of the sponsor. Legitimise learning and communicating the value of learning through the significant others in the environment (e.g., sponsors, seniors, etc.).

Some of these are implementable only when the size of the group is small and the profession is amenable to such learning activities.

### Summary

This paper describes a diploma programme in HRD being offered by the Academy of Human Resource Development in distance education mode to prepare HRD professionals for the HRD function. This diploma ranging over an 18 month period has been started recently. Application oriented assignments, mentors, organisational sponsorship and support to candidates, and the accreditation system are some interesting characteristics of the distance education. Although expensive due to small number, lack of subsidy and high involvement of professional experts, this diploma programme has thrown up a few lessons for making distance learning involving and useful. The paper highlights the characteristics of the programme and presents lessons for distance education.

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**Appendix I**  
**Sample of Assignments Given to Diploma Students in Human Resource Development**

**Course 1 : Introduction to HRD**

There are a total of 21 units and 21 assignments to be completed by the students. Some illustrations are given below:

Sl.No.	Topic Assignment or Learning Activity
1. HRD & Personnel Function	How are the Personnel and HRD functions organised in your organisation (differentiated and integrated)?
2. Induction	Write a brief note about all that is done in your organisation when a new employee joins it. How would you like it to be different? Why?
3. Potential Appraisal	Develop a potential appraisal form for your role in the organisation and assess yourself.
4. Role Analysis	Analyse your present role using the three dimensions suggested for this purpose in the reading.
5. Designing HRD Systems	How will you design a HRD system for your organisation? What will you do to improve HRD system in your organisation? Why?

**Course 2 : Performance Appraisal and HRD**

There are 11 units and 11 assignments. Some illustrations are given below:

Sl. No.	Topic Assignment or Learning Activity
1. Key Performance Areas	Identify the Key Performance Areas of your role using the framework suggested in the chapter.
2. Self-Appraisal	Do a self-appraisal of your performance for last six months using the guidelines suggested in the reading.
3. Performance Analysis	Identify the facilitating and inhibiting factors in relation to your performance in the present.
4. Appraisal Practices in India	Compare the appraisal practices in your organisation with those of others you have learnt about.
5. Implementing Performance Appraisals	What is that you like to do to make appraisals more acceptable in your organisation?

### **Course 3 : Organisation Development and Culture Building**

(There are only three assignments/learning activity for this entire course)

First learning activity requires the candidate to choose a problem or issue that is bothering him/his organisation and develop a proposal for organisational diagnosis.

The second assignment requires the candidate to carry out a diagnosis of any sub-system/department/process using some of the diagnostic tools he has become familiar with during the course.

The third assignment requires him to evaluate any OD work conducted by his organisation using multiple criteria he learnt about.

### **Course 4 : Potential Appraisal and Career Development**

This course has four learning activities.

The first assignment requires the candidate to go through an in-basket exercise on the role of HRD manager and get it evaluated by his mentor and write his learning experience from that.

The second activity requires him to prepare an in-basket exercise for any one role in his organisation.

The third activity requires him to critically analyse the job-rotation to critically analyse the job-rotation policies and practices in his organisation and make recommendations.

The fourth activity requires the candidate to prepare a career path for any one entry level job.

**Appendix II**  
**Professional Diploma Programme in Human Resource Development**  
**Estimated Costs for 100 Students**

<b>Establishment Costs:</b>		(in Rs)
1. Building rentals (@ Rs.8,000/month x 20 months)		1,60,000.00
2. Equipment costs (computer, typewriter, filing cabinet, tables and chairs, telephone, electricity etc. (@ Rs.3,000/month x 20 months)		60,000.00
3. Furnishings		15,000.00
4. Advertisement in newspapers etc.		50,000.00
5. Brochure/Bulletin printing and mailing		15,000.00
		3,00,000.00
<b>Salaries:</b>		(in Rs)
1. Executive/Administrator (@ Rs.5,000/month x 20 months)		1,00,000.00
2. Secretary (@ Rs.2,000/month x 20 months)		40,000.00
3. Helper (@ Rs.1,000/month x 20 months)		20,000.00
4. Professional Fellow (@ Rs.5,000/month x 15 months)		75,000.00
		2,35,000.00
<b>Study Materials:</b>		(in Rs)
1. Books (Rs.2,000 x 125)		2,50,000.00
2. Additional material xeroxed etc. (Rs.400 x 125)		50,000.00
3. Mailing etc., (Rs.50 x 4 mailings x 125)		25,000.00
4. Material preparation costs (Rs.5,000 each x 8 courses)		40,000.00
5. Diploma Newsletter (Rs.2,500 x 12 issues including mailing)		30,000.00
6. Miscellaneous (books) etc.		5,000.00
		4,00,000.00
<b>Contact Workshops:</b> Assuming that six workshops are held at centres, each not having less than 15 participants and one person's travel:		
1. Travel (Rs.5,000 x 6 on average)		30,000.00
2. Living (Rs.1,000 x 6 x 3 days)		18,000.00
3. Honorarium (Rs.500/day x 6 x 3 days)		9,000.00
4. Hiring charges for hall, snacks, video films etc., (Rs.1,500 x 6)		4,000.00
		70,000.00
Repeat the workshop second time		70,000.00

<b>Assignment Feedback and Evaluation:</b>		(in Rs)
Each student needs atleast 5 hours of attention by a professional per course (Rs.100/hour x 5 hours x 8 courses x 100 students)		4,00,000.00
<b>Examinations, Evaluation and Certification:</b>		(in Rs.)
Meeting of Diploma Committee/Academic Council, library additions, video-cassettes, books, journals etc. Master library to be updated.		25,000.00
<b>Total Estimated Costs(in Rs.)</b>		<b>15,00,000.00</b>

1. The estimates are on the conservative side. For example honorarium paid to faculty, travel expenses etc., are on the conservative side.
2. At present no honorarium is being paid to any faculty as they are donating their time thus resulting in a saving of nearly Rs.4,000 per student.
3. The actual fee chargeable from students should be Rs.15,000/- per candidate. However, the Academy has put the fee at half this amount.
4. With large number of students enrolled some of these costs may come down though not substantially.

**Appendix III**  
**Some Early Reactions from Diploma Students**

1. *K. Devaraju (Textool, Coimbatore)*

"I have carefully studied the guidelines and information given and as mentioned I have to be a problem identifier and a problem solver. A few tips pointed out in the guidelines are of course principles of knowledge development and competency improvement for an HRD professional. Now I have set my own pace for reading the course material regularly and identify source of help for my understanding. I am full of confidence in becoming a full-fledged HRD professional through this Diploma."

2. *Julius Sathiaselvan (Madura Coats)*

"I am delighted to be part of the first batch of Diploma programme of the Academy. I have carefully gone through the various practical tips you have enlisted. It is interesting to note that the Diploma has been designed in a very innovative manner and assessments format worked out has been quite unique. I am sure this course will help to mould seasoned HRD professional. I thank you very much for giving me this opportunity for a creative learning."

3. *Dwarka Prasad (SBI, Lucknow)*

"Diploma News provides a lot of guidance and inspiration. The proceedings of the contact programme have been quite useful. Feedback and a good number of assignments have also been reviewed. I convey my gratitude and regards to the resource persons who have evaluated our assignments."

4. *D.K. Likhi (SAIL, Rourkela)*

"I was so happy to receive the feedback on my assignments, and appreciation of my sincerity, interest and commitment to learn. I shall keep on improving with your continuous feedback. I strongly believe that this kind of positive compliments are required for managers in organisations to perform better. I hope that the knowledge imparted to me and to the members of my role set (through me) will lead to a desired shift with more stress on development of human resources. As desired, I shall keep my top management apprised of my feelings about the PA System."

5. *Srinivas Gondhalekar, Sujaya Banerjee, Rakesh Kumar Sinha (Godrej Soaps)*

"Since we discuss every week, we are able to exchange experiences and information that we heard about other companies. This enables us to embellish our assignments. On the whole, we are happy that we are gaining insights into the process of HRD and we are sure our company will be richer for having sponsored us for this programme."

6. *Ram Singh (TELCO, Jamshedpur)*

It would be really good if some assignments are circulated. This would give us better idea of the subject matter and also an idea of what is happening in other organisations."

7. *R.L. Shanmugam (LIC, Madras)*

"I utilise Sundays and other holidays for writing assignments and as such I myself feel that some of my assignments are not upto the mark. However, I will try to take your view-points



into account and prepare assignments in future. I am very thankful for your free and frank appraisal of my assignments."

8. *Fr. Cedric Prakash, s.j. for Pushpa Iyer (candidate) (St. Xavier's Social Service Society)*

"We are happy with the progress that our participant is making with regard to the Diploma programme. We are also grateful to you for the interest shown in helping her to attain the desired objectives."

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