One of the challenges of evaluating the modern era of HRD is that it is still ongoing. History, like high school relationships, is usually best judged with the perspective of longitudinal distance. The challenge is made all the more difficult when considering modern HRD in a similar manner to other eras contained in this text. While the pattern of interplay between philosophy, theory, and practice is more or less evident in previous eras, our own biases tend to interfere with our ability to “step out” of ourselves and evaluate our own philosophical assumptions. Because, that is what a consideration of the modern era requires. By reading this book you may have some role in the modern expression of HRD as a discipline, be it as a practitioner or theorist. If Gosney’s model of modern era theory and practice generation in HRD, proposed in chapter 1, holds true, then we are bound to our own current historical context.

Nevertheless, an evaluation is still worthwhile and profitable. While we cannot escape our current historical context, we can embrace and bring to the foreground the philosophies (and philosophical assumptions) that undergird our current theory and practice. This chapter is broken into two main sections. The first section is a review of the emergence of HRD as a formal discipline and a consideration of two methodological philosophies that influence its current theory and practice. The second section is a review of the influence of specific schools of thought in psychology on HRD theory and practice, as well as a teasing out of the philosophical assumptions various branches of psychology hold.

HRD in the Modern Era: The Formalization of a Discipline

As a new millennium approached, effective change management became the defining aspect of and primary purpose for HRD. Nadler’s (1970) definition of HRD clearly asserted this focus on change when he stated that
"HRD means (1) a series of organized activities, (2) conducted within a specified time and (3) designed to produce behavioral change" (p. 3). While all change does not fall under the purview of HRD, certain organizational change was deemed largely dependent upon that organization’s human resources and their ability to execute strategy and learn as that strategy was implemented (Beer & Nohira, 2001). As HRD progressed as a discipline, greater focus on this fundamental effort to support behavioral change and organizational change became apparent. This was accomplished through the formal establishment of the HRD professional, guided primarily through the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) (DeSimone & Werner, 2012). Although the ASTD was founded in the 1940s, by the 1980s it had already established itself as a key supporter of HRD primarily from a practitioner’s perspective (Miller, 2008). Now known as the Association for Training and Development (ATD), it is the largest professional organization for HRD practitioners (McLean & Akdere, 2015).

The first challenge for HRD as a profession was to define who were, in fact, HRD practitioners. Hansen (1980) defined the HRD practitioner as falling into one of seven categories:

1. Members of professional training associations (such as ASTD)
2. Members of organizations with historical interest in HRD (such as the American Society of Public Administration)
3. Members of human resource environment (or organizational development) associations such as the OD Network
4. Adult education professionals
5. Public remedial employment training professionals
6. Vocational and technical education professionals
7. Members of educational technology professional organizations.
   (pp. 6–7)

Hansen (1984) later reinforced these same seven categories and included a definition of the HRD practitioner as follows:

Those persons who are primarily engaged in attracting to the workplace and fostering human resources, providing for their training, education and development in the workplace or within organizations ancillary thereto, and facilitating the management and utilization of these resources in such a way that both their goals and the goals of the organization are achieved to the maximum extent possible. (p. 72)

Along with defining what an HRD practitioner was, the discipline also was in search of defining the scope of the HRD professional's