This chapter describes the results of the case study research in The Netherlands. Four organisations were studied: the chemicals producer Akzo Nobel Chemicals (BU Salt), the telecommunications company Ericsson, the IC-T service organisation BAC (the IT centre of the Dutch Internal Revenue Service) and the construction company KIBC.

The first four sections contain full case study descriptions (based on data from 1998), including for each case:

- background information on the organisation, such as core businesses, number of employees, and current (learning-oriented) strategies;
- vision of the HRD professionals on their (new) roles in the learning (oriented) organisation;
- strategies they employ to realise these roles.

The next section describes factors that (negatively or positively) influence the achievement of these envisioned roles. General conclusions and a summary are provided in the final section.

**Akzo Nobel Chemicals – chemicals manufacturer (salt)**

**The company**

**Facts and figures**

Akzo Nobel Chemicals BV (Akzo) is a multinational concern with operations in over 50 countries. Its core business is chemical production. The location in Hengelo is a production facility with four business units: Salt, Base Chemicals, Functional Chemicals, and Energy. The case study focuses on Business Unit Salt, which employs 240 people. Its primary process is salt and brine production and processing.

The HRD function is a shared function of the central HR department and the local HR department (one HR manager, one HRD practitioner) from BU Salt, together with line management.
Business strategy

Akzo Nobel was faced with drastic changes in its markets that made it necessary to improve the organisation’s learning capacity. Akzo Nobel held a monopoly position for a long time, but saw this position disappear. Moreover, prices lowered and client demands changed. As a result, quality management and cost reductions became the main business targets. Continuous improvement is a prerequisite. In order to realise this, the company wanted to change its culture.

The concept of the learning organisation is seen as one in which employees have more responsibilities and which has a work environment and an organisational culture in which employees accept broader responsibilities. Training is an important element of this type of organisation, according to Akzo Nobel. As its location director stated:

The concept of the learning organisation as such isn’t used at Akzo Nobel. But it’s all about giving employees more responsibility within the organisation. But if employees get more responsibility, they have to be able or willing to take this responsibility. They need to become flexible and able and this requires training.

The plant manager from BU Salt made a similar statement:

Training and development is an important step: it gives confidence, it’s a way of telling employees what you, as an organisation, are doing.

Change processes

In order to realise the strategic objectives and the desired culture change, several activities were undertaken. First, the structure of Akzo Nobel was changed, the organisation was split up into four business units (BUs) under the leadership of a plant manager.

Second, Akzo Nobel started a process of on-going change, in order to adapt to new situations but also to show employees that making changes is very important for organisational development and that employee development is crucial. For instance, the company implemented a new system of setting mission and targets. The company formulates a mission and at different levels, managers and employees have to derive department or team targets. Improving the communication within the company also received attention; much information is made available for everyone. Next to this, attention was paid to ‘managing total quality’ and the introduction of quality improvement teams. In quality improvement teams, for example, employees with diverse functions are working together on problems Akzo Nobel is facing or improvements that need to be made. In this way people can learn from each other and the organisation benefits from the outcomes of projects performed by the teams.

A third activity, seen as crucial in increasing employee responsibility, was the introduction of self-directed work teams. Training activities were part of the implementation. Employees received training for multi-skilling, as well as social and communication skills. Managers were also trained in their new role as coaches.
An initiative to stimulate employee development and responsibility for their own careers is the ‘job path’ plan: for several jobs, development paths have been defined. For each stage, knowledge and skill requirements are formulated and learning modules developed. Managers and employees decide together how employees function and if they want to grow to new jobs. Together they also formulate individual training plans. The system of ‘star tasks’ is similar, but more simple. It is essentially a job enrichment scheme; employees can enrich their jobs with extra tasks, normally performed by staff departments, for which they have to follow training (provided by staff departments themselves). The objective is to increase motivation for learning new tasks and to show people they have more possibilities for growth.

**HRD within Akzo Nobel Chemicals**

*People involved in HRD*

HRD is regarded as one aspect of the managerial process, and line managers fulfil an active role in assessment of training needs and formulation of training plans. Employees are also expected to fulfil an active role with regard to their own development. HRD professionals support them and support the organisation as a whole by providing advice and HRD products (training, training plans etc.). HRD policy is formulated by the HR manager and management of the business unit.

*HRD objectives*

HRD’s current policy is focused on supporting both organisational and personal development. The first happens through longer-lasting training processes on topics derived from organisational strategy. As mentioned before, Akzo Nobel currently pays a lot of attention to increasing employees’ participation in organisational development. Among the activities used to reach this goal are implementing self-directed work teams and quality improvement teams, and improving communication and information flows. The HRD function supports these activities by organising training and work sessions and by supporting teams and management. Second, individual training programs are developed in strong co-ordination between management and employees, mainly based on function stretch rather than organisational needs. Though training is seen as a means to reach organisational objectives and create a flexible, profitable organisation, some managers are of the opinion that the current HRD policy is still too focused on individual employees’ needs instead of organisational needs.

*HRD strategies*

In what ways does the HRD function try to realise its envisioned role? It was found that HRD practitioners from Akzo Nobel consider HRD policy as a tool of management, but at the same time they are of the opinion that this hasn’t been realised yet. To change this, the function of training co-ordinator was suspended, because this
was just a control function, which was not felt to offer added value to the HRD department. The tasks of the training co-ordinator have been taken over by line managers and the HR practitioners. Boundaries of tasks and responsibilities aren’t clear yet, but managers have an important responsibility. The removal of the function of training co-ordinator and the decentralisation of HRD tasks to the diverse business units should improve the match between HRD policy and company policy. Current HRD policy is mainly focused on job enrichment. Employees are supported in reaching a higher operator level (job path programme). Moreover, every employee can learn extra tasks; the so called ‘star tasks’ (see previous section).

With regard to the collective HRD interventions at Akzo Nobel, it can be said that the focus is on training courses (with a special focus on social and team skills) to support the implementation of self-directed work teams and quality improvement teams (e.g. by training courses on team development and problem solving skills).

**Ericsson – telecommunications company**

**The company**

**Facts and figures**

Ericsson Group is a world wide organisation with operations in 130 countries and 90,000 employees. The Dutch location which served as a case study is Ericsson Telecommunication (ETM). Its main activities include improving telecommunication infrastructures and companies’ communication networks. The case focuses mainly on the research and development department, which employs about 450 people. The R&D department not only works on product development, but also participates in sales, delivery and maintenance of products.

The HRD function of R&D is a shared function of the central HR department of Ericsson, the Training Support Centre and the fifteen competence managers working for the R&D department.

**Business strategy**

Just like Akzo Nobel, Ericsson was faced with drastic changes in its market because of liberalisation of the telecommunications market, changing clients and client demands, and growing competition. Moreover, technology in telecommunications is evolving very fast. A strong client orientation (instead of the old product orientation), efficiency and a focus on knowledge and competencies of employees as the central resource are important strategies in order to adapt to these external challenges.

At Ericsson, the concept of the learning organisation is never mentioned in organisational statements or documents. In addition, the word ‘learning’ seems to have a negative focus; it seems to be associated with time-consuming, passive activities that take place outside the workplace. But even though they don’t always recognise it as such, the opposite is true. In fact, employees at Ericsson are continually learning in an informal way, during work. One of the respondents, a senior manager, stated that
there seems to be an ‘enormous drive for learning’ at Ericsson. This is considered to be very important by the company, pro-activeness is an important element of the organisational culture. The HR department’s head stated that:

it is important that an organisation is being created, which is ahead of future situations concerning organisational culture and strategy. This invites employees to new behaviours. It’s of great importance that employees want to be successful. This is the greatest source for learning and development. The ability of an organisation to learn and develop depends on the degree in which employees want to be successful.

Change processes

In 1993, a new Ericsson management team introduced the ETM Better Best programme, which was characterised by striving for business excellence through continuous changes and client service. An important element was a change in the organisation structure, which was again changed in 1995, from an organisation with departments to a process-oriented organisation around so called ‘client axes’. In a client axis all processes for a particular type of client are linked up and a multidisciplinary team, composed of employees from all departments, is responsible for product development, sales, delivery and maintenance of products delivered to these clients, but also for internal processes such as process management, product management and competence management. In other words: for all activities necessary to provide a good product for a client.

Other important activities to change the existing culture and practices include the introduction of an annual management cycle (strategic plan, self-evaluation, action plans) together with a new integrated management information system which makes available relevant strategic information (which is, of course, necessary to conduct self-evaluations and make action plans). In order to reach the desired business excellence, a total quality management system was implemented. And, finally, to prepare employees for future challenges, a system for competence management was introduced. With this system, Ericsson hopes to keep its source of competencies up-to-date through on-going evaluations of competency gaps (see Box 9.1).

HRD within Ericsson

People involved in HRD

With the introduction of competence management, Ericsson has separated process management and people management. There are now three types of managers: operational managers, process owners (who are responsible for process management) and competence managers (responsible for people management). The latter function as a kind of internal job agency: at the start of each new project, they see to it that each project team incorporates the necessary competencies (i.e. the necessary employees) to fulfil its objectives. Competence managers are not part of the HRD
function, they report to line management. Besides supporting employees with producing personal development plans and career development plans, they are also responsible for analysing required competencies in the organisation now and in the future (see Box 9.2).

An active role is expected from employees in their own development. They have to address their own development needs and career wishes, and work on a personal development plan. The competence managers formulate HR policies, which includes competence management policy. The Training Support Centre provides advice on fulfilling individual training needs, provides training and acts as a broker for external training agencies.

**HRD objectives**

HRD’s main objective is to support the company policy, and more concretely, its strategic plan (which is formulated every year). The main tool is the competence management process, which is used to make sure the competencies resources are sufficient to fulfil strategic objectives. The pro-active orientation is important: the HRD function not only wants to support current objectives, but also the future ones.
A related objective is to support and stimulate the ‘drive for learning’ within the company, although this is mainly a managerial responsibility. By providing information on corporate challenges and involving employees in strategic planning, the company hopes to increase employees’ awareness of the need for learning.

Another important area for HRD is supporting knowledge management, for instance by using job rotation as a means to absorb new knowledge and share existing knowledge.

**HRD strategies**

To a large degree, one could say that the HRD function has already implemented its desired role. In order to realise a competence-based organisation (a corporate objective), competence managers were installed. Together with employees, these managers produce competence analyses and personal development plans. The Training Support Centre provides the training to realise these plans (either internally or externally). Of course, in practice, realisation is sometimes difficult. Operational managers are not yet used to asking for ‘competencies’ for a certain project, they ask for specific people. Problems arise for the competence manager when several managers ask for the same people. A second difficulty is that competence managers have to fulfil the current need for competencies but also need to safeguard individual development of employees, and sometimes these two tasks don’t match. A third problem is the fact that each competence managers works for some 150 employees. This is a large group and it is difficult to find the time to talk regularly with everyone. Competence managers have to be careful not to let their role be limited to a mentoring role, losing the strategic (planning) aspect.

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**Box 9.2 Competence/resource managers at Ericsson and BAC**

BAC and Ericsson both employ competence managers (called ‘resource managers’ at BAC). Their task is to keep the ‘total competence base’ up to date, with the aim to prepare the organisation for future challenges (strategic role).

These are regular managers with mainly HRD tasks. Besides supporting employees in formulating personal development plans and career development plans (practical role), they are also responsible for analysing required competencies in the organisation now and in the future. The HRD department is, in both organisations, not the major partner in competence management. Their role is a supportive one. In strong coordination with competence managers and the employees, training activities are offered and HRD policy is linked to competence management.

On the basis of competence management, and in co-ordination with the employees and HRD professionals, personal development plans are made, which form the basis for the planning of training activities. It seems that for competence managers as well as HRD professionals it is not always clear who is responsible for what tasks. Yet, it is important that clarity is achieved.
BAC – IT Centre of the Dutch Inland Revenue Service

The company

Facts and figures

BAC is the IT Centre of the Dutch Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Its most important task is supporting the primary processes of the IRS (levying and collecting taxes) with IT tools and techniques. Core activities are designing and building information systems and technical infrastructures, and exploiting and maintaining these structures on the diverse locations of the IRS. BAC employs 2,500 people in total. The case study focused on the Systems Development division, which employs 1,100 people. This division’s main task is to develop information systems and provide advice.

The HRD function is a shared function of the central HR department of BAC (two HR practitioners, one HRD professional), the Open Learning Centre and ten local resource managers who allocate employees over the different projects (and who are responsible for facilitating employee development and career counselling).

Business strategy

BAC is a special organisation, in the sense that it offers services to just one client, the Internal Revenue Service. Changes in this organisation, such as striving for a faster collection process, have had a great impact on BAC’s work because these changes have technological consequences. The fast changes in IT technology and social trends (such as a lack of IT staff on the labour market and the introduction of the Euro) also required BAC to change. The organisation wants to become more flexible and improve its client centeredness by changing from a activity-oriented structure to a process chain structure and by decentralisation.

Just like Ericsson, BAC hasn’t officially stated that it wants to become a learning organisation. Still the concept is of great importance for the HRD function of BAC. Learning from mistakes, learning from each other and sharing knowledge are important issues for the HRD department. They believe each of these should be integrated in the methods and procedures at BAC. According to the HRD professional at BAC:

our organisation hasn’t explicitly stated that it aims to becoming a learning organisation. BAC is working on improving knowledge management: ‘How can we share information in our organisation and how can we learn from each other?’

The managing director stated:

we are trying to integrate the concept of the learning organisation in our processes and procedures. This appears from the way we are dealing with mistakes. We are continually examining if mistakes could have been prevented. We make a case study of it and in this way every employee can learn from it.
Change processes

In order to respond adequately to changes in technology, in the IRS and society as a whole, and to improve knowledge management, several organisational changes have been made. Several supporting units (including HR) were decentralised to the separate units, and a chain-oriented horizontal structure was implemented in which BAC, suppliers and clients all take part in the chain of activities necessary to provide a service or product. BAC tries to become more flexible in responding to external developments through this management orientation. BAC has also introduced the Dutch Quality Management model (NKP-model) as a management tool. This model functions as a framework for organisational development and quality management at BAC.

In addition, BAC has started some activities to involve employees more actively in their own careers and to increase awareness of the importance of employee learning for BAC’s development. The most important ones are: introduction of competence management and personal development plans, and the installation of an Open Learning Centre, where employees can study at times that suit them. The intranet is used as a means to provide information on possible training and learning possibilities, linked to competence profiles. A coaching scheme was implemented for management (result oriented management). This entails a process in which managers and employees together decide on development areas and desired performance, and assess the realisation of these objectives. Managers support employees in reaching the targets (see Box 9.3).

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**Box 9.3 Coaching scheme at BAC**

BAC has implemented a system of coaching, with the aim of supporting employee development in a systematic way and on a continuing basis. Coaching forms the basis for the process between manager and employees. In regular coaching meetings between manager and employee questions like ‘how is the work going’ and ‘what can I as manager do to help you’ are discussed.

Assessment takes place once a year and on the basis of contribution criteria. Results are laid down in an assessment form.

On the basis of both activities, a personal development plan is produced for each employee. At the end of the year a new assessment takes place in which development activities are included.

The role of the HRD department is to support managers in their new role as a coach and to provide training and courses to employees on the basis of the personal development plans.
HRD within BAC

People involved in HRD

Until 1996, the HRD function was performed by the HR department. This was mainly a brokers’ role and an administrative function. Now, most operational HRD tasks are decentralised, and every division has its own HRD practitioners. The HRD consultant at the central HR department now has more of a ‘directors’ function and a consulting role towards management. He also formulates HRD policy for BAC as a whole. The division has its own training coordinator who fulfils the role of broker. Just like Ericsson, BAC has introduced resource managers who just like competence managers, are responsible for supporting employee development and for looking at future needed competencies (see Box 9.2). The Open Learning Centre, managed by the HR department, is an important part of the HRD function.

HRD objectives

The HRD department made the first moves towards implementing competence management (see Box 9.1) with the aim to monitor employee development and match employee development and organisational development. The department wants employees to have an active role towards their own development. As a concrete objective, BAC wants seventy five per cent of its employees to have a personal development plan.

A second important objective is to improve knowledge management, especially sharing of knowledge by improving communication among employees (part of creating a learning culture).

Improving employees’ mobility and multi-skilling is also an important target. BAC wants to have versatile employees, who are prepared for changes.

Recently, the training network was founded: local training coordinators from different divisions communicate together with the aim to improve the HRD function and create conditions for lifelong learning.

HRD strategies

Decentralisation of HRD was a very important strategy to improve the integration of HRD within the company and to link HRD policy to company policy. It enabled the central HRD professional to fulfil more of a director’s and strategy-making role. HRD policy is now closely linked to organisational issues such as competence management, knowledge management and quality management. The policy is oriented towards supporting organisational objectives. Strategies concerning HRD interventions are quite diverse. On-the-job learning (informally), coaching and using intranet and theme meetings are important methods to increase employee flexibility (multi-skilling, readiness for change). Theme meetings and the intranet are also important to achieve knowledge sharing. To improve knowledge management, a special project group was installed (see Box 9.4). Other activities to increase employee learning (and employee
KIBC – construction company

The company

Facts and figures

KIBC is a large group of Dutch and Belgian construction companies that realise projects in housing, commercial and industrial building (thirty per cent by own property development). KIBC plays an important role in stimulating innovation within the building industry, which is on the whole a quite traditional and hierarchical sector. The case focuses on Utility Construction, a division which employs 650 employees (in total, KIBC employs 1,900 people).

The HRD function is shared between KIBC’s central HR department and the local HR department (two HR practitioners, one HRD professional) from the Commercial Building Division.

Business strategy

At the moment KIBC is facing some influential external developments, mainly stemming from new client demands. Building companies are expected to play an increasingly broader role in the entire process of realising a new building. They are not only involved in the actual construction, but also in tasks such as making plans.

Box 9.4 Knowledge management project at BAC

At BAC, a knowledge management project took place with the objective to find out how dissemination of knowledge takes place within the company. A special workgroup composed by members who are interested in knowledge management executed a pilot study.

The workgroup interviewed for example members of a multidisciplinary improvement team working on solving an existing problem. The interviews took place every two weeks. Questions they asked included:

- What is the central problem?
- Where are you searching for knowledge to solve the problem?
- Who are you discussing this information with?

The role of the HRD department was a more supporting role. The HRD function was a partner in this project. For BAC it was found that the most important problem they were facing is that most employees find it very difficult to admit that they have a problem and to ask colleagues or managers for information to solve the problem. Knowing these results, BAC introduced these problems in a culture change process which is now ongoing.
Cases from The Netherlands

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(together with architects) and financing projects. Moreover, the building industry in the Netherlands is a very unstable sector (with many mergers) with few possibilities for growth, which increases competition. A related problem is the difficulties of finding well-qualified staff.

In order to face competition adequately, KIBC aims to become a market- and client-oriented organisation that is able to respond in a timely way to new questions and other market developments. Instead of the current strategy that is highly inwardly oriented, it wants to develop an externally-oriented strategy. KIBC describes itself as wanting to become a learning organisation. In its mission statement the firm states that it ‘wants to be a client-oriented, learning organisation, which timely and adequately adapts to the expectations from clients and to the changes in the market’ (source: KIBC internal documents).

In KIBC’s view, a learning organisation is, in the words of the HR manager:

an organisation that (…) communicates with clients, investigates market developments and knows what its clients want; derives a clear strategy from these market developments and client’s wishes, implements this through projects, evaluates its projects and presents the results to employees; has a clear view on where it wants to go, translates this into necessary activities and competencies; expects an active role of employees who communicate on their own careers.

Central to KIBC’s first steps towards becoming a learning organisation are two points: (1) making available or directly providing all information needed to employees and (2) making sure this information is used in the organisation, especially for improvements and innovations. The managing director HR formulated this as follows:

we use the concept of the learning organisation because in this organisation a lot of knowledge is available and created at different places. We have to organise or direct the organisation in such a way that knowledge is available for every employee who needs this information, that constantly new knowledge is created for example because of contacts with clients or by embedding problems.

Change processes

In common with the other case study organisations, KIBC has implemented structural changes to support the development process. The old organisational structure, a collection of building companies, was replaced by a new structure based on different sectors for basic activities. Business plans are now made jointly, on the basis of mutual strategy formulation.

Other important activities include new methods for strategy formulation (strategy sessions, joint strategy formulation processes) and the development of a clear organisational profile for the market.

Activities related to stimulating employee learning include a new performance assessment system in which managers and employees set individual performance targets, managers coach employees in realising these targets and at the end of the year
the employee’s performance is assessed. This approach enables a systematic discussion on development needs, and provides a means to link business development with personal development.

A second important (and related) activity is the implementation of a competence management system. This is in a very early stage of development.

Managers also receive attention, through an internal management development course. Managers are provided with workshops on coaching and on the new performance assessment system.

**HRD within KIBC**

People involved in HRD

HRD tasks are at the moment predominantly a responsibility of the central HR department and the local HR practitioners in the different sectors. The centralised HR department is mainly focused on HRD policy, the decentralised HR practitioners are working on the more traditional HRD tasks. From employees and managers a more active role is expected. The HRD manager thinks HRD tasks should be their responsibility and not so much of the HR department. The younger managers are picking up on these new tasks quite readily. In the ideal situation HRD will become more of a shared responsibility of HR professionals, managers and employees. The HR department should fulfil a director’s role as a ‘manager of learning and change’ and a ‘learning and training consultant’. Management should take the initiative by recognising training needs and supporting employee learning.

**HRD objectives**

At the moment, the HR department is making a shift from a more traditional control orientation on human resources towards an approach centred around development. The HR department is focusing more and more on organisational development and linking HRD policy in order to support organisation’s policy, and less on operational control tasks with regard to personnel. New activities are for instance translating the business plan into functions and matching competence profiles and leading a strategic discussion on KIBC’s future. Important issues for the HRD department are for example a new vision on leadership, innovation of assessment policy and implementation of competence management.

Key objectives are the implementation of coaching and result-oriented assessment (new management style), and stimulating employees to take initiatives with regard to their own training and career.

**HRD strategies**

The new manager of the HR department has had a great impact on the HRD function. He is the initiator for the new development-oriented policy. Decentralisation of HRD tasks towards local HR departments and (line) managers is also an important strategy to realise the new HRD role.
The decentralised HR departments are still very control-oriented while the central HR department is working on making a move towards a more development-oriented HRD policy. Initiatives like the use of competence management are still ‘under construction’.

To support current organisational issues the HR department organises training courses on topics such as coaching and result-oriented leadership and client orientation. But other activities to support employee learning in general are also undertaken. For instance, the HR department pays much attention to organising training courses on management development and innovating the assessment procedures. Both should lead to a realisation of the objectives of coaching, result-oriented leadership and active employees.

Factors influencing HRD’s role and how HRD deals with them

The preceding sections described the visions and strategies of the four case study organisations with regard to becoming a learning organisation, as well as HRD’s role in this process. This section describes factors which affect the achievement (or lack of achievement) of the envisioned role of the HRD department. Inhibiting factors, facilitating factors and strategies to overcome constraints are briefly discussed.

Inhibiting factors

All Dutch case study organisations were found to be facing some inhibiting factors in the change process towards a learning (oriented) organisation. Table 9.1 lists the most significant ones.

For all organisations it can be said that work pressure is the most inhibiting factor for achieving the envisioned HRD role. Other important projects are so time demanding that HRD activities are decreasing in importance.

A second important factor is lack of motivation and support from management. Sometimes this is related to the time factor: managers are so busy already, that they are not eager to take on new tasks, even though the HRD professionals try to support them in doing so.

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<tr>
<th>Inhibiting factors</th>
<th>Akzo Nobel</th>
<th>ETM</th>
<th>BAC</th>
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<td>Lack of time</td>
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<td>Lack of motivation and support from management</td>
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<td>Lack of motivation and responsibility for learning from employees</td>
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<td>Difficult position competence/resource managers</td>
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<td>Insufficient learning culture</td>
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A lack of motivation on the part of employees, as experienced in Akzo, BAC and KIBC, can probably also be traced back to the same reason. An extra problem is that employees sometimes don’t see the need for learning, so they don’t feel responsible. This goes for uninformed employees, but also for older employees who have worked for the same company for a long time.

Lack of understanding of the HRD policy compounds the motivational problem. Employees and managers will only be motivated once they understand the reasons and methods of the new policy, but this is not yet the case in all organisations (BAC, KIBC).

An interesting problem is the difficult position of the competence managers and resource managers (BAC and Ericsson). This presents a serious problem because these managers play a key role in the implementation of competence management in BAC and Ericsson. For Ericsson especially, the constant work pressure for competence managers is seen as an important inhibiting factor. Because of a lack of time competence managers are continually working on the daily support of employees. They have no time to focus on future needed competencies, which is also a very important task. The company is now working on extra administrative support for competence managers in order to decrease their work pressure.

A similar situation can be encountered for the resource managers from BAC, who have a similar role and face similar problems. Employees expect them to pay attention for employee development, project managers want them to provide good employees who are able to work on all kinds of tasks and who are quickly available and top managers want the resource manager to continually look for long term developments and consequences for employees. It is not easy to resolve these tensions.

Finally, an insufficient learning culture is an inhibiting factor for BAC and KIBC, as a result of a long-term focus on formal training only.

Conducive factors

A large number of factors that support the development towards a learning (oriented) organisation were found. Table 9.2 gives an overview of the most important ones.

Whereas a lack of a clear HRD policy and communication on HRD’s new role is an inhibiting factor, a clear policy and good communication are conducive to the change process, because this positively influences motivation for change. For Akzo, for example, improvements in the general information and communication flows on HRD as well as other policies turned out to be a successful strategy to improve

<table>
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<th>Conducive factors</th>
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<td>Clear HRD policy</td>
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<td>Clear (HRD) communication</td>
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<td>Increasing learning opportunities and facilities</td>
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<td>Supporting teams</td>
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<td>Support of management</td>
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participation of employees. As they knew more about the company, their involvement and willingness to learn grew. A similar story can be told for the other companies, who experience a positive influence on employee motivation for learning from new organisational structures and strategy-formulation processes (as a result of which employees know more of the company and its objectives).

Increasing learning possibilities and facilities for learning also help the change process (mentioned by Akzo, BAC, KIBC). For instance, at Akzo Nobel, the new possibilities for job enrichment and social skills had a very positive influence on employees willingness to learn and learning skills.

Likewise, supporting teams can also help the change process (Akzo, Ericsson). For instance, BAC mentioned improvement teams as a positive factor. Employees from all functions work together on problems, and learn to solve problems in a systematic way. They learn to work with other people and to look at problems from different points of view. The supportive role of the HRD department proved to be of great importance for these teams.

Lastly, HRD professionals from KIBC considered the new board of directors, especially for HRD, as an important conducive factor. The new board of directors and the new head of the department HRD both disseminate that they totally agree with the new direction in which KIBC is developing. This is an important stimulus for employees to play an active role and to take initiatives.

Coping strategies

Strategies to cope with the inhibiting factors differed for the four case organisations. For Ericsson, a major problem is the difficulties competence managers experience in their new role. Therefore, the company is now working on providing extra administrative support in order to decrease their work pressure (so they have more time to work on strategic personnel issues). For BAC, lack of time (other projects demand more attention) and lack of a learning culture are important constraints. In order to improve the link between HRD policy and company policy the HRD department wants to implement director groups in which HRD professionals, top managers, line managers and resource managers participate to improve this link (see Box 9.5). To stimulate a learning culture the HRD function works to increase possibilities for informal learning and knowledge sharing. Finally, KIBC found that improving HRD policy and improving communication and information flows are both very useful in decreasing resistance and increasing motivation for learning.

Summary and conclusions

Organisational context

Four Dutch organisations were discussed: Akzo Nobel Chemicals, Ericsson Telecommunication, BAC (IT Centre of the Dutch Internal Revenue Service) and KIBC. An overview of the characteristics of the case study organisations, such as sector, number of employees, HRD function, number of HRD practitioners and HRD investments is provided in Table 9.3.
Table 9.3 Overview of Dutch case study organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company and sector</th>
<th>Number of employees</th>
<th>HRD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akzo Nobel Chemicals, Business Unit Salt</td>
<td>Total: 700</td>
<td>• Central HR department/local HR practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chemical industry</td>
<td>BU Salt: 240</td>
<td>• 1 HR manager central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ericsson Telecommunications, research &amp;</td>
<td>Total: 1,500</td>
<td>• HR department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development (R&amp;D) telecommunications</td>
<td>R&amp;D: 450</td>
<td>• Training Support Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAC (IT Centre Internal Revenue Service),</td>
<td>Total: 2,500</td>
<td>• competence managers (15 in R&amp;D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems Development Division, information</td>
<td>SO: 1,100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technology services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIBC, Utility Building</td>
<td>Total: 1900</td>
<td>Central HR department (2 HR practitioners)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Unit, building sector</td>
<td>UB: 650</td>
<td>Local HR department (1 HR practitioner)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For all Dutch case study organisations it was found that the main driving force for change was the need to deal with strong competitive markets (for all but BAC) and/or fast technological changes. In order to respond to these developments the case organisations want to improve their client-centeredness (Ericsson, BAC, KIBC). Related strategic objectives are: increasing flexibility (BAC), increasing cost effectiveness.
(Akzo Nobel, Ericsson) and realising quality improvements (Akzo Nobel, KIBC). Very important in all cases is the creation of a new organisational culture, which reflects the market orientation but which also stresses the importance of employee learning to achieve client service (because employee learning and knowledge sharing are essential tools in achieving issues such as flexibility, client service, improvements and innovation).

In order to improve client-centredness, all cases engaged in a reorganisation. Ericsson and BAC adopted a process oriented structure, in which they try to manage their work processes as a long chain from suppliers to customers. Three case organisations (Akzo Nobel, BAC, KIBC) adopted a new method for strategy formulation and planning, in which a central strategy is translated in different operational policies and targets on the lower management levels. Two case study organisations also improved their communication systems and the way information is shared among employees (Akzo Nobel, Ericsson). Both strategies can be regarded as ways to increase employee commitment to and knowledge on the organisation and the challenges it faces. This may positively influence the motivation for learning.

Total quality management is also an important strategy (Akzo Nobel, Ericsson, BAC), which can be seen as a means to realise on-going improvements, using employees knowledge of the work processes.

Several efforts to increase possibilities for employee learning are also visible in these case organisations. Most common are the use of a competence management system (Ericsson, BAC and KIBC) and a new role for managers who set performance targets with employees and at the same time derive learning needs (sometimes written down in a PDP) (Akzo Nobel, BAC, KIBC). It is interesting to note that three companies provide training for managers in order to fulfil their new role as coaches (Akzo Nobel, BAC, KIBC).

HRD’s envisioned role

It seems that HRD departments from all four case organisations share the opinion that the more traditional HR and HRD tasks should become the responsibility of line management while the HRD department is changing towards a more supportive and directing role. Not every department has realised this task division yet. Linked to this notion is the active role that is expected from employees in their own development, especially within BAC and Ericsson (highly-educated professionals) but also within Akzo Nobel and KIBC (less educated manual workers). The emphasis of new HRD tasks is on matching HRD policy with organisational policy and on a consulting role towards line management.

Likewise, HRD departments of all four case study organisations hold the view that HRD policy is a ‘tool of management’ to be used to realise the attainment of organisational objectives. Next to this, all HRD functions aim to support employee development, as a tool for organisation development. Competence management and the use of personal development plans are the tools used to achieve the link between these two. Sometimes employee development and organisation development are difficult to combine. Akzo Nobel for instance, still experiences that the accent in the
personal training plans is on personal development; the link with company strategy is more obscure.

**Strategies adopted to realise HRD’s new role**

When looking at strategies with regard to HRD organisation it can be said that all HRD departments have changed the organisation of their department to a greater or lesser extent. Decentralisation of HRD tasks is an important means to realise HRD’s envisioned role of policy-maker and consultant. Managers have become important new participants in the HRD function, especially at BAC and Ericsson where resource managers/competence managers have been implemented. They are responsible for employee development focused on present but also on future needed competencies for the organisation and for individual employees.

Facilitating courses remains the most important means to fulfil identified learning needs, but some organisations are experimenting with other, more informal ways of learning. For instance BAC, where knowledge sharing through the intranet and theme meetings is stimulated, Akzo Nobel, where employees can learn through participating in quality improvement teams, and KIBC, where managers are supported in their new role as coaches. Ericsson does underline the importance of informal learning on the job, but does not deliberately try to stimulate or support it. It does, however try to motivate people for learning and changing (stimulate the ‘drive for learning’).

**Influencing factors**

For all four HRD departments it can be said that work pressure is the most inhibiting factor for attaining the envisioned HRD role. Other important projects are so time demanding that HRD activities are decreasing in importance. A second important factor is lack of motivation and support from management and a lack of motivation on the part of employees. Lack of understanding of the HRD policy may compound the motivational problem. A particular problem is the difficult position of the competence managers and resource managers in BAC and Ericsson.

Whereas a lack of a clear HRD policy and communication on HRD’s new role is an inhibiting factor, a clear policy and good communication are conducive to the change process, because it positively influences motivation for change.

Increasing learning possibilities and facilities for learning also help the change process.

Strategies to cope with constraints differed for the four case organisations. Ericsson is now working on providing extra administrative support in order to decrease competence manager’s work load. BAC wants to implement ‘director groups’ in order to improve the link between HRD policy and company policy. To stimulate a learning culture the HRD function works to increase possibilities for informal learning and knowledge sharing. KIBC, finally, found that improving HRD policy and improving communication and information flows are both very useful in decreasing resistance and increasing motivation for learning.