Since I was a young boy, facing many challenges (I am legally blind, I was the shortest kid in my class, I came from an upper-lower class family in Canada), I have been an optimist. One of my favorite stories as a child, *The Little Engine that Could* (Piper, 1930, though credit has been given to many other authors) was about the smallest train engine in the yard that was able to take a long train over the mountain when bigger engines could not succeed. It kept saying, “I think I can, I think I can,” turning into, “I knew I could, I knew I could.”

As a high school student, I discovered the poem, *Andrea del Sarto*, by Robert Browning, in which Browning said, “A man’s [person’s] reach should exceed his [her] grasp, or what’s a heaven for?” The point is that one achieves more when higher goals are set than if easy-to-reach goals are set, and then no more effort is put into the task of accomplishment. This point was reinforced for me when I saw *The Man of La Mancha*...
(Leigh & Darion, 1965) on Broadway in New York City in the late 1960s with its message of “dream[ing] the impossible dream.” Even if a dream feels impossible, more is accomplished by dreaming big. More is accomplished through optimism than through pessimism.

While these stories may have led to my becoming a workaholic, they also led to my successes. The message of combined optimism and hard work in each story leading to greater success can also be applied at other levels, including teams, organizations, communities, nations, regions, and, ultimately, all of humanity—all beneficiaries fitting the definition of human resource development (HRD) suggested by McLean and McLean (2001) and reinforced by the examples in this book.

Primitive Vietnamese history started from the Stone Age to the gathering of ethnic groups into an initial state, Van Lang in the Hung King period (see Chapter 1). Vietnam was then under Chinese dynastic rule in 179 BCE (Before the Current Era) until 938 CE (Current Era). Periodically, it had to drive out the Mongols, Chinese, and French who colonized Vietnam from 1858 CE to 1954 CE, interrupted by Japanese occupation during World War II. As the French were driven out, a group of countries, led by the USA, supported South Vietnam against North Vietnam in the second Indochina War. Vietnam was eventually reunited in 1975 with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam being declared in 1976, for a united Vietnam once again.

As shared in this book (see Chapter 3), Vietnam has made significant growth on many economic measures. But, for many reasons, it has not been prepared to capitalize on the many opportunities presented to it as many businesses have moved out of China (Lee, 2020) (and other countries) to search for other locations in which to position their businesses. Vietnam’s problems have included an inadequate public education system (at all levels in some places) (see Part II), insufficient levels of skilled employees, insufficient opportunities for workforce development, government policies that create challenges and opportunities for new businesses, inadequate technology support, and many other issues. In this chapter, I bring together suggested solutions, as well as adding my own HRD perspectives, of what might help Vietnam to realize its economic dream.
Consider the Vietnamese flag and its symbolic meaning in Vietnam’s economic revolution in preparation for becoming a modern industrial country (see Fig. 1).

How does the symbolism of the Vietnamese flag fit the challenge confronting Vietnam today and into the future? First, there is uncertainty, though suggestions have been made, about the origin of the current version of the Vietnamese flag. It went through a number of modifications, though slight, just as the country itself has gone through numerous changes, many of them significant (National flag, 2012; Roth, 2018). The symbolism reflected in the design of the flag was described by Roth (2018):

The red background is a symbol of bloodshed, struggle and the success of revolution. The golden star represents the people. Each point, symbolizing one of five specific classes—businessmen [sic.], farmers, workers, intellectuals and military. (para. 6) (Grammatical errors were in the original)

The flag, then, is a symbol of what the country must go through as it seeks to become economically sound; it will require the commitment of all people in system-wide changes to the nation, but, as described below, it will require thinking about “intellectuals” as including students, and “businessmen” as referring to all business people, including, especially,
women. And, while it will not require the sacrifices of physical revo-
lution, it will require a revolution of the way of thinking and doing
education, business, agriculture, and government.

The chapter authors in this book have done an excellent job of
providing an overview of the status of many important components
of NHRD in Vietnam, and all include implications for practice and
recommendations for future research. This is a great resource for both
practitioners and researchers, who can explore any component of HRD
of interest to them. As a result, it is not my intent in this chapter to
summarize what has been previously presented in this book. Rather, I
will offer my insights on many of the components, either because I have
a different perspective from the authors or because it is an idea that I
think will enhance the component being discussed.

1 Recommendations for Government
Consideration

Among the many interventions needed for change that would help move
Vietnam toward its dream of economic improvement is the development
of NHRD. The following specific recommendations could fit under the
category of NHRD interventions.

1.1 Define HRD for Vietnam

As is clear from the content of this book, there is no common, consistent
definition of HRD. In fact, several authors have included performance
management, recruitment, selection, and other functions typically found
in HRM rather than HRD. Does that mean that Vietnam does not have
an HRD function that is separate from HRM, or are they the same,
included in one field? Getting a well-accepted definition will be critical as
Vietnam establishes HRD policies and creates academic programs across
universities.

To create such a common, standard definition will require considerable
research to determine, across practice and academia, what approach to a
definition will work best in HRD. Without such a definition, there will be confusion in funding, accreditation of academic programs, continued confusion in responsibilities across government agencies and funding, and creating collaboration across many fields in academia and across many functions in organizations. Defining HRD, from the perspectives of both status quo and aspiration, should be a top priority for university researchers, for organizational practitioners, and for government policymakers. Such efforts have been made by the authors of Chapter 2.

1.2 Expand the National Council for Education and HRD

Vietnam’s National Council for Education and HRD (the Council) was established in 2016. The Council, consisting of 28 members and six working groups, are in charge of (1) assisting the Prime Minister direct, review, and evaluate innovation in education and HRD. The Council directs the completion and implementation of the Law on Education, Law on Vocational Training, National Qualification Framework, Human Resource Development Strategy 2011–2020, and HRD Master Plan 2011–2020; (2) researching, consulting, and assisting the PM in directing, administering, and deciding important policies and measures to develop education, training, and vocational training, and HRD (Quyết định [Decision Number] 337/QĐ-TTg, 2017). In the context of NHRD, as defined in Chapter 2 of this book, this is a very narrow mission. Chapter 2 includes a proposal for a definition of Vietnam’s NHRD pertaining to the current development stage of Vietnam, reflected in the Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2011–2020 and Human Resource Development Strategy 2011–2020 (Van & Phuong, 2021):

Vietnam’s human resource development for the 2011–2020 period is a strategy at the national level (Vietnam’s NHRD 2011–2020) to develop human resources, on the basis of meeting the HR needs of different sectors and localities in an appropriate manner. Vietnam’s NHRD focuses on improving employment-oriented competencies and
developing and managing the workforce, especially high-quality and talented people, through higher education and vocational training. Vietnam’s NHRD 2011–2020 contributes strategically to realizing Vietnam’s overall goal of a modern industrial country. (pp. 51–52)

One of the problems that occurs in many countries, perhaps even in Vietnam, is that NHRD, in whatever form, when it is extended to be comprehensive, in line with its definition, is that there may be little cooperation across ministries. Therefore, there can be conflict of priorities across the various ministries. Having a separate Ministry of Education and NHRD, as was done initially in South Korea (Cho & McLean, 2017), has the potential of the use of power or influence that may create jealousies among the ministries. The potential lack of trust can defeat the purpose of collaboration reflected in NHRD, as was the case, again, in South Korea (Roh, Ryu, & McLean, 2020). (South Korea is the country on which the greatest number of research studies have been carried out on NHRD). Thus, the success of a separate Council of Education and HRD is not certain unless there is a high level of commitment to doing collaborative work, which might be the case in a collectivist culture such as found in Vietnam (a very low score on individualism of 20) (Country Comparison, 2020; Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minlov, 2010). The Council, as it becomes more comprehensive, moving toward being NHRD, can be made up of representatives from each ministry. It can be formed for the necessary decision making in moving NHRD forward.

The primary tasks of the expanded Council would be to make decisions related to reviewing existing policies and creating new policies to ensure that there is no overlap and greater efficiencies in running the country. This is a broad responsibility that would include actions necessary to create an environment in which NHRD can be managed collaboratively and for the economic well-being of the country.

1.3 Implement Changes

I am too far outside of the system to make recommendations for implementation. At a simplistic level, here are some of the steps that I would
make to move forward. First, I would replace the Prime Minister as leader of the Council, thus reducing the potential conflict of interest between the roles of the Council and the Prime Minister. Second, I would create a rotating chair so no one ministry would have power. Third, I would create an independent third-party evaluation team to assess whether the Committee is achieving its goals and identifying the gaps between goals and achievement. Fourth, I would conduct annual quantitative and qualitative studies to determine how well the Committee is meeting the needs of each ministry through its NHRD practices. Fifth, I would have public participation to review what the Council is doing and, through a focus group, to provide the Council with feedback.

1.4 Plan for the Future

As with many countries, Vietnam uses a five-year plan process, but also uses yearly, 6-month, and even 1-month plans depending on administrative level. The problem with such plans is that no one can see even one year into the future, let alone five years. A good plan will require resiliency, with weekly or even daily updates to respond quickly to unpredictable events. Consider, for example, how quickly the world changed with the onset of the Covid-19 virus. With the onset of Covid-19, Vietnamese government agencies and localities met daily online. The social networks and government online portals are always active these days.

But such resiliency needs to go beyond Covid-19. The environment changes, technology changes, competition from other countries changes, trade agreements that were unimagined when the plans were created come into place, and, as we have discovered, the health situation can change quickly and dramatically. If the only thing that the country can fall back on is the five-year plans that are no longer relevant, then the country is in danger. The first thing that the National Council for Education and HRD must do is modify the five-year or one-year plans in all aspects of NHRD into flexible plans. As is currently happening as the government pursues an e-government approach is to publish all plans online. Except for emergencies, the Council should then meet weekly to
review the plans and modify them based on what has newly happened in the past week.

Perhaps more effectively the Council should adopt scenario planning. Vietnam has a low score (30) on uncertainty avoidance (Country Comparison, 2020; Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minlov, 2010). As a society, they are comfortable with uncertainty about the future. This has made it possible to live in a country that has a centralized government while having a market economy. Such a society is likely to match the demands of newly emerging environments; scenario planning fits into this need nicely (Chermack, 2011; McLean & Egan, 2008). Everyone involved needs to understand that the purpose of scenario planning is not to set plans for various future scenarios, but, rather, to help senior managers/policymakers understand the importance of quickly making new plans to fit new environments as they occur. This does not mean the end of five-year plans. Rather, it means a different way of administering and working with the five-year plans.

1.5 Support Innovation

It is clear that every country will come out of the current economic challenge from the Covid-19 virus with the desire to create or return to an upward trajectory in economics. They will do this more quickly and efficiently through innovation, both in products or services and processes. Whether focusing on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) occupations or occupations in manufacturing, service, agriculture, forestry, fishing, tourism, business and technical support, or any other occupation, the country will benefit from innovation. While it is impossible to predict the future and the occupations that will be most in demand, I share the conviction of many authors that such growth will require skills in robotics and artificial intelligence (Lombardi, 2017), and the world of work, subsequently, will change dramatically.

Vietnam’s society reflects ambiguity. As with most of Asia, Vietnam has a high score on power distance (70) with a low score on uncertainty avoidance (30) (Country Comparison, 2020; Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minlov, 2010). As a result, they experience inequality in
the workplace, while being comfortable with a lack of specific direction. The issue that this ambiguity causes for Vietnam’s employees is that they may feel that they must listen to and follow their supervisors, while, at the same time, feeling freedom from not having specific rules and making decisions on their own. Innovation requires autonomy on the job. Employees must feel free to speak up about improvements or innovations that they think will improve their performance (Hung, Lien, Fang, & McLean, 2010). A supervisor who is frequently looking over the employees’ shoulders should not expect to have an innovative workforce.

The challenge, of course, is making a significant change in the culture of a nation to allow innovation in the workplace, according to Hofstede’s cultural assessment. What needs to be done to encourage rather than inhibit innovation? Certainly, coaching and training can be used to encourage changes in supervisory behavior. Performance management, with immediate feedback from those being supervised, can be useful—assuming that employees can become comfortable in the high power-distance culture to provide such feedback to their supervisors.

But, making this change in culture will be very difficult and time consuming. Yet, such a change is essential for innovation to prevail. So long as questioning superiors remains difficult, if not impossible, innovation and progress will not come easily.

1.6 Develop the Workforce by Expanding and Using the Qualifications Framework

A major factor inhibiting Vietnam’s economic development is the quality of its workforce (World Bank & Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam, 2016). With the extent of the business coming out of China because of trade battles and then the coronavirus, Vietnam has had an excellent opportunity to expand its business considerably. However, because of an insufficiently trained workforce and its lower productivity, it has not been able to take full advantage of the opportunities presented.

A well-run NHRD will allow Vietnam to target occupations that go beyond service-level incomes of manual workers, that is, occupations that receive low levels of income to provide incomes that go well beyond
poverty levels. There has been a lot of interest in Vietnam in education leading to STEM occupations, as reported in earlier chapters of this book. The problem, however, is that every country appears to be targeting STEM occupations. Will Vietnam be able to compete against every other country adopting STEM occupations as their targets? There are many other occupations that Vietnam could target to create a niche that other countries are not targeting. These should be identified by the NHRD Ministry or Committee to be developed, in conjunction with educational programs in STEM.

Why is the Vietnamese workforce deficient, especially given its high level of literacy, with a 2016 adult (aged 15—35) literacy rate of 98.1%, and an estimated 2020 rate of 99% (Total literacy rate..., n.d.)? And 53.8% of Vietnamese speak English, behind only Singapore (61.1%) and Malaysia (60.3%) in the region. Other common foreign languages, after English, include Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and French. These languages are often a reflection of business interests, education, and family connections.

What is needed to bring the Vietnamese workforce up to the standard required to meet the demands of a global workforce? A notable standard that NHRD can help Vietnam meet can be found in the ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) Qualifications Reference Framework through which Vietnam has established its own Qualifications Framework (VQF) (Quyết định [Decision Number] 1982/QĐ-TTg, 2016). The objectives of the VQF are:

a. Classify and standardize the capacity and minimum academic load and qualifications suitable for specific levels in vocational education and undergraduate education of Vietnam, contributing in the increase of quality of education of human resources;

b. Formulate an effective mechanism for the connection between employer’s requirements for quality of human resources and the system of education level via the education and quality measurement, assessment and evaluation;

c. Set out a basis to formulate planning for educational institutions and learning outcomes of the training program of different levels of
study and formulate policies to ensure the quality and increase the
effect of the training of human resources;
d. Formulate a relation with national qualifications framework of other
countries via the regional qualifications reference framework and
international qualifications reference framework as the basis for
mutual recognition in terms of qualifications to increase the quality
and the competitive capacity of human resources;
dd. Formulate transition mechanism between education levels, formu-
late lifelong-study society. (Section 2).

What it is going to take moving forward is for the Ministry of Educa-
tion and Training (to whom such responsibility is assigned in the law)
or the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, or the Council
rapidly and completely to implement the framework. And, as will be
obvious from reading the law setting up the VQF, changing in dramatic
ways how public education at all levels and HRD through corporate and
public training are delivered. As the workforce and potential workforce
receive such education and training, much more sophisticated curricula
and more highly qualified instructors will be needed.

1.7 Emphasize Technical and Vocational Education
and Training (TVET; VET in Vietnam)
and Teacher Education

Many countries, including Vietnam, that are in a hurry to develop
a highly qualified workforce will focus primarily on the higher levels
of qualification, specifically focused on university education with those
occupations that require such education. Unfortunately, this does not
allow them to fill a unique niche. Vietnam will need a workforce that
is designed to meet local, regional, and global competition, focused
primarily on agriculture, manufacturing, the country’s infrastructure,
and tourism. Because of a heavy reliance on equipment and machinery
(with high investment costs) and a shortage of highly qualified teacher
educators in these fields, Vietnam is heavily reliant on cross-country
cooperation from many countries or agencies.
In spite of a renewed interest in VET in Vietnam, there remain reforms that are needed to respond to the remaining challenges faced by VET, as suggested by Caggiano (2018):

Current reforms are focused on the implementation of the Law and Vocational Education and Training, and include:

- reforming the testing and examination procedures;
- developing policy reforms to improve the quality of teachers and trainers;
- establishing a network of VET institutions and enterprises;
- increasing the autonomy of VET institutions.

There are five main challenges to the TVET system identified in Vietnam:

- adapting the VET system to technological developments;
- poor ratio of skilled workers working in the sector;
- skills mismatch affecting productivity;
- increasing autonomy among VET institutions;
- outdated technology of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) cannot provide proper employment. (paras. 7–8)

Across south-east Asia, including Vietnam, there is a lot of room to grow in providing leadership in developing TVET programs accompanied by TVET teacher education, without reliance on countries with better developed programs. NHRD can go a long way in rectifying this situation. In particular, through collaboration, NHRD can bring together the Ministry of Education and Training, private enterprises, and both public and private VET institutions. A well-developed collaboration between enterprises and such institutions is likely to be essential given the need for rapid adjustments to industrial change and the high costs of the equipment and machinery that accompany TVET instruction. Further, TVET teacher educators are faced with significant challenges in keeping up to date when they are no longer employed at the enterprise level. Enterprises will need to offer teacher educators internships for their own faculty development.
1.8 Develop Faculty

Not only do TVET and VET teacher educators face a challenge with faculty development. This is true for K-12 educators and college/university faculty. Vietnam does not have a strong history of encouraging or requiring higher education faculty to self-develop in their teaching skills, to produce high-quality research to keep them current, and to create innovation in their teaching and research (Phuong, Duong, & McLean, 2015). It is possible that the government will not have the interest in developing higher education faculty to become research scholars. However, if Vietnam is interested in competing with more developed countries, they must take the necessary steps to develop.

The Council can be very helpful in this regard. First, faculty must be required to take their sabbatical leaves on a regular basis, with a plan for self-development in both teaching and research skills. This plan can be based on a competency model developed for faculty under the auspices of the NHRD Ministry. Second, each university or technical institute must establish a system for faculty review to determine the gap between the competencies needed and individual performance. Third, a faculty development specialist, also determined within the competency model, should help each faculty member to create a plan, such as an individual development plan, to close the gaps. All of these steps require the input of the Committee of NHRD.

The Council will also require input into the country’s budget in order to carry out the steps in the previous paragraph. Study abroad, language development, competency model development, self-assessment and peer assessment, development offered by faculty development, specialists’ development, research publication development, and any other costs required to develop faculty must be included in the budget.
1.9 Develop Women

As with much of Asia, a major factor holding back workforce development is the bias that exists against women in the workforce, especially at upper echelons of professions. Fortunately, Vietnam reflects near gender equality at lower occupational levels. However, the glass ceiling exerts itself as women move up the career ladder and reach higher levels in their occupations. In spite of this, however, Vu (2018) reported on Financial Times’s findings from a 2017 survey of 5000 respondents from five countries in south-east Asia. The survey found that 30% of women reported that their pay was lower than men colleagues, and almost that same number reported that they had fewer opportunities on the job.

From the Financial Times’s 2017 survey findings, the ratio between men and women in upper management in Vietnam, at 8:1, is the lowest among the top five economies in south-east Asia, followed by 5.6:1 in Malaysia, 2.8:1 in the Philippines, and 2.2:1 in Thailand, but Indonesia had an almost equal ratio with 1.2:1 (Vu, 2018). Vu also reported on a Boston Consulting Group study that found that, in 2017, women held 25% of the CEO or board lead positions in Vietnam, higher than any other country in the region. Details related to this phenomenon are found in the chapter on Vietnamese women leaders in this book (Chapter 9).

As for the future of women in contributing in leadership roles in Vietnam, these data suggest a mixed prediction. The Council can make a significant contribution in supporting research to determine why so few women are in leadership positions, while, at the same time, a significant number of women are in lead positions. In-depth qualitative research can help to determine the attitudes of those who make promotion decisions to determine the source of the gender biases and what it will take to change the situation. While I am hesitant to suggest the mandatory quota system, as used in a number of Asian countries, it may be required, depending on the findings of the proposed research.

Political representation of women in leadership roles is low in Vietnam. Dr Luong Thu Hien, Executive Director of GeLead, concluded: “Despite the great efforts of the Party and the State of Vietnam to improve political participation of women over the past
decades, women’s leadership in Vietnam still lags far behind the targets that it’s striving towards” (Dunlevy & Thu, 2018, para. 6).

Dunlevy and Thu (2018) summarized the situation of women in political leadership in Vietnam:

The number of women members in Vietnam’s National Assembly fell steadily between 2007 and 2016 and slightly increased in the election for the term XIV (2016 – 2021), but still did not meet the target of 35 to 40 per cent. In the Inter-Parliamentary Union international ranking, Vietnam fell from 9th position to 64th. (para. 3)

In the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, women are also under-represented, making up 10 per cent of its membership. In [the] cabinet, there is one woman among the 27 cabinet members. (para. 4)

If politics cannot model gender equality, how can there be an expectation that gender distribution in businesses will be equal? If the government is really interested in gender equality, it must set goals that reflect equality, not in a ratio of 1:2. Given the one-party system that exists in Vietnam, it should be relatively easy to achieve gender equality in both government and business. This will require developmental activities for women who show signs of potential leadership and for those who will be in selection roles. Women need to become confident in their abilities to serve in a political leadership role. And those who select leaders need to understand their own biases and the importance of making leadership decisions independent of gender.

Similar developmental activities can be offered to other organizations that are looking to maximize their leadership while moving to create gender equality. By recognizing the value of both genders in leadership positions, Vietnam will maximize its abilities to lead the country into an improved position to take advantage of the opportunities that are being presented for economic development.
1.10 Improve the Education System

Overall, Vietnam has done well in its education system, especially in comparison with other countries in the region. Universal education exists in primary schools, though children at the very bottom of the economic strata may not be able to attend school because they cannot afford the school uniform, shoes, notebooks and writing utensils, and so on, as required by the school system. Vietnam has almost achieved gender parity in education, with low student/teacher ratios. Other challenges remain for children in remote areas and those from minority populations. Reed (2018) reported that these positive outcomes can be attributed to “the work ethic prized under Confucianism and the need to rebuild the country after the war” (para. 7).

As in many countries where the emphasis in education is preparation for exams, and where graduation from prestigious universities determines employment, Vietnam has this strong paper-based, exam-based education. This means that things like creative thinking, career development, self-awareness, relationship development, team building, emotional intelligence, and even problem solving, all of which are critical for success in employment and, indeed, life, are neglected. This is not to suggest that cognitive accomplishment, especially in the STEM areas, is not important. Rather, it calls on all education systems to find a balance.

Another educational factor that impedes the development of Vietnam’s workforce is its quality of language development. At a minimum, it is critical that Vietnamese children become fully competent in a foreign language that is widely used, especially in business and tourism contexts. English is especially important, with options in Chinese (already spoken widely by those Vietnamese with a Chinese legacy), Japanese, and Korean, because of the potential for trade and tourism from these countries. It is almost hypocritical for me to suggest this, as the U.S. is not a bilingual country among the majority population, but minority members of the country have been forced to learn English (in addition to Spanish and hundreds of other native languages). Having received my education up to graduate education in Canada, I was bilingual in English and French, but the quality of that education was deficient in oral language
skills. Nevertheless, being a country that desires to move up within the middle-income country category, having bilingual skills becomes critical in Vietnam.

Then, if the country is going to put a strong emphasis on STEM occupations to develop the economy, students of both genders must be well-prepared by having a strong emphasis on STEM in their educational experience. As suggested in this book’s sections on Education, there are many needs in higher education in Vietnam in order to improve occupational qualifications and be prepared to work in occupational areas that will be necessary to become a country that can succeed in building the vision of the economy that Vietnam desires.

The need for professionals in HRD will grow under a NHRD approach. All aspects of HRD will be needed in a society and economy that rely on HRD: training and development, organization development, and career development. For this to occur, HRD degree programs in universities, which currently do not exist in Vietnam, must be established. These might be standalone programs or they might be developed under the auspices of human resource management (HRM) programs. In any case, for HRD to be successful, it must operate in cooperation with HRM. This will require that universities modify their curricula to include HRD programs at undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral programs. Not only will this require the development of the curricula, but it will also require the recruitment of knowledgeable scholars and scholar-practitioners who can staff such programs. This will be a daunting task, given that there is no feeder program currently in Vietnam.

### 1.11 Incorporate HRD in Organizations

Training is currently included in organizations in Vietnam, as described in Chapter 8 for corporations and Chapter 11 for SMEs. The incorporation of HRD degree programs in universities offers a possibility for more and better HRD offerings. The primary focus of HRD in corporations is training, including both internal and external offerings. There is
little evidence, however, of organization development and career development. And SMEs rely almost solely on external resources because of their smaller sizes.

Because of the high reliance on external training sources, the National Council for Education and HRD could, at the lowest level, establish criteria or a checklist that any organization can use to evaluate the quality of the external (or even internal) training source. At the next level, NHRD can encourage on a voluntary level for providers to seek an international certification for quality in training, such as the ISO (International Standards Organization) series on training. Another approach, if the existing international standards are deemed not to be appropriate, an accreditation program could be put in place on a voluntary basis. This is common in academic programs, and there is no reason to think that this process could not be equally effective in practice. All of these approaches would be beneficial to all types of organizations, including NGOs, SMEs, and larger corporations.

Another aspect of HRD that could use the coordination and development from the National Council for Education and HRD is organization development (OD). OD is one of the major aspects of HRD. It has been defined in many ways; McLean (2006) defined OD as

Organization development is any process or activity, based on the behavioral sciences, that, either initially or over the long term, has the potential to develop in an organizational setting enhanced knowledge, expertise, productivity, satisfaction, income, interpersonal relationships, and other desired outcomes, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation, region, or, ultimately, the whole of humanity. (p. 9)

While OD exists from international, external providers, it is hardly known within Vietnam. Thus, there is a great need to develop the concepts of OD within the cultural context of Vietnam. This indigenous view of OD should be included in university programs for HRD. The same processes as developed to determine the quality of training also need to be applied to OD practice.
1.12 Improve the Infrastructure to Support eLearning

Covid-19 has underscored the need to have a strong infrastructure to support e-learning, as students at all education levels have been forced to pursue their education online. Further, employees are also increasingly seeking their development opportunities online, especially within SMEs. For these things to occur, there must be a strong infrastructure. It makes little sense for this to occur from school to school or from location to location. A strong, centralized system will be both more effective and efficient. The Ministry or Committee of NHRD can facilitate such development.

1.13 Improve Healthcare

Healthcare is a core and critical component of NHRD, along with the concept of Safety, thus warranting the inclusion of this concept in this book. Until recently, except for minor healthcare needs, most expats in Vietnam and wealthier Vietnamese traveled to nearby Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, or Singapore for their healthcare. At the same time, those living in small towns and in rural areas had minimal access to any form of healthcare; they needed to find some way to get into the major cities in the country (Healthcare in Vietnam, 2020).

In the past few years, however, this situation has changed dramatically. New hospitals have been built in many of the small cities and towns. Two general hospitals, one each in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, have been internationally accredited, as has the Cao Thang Eye Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City (Healthcare in Vietnam, 2020). Dental work is also widely available and of a high standard. The consequence of the health situation in Vietnam is reflected in life expectancy. In 2017, life expectancy for women was 79.37 and for men, 71.12 (Plecher, 2020); these compare with 81.1 and 76.1, respectively, for the same year in the United States (Arias & Xu, 2019).

Another factor supporting healthcare in Vietnam is its cost. The public hospitals are almost free, while private hospitals are more expensive, but
still relatively inexpensive. Hospitals accept insurance, and some hospitals have their own health plans. As a result, they are relatively accessible. There is little inability to go to the hospital or dental clinics, keeping the population relatively healthy. As a result of the combination of quality and cost, Vietnam has become a medical tourist destination, especially from Australia, the United States, and Europe (Healthcare in Vietnam, 2020).

As in almost every country, the coronavirus-19 has affected Vietnam. Unlike these other countries, however, Vietnam’s response to the virus has been almost the best in the world. As soon as the first two cases were identified when an affected Chinese father from Wuhan arrived in Vietnam to visit his son who was working there, flights to and from Wuhan were canceled, followed a week later by cancelation of all flights into mainland China, along with the closure of China’s land border. According to Tatarski (2020), Vietnam has had among the most successful global responses to the virus. “The government created the National Steering Committee on COVID-19 Prevention and Control, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Vu Duc Dam, to coordinate the national response” (para. 4). Because of the rapid interventions, as of May 30, 2020, Vietnam had seen only 328 Covid-19 infections with no deaths, because of its quick application of NHRD concepts related to healthcare.

Among the interventions included were mandatory wearing of a mask and social distancing, shutting down of non-essential businesses, extensive use of posters, stay-at-home policies but not a complete lockdown, and immediate quarantining and health service. These interventions may not be dramatically different from those used in other countries, but the positive responses of the Vietnamese in a totalitarian society may have contributed to the positive outcomes. As a result of these interventions, Vietnam’s medical response has been outstanding. However, Vietnam’s economy has been affected because of a loss of tourism income, a major industry in Vietnam, but also in manufacturing and trade because of the reliance of Vietnam’s economy on other countries that are much more seriously impacted than the economy of Vietnam. Moving forward, Vietnam is likely to have a GDP growth for 2020, while most countries will be experiencing a decrease in GDP, to experience between 2–5%
growth. The lesson for Vietnam and other countries is the importance of diversifying industries and not relying heavily on business in other countries.

However, Vietnam (and the rest of the world) cannot sit back and assume that their actions have stopped the virus. According to Michael Osterholm, the director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota (reported by Kapner, 2020), the world is still a long way from having conquered this disease. According to Osterholm, we will not get ahead of this disease until 60–70% of the population has had the disease, gaining either hard immunity (from having had the disease) or vaccine-induced immunity. This suggests that the major planning confronting Vietnam is to determine in advance how it can get the vaccine and how to distribute it among its population. Further, Oserholm has concluded that the wearing of masks is of virtually no use in stopping the spread of the virus. How one handles this long-term impact (to last about two years) on mental health, economics, society, physical health, and so on, will be a huge challenge to every country. This challenge will truly take a united, collaborative approach for Vietnam’s society to survive.

1.14 Improve the Environment

According to the USAID (2020), Vietnam is one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change because of its extensive coastline. During the lockdown associated with the pandemic, Vietnam, along with most other countries, has experienced a marked improvement in the quality of air with the reduction in traffic and reduced smokestack emissions. With the need for masks, there is also increased need for recyclable materials. The challenge for Vietnam and the world is to find ways to continue and add to programs to improve the environment and contribute to saving the climate. For Vietnam, NHRD’s role in improving the environment is urgent; it is, in fact, a matter of life or death for Vietnam.
1.15 Address Other Social Issues

The NHRD Ministry or Committee will be kept very busy in fulfilling the mission assigned to it. In addition to everything that has already been described above, there are numerous issues that need addressing for the welfare of the Vietnamese society. While each could be described in great detail, because of the shortage of space, they will be presented only briefly below.

Labor Mobility in ASEAN. As the policies permitting labor mobility in ASEAN become fully implemented, Vietnam will face two problems—outward migration of trained talent and inward migration of labor from across the region, many of whom will not be well-prepared for employment. Policies and practices will be needed to address both issues.

Visas. Visas serve two major purposes for a country: control who enters the country and provide revenue for the country. How these two purposes interact is not always clear.

NGOs. Most of the emphasis on HRD for organizations has been on SMEs or large corporations. Certainly, HRD can also be used for governmental agencies or organizations. But NGOs, non-governmental organizations, are often ignored, in spite of how extensive they are. Such organizations in Vietnam support women’s development, education, health, poverty, children, and many more. These organizations generally fill the gap between what is needed and what the government provides.

In the early 2000’s, a long-time friend and OD consultant, Jerri Hirsch, approached me to sponsor her trip to Vietnam where she was planning on doing volunteer teaching in a Catholic school in Ho Chi Minh City, Anh Linh elementary and secondary schools. I suggested to her that contributions would go further if she worked as a volunteer for a non-profit organization. Bridges to Learning came into being in 2005 with this mission: “Bridges to Learning is a volunteer non-profit corporation dedicated to supporting education, health and social development initiatives for under-resourced students in Vietnam” (2020). I subsequently served as board member and chair of the board. I am so
proud of the difference we have made in the lives of 100s of under-
resourced Vietnamese children who have received an education through
secondary school and even through college through scholarships that our
organization has provided.

2 Conclusion

I titled this chapter with a line from a memorable song from *Man of
La Mancha* and explained why I believe that dreaming the impossible
dream will accomplish much more than having little hope for the future
or having a sense of malaise about the future. Another line from that
song includes, “To reach the unreachable star.” I remember vividly when
Apollo 11 landed on the moon on July 20, 1969. Very few people
believed that this was a task that could actually be accomplished. I was
running the data on my doctoral dissertation, and in those days the data
were recorded on punch cards—in my case, six boxes full. I was using
canonical correlations as my analysis. I started at 5 p.m. on Friday (July
11) and finished on Monday morning. I was using the school’s computer
because the analysis took so much time (65 hours; today it would take
less than a minute). I was also feeling that this was an “unreachable star.”
But both tasks were accomplished. I completed my degree and Apollo
11 landed on the moon, and its crew returned safely to earth.

This song represents what Vietnam has been facing, what it has accom-
plished, and what it is likely to accomplish in the future. I am old
enough to have lived through the times of French and USA involve-
ment in Vietnam. Who would have thought that Vietnam would have
come through all of this in such an amazing way? Who would have
thought that friends from Vietnam and the United States would be
such friends? This is even more amazing to me after touring the War
Museums in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, and having viewed the
artwork of the soldiers in the Museum of Modern Art in Hanoi. Yet,
here I am, as a U.S. citizen, working in partnership with Vietnamese
students, faculty members, and mentees in writing this book that lays
out the hope of Vietnamese scholars and businesspeople for the future
of Vietnam through the application of HRD. May all of our dreams be fulfilled and exceeded!

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