Foreword

I wear my HRD scholar-practitioner title with pride. I have edited journal issues on the subject, run conference workshops on it, spoken at conferences, authored journal articles, and completed partnership research with academics. At the same time, I have 23 years of experience as an HRD practitioner working in both Europe and the United States. I therefore consider myself to be a scholar-practitioner and, as such, am delighted to see a book that focuses on the challenges faced in the role and the importance of bridging the gap between research and practice in the field of Human Resource Development.

Over the last ten years, we have made important strides in this area, including defining what we mean by the term scholar-practitioner, describing key aspects of the role, and recognizing HRD scholar-practitioners through awards. The Academy of Human Resource Development has been at the forefront of this work, and scholar-practitioner research has appeared in its conferences and journals. Seeing this work now transition from journals to books is further evidence that this is a mainstream issue that tackles real needs that, as a profession, we have to solve if we are to ever come close to reaching our true potential.

As you explore the different chapters within the book, you will consider scholar-practitioners from different angles. Between them, they highlight the work of HRD scholar-practitioners as distinguished from others working in HRD. HRD scholar-practitioners ground their practice in research and theory, champion research and theory in the workplace, conduct and disseminate research, partner with academic researchers, and they act as a bridge between research and practice in seeking further development of the field of HRD. For many working in HRD, this is an aspirational statement that practitioners strive to achieve. As such, it is really a journey towards a place where research informs practice and, in turn, practice informs research agendas, scholarly research, and research-in-action.

This all differs from much of past and some current HRD practice, which is often guided by the latest fad and by simply following what is happening elsewhere, what has been done before, or what feels like the right thing to do. Following a different route by seeking ways of using research to inform practice has never been a well-trodden path. It requires that we access research in journals, put that research into the context of the wider literature on the subject, interpret the research into the context of the practitioner’s organization, and translate it into a language that can be understood by other HRD practitioners and their stakeholders. None of that is easy or quick. When organizations increasingly operate at a fast pace and are looking for speedy just-in-time solutions, it is no wonder that the majority of HRD practitioners operate with little understanding of the research literature for their own profession.

It is therefore a significant step forward that we are helping the minority of practitioners who operate as scholar-practitioners (whether or not they would refer to themselves using such a term). Through books like this one, combined with HRD degree programs, research-informed conferences, and professional associations that take this seriously, the time could well have come when HRD grows up. As a patient,
why would we ever go to a doctor who does not understand the latest drugs, their effects on patients, and the latest on diagnosis, preventions and cures? As such, we are hopefully approaching a time when organizations expect, if not demand, the same from HRD. It is time for the HRD profession to embrace a sound body of research literature that is understood by its practitioners, and is implemented through standard practices. This book is a key step in that direction.

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Darren C. Short has been a Board member of the Academy of Human Resource Development since 2006, and was President from 2012 to 2014. He is a former Chair of the AHRD Scholar-Practitioner Committee, and a former Chair of the ASTD Research-to-Practice Committee. He is a former member of editorial or advisory boards for three HRD research journals, and has edited three journal issues (including one focused on scholar-practitioners). Darren has 23 years of HRD experience working in Europe, North America, and Asia, and is currently Sr. Director of Learning at GoDaddy seeking to bridge HRD research and practice in support of 4,500 employees worldwide.