

OD VALUES AND THE BOTTOM LINE

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ABSTRACT

After tracing the history of the organization development (OD) field, this article argues that the current pragmatism of OD has lost touch with its original value premises. A questionnaire is provided for the OD consultant to measure his/ her underlying values and to compare the results with others.

OD Values and the Bottom Line

by

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The great diversity and "fuzziness" of organization development (OD) seems to leave more people confused than pleased. Conference after conference of learned scholars and practitioners has continuously asked for a clearer "definition" of OD. "What is it?" they cry out in unison and frustration, followed by a review of twenty definitions, out of which there is a summary definition geared to put everyone to rest (Tregoe, 1974). But for some reason it doesn't!

Critics of OD prey on this internal unrest. They characterize OD as a home for religious zealots or relegate it to a bunch of crazy techniques in search of a theory (Levinson, 1972). They, too, are impatient with OD for not coming up with a consensus "definition," which in itself is seen as a sign of its faddish and transitory nature (Mills, 1975).

Scientist critics are particularly harsh in their questions for "proof" of OD's benefits. They require tightly controlled experiments backed-up by quantitative data to determine the precise results of a particular OD intervention. And skeptical managers also throw barbs at OD for its lack of clarity in presenting what works or doesn't work, and in being unable to demonstrate dramatic "bottom line" improvements.

OD has frequently fallen for these attacks, replying to its critics in an agreeable and deferential fashion. Numerous OD scholars and consultants not only plead for clearer definitions of OD, but they deify rigorous quantitative research, and they say "amen" to managers for their "bottom line" concerns. In everyone's eyes, it seems, OD must

satisfy its critics if it is to become a "legitimate" profession and a reputable scholarly discipline.

Another Perspective

This presentation takes a different tact by rejecting the "scientific" path which hopes that after a thousand stones are turned we will at last discover the truth about OD. That is the philosophy of logical positivism which assumes we can utlimately uncover a "correct" definition, or identify the "best" OD technique, or develop the "perfect" theory to explain it all. It promises Nirvana just around the corner, if only we remain faithful to science and truth!

Rather I shall treat OD as not one thing but a variety of directions, people, techniques, and goals that are quite "healthy" in their diversity and development. That is because a variety of values underlies OD and management itself (Conner and Becker, 1975). In fact, I shall argue later that "it" and "we" should become even more diverse and exploratory in searching out new values. Instead of trying to reduce OD to a few concise words or a regression equation, I would like to see OD open-up even more, to grow further, and to experiment continuously with its values. If OD tries to become too professional and "legitimate," it may rigidify itself into an early death.

My underlying philosophical position in this presentation is based on the following four assumptions:

1. All behavioral action, including OD and management, is value-based. That is, each OD change agent acts in terms of his or her values, which are then reflected in one's choice of diagnosistic techniques and program content. As a result, we spawn a plethora of OD approaches—one for each change agent, and even that "one" becomes modified by the values of many other people involved in the same client organization. Moreover, the term "bottom line" is also value—laden. For some people, it may be growth in sales over five years, while for others it may be progress toward lower rates of turnover and

absenteeism. Who is "right"? Could there be more than one bottom-line, or even outcomes that we don't know are possible or desireable yet?

- 2. Because of the many values embedded in OD and the bottom line, it is futile to argue about who is "right" and who is "wrong," or which is "best" and what is "worst." We live in a reality where everything, including OD, is relative--my brand of OD may not be your's, but that does not make me "right."
- 3. Nor will we ever be able to discover through systematic research who is "right" and who is "wrong." This may shock some of my academic colleagues who still believe in a final truth. But reality is far too complex, varied, and changing for research to produce answers with clarity and simplicity. Even with the most sophisticated statistical tools and research designs, today's organization researchers are able to explain only a small percentage of the variance between variables. Ironically, greater sophistication in research methods has led to an even more complex and situational view of reality. It is, therefore, futile to hope for the ultimate proof.
- 4. We can still have "faith" in knowledge about OD--but not knowledge based on absolute values that will be determined by a laboratory scientist in a breakthrough discovery about the year 2000. Rather, our knowledge is evolving every year through cumulative experience, shared learning, and self-awareness. Research is but one tool to aid this process, along with education, mistakes, reading, disobedience, chance, listening, conferences, risk-taking, and story-telling.

The implications of this "relativistic" line-of-thinking about OD and its values will be drawn out in this article. We shall see how OD values have been evolving over the years from T-Groups to stress management. Then we will look at our own personal value orientations with an "experiential" exercise designed for self-awareness and comparison with others in the OD field. Finally, I will suggest a range of new value orientations that are still in our future because OD and organizations have yet to gain experience with them.

OD's Value Evolution

Organization development is obviously not the same in 1980 as it was in 1960. Whether it is "better" is debatable, depending on your

values. Let us look back to see how OD has developed through years of experimentation, evaluation, criticism, and innovation. Despite individual differences in OD values, there has been a discernable "collective" set of values that has often been referred to as the "mainstream" or the "movement." These are the values shared by a majority of adherents to the OD movement at any particular point.

Stage I: "In the Beginning"--The Late 1950s. This was the genesis period, where religious references are apropos. A very strong but narrow value orientation pervaded OD and its eager founders. These were the values of trust, openness, feedback, and personal change conducted within a T-Group design (Bennis, 1969). Less overt were anti-authoritarian values expressed through a "leaderless" group, and, of course, there was the power attributed to group dynamics with its potential for "good."

The pioneers advocating these values came largely from academia. They were "teachers," and their "bottom line" was individual learning and change, not reduced costs or higher profits. National Training Laboratories (NTL) became the mecca for this movement, a place where you could be "certified" as a legitimate teacher of the new OD values.

Attempts were made during this period to bring OD and "humanistic" values to the business enterprise. One notable effort was the Baton Rouge refinery of Exxon where over 800 management personnel participated in a one-week T-Group. The academic change agents who acted as trainers pursued roles of "conversionist," "advocate," and "teacher" as they sought to convert managers away from traditional authoritarian values and toward greater openness and confrontation with each other. Their goal was to help individuals become more self-aware and sensitive to others.

Stage II: "Going Commercial"—the Early/Mid 1960s. Rapid initial success in the T-Group movement led to a new "marketing" era in the selling of OD values to organizations. Ironically, the values also changed as entrepreneurs were attracted to the field. They began to "package" values in programs that were turned into mass training efforts designed to convert not just individuals but entire organizations.

Where the individual had been the target of change in the T-Group, emphasis shifted to leadership style and the manner in which a leader pursued work through others. Values moved toward the importance of teamwork, integration, and organization change, which were translated into simplified vocabularies, such as "9,9," that managers could easily understand and communicate (Blake and Mouton, 1964).

The change agent of this period was not so much the academician but the professional consultant with his/her own business. While NTL continued to flourish, the mainstream was invaded by marketeers who were as interested in dollars as idealism. Their "bottom line" became "sales," which was expressed in terms of client volume and number of trainees.

The role behavior of these OD entrepreneurs was different, too, moving from teacher to "designer" of programs, "seller" of new designs, and even "administrator" of a salesforce with its accompanying paperwork. For some it was the "Elmer Gantry" era of OD.

Stage III: "Getting Knocked"--the Late 1960s and Early 1970s. The bloom fell off the OD flower in the late 1960s as research evaluations of earlier OD efforts began to reveal less than the promised results. Despite the early enthusiasm of OD advocates and consultants, "hard" statistical results indicated little in the way of lasting individual or

organization change. While some studies pointed to changes in behavior and attitudes, few evaluations showed significant improvements in economic indicators such as profits or ROI (Campbell and Dunnette, 1968).

Research evidence was a vehicle and symbol for critics who were rebelling at what they perceived to be the idealism and false promises of an evangelical movement. Their values were not humanism or conversion, but those of science, proof, and skepticism. For them truth could only be expressed in the values of classical science. They were joined by managers who had been skeptical from the beginning or by those who had been "burned" by a program that did not deliver.

The OD movement was put into dissaray by these attacks, with the term "OD" even becoming a bad word within many organizations. A defensive reaction set in, and OD and its values moved toward answering its critics. Emphasis was placed on "results," which meant the economic values of managers (Huse and Beer, 1971). A favorite word in the OD vocabulary became "task oriented." OD applications became highly pragmatic--"if something isn't tried and proven, don't use it." OD departments in corporations were eliminated or transformed into departments of "human resources" or "management and organization development."

The OD change agent, if he/she was to survive during these critical times, joined the management establishment. Compromise and even "going underground" was necessary. Many change agents turned on their past to disown its "softness." Their new role orientation shifted toward "gradualist," "politician," "apologist," and even "servant" to management. Their "bottom line" became management's "bottom line."

Stage IV: "Branching Out"--The Late 1970s. Recent years have seen OD move gradually out of its defensive shell to begin new efforts geared

toward coping with societal forces affecting people and organizations. We see new programs embracing quality-of-work-life issues (QWL), equal opportunity, managerial stress, and career development (Golembiewski, Hilles, and Kagno, 1977). OD began to help organizations in meeting these pressures, as well as to give individuals a broader insight into their lives.

The value orientation of OD consultants during this period emphasized multi-disciplinary thinking. OD learned from other scholars and professionals, such as engineers in work design, lawyers in equal opportunity, and psychiatrists in stress. Instead of rushing into programs with its earlier zeal, most OD efforts were couched in cautious and experimental terms. Pilot projects were used to determine the utility of wider exposure. The contribution of OD was in its design and implementation skills, while outside disciplines contributed their substantive knowledge.

Our OD consultant/change agent during this period assumed roles of "experimenter" and "evaluator." The "bottom-line" became a variety of human outcomes--turnover, absenteeism, productivity, morale, stress reduction, and legal compliance.

As we shall discuss in more detail later, OD seems to have moved during the late '70s into a "middle ground" between its 1950s revolutionary zeal and its early 1970s preoccupation with management's economic results.

Your OD Values

So far I have discussed value shifts in the broad OD field over a period of twenty-five years leading up to 1980. You may have been a pioneer in this long and changing movement, or you may be a newcomer.

At issue is how your own values relate to this evolving field, because that is what will make the difference as you work with people and organizations (Tichy, 1974). You may be active in the current mainstream, or you may be part of a previous stage that lingers on into the present.

Self-awareness on the part of the change agent is too often neglected in favor of preaching self-awareness for others. So let us stop for a moment to identify your own values and place you in relationship to your contemporaries. Listed below is a brief questionnaire that I prepared for the OD '80 Conference in San Diego. Participants were asked to complete it and discuss their results during my session.

Why don't you now spend a couple minutes filling out the questionnaire, because the upcoming sections will be more involving and revealing
for you when confronted with your results versus others in the profession. You may be surprised about where you fit into the OD field--are
your values quite similar to the OD practioners at San Diego or very
different? If you skip this questionnaire, you may never know!

OD PREFERENCES QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: Distribute 3 points among the two choices on each question, depending on the weight you give to each statement relative to the other statement. Choices can be 3,0 or 2,1; or 0,3 or 1,2 for each question.

I PREFER AN O.	D. APPROACH WHERE THE CHANGE AGENT:
1	tries to motivate people to change the situation around them. helps people to adjust better to the situation facing them.
2	emphasizes the need for total system change from one organiza- tional state to another. introduces changes that are geared more to making the existing situation work better.
3	provides new value alternatives, such as collaboration, confrontation, etc. works to solve problems facing people in the organization.
4	strives for significant change introduced through a planned program over one to two years. moves ahead step-by-step toward gradual change over four to five years.
5	works closely with lower level employees in helping to improve the organization around them. works closely with top management in helping to improve the organization below them.
6	provides personal leadership by actively contributing toward a plan and method of change. brings others together so they may develop their ideas into a plan and method of change.
7	seeks better and more effective behavioral relationships between employees. strives for greater productivity and creativity from employees.
8	helps to bring out the potential in people and organizations to achieve beyond their expectations. recognizes the practical limits in available resources and people within organizations.

The questionnaire is constructed so that all first blanks represent values toward the "conversion" end of change theory, while all second blanks signify values toward the "pragmatism" end. Add up all scores in first blanks and then subtract from this your total for the second blanks. Thus, for example, if your first blank total is 4 and your second blank total is 20, then your overall score is -16. The highest possible score toward the "conversion" end is +24, and highest "pragmatism" score is -24. If your score is zero, you would be directly in the middle. Results for 55 participants at the OD '80 Conference in San Diego are written in below the scale in Exhibit 1.

Insert Exhibit 1 About Here

As can be seen in Exhibit 1, "conversion" refers to a series of values concerned with rapid change toward an ideal future state, which often involves an overturn in the existing power structure. On the other hand, "pragmatism" works with the existing situation in a gradual change program that conforms more to the desires of the existing power structure.

Exhibit 1 also shows a spectrum of role behaviors that I have assigned to various scores. This assignment, of course, is arbitrary because it will take more study and statistical analysis to determine more precisely where each role might actually fit. But for now, consider that the role behavior at the "conversion" extreme would likely be "revolutionary" in thrust, while at the other end it would involve acting more as a "servant" to management in carrying out their wishes.

How do your results compare with your own self-perception? Where do you fit relative to the OD '80 participants? Interestingly, we find

50% of them in the middle between +2 and -2. Such a finding lends credence to my earlier analysis that OD is currently in a "middle" position between "overturning" management on the left and "joining" management on the right.

There is still a significant percentage of people scattered farther out toward both ends of the spectrum, although we have few real extremists. The left side likely represents OD as it emerged in the late 1950s; it then moved somewhat to the right with the commercial period in the 1960s, and then even farther to the right in reaction to criticism in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

When we discussed these results in San Diego, it appeared that "internal" consultants were more toward the right "pragmatism" side, while "external" consultants were more to the left "conversion" end. Interestingly, women appeared more to the left than men. Besides societal forces pressing women in this direction, one woman explained that within organizations women are still acting out of personal characteristics than from positional power as an integral member of management. New Value Orientation

Is it a positive sign that a majority of the OD '80 participants in San Diego are clustered in the "middle" of Exhibit 1? Some might argue "yes" because it is a sign of maturity and lack of extremism. In essence, OD has finally learned from its highs and lows to position itself in the great "middle ground." Not bad for a survival strategy, but is it a viable growth direction?

My present concern about OD is its "boxed-in" position between the two extremes in Exhibit 1. Revolution seems to be out but so does

identification with the power elite. Will OD retain much identity or vitality in this "compromise" position?

A possible way out of the dilemma is to focus more on what values to emphasize in OD than on how to implement them. The issue in Exhibit 1 is over "how" to proceed with a change philosophy, but it does not raise to the surface questions of what values to pursue.

For too long OD has, in my opinion, been preoccupied with methods of change while neglecting the "message" it has to offer. Where once in the 1950s the value emphasis was quite clear on "openness," "trust," "owning up," and "sharing," we seem to have set aside these anachronisms for a bag of others' tricks and values in the form of MBO, behavior mod, affirmative action, life cycle planning, and assertiveness training. We act as technocrats to implement these methods, while often unknowingly borrowing their values (Tichy, 1978). Just ask yourself if you ever consciously and openly questioned the values embedded in your company's MBO system--are there some MBOs you could live with and others you might not accept?

What does OD stand for? If all behavioral action is value-based, including management decision-making and even "profit maximization," and if there is no "scientific" proof for the absolute validity of any of these values, then why can't OD make a significant contribution by helping management to confront its present values and to suggest new alternatives? We might just discover some behaviors and results that could take OD and its clients into an exciting growth period.

Value Alternatives

There are two key values that provide the foundation of OD. One is an overriding emphasis on the "human" dimension. We are clearly not in business to advance the financial or technology dimensions—economists and engineers do very fine in these areas. We can even say a bit more about the human side in that OD has long believed that people can influence organizations instead of being the victims of them. Which leads to a second value—that of broadening the decision—making process to include the affected employees so they can have a say over what happens to them and their organization.

Both these value positions, while seemingly obvious to me, have not been clear in some recent versions of OD. I am aware of programs where the primary value is on financial results and people are treated as secondary. And, it is not common to hear about OD programs that exclude employees from the decision-making process. Neither of these examples meet my basic criteria for sound OD, and I am quite prepared to say so to whomever advances such programs under the OD banner. Should we not unmask some of these OD masqueraders!

Least I appear too arbitrary and orthodox, let's move beyond the fundamentals to identify several value alternatives that might branch out from this foundation. We have been trapped too long in the "openness" and "trust" camp. Are there other values or value clusters that also advance the human dimension in organizations? Let me suggest a few, because I see us being much too mypoic in our ability to create new value alternatives.

Exhibit 2 presents seven clusters of relatively unexplored values in OD and organizations. Germs for these values presently exist in society, but we have not been quick to pick up on them.

The "diversity" cluster places a high value on the breadth of human differences in an organization. Too often we subscribe to homogeneity

with OD programs that try to make everyone alike, or judge everyone by the same standards, or emphasize consensus and cohesiveness at the expense of each individual's unique contribution.

Insert Exhibit 2 About Here

The "creativity" cluster is sadly missing from so many organizations. Rationality tends to crowd out creativity. Surprise is considered to be "bad" for its lack of anticipation, and intuition is too emotional. But look at the decreasing rate of innovation in U.S. new product development. More telling are the stories of scientists who, in reviewing their breakthroughs, are quick to indicate that rational planning was only a small part of an uncertain and unpredictable process.

While the "health" cluster has become popular outside work, we see too few organizations who value it as an integral part of company culture and its everyday life. So long as executives can pass their annual physical example, which are often superficial, they are supposedly ready for the rigors of work and more work. How many executives do you know who shortchange their vacation allotment? And what about workers who receive only one week of vacation annually? Or how many company cafeterias are still turning out meals rich in sodium and fats? But health goes farther into areas of stress and mental alertness. Do your training programs inform employees about sources of stress and relaxation techniques? Do managers know how to read non-verbal signs so they can conclude a meeting before the energy level runs down?

A controversial cluster is undoubtedly "play" because that is reserved for children or social life outside organizations. Yet think back to when you most enjoyed your work and colleagues, and my hunch is

you will describe it as a "fun" situation. It is when work doesn't even seem like work! Jokes and wit can relieve tension and give new perspective. Informality can prevent military salutes and deference to management by title and position. Even thirty minutes out for an office birthday party can reaffirm our mutual warmth for each other.

While "play" might be tolerated occasionally at celebrations in an organization, values surrounding "intimacy" have typically been taboo. We continue to believe in myths such as "never get too close to your subordinates," or "don't call bosses by their first names." I even know a company president who fired a vice-president for taking his secretary to lunch during National Secretaries' Week! Yet how can we work for so many hours of our life in organizations while pretending to be "impersonal" and "business-like"? Must we wait until our retirement dinners to receive a hug and pat of praise? Caring extends to asking for blood donations for ill employees, avoiding meetings on Saturday, and smiling at an unknown employee in the elevator.

In a nation that has emphasized quantitative measures of just about everything, a shift to "quality" carries with it a mixture of foreign intrigue and welcome relief. But it is much easier said than done because assembly lines, information systems, and stockholder expectations are geared more to quantitative output. Nevertheless, natural resource shortages and energy prices prompt a serious reevaluation. Besides, the Japanese and other foreign countries have been immensely successful with a "quality" strategy for product development. What would happen to life in organizations if we sought excellence in product design without planned obsolescence? What if workers were expected to become artisans who took pride in their manual and mental contributions?

What if we actually sought to meet the needs of consumers instead of creating false needs through wasteful advertising? What if we knew the difference between "crass" and "class" ways of treating employees?

Lastly, we can become metaphysical with the notion of a "spiritual" cluster of values to replace amoral and expedient values pervading so many organizations. Should organizations tolerate the bribery of potential customers? Should products be marketed that are dangerous to human Should return-on-investment be the primary "bottom line" in business organizations? My hunch is the answer would be clearly negative if more managements believed in the value of "service" than in the value of acquisition. It involves a high degree of respect for employees and customers, a willingness to cooperate with outside vested interest groups, and a desire to contribute to society more than take from it. I see these values occasionally espoused by executives but rarely implemented as deeply shared practices throughout organizations.

Value Confrontation Laboratory

Nothing will happen about values in any organization unless there is a confrontation with its existing value system. Since OD builds off a foundation of employee involvement, why can't OD participate actively in arranging a constructive reevaluation of values underlying employee behavior in organizations? This "consciousness raising" experience will likely surprise executives and workers alike by revealing beliefs they had taken for granted or considered to be the sole alternative.

Here is a series of steps that I can imagine taking place to initiate the value change process within an organization:

1. Acceptance of the Value Premise

Participants in the exercise, including the change agent, must be willing to acknowledge that: (a) values underly all behavior; (b) there is no scientific proof for the "right" or "wrong" values to hold, and so; (c) it is a matter of personal and organizational choice to select a set of values to guide behavior within the organization.

2. Presentation of Value Alternatives

This chapter has presented seven alternative value clusters that an not yet prevalent in organizations. There are obviously more alternatives, along with what already exists. Participants should be given an opportunity to examine these values and to suggest other alternatives, along with a chance to debate the characteristics and consequences of each alternative. It will be a difficult examination because the temptation will be to fall into a "right" versus "wrong" analysis.

3. Measurement of Present and Desired Values

You can design your own measurement technique, since there are no standardized types available. It may range from a questionnaire such as the one used in this chapter or simply voting by hand according to choices on a blackboard. The point is to obtain an "objective" picture from employees of their present and desired values from the alternatives available.

4. Discussion of Value Measurement Findings

This step permits a probing of the numerical results to determine the extent of agreement on the value alternatives and the gap between present and desired values. Some people will no doubt be shocked to see themselves on the fringes, while others will want to persuade colleagues that their values are preferable. Emphasis should be placed on understanding the results, not on judging them.

5. Choice of Shared Value System

Here the participants are asked to decide on the "shared" value system they wish to implement in the organization. It will likely involve some of the present and some of the preferred values expressed earlier in the measurement results. The critical issue is "choice" where a consensus is sought on values that a majority want and don't want for the organization.

6. Description of Expected Behavior and Results

Values need to be made concrete for them to have meaning and impact. While the earlier steps will have brought out some expectations about the implications of different values, it helps here to spell out the types of behavior and practices that are to be considered "legitimate" and "non-legitimate" under the new value system. In addition, some clarity can be gained around results expected to flow from these new behaviors.

7. Design of Support Mechanisms for New Value System

New value systems do not flourish without strong support from organizational systems, such as rewards, rules, information, layout, plans, budgets, and procedures. Each of these must be considered for their consonance with the new value system. Old values will be embedded in these systems so many changes will likely be necessary to remove the "drag" of the past.

8. Experiment and Evaluation of New Values

We have all learned through frustration and pain that an entire organizational system cannot be converted overnight. So plan a value experiment for two or three sub-units where there is senior management commitment to change. Then you can evaluate it and debug it before broader application. Be prepared to discover that values in the abstract do not look the same way in actual practice, nor do they always lead to the promised land. But then again, you might be more than pleased! We have little to lose if we remember that values are relative and changeable, and are not final answers as we often assume.

Experimented ... Gradualist ... Compromiser ... Servani. ... - Ser . Experimentel. 9 S 7 = . De signe +24 +22 +20 +18 +16 +14 +12 +10 +8 +6 +4 +2 0 9 2 . January. 6 . Selle? . SIROOMA . 10 R. 2. . Armonmood. OD '80 Results

CONVERSION VALUES

Person Makes Difference
Idealistic
Means
Rapid Change
Future Orientation
Overture Power
Total System Change

PRAGMATISM VALUES
Situation Makes Difference
Eclectic
Ends
Step-by-Step Change
Status-Quo Orientation
Accept Power
Fine-Tuning Change

Figure 1. Value Orientation and Consultant Roles

EXHIBIT 2

NEW VALUE CLUSTERS

"PLAY" Games/pranks Wit/Jokes Enjoyment Celebration Informality	"SPIRITUAL" Faith Commitment Contribution Understanding Peace
"HEALTH" Exercise Relaxation Energy Prevention Mind/Body Whole	"SPIRIT • Faith • Commit • Contri • Unders
"HEALTH" • Exercis • Relaxat • Energy • Prevent • Mind/Bo	"QUALITY" • Excellence • Service • Pride • Craftmanship
"CREATIVITY" Curiosity Spontaneity Surprise Intuition Experiment	"INTIMACY" Friendship Helping Touching Caring Involvement
DIVERSITY" Hetrogeneity Differentiation Mutual Respect Tolerance Acceptance	"INT. Frid Hell Touch

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