

# Reflections on the Future of Organization Development

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This article describes and interprets the results of interviews with 21 pioneering organization development (OD) thought leaders regarding the past, present, and future of the field. Interpretations of the data reveal a pattern of responses that reflects the evolution of the field; adds to our understanding of the definition, values, skills, and trends in the field; and supports recommendations for developing future OD practitioners and reconciling the discipline's currently fragmented state.

*Keywords:* organization development; future

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Organization development (OD) is at an important crossroads in its evolution. Serious questions exist about the future of this applied behavioral science discipline (Burke, 1976, 2002; Cummings & Worley, 2001; Farias & Johnson, 2000; Hornstein, 2001; Jamieson & Bennis, 1981; Worren, Ruddle, & Moore, 1999). On one hand, its relevance is being questioned (Nadler, 1999; Nicholl, 1998a, 1998b). Traditional OD practice, with its reputation for focusing on group and interpersonal-level issues such as team building, conflict management, diversity awareness, and other human process-

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oriented concerns, is seen by some as unrelated to the urgent pressure to add value in organizations.

On the other hand, the subject of change, change management, and leadership—important and focal areas of OD—is at the top of CEO agendas. It is the central subject in business press and best-selling books and the core of an increasing number of academic programs. Moreover, large consulting organizations are spending a significant percentage of their investment capital, advertising funds, and practice management budgets to develop their capabilities to lead and manage change for their clients (Worren et al., 1999). Reflective of this crossroads, professional associations, such as National Training Laboratories (NTL), the OD Network, the OD Institute, and the Academy of Management's OD&C Division, are wrestling with their purpose, values, and strategies.

The difficult question of OD's future direction is the focus of this study, and we sought to ground that exploration in the central tendency of informed observers rather than in personal sentiment or opinion. Our first objective, therefore, was to understand how a set of "thought leaders" in the field conceived of their own success, how they believed the field needed to change, and what competencies were necessary for success in the future. We conceived of thought leaders in a relatively narrow way as practitioners and academics whose focus was strongly and clearly related to OD and who could be considered founders, or at least early contributors, of the field. These people in our sample already have a legacy. They helped shape OD, their imprint on many organizations is still recognizable (Kleiner, 1996), and they have recorded their thinking for others (cf. Addison-Wesley OD Series)—making them reflective practitioners in the best sense. This article summarizes and integrates what they told us. At various times, they were reflective, energized, critical, and hopeful. They all were committed to providing their best thinking to this effort.

Our second objective was to develop a set of both practical and research recommendations that might address the field's currently fragmented state. In fact, the conversations summarized here were grounded in the pragmatic goal of using the data to redesign an OD master's degree curriculum.

This article first briefly reviews some of the central aspects of OD, including definitions, values, skills, and trends that are influencing the future. We note whether there is agreement in the field about each of these or whether this is an area to be explored. Next, we describe our methods and results, and last, we talk about the implications for the future of the OD practitioner, OD practice, and OD theory.

## CENTRAL ASPECTS OF THE FIELD

### Definitions of OD

Most OD definitions agree that it concerns systemwide planned change, uses behavioral science knowledge, targets human and social processes of organizations (specifically the belief systems of individuals, work groups, or culture), and intends to build the capacity to adapt and renew organizations (Cummings & Worley, 2001;

French & Bell, 1999). Within these broad parameters, the definition changes with the person defining OD and reflects a variety of perspectives. For example, some emphasize the process of OD work (Beckhard, 1969; Beer, 1980), whereas others attend to the object of the OD practice (Burke, 1982; French, 1969). In general, there is a strong commitment to the action research process and to the idea that OD is a special case of change management.

Most OD textbooks (e.g., Beer, 1980; Burke, 1982; Cummings & Worley, 2001; French & Bell, 1999) list interventions considered within the realm of OD practice. Those include broad categories of human process, technostructural and human resource management, and strategic interventions. Within each broad category there exists an array of seven to eight methodologies, such as team building, large group interventions, reengineering, total quality management, goal setting, strategic change, culture change, or self-designing organizations. There is a very high level of agreement across texts about these interventions and methodologies.

The boundaries are not as clear as they first appear, however. With few exceptions, almost every OD intervention is claimed by at least one other discipline. Reward system and performance management interventions also are within the realm of human resource management and organization behavior. Leadership and strategic change methodologies are shared with the strategy and business policy discipline, whereas work redesign and reengineering are claimed by industrial engineers and information technologists. Where do these other fields end and OD begin or vice versa? Where do emerging issues, such as environmental or sustainability auditing, the creation of an internal information system knowledge base, or the management of cross-cultural organizations, belong? We hope the data will speak to OD's boundaries and definition.

### **Values of the Field**

OD was founded on humanistic values and ethical concerns like democracy and social justice, and most practitioners would agree that OD tends to emphasize human development, fairness, openness, choice, and balancing of autonomy and constraint (Burke, 1997). In "Values, Man, and Organizations," Tannenbaum and Davis (1969) provided 13 statements that confirmed the humanistic origins and stated the basic beliefs, including the beliefs that people are good, that they should be affirmed as humans, but also that they should be confronted with data. For a long time, this list represented the de facto statement in the field.

In the early 1990s, Warner Burke and Allen Church examined these values (cf. Church & Burke, 1992) and compared value lists generated by Bennis, Beckhard, and Tannenbaum with their own list. There were some obvious differences. In particular, Church, Burke, and Van Eynde (1994) noted that the practice of OD had become more "results" and "bottom-line" oriented. The expression of personal power and reaping the rewards of consulting relationships had become the most prominent motivators in practitioners' current modes of operation. However, when practitioners were queried as to their ideal motive, they were more interested in social action and helping people. Thus, it seems safe to say there has been a shift in values, but there is no published evidence that it has been a conscious or intentional one. We hoped that the founders might

shed some light on this issue and raise questions about the values that guide OD practice and whether there is a need to clarify or bring coherence to them.

### **The Skills and Competencies**

Several attempts have been made through the years to develop a comprehensive list of OD skills and competencies (Head, Armstrong, & Preston, 1996; Shepard & Raia, 1981; Sullivan & Sullivan, 1995; Worley & Varney, 1998). In the most recent effort, Worley and Varney (1998) listed seven "foundation competencies," namely, knowledge of organization behavior, individual psychology, group dynamics, management and organization theory, research methods (including statistics), comparative cultural perspectives, and a functional knowledge of business. Individuals beginning their study or practice in OD should have a conceptual background in these areas. They also listed five "core knowledge competencies" (organization design, organization research, system dynamics, history of OD and change, and theories and models for change) and five "core skill competencies" (managing the consulting process, analysis and diagnosis, designing and choosing appropriate interventions, facilitating and process consultation, developing client capability, and evaluating organization change). Most of these lists document currently accepted skills and competencies, but typically they do not address what might be needed in the future. These lists are instructive in several ways, but perhaps most important, they offer a data-based counterpoint to claims that OD is distinct from (and for some, inferior to) change management. In fact, OD and change management are quite similar, and we were hopeful that the interviews might shed some practical light on the similarities and differences.

### **The Forces Affecting the Future**

Cummings and Worley (2001) elaborated on some key forces that will influence the future of OD practice, including changes in the economy, the workforce, technology, and organizations. The economy is trending toward more concentrated wealth, globalization, and ecological concern. The workforce is becoming more diverse, more educated, and more temporary or "at will." Technology is driving productivity within organizations, e-commerce is affecting both the supply chain and sales, and organizations are becoming more networked and knowledge based.

These trends could affect OD in several ways. OD practice may become more embedded in the organization's culture, more cross cultural, and more diverse in its client organizations. OD practitioners will need to be more technologically adept and be ready to deliver on shorter cycle times (Herman, 2002). Their focus is likely to shift toward innovation and learning, and they will need to be more familiar with a wide array of disciplines and clearer about the values that guide their practice and behavior.

This study was intended to discover whether the thought leaders would reinforce the importance of the traditional skills and values that would prepare OD practitioners to handle these trends or if they would identify new ones.

## STUDY METHOD

The study employed a standard survey design and sampling procedure (Kerlinger, 1973). The data and analysis reported here were parts of a larger curriculum evaluation process of a well-known master's degree program in OD. As part of that process, a list of thought leaders in the field was generated based on publication records, tenure in the field, existing lists of the top people in the field, and recognition as a prominent speaker or practitioner. The list consisted of more than 50 white male and female names. Twenty-one of them ultimately participated in the interview process. Almost everyone who could be contacted participated. Nonparticipants were simply unavailable during the time the interviews were conducted. There appears to be no sampling bias in terms of academics versus practitioners, older versus younger, or any other relevant dimension between the participants and nonparticipants. However, the sample is almost entirely white males (there is one white female) and obviously is biased toward individuals who are associated with the beginnings of the field.

We therefore believe that the current sample can be viewed as representative of the OD field's early conceptions. The view reported here is uniquely historical. The interviewees were there when the field was first conceived and were important contributors to its early definition and development. With a couple of exceptions, each of them remains successful and current in today's marketplace, and their perspectives on the future of the field are unique. A list of the participants' names is available from the authors on request.

Five different faculty members interviewed the 21 subjects, with the interviews ranging in length from about 45 minutes to almost 2 hours. For the purposes of this study, the subjects were asked three questions:

1. What are the key skills, knowledge, values, or competencies that have made you successful?
2. What does the field need more of and less of in the future?
3. What are the critical needs or issues in educating people to facilitate change in the future? What skills, knowledge, and competencies will the next generation of change practitioners require?

The data were summarized via a series of structured content analyses (Neuendorf, 2001). First, two OD graduate students read the answers to each question and identified the key "thought phrases" for each respondent (Gray, 2000). A thought phrase was a sentence or sentence segment that best represented the individual's central point. Thus, an individual's answer might include one or more thought phrases that were used in the analysis. Then, the graduate students sorted the identified thought phrases into common themes. Second, the authors went through the same process as the students, identifying thought phrases and sorting them into themes. Third, thought phrases common to all four coders were identified, and common themes were identified and defined. When student-generated themes differed from author-generated themes, the author-generated themes were used.

Fourth, the final theme categories were defined and described. A random sample of thought phrases from each question was selected. The category definitions and thought phrases were sent to three independent coders who were asked to review the

**TABLE 1**  
**Descriptive Coding Statistics and Reliabilities for the Three Questions**

<i>Question</i>	<i>Sample Size (Interviewees)</i>	<i>Number of "Thought Phrases"</i>	<i>Average Items/ Person</i>	<i>Average Interrater Reliability</i>
1	21	86	3.9	.71
2	21	104	4.95	.62
3	21	87	4.1	.74

definitions and to place each item into a category. From these three coders, an estimate of the reliability of the categories was determined (Nunnally, 1978).

Basic descriptive statistics and reliabilities from the content analysis and coding effort are shown in Table 1. Each interviewee averaged about four distinct thoughts per question (range = 3.90 to 4.95). They had more to say about what the field needed more of and less of (almost one full thought phrase per person) than the other two questions. The reliability of the identified themes in Questions 1 and 3 was very good, at .71 and .74, respectively. The reliability for Question 2 was .62, and there was more inconsistency among the four coders than with the other two questions. Our analysis of this inconsistency showed a clear pattern of interpretation. As a "more of or less of" question, the authors conceived of themes as bidirectional. For example, the theme "individual and group process interventions" included statements that indicated that OD should do more individual interventions as well as statements that indicated that OD should do less group interventions. The lower reliability is the result of coders' wanting to put statements into categories that were unidirectional. For the purposes of this study, we will retain the original categories but be cautious about interpreting the frequency and importance of these themes.

## FINDINGS/RESULTS

This section describes the frequency with which different themes were mentioned in the interviews. Tables 2, 3, and 4 provide category labels, category definitions, and the percentage of the sample that mentioned the theme.

### Past Keys to Success

The sample's comments about what made them successful were organized into 11 different themes (Table 2). Three themes were mentioned by more than 30% of the sample, and two more were mentioned by more than a quarter of the sample. The most frequently mentioned reason for success was broad exposure to, and experiences in, areas outside of the field of OD. Almost half of the sample attributed their success to eclectic backgrounds, broad study curriculums, and/or readings outside the field. The eclectic backgrounds ranged from military training to work as a line manager, and studies included accounting and philosophy of science.

**TABLE 2**  
**Category Labels, Definitions, and Frequencies for Question 1**

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Definition: Success Resulted From . . .</i>	<i>Percentage of Interviewees</i>
Broad education, training, experience	The background the individual had, especially the exposure to concepts and experiences not directly related to organization development	48
Interpersonal skills	Having a skill set that allowed the individual to work well with others	43
Clear knowledge of self	Having focused on the development of the self	33
Ability to see systems	The ability to view organizations systemically	28
Focusing on relevant issues	A focus on relevant, as opposed to "touchy-feely" issues	28
Ability to operate within values	The ability to work within or under a clear value orientation; expressed beliefs or values	24
Specific competences	The applications of a specific or unique competence/skill/knowledge area	19
Luck and timing	Being in the right place at the right time	14
Exposure to the field	Having experiences within the field of organization development	14
Cultural experience	Being exposed to different cultures	9
Theory and practice	The balancing of applied and theoretical concerns	9

Having good interpersonal skills was the second most frequently mentioned theme (43%). In combination with a clear knowledge of self (33%), these two themes form the heart of what might be called the traditional view of the OD practitioner. The basis of the field in T-groups and sensitivity training promoted the development of interpersonal skills, knowledge of the self, and a particular set of values (mentioned by about a quarter of the sample). It is not surprising then that these well-known pioneer practitioners would attribute their success to these classic attributes. Two other themes—the ability to see systems and the focus on relevant issues—were mentioned by 28% of the sample.

#### **Changes in the Field of OD**

The OD practitioners identified 13 different themes in response to the question about what OD needed more of or less of (Table 3). Six of the themes were mentioned by at least 30% of the sample. The most frequently mentioned theme was that the field needed to avoid getting trapped into a reliance on fads and techniques. Almost half of the comments were derisive in tone, including "less prescriptive, faddish people not knowing what they are doing" and "less jumping on every trendy notion that comes along." In addition, this theme also included admonitions to continue using classic design skills and traditional (but effective) processes.

**TABLE 3**  
**Category Labels, Definitions, and Frequencies for Question 2**

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Definition: The Field Needs . . .</i>	<i>Percentage of Interviewees</i>
Less reliance on fads and techniques	To rely a lot less on techniques and jumping on the latest fad	48
Collaboration within the field	To do more bridging among different stakeholders within the social sciences and a lot more working together	43
Relevant approaches to change	Approaches to change that add value and are relevant to the organization and its members	43
Personal and group development	A lot more emphasis on individual and group-related interventions OR a lot less emphasis on these	43
Large systems focus	A larger systems focus	38
Understanding of organization development's value orientation	A lot more values work OR needs to drop the whole values issue	33
More business knowledge	To incorporate more business knowledge in its thinking	29
Taking a stance	To take a stand on issues in organizations and with client systems and be less wishy-washy	24
More understanding of self as instrument	Individuals with a lot more understanding of who they are and their motivations for doing this work	19
Generating new ideas	To develop new ideas and new ways of looking at organizations	14
Action learning	To create methods and processes that promote learning	14
Working with power	To learn to work with or against power in a system	9
Global competency	To address cross-cultural and global issues	9

Three other themes—more collaboration in the field, more relevant approaches to change, and more/less personal and group development processes—were mentioned by 43% of the sample. First, the OD practitioners believed OD needed more collaboration among members of the field. There was a broad call for building bridges and relationships both within and across the field of OD and also with other disciplines. Second, the respondents believed that OD needed to be more relevant in its approach to change. The thought phrases in this theme reflected a more bottom-line orientation to change processes and included phrases such as “continually asking ‘OD for what?’,” “interventions based more on customer satisfaction and key measures,” and “realize that we are working for business . . . help them make things work on their terms.” Finally, it was common for the sample to mention personal and group development



**TABLE 4**  
**Category Labels, Definitions, and Frequencies for Question 3**

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Definition: In the Future, Organization Development Practitioners Must . . .</i>	<i>Percentage of Interviewees</i>
Large systems fluency	Understand and work with large systems, including large organizations and large groups of people	43
Consulting is saying the tough stuff	Have the mind-set and ability to handle rejection and deliver tough messages to a client	33
Ability to design	Have the ability to understand how to design and redesign systems	28
Power and influence	Be comfortable with power and using influence	24
Business orientation	Have more skills and knowledge about business and a line management orientation	24
Broad understanding	Have a broader understanding of the world	24
Systems thinking	Understand the way systems work and behave	24
Evaluate and research	Have better research and evaluation skills	19
The necessity of practice/experience	Have more experience and fieldwork before they practice	19
Self-knowledge and exploration	Have a solid understanding of their "self" and focus on their personal growth	19
Ability to deeply understand an organization	Have better diagnostic skills that get behind the issues into important, deep, and subtle aspects of the organization	14
Developing new models of change and organization	Have better models and new ideas about how organizations work and change	14
Considering multiple viewpoints	Consider contrasting, conflicting, and cross-cultural perspectives	14
Ability to bring people together	Be better at pulling people together for a common purpose	14
Core knowledge about the field	Have good knowledge about the field of organization development	14
Personal philosophies and values	Have a strong and clear sense of their own values and beliefs for their practice	14

approaches as something the field should do more of *and* less of. That is, there was a clear split in their thinking. Half of the comments called for increased attention to group interventions, and half believed that OD should move away from the traditional group approaches to change, calling them outdated and limiting.

Two other themes—large system focus and understanding OD's value orientation—were mentioned by more than a third of the sample. Unlike the first question, the personal growth and self-knowledge theme was mentioned only by 19% of the sample.

### Critical Future Competencies

In the final question about required future competencies of OD practitioners, the sample identified 16 different themes (Table 4). Only 2 themes were mentioned by more than a third of the sample: large systems fluency and "saying the tough stuff." However, a total of 7 themes was mentioned by 24% or more of the sample.

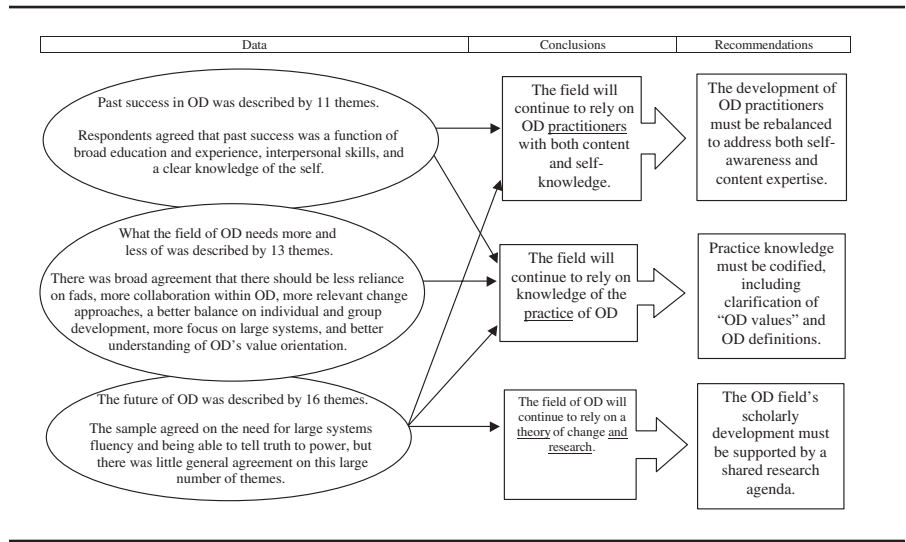
The large systems fluency theme, mentioned by 43% of the sample, included many references to knowing how to bring the whole system into the room (Weisbord, 1991) and looking at organizations as complex systems. In addition, this theme included concerns about better understanding the unintended consequences of managerial and other OD interventions. The second most common theme, with 33% of the sample, also reflected a broader theme of how OD practitioners conduct themselves but was concerned that OD practitioners in the future needed to "speak the unspeakable" (Argyris, 1980). The clear message here was that practicing OD requires a lot of self-confidence and self-knowledge that allows for relevant and appropriate client confrontation. At the same time, knowledge about large organizational systems and interventions also is essential.

The second tier of themes included having an ability to design change in organizations, being able to work with power and use influence, needing a business orientation and knowledge, having a broad understanding of the world, and being able to deeply understand organizations as systems.

## DISCUSSION OF THE DATA

The purpose of this study was to understand better the future direction of OD through two objectives. First, we wanted to understand, from the perspective of the people who have shaped the field, how they conceived of their own success, how they believed the field should change, and what skill sets they thought were necessary for success in the future. Second, we wanted to develop a set of practical and research recommendations to guide that future. The basic relationships between the data, our conclusions, and our recommendations are shown in Figure 1. This section addresses the second objective by discussing the data, noting an evolution in the responses, and providing some initial interpretations.

As shown in the left-hand side of Figure 1, the data suggest that this sample's prior success was primarily a function of their knowledge of self, their interpersonal skills, and their broad experience. As the interview and responses moved from past experience to the future of the field, the answers became broader in number and scope and more diffuse in agreement. For example, there were a larger number of categories in response to the question about how the field should change. Responses suggested that the field should be less faddish and that OD practitioners should collaborate more; develop more relevant change approaches; balance individual, group, and large systems interventions; and be clearer about the values of the field. When asked about future competencies, 16 categories emerged, although the sample agreed on only two



**FIGURE 1: Summary of Data, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

NOTE: OD = organization development.

issues: that OD practitioners need to better understand large systems and to develop the ability to tell the truth to persons in power.

The answers to the three questions display a clear evolutionary pattern in their substantive content. OD practitioner issues (e.g., self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and value orientation) dominate answers to the first question. Answers to the second question are focused almost entirely on OD practice and OD theory. That is, the field needs more sophistication in the mechanics of helping organizations change as well as in its understanding of why organizations change or why interventions work. Finally, answers to the third question reflect an integrated focus on all three domains. We discuss this evolution below.

Early OD practitioners were born out of the T-group movement and were responding to concerns that scientific management and bureaucratic models of organizing were dulling the human spirit (Kleiner, 1996). They were “looking to put a velvet glove on an iron fist,” as one practitioner noted. As a result, there was a great deal of attention on the personal growth and interpersonal skills of the OD practitioner who could represent a model of self-actualization. Moreover, the primary interventions of the day were process-oriented ones, such as team building, conflict management, and survey feedback. There was a natural fit between the intent, the skill set, and the intervention methods. Not surprisingly, then, the themes to the first question revolve around characteristics of the practitioner. There is a clear emphasis on the practitioners’ broad backgrounds (which presumably helped them to be better change agents), interpersonal skills, knowledge of self, and ability to operate within a set of values.

When the question moved to what the field needed more or less of, the focus of attention shifted to issues of theory and practice, and the characteristics of the consultant become less salient. Relevance and practice, small voices in the themes of the first

question, begin to take center stage in Question 2. Practitioners in the field need more business knowledge, more relevant change processes, less faddish techniques, and a large-system focus. The split in the personal and group development theme reflects the evolution in the responses but also the current state of the field. Half of the thought phrases in this theme called for more attention to interpersonal and small systems interventions, whereas the other half called for movement away from these interventions. The focus was on practice and theory, not on the development of the self. The values orientation theme also was qualitatively different from the values theme in the first question; the focus clearly was that the field needed to develop a set of shared values instead of individuals operating within their own sets of values.

Finally, in the third question, self-awareness and practitioner characteristics are on an equal footing with the relevant practice, skills, and knowledge issues. The top seven themes reflect this integrated view: large systems fluency, saying the tough stuff, the ability to design, working with power and influence, having a strong business orientation, having a broad understanding, and incorporating systems thinking into their practice. Not only did Question 3 generate the largest number of categories, all three domains—practitioner, practice, and theory—were equally represented.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As shown in Figure 1, these data lead to three sets of conclusions and recommendations. The first conclusion is that the field will continue to rely on OD practitioners having both content knowledge and self-knowledge. We therefore recommend balancing the development of OD practitioners to address these two, often difficult to integrate, subjects. The second conclusion is that the field will continue to rely on knowledge derived from practice that is distinct from theory. This leads to a recommendation that the field formalize its applied knowledge. The third conclusion is that the field of OD will continue to rely on research into OD's effectiveness. Within the context of this study's objectives, we recommend orchestrating OD's research agenda. We discuss each of these conclusions and recommendations in turn.

### Development of OD Practitioners

The data support the conclusion that effective OD practitioners integrate self-awareness with specific content competencies. OD's once relatively simple focus on human process interventions has evolved into a complex and less easily defined field. The skill sets are more demanding, and the intervention methodologies range from personal and small system designs to managing organizational alliances and mergers. The development of future OD practitioners must balance inquiry into the self, practice, and theory.

*Development of self.* Recommending self-development in balance with theory and practice is not as obvious or neutral as it might appear. It represents, in fact, an important "fault line" within the data and the field. One side of the fault line sees self-development

as the sine qua non of OD, whereas the other side argues its irrelevance in practice and theory. The field's current fragmentation may well stem from failing to recognize, understand, and address the conundrum of personal development as an end in itself and self-knowledge for relevant practice. Our conclusion, informed by the data, is that personal growth is critical in the development of OD practitioners but misplaced as a goal or purpose of OD practice.

The insights from personal growth and intrapersonal competence work are central to the development of effective OD practitioners. Awareness of one's motives, early developmental influences, self-image, biases, and capabilities improves the ability to speak truth to power, live according to a set of values, and help an organization plan and implement change. It decreases the chance that the practitioner will use the client to satisfy unconscious wants and needs. The clear message for OD practitioners (and consultants in general) is the importance of the question, "For whose needs are you working?"

We also conclude that self-development and personal growth is misplaced as a goal or purpose in OD practice. If, as some have asserted, OD's main purpose is the development of human potential, then it is important to distinguish personal growth as an ingredient in the development of OD practitioners from building human potential in a client system. If a practitioner's or client's self-development is given precedence as a legitimate intervention over pragmatic assistance to improve a system's effectiveness, conclusions of irrelevance are not far behind and probably are justifiable. Few people deny that work should be both meaningful and productive. However, an OD practitioner's pursuit of self-knowledge to the exclusion of productive value-added activity is narcissistic, and it is misguided when personal growth is normatively viewed as central to the client (unless that is what has been contracted for).

This is a very different notion than developing the client's capability to manage change, a legitimate value-added OD activity. When an OD practitioner pursues personal growth on the client's time, there is little probability that change capabilities are being transferred to the organization. OD practitioners are more likely to build a dependency relationship and violate an enduring value of OD than to help the client be more functional in the future.

The self-development puzzle is reconciled by recognizing that without self-knowledge, practitioners can inadvertently carry out activities that resolve their own inadequacies and needs at the expense of good change practice or the application of good theory. With self-knowledge, one can make the work relevant by taking tough stands or intervening appropriately to enhance the client organization.

*Grounding in theory and research.* The development of OD practitioners must also include a solid grounding in the fundamental theories of change and intervention dynamics as well as the broad disciplines that underpin those theories. Competent OD practitioners must be familiar with a wide range of social sciences, including anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science, and economics, and also with issues of organizational and national culture, philosophy of science, research methods, and technology. The data reported here point up the importance of increased knowledge and skill in these technical areas, and curricula need to be adjusted to address this

shortcoming. These are no small tasks, and to efficiently educate OD practitioners in the future, new methods of exposing people to this broad and deep knowledge base will need to be developed. As a practical matter, no single educational program can address all of these issues in any depth. More likely, programs should develop distinctive competencies and encourage applicants to match their needs with curriculum offerings.

*Experience and practice.* Finally, the development of OD practitioners must include practical experience and application of theory. It is one thing to lead and manage an organizational system. It is quite another to *help* someone else lead and manage change so that the capability to do it better the next time is enhanced. This suggests that individuals entering the field need to have amassed a significant amount of consulting experience or, in the absence of experience, need to have internships or other supervised fieldwork to understand the intertwined nature of practitioner, practice, and theory.

#### **Codification of Practice**

The second conclusion is that the field will continue to rely on a practice base of knowledge that is distinct from the theory base. As an applied discipline, it is hard to separate theory from practice and even harder to separate the practice from the practitioner. Clarifying the boundaries of the field's definition, clarifying the values that govern practice, and developing an information system for collecting practice knowledge will help to understand the boundaries among theory, practice, and the practitioner.

*Clarify the field's definitional boundaries.* Despite considerable overlap in published definitions of OD, there clearly are two camps, and the data support this distinction. The first camp is represented by the traditionalists and neotraditionalists who believe OD was and always should be confined to issues of human process. Supporting the field's traditional humanistic values, they normatively argue for more "chaordic" (Hock, 1999), spiritual (Gunther, 2001), diverse, and organic organizations. The second camp, the pragmatists, wants to integrate the field's process competencies with the analytic and rational approaches to strategy and organization design. The traditionalists fear the pragmatists may consciously or unconsciously conspire with powerful elites (Cummings, 1999) toward ends (e.g., the concentration of wealth [Korten, 1995]) or processes (e.g., speed [Worley & Patchett, 2000]) the traditionalists would never support. The pragmatists worry that the traditionalists will retain the "touchy-feely" tradition. They inquire as to how spirituality in the workplace, training, and attention to group process will contribute to the success and survival of today's organizations.

Clearly, there is a need for an OD definition that specifies the scope and boundary of the field. Our interpretation of the data suggests three initial elements of such a definition and helps reconcile the traditionalists' and the pragmatists' viewpoints. First, for research and practice activity to be considered OD, it must involve change in an organization, one or more of its systems, or its members as a whole. That is, there must be

action taken (or studied) that is deliberately and consciously designed to bring about change over a specified time period, and there must be some way to demonstrate and/or measure the degree to which the change has occurred. For example, helping a senior management team develop a new organization vision would not qualify as OD unless there was some description and assessment of its implementation. If research and practice under the rubric of OD does not meet this most basic requirement, then we believe that there is too much overlap between the fields of OD and organization behavior, human resource management, or industrial psychology.

Second, research and practice can be called OD if it is intended to transfer a change capability to the client system. OD must involve learning; the process of change must be conducted in such a way that the client or client system has more knowledge about how to manage change in the future. Evidence of such potential could include appropriate and relevant levels of participation, client coaching and feedback sessions, evaluation and review activities, and the like. This criterion holds promise for distinguishing between OD and “change management.”

Third, research and practice can be called OD if the activities involve a deliberate and conscious effort to improve the performance or effectiveness of the client system. OD’s future is best maintained if any effort under the umbrella of OD can address the “so what” question.

The data support the conclusion that OD definitions include intended change in the system, intended increases in the capacity of the system to manage change in the future, and intended improvements in systems effectiveness. Such a definition will help to define interventions and other activities that are included within the boundaries of OD and, more important, the interventions and activities that are excluded. For example, a diversity initiative that measures changes in an organization’s culture through modifications in the human resource systems, the dominant coalition’s mindset, and multiple forms of training could be considered OD. However, a series of workshops alone would not be considered an OD intervention because there is no measure of change, no evidence of learning, and no evaluation of its impact.

*Clarify the values of the field.* Fuzzy definitional boundaries are partly a function of the lack of clarity around the values of the field. Without a set of clear and shared values, an OD practitioner is less likely and less able to take solid stands on tough issues; practice values will default to the individual’s values in a specific situation. For example, if a client system ignores environmental sustainability in its operations, the practitioner’s tendency to address the issue will be more a function of his or her environmental values than of OD’s values. With few exceptions (cf. Burke, 1997), the field had no stance on the downsizing movement or the reengineering fads of the 1980s and 1990s and was ineffective in shaping organization change. Similarly, without a set of clear and shared values around technological proliferation, third-economy development, child labor, or the current rounds of downsizing, there is little chance that the field will drive change in desired directions.

Unfortunately, we are heading in the wrong direction. There has been a clear movement away from focus, agreement, and clarity to confusion, bickering, and fragmentation. For example, there are at least three organized but uncoordinated efforts to iden-

tify a set of values. Because each is interested in its own outcomes, there is little chance the generated values will be shared. There was a clear call in the data for more collaboration among professional OD organizations and OD practitioners. Bringing these different efforts together would be a tangible first step in the right direction. Such a process holds the promise of being inclusive so that debate on the values can occur and consensus potentially can emerge.

*Develop a knowledge management system.* Much in the myth and history of OD includes the advice to “carry someone else’s bags,” referring to the practice of apprenticeship and mentoring. In the early days of the field, it was recommended that elders pass along tacit practice knowledge to the next generation. This tacit knowledge included practical tips about how to understand and work with power and politics, when to intervene and when to be patient, how to resolve ethical or value dilemmas, or how to make choices about the speed of the process. This practice has declined significantly, and for OD to increase in rigor and relevance, this tacit practice knowledge cannot be left to diffuse randomly. The problem can be remedied by creating a central location where OD practice knowledge is stored and where best practices in emerging areas can be developed more quickly.

As a practical matter, a variety of portal technologies and knowledge management systems exist. There is no need to design a system from scratch, but there are two key challenges. First, decisions must be made about the data categories to be used; ways to input, search, retrieve, and present the information; and where to maintain the system. The first two decisions are empirical and represent practical suggestions for research. With respect to the third decision, servers at NTL, Organization Development Network, or one of the universities that teach OD could house the system. Second, demand for the knowledge initially will exceed the supply, and efforts to encourage or induce people to share their knowledge will be needed.

#### **Development of a Research Agenda**

The final conclusion is that OD will continue to rely on research that demonstrates its effectiveness and develops change theory. The data support a recommendation to better orchestrate OD research. The field’s current fragmentation is attributable partly to an uncoordinated research approach.

Judging from the quantity of publications describing new interventions, new approaches to change, and new theories of change, the field of OD would seem to be healthy. With few exceptions, however, there is little coordination among OD researchers and little relationship among their outputs. The data expressed the concern that OD was jumping on bandwagons and in doing so risked its identity. For example, there have been dramatic changes in the contexts and systems within which OD practitioners work. Yet there have been few real theoretical or practical breakthroughs to fit this new reality. Rather than a programmed approach, the field has reverted to an “old wine in new bottles” strategy. Total quality management and reengineering, for example, were powerful concepts that have shaped the current organizational landscape. At their core, however, these interventions are linear extensions of sociotechnical systems



theory. Today's infatuation with "six sigma" processes represents that same phenomenon. Other examples include large-group interventions (also hailing from earlier work with the sociotechnical systems movement), strategic change (hailing from Beckhard's and others' open-systems planning work), and diversity (OD's early roots are in race relations). Although clearly innovative, these interventions are part of OD's normal development cycle as an applied behavioral science. Without coordination and with the continued acceptance of "old wine in new bottles" as truly innovative approaches, the field will continue to be fragmented by forces focused on the promulgation of separate and distinct interventions. At best, OD will be defined as a "tool kit."

A coordinated research approach, on the other hand, identifies and addresses the key questions facing the field, develops the theoretical and practice aspects of a new intervention in a programmatic fashion, and evaluates the effectiveness of OD practice. The first step is to understand the critical issues facing the field. Our hope is that this study raised several concerns, including suggestions for the development of OD practitioners, suggested refinements to the field's definition, the development of a shared value base, and creation of a practice improvement database. To these issues, we would add the viability of virtual teams, the impact of globalization, the influence of technology, the applicability of complexity and chaos theory, and the development of sustainability models.

The second step is to coordinate programs of research where specific questions, theories, or interventions are methodically developed and evaluated. A good example is appreciative inquiry (AI). AI has drawn on a different set of theories to create a new practice (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), and David Cooperrider and others have organized the research in this area. Much work needs to be done to determine whether (a) there is a difference between a process that incorporates an appreciative approach and a formal AI, (b) the intervention improves effectiveness, (c) current research methods are appropriate to evaluate an intervention based on social constructionism, and (d) AI is an alternative to or a replacement of our traditional views of system development. Because the research in this area is coordinated, shared, and cumulative, there has been considerable progress on this subject.

The third step in a coordinated research agenda is more evaluation of OD's ability to affect organization effectiveness. Despite numerous calls, there has been little cumulative research to verify the effectiveness of OD practice. To be fair, the longitudinal research designs required to effectively evaluate a change process are sophisticated and require the use of statistical techniques that incorporate time as a variable. Yet there is little development of these methods and even fewer applications of them. If OD is to gain in credibility, then it must not apply simplistic evaluation models to complex systems of change.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Three limitations to this study need to be acknowledged. First, the sample is neither random nor representative of the OD field in general. It is clearly biased in favor of people associated with the beginnings of OD, and the sample consists almost entirely

of white males. Our descriptive findings should be generalized to the larger OD community of scholars and practitioners only with care and with the possibility that it might represent a white male view. One obvious suggestion for future research is to replicate this study with a more current and more diverse group of OD practitioners. However, the views of this sample are indeed instructive and help to form a more grounded picture of the crossroads facing OD.

Second, the reliability of the analysis for Question 2 warrants careful interpretation. The question was phrased as a "more of or less of" question, and we tried to exercise caution in our presentation of the data and to present our findings as conservatively as possible in acknowledgment of that weaker reliability. Future research should reword this question to avoid the reliability problems experienced here.

Finally, the 21 subjects were interviewed by five different faculty members who, although working from the same interview protocol, took notes at varying levels of detail and may have taken the interview to areas of their own personal interests or in the interest of redesigning the curriculum. That bias could not be accounted for.

### SUMMARY

We interviewed 21 thought leaders and pioneers in the field of OD on their views of past success, their opinions about changes required in the field, and their thoughts about competencies in the future. Our analysis of their answers confirmed some doubts about the field's current state but also provided hope by charting some paths to renewed rigor and relevance. The founders acknowledged that OD practitioners in the future will need to be globally competent, understand a broader range of issues in the workforce and the world, and develop new models of change and organization. The breadth of issues mentioned by the panel suggests that there is no clear and desired future state for OD.

We believe that OD is ready to move out from the shadow of other social science disciplines. This is both its practical and research challenge. Practically, OD must demonstrate that it is more than change management and that OD can improve not only effectiveness but also the capacity of a system to change in the future. The development of a codified practice base will raise the overall quality of current practice, and the pursuit of a coordinated research agenda will help to distinguish OD from other social sciences as well as create a knowledge management system for learning as organizations develop.

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