

Enacting Values-Based Change: Organization Development in Action

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As a field, organization development (OD) is deeply grounded in a set of core values and principles of practice about how one should work with and in organizations. These perspectives are based on a wide range of theoretical influences on the evolution of the field, including social psychology, group dynamics, psychotherapy, industrial-organizational psychology, participative management, and sociology. Early OD also operationalized new management and behavioral science research that provided evidence of better ways to treat people and run organizations (see Jamieson & Gellermann, 2014, for an overview). It is also the result of a number of external forces including the social milieu of the 1950–1960s, and a response to many of the troubling organization, management, and Human Resources (HR) practices that dominated in the industrial age. At that time, overtly negative,

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oppressive, bureaucratic, inhumane, and unfair practices were commonplace, and OD practitioners were developing interventions and processes to drive positive changes and instill more empowering and developmental ways of managing organizations and their people. It was an uphill battle early on in the field and *still is in many places*; however, the values and practices of the field are a key differentiator of OD, particularly when compared to other types of management consulting and change approaches (Church & Jamieson, 2014).

Attempts at codifying and clarifying OD's values have been rampant since the beginning of the field (e.g., Bennis, 1969; Tannenbaum & Davis, 1969; Gellermann, Frankel, & Ladenson, 1990; Bradford & Burke, 2004; Burke, 1982; Friedlander, 1976; Golembiewski, 1990; Greiner, 1980; Harvey, 1974; Jamieson & Worley, 2008; Margulies & Raia, 1990; McLean & DeVogel, 2002; Weisbord, 1982). More recently, Jamieson and Gellermann (2014) have collected many lists from the past and, once more, tried to organize and simplify the common ground in OD values.

There were about 85% common elements across most value studies and conceptual frameworks which can be organized under four core categories:

- **Humanism:** including such values as authenticity, openness, honesty, fairness, justice, equality, diversity, respect
- **Democracy:** including such values as participation, voice, choice, responsibility, opportunity, collaboration
- **Development:** including such values as personal growth, human potential, learning, actualization
- **Effectiveness:** including such areas as in process and content, mission and results, social and technical aspects of organizations

Ironically, OD has always sought balance between the effectiveness and health of the workplace, between content and process, between the individual and the organization needs, between performance and humanity, and between the both-and solution.

Gellermann, Frankel, and Ladenson (1990) conducted one of the large-scale processes to develop consensus on a set of values and ethics believed to be central to OD practice. The emphasis in their work has focused mostly on practitioners' personal conduct and how practitioners

should work with others. But the values also guide how organizations need to be designed and how changes need to be planned and executed.

In the practice of OD a *context of democracy* is important, that *empowers people to participate with free choice and responsibility*, to develop processes and structures that *build people's involvement in their destiny*, and *to hold people accountable* for their actions and decisions. To work in OD is also to utilize the *power of the group* and facilitate *interpersonal competence, cooperation, collaboration, and synergy*. And, to build *jointness – collective and community* – into the mindset of the human system. (Jamieson & Gellermann, 2014)

Most OD practitioners have had to overcome many barriers throughout the past 70 years of practice. Many were created by the misalignment of OD values and practices with predominantly economic and productivity beliefs and values (many of which are inaccurate for organic, human social systems). Many other approaches to improving organizations operate on different value platforms (quality, lean, management consulting, etc.). Many have narrow efficiency or productivity lenses. Some just desire to maximize profit. But few pay attention to multiple desired outcomes simultaneously. From the start, OD was mutually concerned with organization effectiveness, workforce well-being, and forms of sustainability in communities, society, and the world.

The early emphasis was clearly on human social aspects as opposed to a technical-production focus. This was clearly an attempt to focus on what was missing in an engineering dominated, industrial production-oriented system. Yet the early OD pioneers had not lost sight of effectiveness, performance, productivity, and efficiency. As Bennis (1969) stated, “More often than not, change agents believe that realization of these values will ultimately lead not only to a more humane and democratic system, but to a more efficient one.” Argyris (1962) further emphasized, “Without interpersonal competence or a ‘psychologically safe’ environment, the organization is a breeding ground for mistrust, intergroup conflict, rigidity... which in turn leads to a decrease in organizational success in problem-solving.” And, French and Bell (1999) in their historical view of OD state, “We think most organization development practitioners held these humanistic and democratic values with their implications for different and ‘better’ ways to run organizations and deal with people.”

The field has long been too inwardly focused, with not enough attention to balancing/aligning with those who lead the systems we wish to

change. This has often led to value conflicts and value abandonment. Some OD values have been compromised, some overpowered by dominant economic/profit drivers, and, today, some may be less internalized by the many new practitioners entering the field with little education or experience. Ironically, many of the original conditions that OD was responding to (in the 1940s and 1950s) seem to be alive and well again, as well as many new workplace values issues, generating from the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) world. OD's original values were not just a nice way to treat people, they were central to how to create effective and healthy organizations. OD approaches, embedded with their values, have been shown to support more effective and high-performing organizations and sustainable changes (Golembiewski, 1990; Sanders & Cooke, 2012; Lawler, 1991; Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990; Beer, 2009; Tamkin, 2004). Everyone can win!

Over the years, there have been a number of formal and informal efforts to articulate, measure, train, and even draw boundaries around the values of OD (e.g., Church, 2001; Gellermann, Frankel, & Ladenson, 1990; Jamieson & Gellermann, 2014; Minahan & Norlin, 2013; Murrell, 1999; Waclawski & Church, 2002; Weidner & Kulick, 1999). Discussion of these topics and issues have also spawned a number of formal research efforts on the state of the field (e.g., Church, Burke, & Van Eynde, 1994; Church & Burke, 1995; Church, Waclawski, & Burke, 1996; Fagenson & Burke, 1990; McDermott, 1984; McMahan & Woodman, 1992; Shull, Church, & Burke, 2013). As it turns out, however, it has proven to be exceedingly difficult to achieve alignment and closure on the issue of OD values across a field of practitioners and scholars that is so varied and divergent in orientation and mind-set, though considerable progress has been made.

Interestingly enough, and while these internal debates have been occurring among practitioners and scholars of the field for decades, many of the concepts and principles of OD itself have quietly been adopted and adapted into core management practices (many aspects of participation, team development, and some leadership practices). Some of this has been intentional and some has been through osmosis. While having OD embedded into core management practices is clearly a positive outcome and one many practitioners would strongly encourage. Given the manner in which it has evolved, the concerns continue regarding the degree of compromises that may have been made. Although some are troubled by the potential misuse and misapplication of OD tools and technologies (e.g., Church & Dutta, 2013), others remain worried about the balance of values in practice

particularly as the business outcomes may overtake positive humanistic concerns given intense pressures to enhance organizational productivity year over year (Church & Jamieson, 2014).

With increasing convergence among disciplines within the larger HR umbrella and with the rise of practice trends in HR such as diversity and inclusion, executive coaching, talent management, generational differences, Big Data, and others, the focus has enlarged. This creates competing space in the OD practitioner's domain. Attention has begun to focus once again on what is OD and what values are in practice, thus the future of the profession. As a result, many scholars and practitioners have started raising the core fundamental questions regarding the future of the field yet again (e.g., Burke, 2011; Burnes & Cooke, 2012; Jamieson & Gellermann, 2014; Minahan & Norlin, 2013). Given these pressures, and as new perspectives (e.g., Burnes & Cooke, 2012) and new research on values, attitudes, and practices in the field (e.g., Shull et al., 2013) are emerging, it seems a perfect time to step back and devote focused attention to the subject of OD values once again.

So, what values are operating? What values are needed for change in this complex world? As the world gets "smaller," how are our values and ethics affected by different global perspectives? What value conflicts are becoming more commonplace? How are values used through each stage of consultation process? How do they influence choices, outcomes, and help establish the consulting relationship? How are values in practice affecting the ethical climate? What values are our managers and leaders picking up today through their mostly "MBA" educations? Do our OD programs embed values in both the content and practice aspects of education? How can we include values in all future education for both leaders and change agents?

The sections in this book will provide current and future-focused perspectives on values in practice, specific applications, and views on managing the inherent value conflicts in a diverse and complex world. This volume brings together a stimulating array of perspectives on the importance of values in practice and difficulties balancing the use of values across OD practitioners and organization cultures, some thoughtful new ways to think about what we are working toward and how the field needs to be positioned, how diversity and inclusion play a larger and more central role in all OD work, and some clarity on how to navigate inherent value conflicts.

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