CHAPTER 3

A Look in the Mirror: Current Research Findings on the Values and Practice of OD

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Introduction

Organization development (OD) as a field is well established. In the 60 years since its origins, one could argue that we have seen it all. There has been evolution, revolution, devolution, indifference, and even outright resistance at times in various aspects of OD models, tools, and applications when it comes to change from within. In that time, we have seen the introduction of new science, total systems interventions, appreciative inquiry, diversity and inclusion, and dialogic OD emerge as discrete areas of practice within the field. The tried and true frameworks of consulting skills, action research, survey feedback, and individual development efforts to enhance self-awareness and growth (Burke, 1982, 2011; Church, 2001; Waclawski & Church, 2002), however, have remained at the core

An earlier version of this article appeared in the *OD Practitioner*, 46(4), 2014, 23–30.

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D.W. Jamieson et al. (eds.), *Enacting Values-Based Change*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69590-7_3

all along. We have also seen formal academic programs in OD emerge and flourish while corporate OD groups have been downsized in the name of productivity. And we have seen solo consultants grow their practice in scale until acquired by the big professional service firms and then start all over again with new ventures. Given all these changes over time, in a field that is grounded in and obsessed with change and self-reflection, is it any wonder that we continue to question the past, present, and future of OD and to explore our own evolution?

In fact, some have argued that the role of the OD consultant is now out-of-date, with various aspects being encroached by other professionals and scholars such as those in industrial-organizational (I/O) psychology, human resource development (HRD), organizational behavior (OB), and most recently the emerging field of neuroscience. On the practice side, there is an increasing trend in organizations for OD functions to get absorbed into broader talent management (TM) functions which encompass a whole host of activities beyond the traditional realm of OD. In fact, several articles have been written recently in the *OD Practitioner* about similarities and differences between the TM and OD mindsets and clarifying different roles and values in practice with respect to issues of broad-based development versus differentiation, and enhancing "high-potential" versus human potential (Church, 2013, 2014; Happich & Church, 2016). Interestingly enough, while some practitioners questioned the death of the field in the 1990s (e.g., Golembiewski, 1990), if we look at the trends today, the picture would appear to be that much more concerning. For example, a quick search of job titles on the networking site LinkedIn shows there are over 400% more job titles with TM than OD in the listing. While clearly a limited and biased sample, it is still troubling, particularly given the increasingly widespread use of the social network for resumes and online staffing. So, what does this mean for the future of OD? Where are the OD practitioners of today, and what are they doing? Do aspiring OD practitioners and new entrants to the field need to rethink their career choices? Do they need to migrate to other fields with more contemporary areas of focus?

We think that they should not; OD is alive and well today. Although the field has been and will continue to evolve over time, it represents a critical and unique perspective on individual and organization change. As scholar-practitioners, we must ensure that we continue to codify, articulate, build capability, and reinforce the core aspects of the field that make it unique. To do this, however, we do believe that we need to look at where the field

has been and where it is today, in order to better understand where it is headed in the future. While anyone can implement a certain set of interventions, one of the key aspects that makes OD unique is its core values. It is critical then to take the pulse of and understand the values and perceptions of practitioners in the field of OD periodically in order to understand how things have changed or stayed the same over time. Recently, we undertook such a survey research study as a follow-up to one that had been conducted back in the early 1990s (Church, Burke, & Van Eynde, 1994). The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the key highlights of that research. While additional findings can be found elsewhere (e.g., Roloff, Fudman, Shull, Church, & Burke, 2014; Shull, Church, & Burke, 2013), the intent here is to focus on the highlights and reflect on what these findings tell us about the current and future state of the values inherent in the OD community today. More specifically, how have we evolved in the last 20 years and where are we heading in the future as a profession?

Background

Since the original OD values research study conducted 20 years ago, much has changed in the business and global environment to influence the field of OD. In addition to the broader social, political, and macro-economic external forces which have resulted in a need for increased breadth, other closely related fields, including HRD, OB, and I/O psychology, have continued to emerge, putting greater emphasis on specialization and deep content knowledge of theory and practice. These trends have contributed to the further fragmentation of the field of OD, and as a result, practitioners continue to debate the differences and similarities of their work compared to those in other areas. Should OD professionals also be serving as executive coaches or stick to process consulting? What is the role of an OD practitioner in a change and productivity initiative run by a top-notch management consulting firm? What is the role of OD in talent selection and assessment efforts? Should OD practitioners be designing and leading leadership programs anymore or are those best left to the professional learning people? These are all challenging questions in corporations and in the marketplace.

It didn't use to be like this. At the onset of OD, while closely related fields existed, it was easier to distinguish the democratic, humanistic values of OD work from others (e.g., business strategy or professional services consulting firms). However, as more time has passed and the business

environment has continued to change, the field of OD has continued to struggle with distinguishing itself from other closely related fields. Others have adopted from us just as we have adopted from them. As a result, some might argue that OD practitioners have moved farther away from the founders' original focus on interpersonal, humanistic values to a focus on business efficiencies and effectiveness. While the "right mix" has always been a debate in the field (e.g., Friedlander, 1976; Greiner, 1980; Burke, 1982; Church, 2001; Margulies & Raia, 1990), the dual emphasis appears to remain a constant. This shift which started almost since the beginning of the field but has accelerated reflects business conditions of recent decades, including factors such as globalization, the pace of change, growing diversity, and technology and innovation. These factors have all had an impact on the type of work being done by practitioners in the organizational sciences field in general, and OD in particular (Greiner & Cummings, 2004; Church & Burke, 2017). It is both broader and yet more specialized at the same time.

But this begs the question again; have the underlying values of the field really changed? While we know the field has evolved over the years, trying to hold on to its core values and founding principles, while adapting to the new challenges faced by organizations, is OD different at the core? The research described in this article sought to explore these questions. More specifically, we were interested in three fundamental areas: (a) understanding the perceptions of OD practitioners today, (b) determining if and how the attitudes, values, motivators, and practices in the field have changed in the last 20 years, and (c) whether the founding principles still guide professionals working in the field today. The following section provides a summary of the key themes across multiple sets of analyses from the 2012 survey research study along with parallels with the research conducted back in 1993.

Method

The data presented here were collected as part of an applied survey to measure the values, attitudes, motives, and activities of practitioners and academics in the field of OD, and the organizational sciences more broadly. This research was undertaken as an update of and expansion to the original study conducted by Church, Burke, and Van Eynde (1994). The survey instrument was adapted from the questionnaire used in the prior study, and contained sections pertaining to values, motivators, and

attitudes regarding the field today, and utilization questions based on a large number of activities and interventions. Some questions were modified and/or expanded to better reflect and measure current trends in practice (e.g., regarding sustainability, talent management, inclusion, and coaching). Respondents were invited to participate in this anonymous survey conducted online using the email mailing lists and/or LinkedIn groups of multiple professional associations (including the OD Network's discussion group).

In total, we received 388 survey responses that indicated respondents' primary affiliation as "OD" professionals (vs. those in I/O psychology, OB, or HR more broadly). Although it is impossible to determine a response rate for a "snowball" survey of this nature, based on the demographic data collected, the sample obtained was quite robust in terms of background, experiences, tenure, and industry represented. Details regarding the sample are described below.

Based on self-reported affiliation, respondents represented membership across a variety of groups including the Organization Development Network (ODN) (55%), Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) (18%), the International Society for Organization Development (ISOD) (12%), the National Training Laboratories (11%), the Organization Development and Change Division of Academy of Management (AoM ODC) (3%), and the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) (1%). These are very similar to the mix of groups from which data were gathered 20 years ago.

About half of participants responding (50%) were external consultants, 39% were internal practitioners, 10% academics, and 1% pure researchers outside of a university setting. In addition, many respondents indicated they had some further type of educational affiliation on top of their primary role: 15% were guest lecturers/speakers, 14% part-time faculty, 7% visiting faculty/instructors, 5% full-time faculty, 4% held tenured positions, and 9% indicated some other academic affiliation.

The majority of respondents were highly educated, with 60% of respondents having a master's degree, 31% with doctorates, and 9% with some other type of degree. Regarding OD experience, the sample represented the full spectrum from old guard to new entrants to the field with 35% having worked in the field for 20 or more years, 21% between 16 and 20 years, 11% between 11 and 15 years, 17% between 6 and 10 years, and 16% five years or less.

Other information collected included the size and sector of the respondent's current company. In terms of company size, over half of individuals (53%) indicated they work in a very small company with 1 to 100 employees, 7% from 101 to 500 employees, 5% from 501 to 1000 employees, 14% from 1001 to 10,000 employees, and 21% with more than 10,000 employees. This makes sense given the large proportion of consultants (probably in very small firms) included in the sample. More specifically, for company sector, 42% of participants were in the consulting industry, 10% in government, 9% in health care services, and 5% in education, with small representations from over 20 other sectors, including pharmaceuticals, consumer products and goods, automotive, construction/real estate, telecommunications, and non-profits.

Before moving to the results of the study, there are a number of differences in the composition of the samples between the past and present surveys that should be noted for context. The most recent survey sample was significantly more diverse with a greater proportion of women (47% versus 36%) and people of color (22% non-White compared to 4% non-White) responding. Interestingly, the current sample was also somewhat older (average age of 54 versus to 46) than the 1994 survey sample. This suggests at least that the field is continuing to evolve to a more diverse and inclusive set of practitioners compared to 20 and certainly 40–50 years ago.

The following section describes a high-level summary of results and trends identified for each major section of the survey *interpreted in the context of the values of the field*. For more detailed empirical analyses of the survey results and information about the survey methodology, refer to Shull, Church, and Burke (2013) and Roloff and colleagues (2014).

What Do OD Practitioners Value?

When looking at perceptions of the values in the field of OD today, it would appear that they have remained relatively stable over time and are quite consistent across both internal and external consultants. OD practitioners remain largely focused on employee welfare and driving positive change in the workplace. Humanistic values such as *empowering employees*, *creating openness of communication*, *promoting ownership and participation*, and *continuous learning* remain strong compared to 1992, and all are rated by survey respondents in the top five values then and today.

Interestingly, however, while *increasing effectiveness and efficiency* was ranked as the number one value 20 years ago, in the most recent survey, it was rated below the top 5 at seventh on the list. This is somewhat surprising

given that survey respondents continue to believe that OD practitioners should focus more on effectiveness, efficiency, and competitive advantage to remain competitive for the future (71% in 2012; up slightly from 69% in 1992). Thus, while belief in the need to focus on effectiveness remains as strong as ever, ratings of values-in-action lean more toward the humanistic side than in the 1990s. Given the continued emphasis in the business environment on balancing global economic forces, driving productivity year over year for investors (at least in publicly traded companies), widely touted failure rates of organizational change efforts, and the need to demonstrate return on investment (ROI), we expected to see OD practitioners reporting an even greater emphasis on the bottom-line impact of their work.

While evaluating OD efforts is a critical skill area that we as practitioners need to focus more attention on (Church, 2017), one of the unique aspects of OD is its normative approach to change. So, seeing the reverse trend is encouraging to say the least. It suggests that while enhancing effectiveness and efficiency remain critical elements of OD efforts, they have not overtaken the humanistic core values of the field despite the concerns raised in the 1960s and 1990s by many practitioners and scholars in the field. While the balancing act remains, we might even go so far at this point to suggest that the debate between humanistic and bottom-line values may be over. Although an emphasis on the bottom-line was arguably not a core value in OD originally and is even somewhat contradictory with OD's humanistic roots, it can coexist and in 50 years' time has not entirely overshadowed the "missionary" components of the field (Harvey, 1974).

Aside from this trend, we saw another interesting outcome with respect to values. More specifically, some seemingly "hot" topics today in other closely related fields, such as I/O psychology and HR, including *having a global mindset*, *protecting the environment* (sustainability), and *promoting diversity and inclusion*, received surprisingly low rankings on the list of OD values (25th, 28th, and 34th, respectively) in the present study. *Protecting the environment* was also at the bottom of the list of core values for OD 20 years ago; however, it was not a hot topic at the time. This time around we fully expected that rating to jump to the top of the list. It did not. Similarly, while diversity has been a core component of OD since its inception, having shared similar roots in the 1960s social movements, and close links to OD's change management perspective (Church, Rotolo, Shull, & Tuller, 2014), this was not a top-ranked value today either. Nor were there any differences between internal and external OD practitioners in their ratings on any of these emerging topics. It may be that these

concepts are subsumed under other labels that did receive higher rankings (e.g., openness, communication, learning) or perhaps this is a reflection of these areas not being core to OD applications today. Either way, the trend is interesting to note and counter to expectations.

Other areas that did receive higher ratings were more in-line with OD practice as well, albeit reflective of trends in a different direction. In looking more closely at differences from 20 years ago, we noted that *developing organizational leaders* had risen to the top of the list (ranked as no. 1 of all values overall) up from 11th in 1992. While this is not surprising given that developing leaders is consistent with the long-held value in OD of bettering and empowering people, and leadership development was always a part of OD (e.g., Burke, Richley, & DeAngelis, 1985), its rise in importance for the field is consistent with observations made elsewhere (Church, 2013, 2014) that OD practitioners are increasingly engaging in talent management efforts. Interestingly, however, this was rated as more important by internal practitioners than externals, though it was still ranked as number 2 for externals as well (only facilitating ownership of processes was ranked higher by externals).

In contrast, it was interesting to note that change management-related values, such as *enabling organizations to grow more effectively*, did not receive as high ratings as one might be expecting (ranked no. 9), and in looking across the survey, we noted that *efforts to achieve long-term change* ranked as number 13 on the list of common practices and interventions in OD. This was very surprising given that planned, long-term change has been considered at the core of OD work since the founding of the field (Burke, 1994). This raised a new set of questions for us. What has happened to OD's role in large-scale change? Are OD practitioners moving away from systems-level interventions in their efforts to focus even more on the individual? Has the role of change management been taken over by other disciplines and/or practitioners (e.g., strategy consultants, HR business partners, talent management), and if so, are they trained properly for that type of work? Or is the nature of change different today than in the past? Perhaps it is less planful, and more unexpected and continuous. What does all this mean for the future of OD's involvement in change efforts, and even more importantly, is anyone asking if those who are doing the work have the right skill set? Although the humanistic versus bottom-line debate may be over, these data could be signaling a new trend to watch for the future.

Finally, if *developing organizational leaders* is listed first in the set of core values in the field of OD today, perhaps that explains the increasing focus and energy dedicated to coaching in the field today as well. We know from the high level of agreement (87%) in the survey that coaching is now considered an integral part of OD and 67% of OD practitioners are actively engaging in coaching efforts today. The fact that coaching is a hot topic in almost every field of practice today has led many to debate about those who are most qualified to deliver various types of interventions (Peterson, 2010). Based on this trend, we wonder what does OD do about other closely related fields that are also heavily practicing coaching? Does OD get involved or leave that type of work to the psychologists and retired senior executives? In our opinion, this is an area that needs some further discussion and clarification for the field to better inform practice and education of OD practitioners going forward. Next, we'll take a closer look at the motivators for why people join the field of OD in the first place.

What Motivates OD Practitioners?

In general, similar to the results regarding the values of OD, what motivates people to join the field appears to have not changed much in the last 20 years since the last survey of practitioners either. *Helping people* remains at the top on the list (ranked no. 1 in this study, up from no. 2 in 1992), which highlights the altruistic tendencies prevalent in the field of OD since its origins. Interestingly, *enhancing self-awareness* has increased from seventh in 1992 to second in 2012, which is consistent with the trend discussed above regarding leadership development as a top value in OD today. This is also an area that is consistent with the increasing use of feedback via multiple methods to help improve leadership strengths and opportunities (e.g., Happich & Church, 2017). Also ranked near the top, *making the world a better place*, a new item added for this survey, and *having social contact and human interaction* were ranked 3rd and 4th, respectively. Again, these findings reinforce the altruistic and interpersonal orientation of those attracted to the OD field.

On the other end of the spectrum, it was a little concerning to note that *collecting data and generating theory* remained relatively low as a motivator, at 11th both in 1992 and today. This finding is similar to what we found on the values section of the survey, *promoting evidence-based practices grounded in science* was ranked quite low (21st) on the list of values.

Similarly, *using research and statistical skills* was cited by only 29% of OD practitioners as being part of their toolkit today. What does that imply about data in the practice of OD?

While the field of OD is clearly grounded in data-driven methods as many have written about over the years (e.g., Burke, 1982, 1994; Nadler, 1977; Waclawski & Church, 2002; Phillips, Phillips, & Zuniga, 2013), it would seem that the more theoretical and analytical aspects of the field are not what drives many people in practice. While this motivator is higher for those with more advanced degrees, it nonetheless represents a potential concern for the future of the field particularly as data and "Big Data" become even more central to individual and organizational realities (Church & Dutta, 2013). Given the continued dual importance of humanistic values and organizational effectiveness, who better to balance these two core values in organizations when thinking through Big Data applications than OD practitioners, as Church and Dutta (2013) have suggested? Interestingly, however, in looking at the activities and interventions further, it was positive to note that OD practitioners still use survey feedback today as a key intervention (51% of the time). This supports the action research component of data-driven OD dating back to interventions from the 1970s and consistent with many models of OD today. There may be a subtle distinction here, however, which is manifested in practitioners' level of interest in data analysis and theory generation itself versus the use of survey methodology with clients to create collaborative solutions. Still, if OD practitioners are not motivated by and do not embrace data and theory, the field may be limited in its impact and relevance in the long term as data is indeed all around us—just ask Google. In the next section, current practices in the field of OD as compared to interventions of the past will be discussed.

What Are the OD Interventions of Choice?

Overall, the survey data on current and past activities and interventions in the field of OD today are consistent with other trends regarding leadership development, process consultation, coaching, team building, and data feedback as noted above. There are, however, some surprising findings to highlight as well. Some of these have to do with shifts over time between where practitioners spent their time 20 years ago versus today, and others are more reflective of key differences between internal and external OD consultants in the present work environment. Figures 3.1

Fig. 3.1 Top 15 most frequently used OD interventions and activities by externals and internals

and 3.2 provide a listing of the top 15 most commonly cited and bottom 15 least common interventions by internal and external practitioners. Figure 3.3 provides another 15 interventions where interesting additional patterns and differences emerged. Many of these are discussed in more detail below.

First, while efforts around *training*, *leadership development*, *and management development* all remained at the top of the list at 78%, 76%, and 73% respectively (and ranked in the top 5 in 1992 and in 2012), *efforts to achieve long-term change* dropped from 2nd in 1992 to 13th among the present sample at only 66% overall. Similarly, efforts around managing rapid change were practiced by only 49% of respondents even further down the list at 26th overall (out of 63 total). Consistent with the themes raised earlier, this suggests that OD practitioners today may be somewhat less engaged in change management practices than they used to be. It should be noted, however, that external consultants rated this 9 points higher than did internals, which likely reflects their role as outsiders. In addition, efforts focused on *changing the corporate culture* were ranked 9th at 71% overall with no differences between internals and externals. So, perhaps the emphasis with respect to change management may be more evolutionary rather than revolutionary in approach today compared with

Fig. 3.2 Bottom 15 least frequently used OD interventions and activities by internals and externals

some of the more transformational change agendas of the past. This may also be signs of subtle shift in values regarding where practitioners place their energy from the more normative humanistic origins of the field to the more nuanced and complex domain of culture change (Burke & Litwin, 1992).

Second, *process consultation*, a practice aimed at increasing group awareness and dynamics, remained one of the more commonly used interventions in the present sample (ranked no. 2 overall at 77%, and no. 1 for externals at 83%). This suggests that focusing on interpersonal relationships, which was an integral part of the origins of OD in T-group settings in the 1960s, has remained a primary intervention in the OD toolkit despite all the pressures to focus on other types of outcomes. Of course, in a way this makes sense if practitioners are focusing less at the systemic level and more at the individual level of change (Church, Walker, & Brockner, 2002). However, it is surprising to us that process consultation is still listed as such a commonly used intervention given that it is such a unique skill set and one that we feel is not being developed or emphasized as much as it once was. Interesting enough, however, internals were significantly less

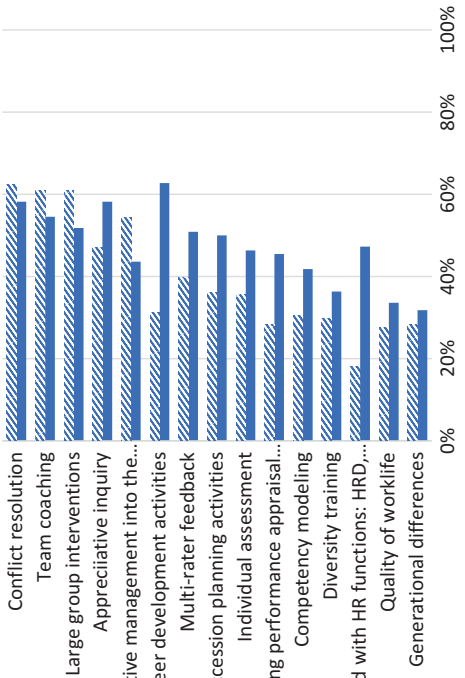

Fig. 3.3 Additional OD interventions and activities of interest by internal versus external practitioners

likely to engage in process consultation (69%), which again likely reflects constraints on their ability to act as independent agents with their clients (as they are part of the system itself). Also, the more traditional intervention of T-groups itself was rated near the bottom (at 14% overall and dead last at only 6% for internal practitioners ranked 63 of 63), which is something telling. Clearly, while the method itself has perhaps probably seen its heyday, the concept of understanding interpersonal and process dynamics remains a strong facet of OD work (Burke, 1982).

Of course, what was not so surprising given the data we have reported so far is prevalence of practitioners doing *individual and executive coaching* in OD. At 66% (and 12th on the list), almost as many are engaged in coaching today as are in *conducting survey feedback* (at 71%, which was consistent for both externals and internals, and ranked 7th overall). *Life coaching*, on the other hand (along with areas such as *stress management* and *time management*), which seems to have a broader appeal to the general population, was not an area that OD practitioners were engaging in, with only 23% citing this as a current practice. By comparison, efforts around *leadership transitions* (58%), *team coaching* (58%), and *problem solving* (58%) all seemed to be much more in-line with where OD practitioners found traction in their work. So, coaching for leadership impact and effectiveness is indeed a key domain for OD practitioners today, and much more so than in the past.

Interestingly enough, however, *individual assessment* and *succession planning*, areas that commonly are connected with talent management and coaching efforts at the c-suite level (and when conducted by other types of consultants such as I/O psychologists), were not heavy practice areas for OD practitioners ranking 32nd and 31st, respectively, among the list of 63 total interventions and activities. This suggests a possible disconnect between the value of focusing on leadership growth and development versus leadership assessment for decision-making, something that has been discussed before in the context of OD versus talent management (Church, 2013, 2014). In support of this argument, and as might be expected, far more internal practitioners were focused on these talent management-related areas compared with their external counter parts (e.g., 50% and 46% were engaged in succession planning and assessments vs. 36% on either externally). The same general pattern applied to the use of 360 feedback (or *multi-rater feedback*) as well, another common I/O methodology, which has often been applied to OD settings (see Church, Waclawski, & Burke, 2001; Church et al., 2002), which was used by 51% of internals

and only 40% of externals. This would suggest that while OD practitioners may be starting to enter the talent management arena as has been suggested elsewhere (Church, 2013), they are more likely to be doing so in internal roles versus engaging in external consulting in this area. This may well result in values conflicts over time as the interventions and data that were once primarily used for development purposes are now being repurposed for use in making decisions about people, which historically is not the role many OD professionals have wanted to be involved with.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the practice area of *selection*, which is also a talent management domain but more of a traditional area of focus owned by I/O psychologists, was not widely practiced by OD practitioners (only 31% internals and 15% externals were involved in this aspect of talent). So, it would seem that OD remains about working with people once they are inside the company already versus targeting efforts at attracting and hiring them into the company. The effective utilization of the more contemporary methods of *appreciative inquiry* (52% and more so by internals at 58% vs. 47% for externals) and the use of *large group interventions* (57%, but more so by externals at 61% vs. 52% for internals) speaks to this pattern as well and provides an interesting juxtaposition in intervention of choice between the two of OD roles (see Fig. 3.3).

Finally, there are a few surprises regarding which interventions were not reported to be in use today in the OD practitioners' toolkit with any regularity. *Diversity training*, for example, was quite far down the list (40th), a *focus on generational differences* was ranked 46th, *quality of work life* efforts at 45th, and *initiatives and programs for women and minorities* was ranked at 53rd (with approximately only 20–30% of practitioners engaging in any of these types of practices and very little differences between internal and external roles). These are very troubling results to us given the changing demographics of the workforce and the critical nature of diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts in organizations today. While there are clear synergies and connections between D&I and OD, which have been described at length elsewhere (Church et al., 2014), the fact that the present sample is not engaged in these efforts suggests a real disconnect in the field of OD itself. While this has not changed much in the 20 years since the last survey when it was also at the bottom of the list at the time then as well (18th out of 19 items), we fully expected many of these areas of practice and the values of diversity and inclusion to be at the very top of the ranking in today's environment.

In addition to the lack of emphasis on D&I, however, helping organizations leverage technology was also not a major area of focus for OD which was somewhat surprising given the field's socio-technical roots and the critical role that technology is playing in today's digital economy (Church & Burke, 2017). More specifically, *integrating technology into the workplace* was ranked 42nd, and the *development of socio-technical systems* was ranked all the way down the list at 55th. Efforts focused on *job redesign* and *job rotations* were also at the bottom of the list as well (at only 19% and 11% engaging in these areas, respectively). It seems that Hackman and Oldham's (1980) classic job design work may not be as relevant to the OD practitioner as it once was, or they are using those concepts in other ways. Of course, the technology finding is also troubling given the emergence of new forms of organizations, virtual teams and communication methods, hoteling and changing work settings, personal connectivity devices, and of course the resulting emphasis on data generated from all of these advancements in organizations today (Church & Burke, 2017). Based on these lower trends together, it feels as if OD practice may not be staying as current in some ways as it needs to and could run the risk of falling woefully behind in being relevant to the external business landscape over time.

We doubt that many would argue that there is more we could be doing to leverage technology in OD, but perhaps the data are suggesting that OD practitioners have simply abdicated the systems integration work to the professional change management or even IT folks instead, thank you very much. Again, this is an area to watch over particularly as technology is so integral to large-scale organizational change efforts. Take, for example, the implementation of massive talent management, talent acquisition (i.e., staffing), and performance management systems in corporations today. Implementing these tools requires significant change management, training, cultural adaptation, and senior leadership support. One would expect these types of implementations to be fully supported if not driven by OD practitioners. The reality is, however, they are often absent from the effort entirely, and the survey supports this observation, with only 36% of OD practitioners reporting engaging with organizations around their *performance management systems* (46% of internals and 28% externals—one of the biggest gaps overall—see Fig. 3.3). This is surprising from our perspective as performance management is one of the key levers for driving and reinforcing culture change overall (Burke & Litwin, 1992). This is clearly something worth exploring further.

What Are the Attitudes of OD Practitioners Today?

Although we have already discussed a number of the key attitude statements and trends from that portion of the survey above, there are a few final points worth mentioning particularly as they relate to the evolution of the field. Perhaps one of the most troubling findings reported in the original research 20 years ago on attitudes about the field was the perceived weakening of the traditional values in OD. This item was phrased as it related to new entrants and practitioners. While only 23% of practitioners in the original attitudes study (Church, et al., 1994; Church & Burke, 1995) reported a weakening at the time, and a little bit more (29%) felt that such an outcome was inevitable, over half of respondents in the original study (55%) reported that the new practitioners lacked the relevant theoretical background, and 47% felt that new entrants lacked an understanding of or appreciation for the field. Looking at responses to these same four items in the present survey, the pattern is similar today but getting worse with practitioners again seeing a weakening in values and having concerns over the preparation and orientation of new entrants to the field.

More specifically, 38% of practitioners reported that there has been a weakening of the traditional, founding values of the field of OD, a 15-point increase on that item from 1994. Results are more alarming regarding new entrants in the field. Among this sample, 70% agreed that new entrants lack the theoretical background in the social sciences and organizational theory needed (also up 15 points), and 60% felt that new entrants have little understanding or appreciation for the history or values (up 13 points) of OD. These are very troubling trends if one believes that the theory, history, and values of the field should be maintained. Given that the trend is enhanced when one examines the data by tenure in the field, there may be some effect for the changing of the guard if you will, but clearly the other elements of the survey (e.g., values and interventions of choice) do point to some degree of continued evolution as well. The question remains, however, as to what we are evolving to as a field and how people feel about it.

To that point, overall, the vast majority of OD practitioners in the current research study were optimistic about the future of the field of OD at 79% favorable. Only 8% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, and only 13% had no opinion one way or the other. Similarly, although results were slightly more mixed, the majority of survey respondents did not feel that OD is in a state of crisis (54%) either. Only 21% of respondents agreed with the characterization, and another 25% were sitting on the fence. So, despite the trends and concerns raised above and while there

are some practitioners in the field who are concerned about the future, this is evidently not the prevailing perception among the present sample.

Overall, it appears that OD has held strong to its values and founding principles; however, there is a lack of agreement with how OD should move forward given new entrants into the field who may lack the proper training, the continued emergence of closely related fields, and adapting to needs of the changing business environment. For a more complete summary of the findings on attitudes and how they have changed over time, see Shull et al. (2013).

Summary

In general, the findings from the present study are both clarifying and mystifying at the same time. Such is the way with data. The results do demonstrate that while some aspects of the field have changed significantly in the past 20 years, for example, regarding certain areas of practice or the priority of certain values, much has stayed the same. This is particularly true with regard to the values and motivators cited for joining the field of OD. Table 3.1 presents a summary of the key trends for consideration.

In reviewing the data about the "current state," some characteristics have remained largely consistent over time (e.g., the emphasis on humanistic values and empowerment), whereas other characteristics of the field have paralleled changes in the business environment (e.g., the shift from business efficiency and effectiveness toward leader development and executive coaching). Still other practice areas and values have not moved at all despite trends to the contrary (e.g., regarding technology, diversity and inclusion, Big Data, or even assessment and succession planning) in the corporate world. This indicates that while OD practitioners espouse values that have strong roots in the origins of the field, other values, motivators, practices, and attitudes are subject to external pressures. While OD practitioners are still spending time performing traditional OD activities (e.g., process consultation and team building) and the vast majority use survey feedback to drive action planning efforts, they are also spending a large amount of time performing activities such as training, leadership development, and individual coaching. Perhaps that is exactly what evolution is all about. However, it is important that practitioners work to reverse the decline in emphasis on culture and large-scale change, and at the same time enhance their data and technology skills to ensure they remain relevant for the future. The findings here do not point to progress in the latter domain.

Table 3.1 Key findings from the 2012 OD Practitioner Survey

Area of focus	*Key findings*
Values	Humanistic values such as empowering employees, creating openness of communication, and promoting ownership and participation remain strong. A focus on enhancing business effectiveness and efficiency has declined in the last 20 years. Having a global mindset, protecting the environment, and promoting diversity and inclusion are near the bottom of the list.
Motivators	OD practitioners today remain primarily driven by a desire to help people and make the world a better place. Achieving self-awareness and developing leaders have emerged as top motivators. Data-driven and science-based methods are not key motivators for OD practitioners, just as they were not 20 years ago.
Practices	Process consultation and management development remain as the top OD practices compared to the 1990s. The role of OD in long-term change efforts has declined in the last 20 years. Common talent management practices such as individual assessment, succession planning, and diversity training were not ranked as often used practices among OD practitioners.
Attitudes	Coaching is seen as integral to the practice of OD today. There are worsening perceptions of the weakening of traditional values of OD and lack of proper training of new entrants to the field. Practitioners are optimistic about the future of the field of OD.

In sum, it appears that the field of OD remains a thriving and robust one that has retained many of its founding values. Practitioners have reported an increased interest in developing people more directly, whether through leader development, coaching, or training. The trend away from interventions used to target large organization change efforts though is one that will be important to watch over time, as is the seeming lack of interest and motivation to focus on theory and data in the field. As the field continues to evolve, we believe that it is critical that OD retains its identity as a key contributor to driving organizational transformation. This will clearly involve a number of factors studied here such as the use (and impact of) technology, data, talent identification, diversity and inclusion, and of course large-scale culture change.

Let us clarify and underscore this final point in the following way: with increased emphasis on leader development, training, and coaching, it is clear that OD practice today resides more at the individual level than at the

larger system level. The increasing emphasis on talent management as a practice area reinforces this as well. This shift is, on the one hand, most encouraging for as we all know strong, effective leadership is in great need. Yet, on the other hand, if this shift subtracts from our focus on system-level change, fundamental to OD, we have a problem. Culture change is difficult to be sure, but concentrating at this more systemic level provides context, and in the end, it is the system that we must change if OD is to be realized.

To return to our statement at the beginning of this chapter, we believe that aspiring organizational sciences practitioners should not only consider the field of OD, but they should be proud to join a field with a set of strong, humanistic values at its core. Moreover, it is true that many of the issues that were raised 20 years ago about OD, including effectively training new entrants to the field and more clearly defining the role of OD in organizations, still require solutions. With the growing rise of closely related professions, however, such as TM in organizations, it is critical that OD practitioners continue to differentiate their value. We believe that the fundamental toolkit of the OD practitioner remains relevant and useful today. Even though the job titles on LinkedIn might be skewed toward Talent Management today, the work of OD remains wherever it resides. However, we also believe that OD would be well-suited to being open to expanding that toolkit to include a host of additional knowledge, skills, and capabilities as well to support the future of organizations.

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