What Is Happening with Values in Organization Development?

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The topic of values is central to an understanding of organization development (OD) (Margulies & Raia, 1972). Any consideration of the origins of OD, traced to the work of pioneering social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1890–1947), provides insight into the essentialism of values in OD practice. Lewin, and other OD forerunners, exploited the relationship between values and behaviors, and learned from their early experiences the relationship between democracy and performance.

These issues remain as relevant today as they were in the immediate years following World War II and the rise of industrialism. Today, in an era where information flows freely in many parts of the world, understanding the relationship between values and performance retains the essential character of OD as constructed by the field's pioneers.

Two primary considerations exist in an exploration of values in relationship to OD practice. The first consideration is to understand what is meant by a value, and the second consideration is an appreciation or understanding of what is valued. By definition, a value is held dearly—something held in high regard (*Merriam-Webster.com*, 2014). Values are selective, informed

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by environmental factors. For many, values by definition are abstract; however, it is clear that values affect attitudes and behaviors. Consequently, what gets valued, either personally or organizationally, is a judgment—a determination of what is valued. These judgments affect both practitioner and organizational behavior and can help to assess alignment between individual and organizational behaviors, fit, and satisfaction. Given that values are pervasive, both in their practice and at times in their absence, it is reasonable to conclude that in practice, values are contagious.

Values affect the entire consulting enterprise. For example, a consultant might value doing no harm to clients or client systems. The consultant enacts the value through choice and approach. Importantly, values will determine how parties to the consultation feel about information and data gathered during intervention, affecting confidentiality and transparency. In addition, values inform interdependencies in the consulting relationship or the measure of dependence created by the consultant or the client for project outcomes. Clearly, values affect abilities and approaches to resolving conflict. In these and in other ways, there is clear line of sight between values and ethics (Jamieson & Gellermann, 2006).

In practice, internals can distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic values, and how both shape engagement. Some intrinsic values held by OD practitioners include acceptance, fairness, and the pursuit of social justice. In humanistic approaches to OD, many share similar intrinsic values. These values also take shape in an environmental context. For example, an internal OD consultant's experience is shaped by status, rewards, and approval. The strength of these factors is likely to influence decisions made by the internal. If economic incentives motivate the consultant, the consultant may choose to work exclusively with others with the authority to monetarily reward performance. For other consultants, it may affect the decisions in what unit or in what level to work. The effective consideration of values includes an understanding of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

Even in desirable workplaces, heartfelt values may be tested. Because values transcend the individual and extend to an organizational culture, norms develop about what is good, bad, desirable, or undesirable. For some, the ability to live values is easy and clear. For others, there are attendant considerations relative to risk and tolerance. The exploration of values is a critical endeavor for the consultant. Are your values such that you can or cannot work in one industry or another? With one client or another? Values significantly influence attitudes and behaviors, and contribute to performance.

OD Work and the Individual

As practitioners, there are both technical and personal considerations in the decision to intervene. Some of the technical considerations include the level and depth of one intervention in comparison to another intervention. Further, technical choices are influenced by particular theory biases used to frame OD projects. In addition, a technical consideration will include the skill level of the consultant.

Values will influence personal actions and decisions by the consultant (Cummings & Worley, 2005). However, all of this is mere background to a larger concern in OD, and that is the prominence of the individual in any change effort.

The prominence of the individual is a direct reflection of an OD value that holds that people are more than elements of production. There is recognition of the humanity of the individual, as an entity with unique hopes, needs, wants, and concerns. Many interventions, unfortunately, tend to lose sight of this basic value. The overarching values of effectiveness and efficiency take over, and consequently, it leaves some asking: Is a layoff an OD intervention? Is performance management an OD intervention? Clearly, given the expansiveness of OD, it seems that some interventions overlook, or fail to consider, the importance of the individual. Consequently, when the consultant takes on the role of expert, he or she may be trumping an important OD value, thereby positioning a test of values for the internal. Successful practitioners, then, give voice and recognition to the individual in any intervention context.

OD practitioners work to express the full potential of the individual. Too many interventions find value in abstraction—well it must be good because of such and such—and ignore the individual. Bad systems trump good people. The thrill of working with senior-most executives can also turn one blind to the many individuals who comprise an organization. When individuals are recognized and valued, the greater good is achieved. A successful OD practice acknowledges that people are in process and that process is a developmental journey. Consequently, OD practitioners work to create inclusive environments in engagements.

Respect and inclusion then are natural partners to the primacy of the individual in OD. To speak of OD without the elements of respect and inclusion would be akin to Earth without air or water. The primary considerations of respect, inclusion, and the prominence of the individual give rise to the expectations of additional values affecting practice.

Expectations of the Practitioner

There are four essential values for OD practitioners that provide a starting, or jumping-off point, for additional consideration, exploration, and practice: self-awareness, authenticity, effective use of self, and competence.

Self-Awareness With self-awareness, the consultant can recognize one's being as an object worthy of attention. The implications are enormous; the ability to treat self as object creates a canvas for growth and for development. Self-awareness is both private and public commodities. At times, personal reflection is sufficient to increase awareness and to catalyze change. As a public figure, self-awareness increases when the consultant takes the limelight. The public stage in organizational life includes aspects of evaluation. The consultant may alter behavior to incorporate aspects of acceptance and desirability knowing that others are judging him or her. In these circumstances, self-awareness becomes critical in remaining true to personal and OD values.

Authenticity Authenticity refers to something in its true state. Advice for authenticity is usually limited to two words, "be yourself." Yet, in organizations, leaders are often asking others to be something other than original. Authenticity is the answer to "Are you for real?" The internal that loses this sense misses the opportunity to bring his or her whole self to OD work and to an organization. The consultant must understand the opportunities and limitations of self-expression in the internal environment. When compromised, or with degrees of compromise, there can be erosion of consulting effectiveness.

Effective Use of Self Use of self is well documented in OD literature, primarily in the senses of awareness and agency (Cheung-Judge, 2001; Curran, Seashore, & Welp, 1975). In other words, with an effective use of self, the consultant is fully aware and informed, to the extent possible, of how his or her actions influence actions. Awareness and choice affect many practice elements, including decision-making, execution, and planning. Greater self-awareness leads to increased choice, providing greater opportunities for self-expression and increasing abilities to create impact in OD interventions.

Competence It may be odd to consider competence as a value; however, it underlies all acceptable work of those providing professional services. Competence not only refers to the skill in providing OD services but also extends to an ability to integrate into an organization. Managers of OD professionals, and sophisticated consumers of OD services, expect OD consultants to be active agents of their own growth and development. In other words, there are expectations that consultants continue to learn and to focus their contributions to OD practice.

DEMONSTRATION OF VALUES

In the consulting relationship, it is rare, except in certain instances, to discuss values. While this is typical of many consulting relationships, it is particularly noticeable in internal OD consulting. In part, this occurs because of either a desire to conform to organizational norms, or because the internal and consultant and client are subject to the powerful influence of organizational norms, often including values. It is true that many organizations, particularly those with any size, have identified values. There is, however, often a divide between stated values and values in practice. In some circumstances, values are not enacted—values are merely words on paper. In addition, some values have become commonplace in organizations, and among those are the values of integrity and passion. If values remain words on paper, we often discover transgressions or the complete absence of actions associated with stated values.

I have noted that values are often tested in OD consulting. Values may be tested at contact with an organization—for example, do I work in this particular industry? By way of further example, values can be tested in contracting—what is a reasonable fee? How will my work be assessed? Each phase in the consulting engagement provides additional opportunity for the discussion and enactment of values. In internal consulting, there are practice approaches whereby the consultant can actively demonstrate his or her values.

Trust is a fundamental pillar of effective consulting relationships. Without trust, progress is difficult to credibly maintain. Surely, results might be delivered, but those results come at a cost with the absence of trust. Trust, as others have noted, also includes the notion of trustworthiness (Covey, 2004). Trust and trustworthiness are companions of effective consultation. Lacking either reduces or eliminates a desire for others to work with the consultant. Likewise, it is difficult to work with clients,

who, by reputation or by practice, lack the components of trust and trust-worthiness. Trust and trustworthiness relate directly to confidentiality, a fundamental to many OD interventions.

The maintenance of confidentiality is central to many OD activities, and yet, our notions and ideas of confidentiality continue to be challenged by the companion notion of transparency. However, in interviews, surveys, and other aspects of data gathering in OD, we often assure clients of confidentiality. In other words, confidentiality means that names will never be associated with data. Yet, what does that mean for contemporary internal OD practice, where knowledge is often power in organizational settings? Many long for a day when anonymity is no longer a factor and employees and others are free to speak up and to proudly associate with their ideas and feelings. Any time that there is an absence of confidentiality, it produces the potential to eliminate or to erode trust. While it is true that everyone cannot be trusted with everything, confidentiality holds a different standard. In organizations, you can often find abuses of confidentiality. This has contributed to practices where some label e-mails with remarks such as "Do Not Forward" or "Internal: Not for Distribution Outside of the Company." Internals who do not maintain confidentiality diminish their effectiveness not only with clients, but also with colleagues.

Values can also be demonstrated through the practice of empowerment. Too often, expertise is trumping empowerment. In a world where OD is often interpreted through survey results, expertise foolishly trumps empowerment. It is better, as the statement goes, to teach one to fish than to provide a fish to the person. Similarly, in internal OD, it is superior practice to encourage the involvement of others as active participants in the consultative enterprise. This requires a leap of faith from the consultant, expanding notions of trust and confidentiality beyond the consultant and into the organizational system. It is one thing for a consultant to plot a course of action based on survey results and a completely different circumstance to have others involved in diagnosis that leads to action. In these and in other ways, values can come to life through empowering others to develop the organization. This can often unsettle internals, as greater emphasis is placed on the helping nature of the OD relationship as opposed to any individual heroics that may be employed by the internal consultant.

Much of this relies on an approach of collaboration, a fundamental way to demonstrate values central to internal OD practice. Collaboration is a process of working together. While this may seem endemic to any approach in OD, it is difficult for many trained to achieve to let others into the

work. However, organizational change, growth, and development are unlikely without collaborative effort; and collaboration is fostered through trust, self-awareness, and an ability to embrace change and transition. The pace and demands of many internal projects require speed, and the ability to effectively collaborate provides further opportunity to display values central to internal OD practice.

Expectations of Organizations

Any time there is a working relationship, there is an exchange of value. For internals, this not only typically includes some form of monetary payment, but also includes psychic income in terms of recognition, contribution, or impact. In this exchange, the consultant may also realize or expect an organization and its leaders to provide an environment and conditions that will foster success, not only for the consultant but for a particular OD initiative and for the organization itself. The following shortlist provides insight into the conditions, or expectations, that internals can expect of organizations relative to the expression of values.

Exciting and Challenging Work Can you imagine an OD practice formed on one aspect of work? In some large organizations, OD has been relegated to the administrative role of analyzing and warehousing employee feedback. This falls into what has become the periodic reporting of "survey says" in organizational life. While engagement and satisfaction are essential elements of an organizational life well lived, these measures fall short of creating enterprises in which employees can do their best work. The client organization must be able to provide a consultant with meaningful work opportunities. Good measures of interesting and meaningful work are often demonstrated in what is being discussed in boardrooms, around executive conference tables, and in formal and informal employee gatherings.

Met Goals Effectively Many OD projects fail. Failures occur for a variety of reasons, including consultant skill, executive sponsorship, effective decision-making processes, and resistance. When organizational leadership does not support the consultant's work, it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain an OD practice. The OD practice becomes a fragment of someone's good idea from the past, or becomes disguised as some other form of Human Resources or other organizational practice. All parties need to commit to the consulting relationship, so that goals can be met effectively.

Ability to Influence the Way Work Gets Done OD work is far from data entry into an organizational system. It goes beyond the successful completion of enduring OD tasks. To succeed, the consultant requires autonomy in his or her collaborative practice. While autonomy and collaboration may initially seem at odds, it goes to the heart of influencing work. The consultant must have the freedom to design work free of constraints that limit access and influence. The best designs will incorporate OD values and participative approaches. OD is more than a rote set of activities; OD requires engagement of others. It is in this engagement that collaboration unfolds. Carrying out the wishes of a client, while desirable in certain circumstances, does not create the environment for influence. There is a desire to see the outcome of consulting work through newly established processes or ways of working that inform and influence behavior.

Awareness of Growing Leaders who value OD consulting provide a wider range of professional development activities than to others in organizations. While this may seem at odds with egalitarianism, the demands to bring the new and different require that the consultant be exposed to trends that are shaping organizational experience. It does not mean that these experiences need to come through courseware or external ventures. Rather, in effective client-manager–consultant relationships, there is an effective design of learning that takes place within the organization. The consultant, taking the stand of a researcher, can use organizational experiences as a teacher or guide to improve consulting effectiveness.

Values help us to connect to the world in ways that are larger than the individual and the organization. This is important because internal OD serves something much larger than the self or the organization; the standard might be in creating better leaders for the world or making organizations better places. My intent is not to describe "better" in a rehabilitative sense, but rather in a way of continually—and sustainably—improving experience in organizations. This means a demonstration of the humanistic values that support OD. Consequently, effective OD practices increase democracy and participation in organizational life. When democracy and participation are realized in organizational life, it often comes at a cost of control. However, the results can be immeasurably superior to those achieved through command and control practices.

Values will continue to be influenced by many events, including education, media events, and other aspects of social experience. In addition,

organizational factors such as job opportunity, income, and career development affect the practice of OD. The demonstration of values in OD is collaborative work among an organization's leadership, the consultant, and the systems that are designed to support effective practice. An appreciation of core OD values, the consultant's personal values, and organizational values provides an extraordinary field in which to explore, to test, and to fully live values that contribute to better ways of working and a better world.

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