

PRINCIPLES, PRACTICES, and PERSPECTIVES



The

NTL

HANDBOOK

of Organization

Development

and Change

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Learn & Live It™

2nd Edition

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The second edition of *The NTL Handbook of Organization Development and Change* is dedicated to the memory and contributions of Kurt Lewin.

The NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science, the profession and field of organization development, and this *NTL Handbook of Organization Development and Change* would not exist without Kurt Lewin and his contributions.

The legacy of Kurt Lewin shows up in every chapter in this book. We have asked Mary Ann Rainey, Lennox Joseph, and Jean Neumann for their reflections about Kurt Lewin. Their two chapters are in Part Seven of this book.

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It is our pleasure to acknowledge and thank the many people who helped to make this book possible. *The NTL Handbook of Organization Development and Change* is a testament to NTL being a major resource for and supporter of the field of OD. We appreciate the many current, former, and late NTL members who are architects of the field of organization development—those who are well known and less known in the field, including Clay Alderfer, Dick Beckhard, Peter Block, W. Warner Burke, Bob Chin, Elsie Cross, Kathleen D. Dannemiller, Kaleel Jamison, Hal Kellner, Don Klein, Ron Lippitt, Edwin Nevis, W. Brendan Reddy, Morley Segal, Herb Shepard, Ed Schein, Robert Tannenbaum, Marv Weisbord, Leroy Wells, Jr., and those who have been constant supporters of the emerging field and of current and future generations. They include as well many of the authors who have contributed chapters to this book.

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Final Thoughts

From Michael—I am full of gratitude for the many years I have been able to be a part of the organization development profession. Here, I can make a living doing the executive coaching, diversity and social justice, and organization- and leadership-development work I am passionate about and I can partner with clients for whom I care deeply. So too, I am thankful for being a member of NTL Institute, where I have grown personally and professionally in ways I could never have imagined and I am challenged and supported daily to live into and in alignment with my values and life purpose. My partnership and friendship with Brenda Jones and the creation of this book with her are an outcome of the impact of NTL and the OD profession on my life.

Finally, thank you to Susan Carton Brazzel, my love, my partner in life, and my friend. You have supported, encouraged, and challenged me to follow my passion with this book and my work, followed your own passion and work in the world, and partnered with me in finding joy and completion in our lives and the lives of our children and grandchildren.

From Brenda—Michael and I were partners in editing this second edition, as we were almost ten years ago for the

first edition. This was a good collaboration for me and for NTL, and I am grateful for it. Ten years ago I was an independent OD consultant and NTL member working on a book that was missing from our experiences as NTL trainers in its OD programs. I have had a unique personal experience during the past year to prepare for this second edition of the Handbook, to celebrate NTL's 65th anniversary and to serve as president and CEO of NTL. By the time this edition is published I will have been two years serving as NTL president. It is an honor to be a leader of an organization that I value and respect and to take responsibility for its path to success. The skills, expertise, and knowledge of NTL members and, in particular, the many members who contributed to and supported this edition, are the content, foundation, and strength of NTL. My experience feels full, complete, and informed by new perspectives on our practice and those shared with us by others. I believe this book contains strong contributions to the study of OD and I remain proud that it is a publication of NTL.

For me, this is made possible by my family, which shares their continuous encouragement and enthusiasm for my work. I thank Bill, Brian, and Robyn, who—with their wonderful hearts—respect and care about the things that matter to me and offer inspiration, love, and hope.

BBJ
MB

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INTRODUCTION

This second edition of *The NTL Handbook of Organization Development and Change* has been in development for more than a year. The original edition was published in 2006. There have been significant changes in organizations, society, and the world in the past seven years. The field of organization development has changed as well. The field reflects the current state of turbulence, uncertainty, ambiguity, and complexity of organizations and the world. It has multiple definitions, multiple bodies of knowledge with different constituencies among OD practitioners, academicians, consulting firms, and clients, and multiple degree programs that have become increasingly competitive for students and recognition.

In the face of these changes, organization development practitioners and academicians have to find a way to remain in an ambiguous and challenging place at the edge of discovery, exploration, and creation; to stay connected to the roots, values, and ethics of the field; to keep defining the field and maintaining its sense of integrity and boundaries; and to avoid becoming only a part of other studies and practices.

Capitalism, globalization and technology are important challenges for the identity, integrity, and boundaries of OD and many of its processes and approaches. Capitalism because OD practitioners must live OD's values and the work cannot only be about making money. Globalization because OD has elements of democratic processes which may not be translatable to all societies and cultures. Technology because the nature of OD is to bring people together in their engagements and interactions, while so much of society is working and living virtually.

Purpose

This second edition of *The NTL Handbook of Organization Development and Change* represents this time in the life of OD with all of its challenges, struggles, and intentions to understanding the current work, studies, and practices of OD. We are pleased to have the thinking and writing of so many chapter authors about the areas of importance and boundaries of the field of OD. The book has been created to reflect multiple views regarding the field, the complexity of organizations and the world, and the need to support the development of OD practitioners and consultants. We have fostered a breadth of information about OD, working OD models, and OD applications, which describe what OD is, how to do it, and the competencies required. Themes and perspectives include having a multiple-levels-of-systems viewpoint, a social justice and diversity stance, and an international and world context. These themes are integrated in chapters throughout the book. Individually, they highlight aspects of OD that are useful and beneficial to a practitioner's work in organizations. Together, they promote layers of thinking, principles, and practices that create a broad capability for addressing organizational issues and dilemmas.

More than three-quarters of *The NTL Handbook of Organization Development and Change* has been changed from the original. All chapters were reviewed. Some chapters were updated and others were replaced with additional themes and topics. A few chapters are classics and were retained in this second edition of the book. The book has multiple bodies of knowledge, theories, methodologies, and practices from many schools of thinking about OD and a variety of professional organizations. This is a time when there are ongoing questions about the value of OD and its relevance for

clients, customers, suppliers, boards, and stakeholders. This book describes organization development in its evolving practice and its specialization, fragmentation, integration, challenge, and competition. OD practitioners will need to support organizations in considering broad economic, environmental, and social justice implications, change and continuity, sustainability and operation in an interconnected international and world setting.

The NTL Handbook is designed as a functional resource for practitioners and others as they enter the field and grow in it over time. It describes an OD with core elements, an OD that is evolving and changing. Among the core elements are use of self, action research, change, multicultural OD, the OD map, phases of the OD process, and OD values and ethics. Increasingly, organizations (and OD itself) must understand globalization strategies and cross-cultural transformation, unravel theoretical foundations, and link them to effective OD practices. Organization change must be supported while working at multiple levels of systems: with individuals, groups, large groups, and large social systems, and by changing organizations from the outside.

New to this edition are approaches to OD practice that are being developed and expanded: change in complex times, system perspectives, emotional intelligence, leadership, network analysis, dialogic OD, sustainable organizations, as well as other important approaches such as appreciative inquiry, cultural assessment, learning systems, and working with energy. We have revisited the roots of OD from Kurt Lewin's perspective and looked to the present and future of OD in a VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) world.

A well-trained and educated OD practitioner is competent to consult to groups and organizations. *The NTL Handbook of Organization Development and Change* supports the

effectiveness and development of practitioners and consultants with its range of in-depth exploration of key theoretical models, methodologies, and applications as they apply to individuals, groups, and organizations.

This book has been designed so that each chapter stands on its own and can be read separately. The sections and chapters can also be read in sequence. The overall book is organized so that the content flows generally from core OD methodology and practice to new and innovative OD applications, and from historical to present to future perspectives.

Audience

This book is written for OD practitioners; people who are just entering the OD field; people beginning an OD certificate, graduate, or other educational program; human resource professionals; managers; leaders; and others who are interested in what OD is about and how it might apply to what they do. It describes OD foundations and current and emerging OD practices, and it is a resource for OD workshops, OD certificate programs, and master's and Ph.D. graduate OD programs.

About the Editors, Authors, and NTL Institute

The NTL Handbook of Organization Development and Change presents an NTL perspective about the OD field and profession. It builds on the assumptions, skills, knowledge, thinking, and values from research, debates taking place in the field, papers and presentations in OD conferences, workshops, certificate programs, graduate programs, and working with clients. The editors of the book

are members of the Institute. The contributing authors are current and former NTL members and distinguished colleagues in the field of organization development and applied behavior science. They are theorists, educators, and practitioners representing a fairly large and diverse group. They are well-known OD consultants in the field, OD practitioners with internal and external experience in the public and private sectors and in a variety of nations, and faculty members in graduate programs in OD and other fields. They come from varying backgrounds: organization development, organization behavior, management, psychology, organizational learning, coaching, education, diversity and social justice, economics, and engineering.

NTL and its members were central in founding the OD field and in creating an OD professional association, the OD Network. NTL has published a leading professional journal, *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, for many years. More recently, NTL has published *Practising Social Change*, NTL's practitioner's journal. NTL offers a range of professional development workshops and certificate programs in OD. NTL partnered with American University for twenty-three years (1980-2013) in offering the AU/NTL master's degree program in OD and continues its relationship with AU/NTL alumni through the AU/NTL Alumni Association. There are now more than fifteen hundred NTL alumni from the AU/NTL program and many other NTL alumni who are graduates of NTL workshops and certificate programs in OD. They are internal and external OD practitioners, OD researchers, and OD academicians. NTL Institute continues to influence the contemporary field of OD in many ways.

Contents of the Handbook

The NTL Handbook of Organization Development and Change is organized with seven primary parts:

- **Part One: Organization Development as a Profession and Field of Practice** is a comprehensive overview of the field with definitions, context, and a perspective on the history, values, and ethics of organization development and change, as well as core methodologies—action research, systems perspective, and use of self.
- **Part Two: Perspectives on Organization Development Practice** covers organization development from several perspectives. The OD map is a visual and cognitive map of OD knowledge, concepts, and practice and includes a list of tasks and actions for each phase. Other perspectives are the OD consulting process, multicultural OD, dialogic OD, and sustainable OD.
- **Part Three: Organization Change, Leadership, and Culture** provides an overarching framework for change at multiple levels of system. Four chapters then elaborate on organization-change theories and models, self-organizing and emergent change processes, organization leadership, and organization culture.
- **Part Four: Working with Groups and Individuals** describes models for working with a variety of groups, including small work groups and project teams and large groups. The last chapter in this section examines working with individuals in organizations, including coaching, two-person consulting, and strategic advising.
- **Part Five: Multicultural Perspectives** explores OD and diversity, inclusion, and justice from a variety of perspectives. There are contributions about the evolving organizational practice of diversity and inclusion,

appreciative inquiry as an OD and diversity process, and using the MCODE model to develop multicultural organizations. Two chapters address cross-cultural/cross-national OD practice and the legacy of colonialism and oppression for OD practice from a global, international, and world view.

- **Part Six: Areas of Focus in Organization Development** includes specialized bodies of knowledge and innovation in organization development with topics about working with nonprofit, social change organizations and networks, emotional intelligence in the workplace, organization network dynamics and analysis, energy, and learning organizations.
- **Part Seven: The Present and Future of Organization Development** begins with two chapters that celebrate the contributions of Kurt Lewin and their relevance for OD as it is today. The final chapter in the book examines organization development's future in an organizational world of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), a world in which OD practitioners must assist leaders and workers in organizations learn to deal with this new reality and "new normal."

The Foreword, written by Edie and Charlie Seashore, reflects on the NTL Institute's early and continuing role in developing and shaping the field and profession of OD. They share insights and perspectives about NTL and OD from their experience as long-term members with NTL and work as leaders, academicians, and practitioners in the field of OD. Part One includes:

- **Chapter One: "Organization Development as an Evolving Field of Practice."** Organization development is both simple and complex. This chapter begins to

shape the understanding of organization development and presents definition, context, a value system and philosophy, and multiple perspectives about the field, in particular a number of knowledge areas and roles and skills required for professional practice.

- **Chapter Two: “A History of Organization Development.”** OD practitioners need to understand the conceptual and practice history of the OD field as it came into being and has changed and developed. This chapter describes the people, events, developments, traditions, challenges, organizations, and trends that are instrumental in what OD is today.
- **Chapter Three: “Values, Ethics, and OD Practice.”** The values of organization development practitioners affect both what they do and how they do it. This chapter defines values and ethics, examines the importance of values and ethics for OD practitioners, and offers a current view of the value base of OD and its differentiation from other approaches to change.
- **Chapter Four: “Action Research in Organization Development: History, Methods, Implications, and New Developments.”** Action research (AR) is central to the practice of organization development and action research practitioners. The origins of action research and OD and contemporary approaches to action research are discussed in this chapter. The chapter ends with a discussion of the possible implications for AR as OD goes global and cross-cultural in the age of social media and data science.
- **Chapter Five: “System Perspectives and Organization Development.”** System perspectives are integral to the practice of current OD approaches. This chapter identifies key perspectives on systems and system theory and how they shape the role of OD

practitioners and their use of current OD approaches. System perspectives are explored for traditional OD and four other OD approaches: sustained-change OD, Gestalt organization and systems development, blended traditional and dialogic OD, and dialogic OD.

- **Chapter Six: “Use of Self as an OD Practitioner.”** From its earliest years, the OD profession maintained the importance of the OD practitioner to the change process. The practitioner must have an understanding of self along with understanding self in relation to clients and others. This chapter explores the use of self in OD consulting. An overview of OD practice is provided through the dual lens of ‘what’ we do and ‘how’ we do it. An in-depth examination of use of self follows with the concepts of the helping relationship and the self, the use of self in OD consulting, and suggestions for maintaining self as instrument.

Part Two contains:

- **Chapter Seven: “OD Map: The Essence of Organization Development.”** Most people coming into the field of organization development struggle to understand, “What is OD?” The OD map was developed in an attempt to answer questions that a group of newcomers to OD asked in an NTL learning program. The map outlines foundational aspects of the current theory and practice of OD.
- **Chapter Eight: “The Organization Development (OD) Consulting Process.”** The OD process and framework described in this chapter are at the core of organization development consulting. The OD consulting process is conceptualized in four phases: start-up, diagnosis, intervention, and transition. Central OD consultant tasks and skills are presented for each phase.

- **Chapter Nine: “Theory and Practice of Multicultural Organization Development.”**
Multicultural organization development emerged from the work of diversity practitioners and OD practitioners who share a commitment to social justice and social diversity in systems and in society. This chapter describes the history of multicultural organization development (MCOD) and MCOD practice, including the MCOD goal, development stages, and process for fostering change in organizations.
- **Chapter Ten: “Dialogic Organization Development.”**
This chapter introduces and explains what dialogic OD is, how it is similar to and differs from other forms of OD, the basic methods or practices associated with dialogic OD, and when to use it. Useful information on dialogic OD theory and practice is provided throughout the chapter.
- **Chapter Eleven: “Sustainable Organization Development.”** Organizations across the globe are awakening to the reality that sustainable business practices provide competitive advantages while simultaneously producing world benefit. Organizations pursuing sustainability are in need of organization development support at multiple system levels. This chapter highlights key developments in sustainability as they relate to OD. The broader literature from academia, practice, and media is discussed, as well as the practical implications of sustainability on the field.

Part Three contains:

- **Chapter Twelve: “A Framework for Change: Capacity, Competency, and Capability.”** This chapter explores a framework that helps to diagnose, take action, and measure success at all levels of system—

individual, group, and organization—in relation to the internal and external environment. Elements of change that align with the needs of the change process and provide understanding for learning, growth, development, change, and transformation are examined. These concepts are capacity, competency and capability.

- **Chapter Thirteen: “Organization Change Theories and Models.”** Organizations are continually changing. This chapter is a review of organization change theories that are used to understand, explain, and predict organization change and models that are used to guide change initiatives and organization responses to change.
- **Chapter Fourteen: “Organizational Change Processes.”** Understanding planned organizational change and change processes means considering systems thinking, change dynamics, planning change, leading change, and implementing change. This chapter explores these key aspects and lays out a step-by-step approach to complex organizational change.
- **Chapter Fifteen: “Tapping the Power of Emergent Change.”** Leaders and organization development (OD) practitioners spend an enormous amount of time thinking about and planning for change efforts. The ability to change and adapt is a natural capacity of all complex adaptive systems. Change happens through the process of self-organization, which leads to new emergent patterns within a system. This chapter explores self-organization and emergent change. This chapter outlines principles that enable emergent change and the implications and applications of these principles for change leaders and OD practitioners.
- **Chapter Sixteen: “Organization Leadership: Leading in a Learning Way.”** Organizations are searching for more effective leadership models in an era

of permanent change where dynamics are increasingly complex, proven solutions unreliable, and everyone and everything is swayed by technology. When organizations are confronted with difficult challenges, learning becomes the best option for leadership. Experiential learning theory (ELT) is used in this chapter to explore leadership as a wholly integrated process of learning and adaptation. ELT provides a theoretically sound and well-established frame of reference to guide leaders in today's uncertain environment. Strategies for leadership education, training and development are identified.

- **Chapter Seventeen: “Culture Assessment as an OD Intervention.”** This chapter explores how OD practitioners can work with organizations on cultural issues to enable members of the organization to identify important cultural assumptions and evaluate the degree to which those assumptions aid or hinder changes that the organization is trying to make.

Part Four includes:

- **Chapter Eighteen: “The Natural Development of Work Groups: Emergent Leadership.”** For organizations, managers, and consultants who deal with small work groups, the model of Ariadne Beck and her colleagues provides new possibilities for working more effectively. This chapter draws on NTL's experiences with applying the Beck model to a range of organizational work groups and project teams for greater understanding of their development and leadership, which emerges from within those groups and teams.
- **Chapter Nineteen: “Working with Groups in Organizations.”** One of the major challenges of being and working in groups is to understand the variety and

complexity of group dynamics. This chapter outlines some of the foundational thinking and knowledge of groups, identifies tools that help in working with and understanding groups, lists some factors that affect group performance, and presents an integrated group development theory and model.

- **Chapter Twenty: “Large Group Interventions.”** OD practitioners working with systemic problems in an organization developed methods for bringing together all the concerned parties in a system in one place to make decisions about the issues facing them. This chapter covers large group methods in three periods of development: early invention and development, adoption of new methods, and incorporation of these methods into a variety of situations. The chapter concludes with five case examples using different large group methods where long term sustainable change has successfully occurred.
- **Chapter Twenty-One: “Working with Individuals in Organizations: Coaching, Facilitating Interaction with Others, and Strategic Advising.”** Many practitioners are spending more and more time with executives and managers in a coaching or in an advisory capacity, in contrast to being a consultant in the traditional sense. This chapter examines a systematic perspective of the possibilities and issues involved in various ways of working with individuals in organizations, including coaching, two-person consulting, and strategic advising.

Part Five contains:

- **Chapter Twenty-Two: “Diversity and Inclusion in Organizational Practice.”** Over the past forty years, significant shifts have occurred in diversity practice and

leadership within organizations. This chapter explores the evolving framing of diversity and inclusion and suggests new prospects for creative approaches that fully leverage the possibilities that a diverse workforce offers. The chapter includes United States-focused compliance issues, programmatic initiatives, systemic culture-change processes, the broadening of the definition of diversity to incorporate global frameworks, and the conceptualizations of intersectionality and boundary spanning across multiple dimensions of diversity. Current challenges and opportunities are highlighted and frameworks for future work are suggested.

- **Chapter Twenty-Three: “Borders and Boundaries: Cross-Cultural Perspectives for OD Practitioners.”** This chapter explores some core constructs in cross-cultural studies, both well-known and lesser known, and applies them to the work of international organization development practitioners. The implications of national culture, individual identity, and boundaries for cross-cultural work of OD practitioners are examined.
- **Chapter Twenty-Four: “Global OD Practice: The Legacy of Colonialism and Oppression.”** For OD professionals who work abroad, understanding the legacy of oppression at the national and regional levels of countries where we work is complex and essential, especially for those who are U.S.-based and U.S.-trained. This chapter explores the lingering impact on national cultures of two types of oppression that have implications for global OD practitioners: colonialism and brutal dictatorships. Background information, tools, and mini case examples are provided for U.S.-based consultants on how to recognize and respond to the invisible power dynamics of oppressive histories embedded in many national cultures.

- **Chapter Twenty-Five: “Appreciative Inquiry as an Organization Development and Diversity Process.”** This chapter examines appreciative inquiry as an organization development change process and a diversity intervention. Emphasis is placed on what is needed to create an environment in which the inquiry is organization-driven and the OD practitioner is the inquiry guide. The chapter has information that the OD practitioner needs when using AI as an OD and diversity change process in a system, community, or organization.
- **Chapter Twenty-Six: “Developing Multicultural Organizations: An Application of the Multicultural OD Model.”** Diversity and inclusion initiatives by organizations have become increasingly common in the last twenty years. Now diversity is practiced all over the world. The multicultural organization development (MCOD) model originated a couple of decades ago. Nevertheless, it is a powerful tool for organizations and practitioners who want to move from implementing isolated diversity programs to comprehensive and strategic interventions suitable for the complex notions of equality appropriate for today’s global organizations. This chapter expands on the MCOD model and proposes some practical tools to support a complex assessment of where the organization is multi-culturally, a vision and indicators for a complex approach to justice in organizations, and strategic criteria that provide a systems’ perspective to guide organizations in becoming more diverse, inclusive and equitable.

Part Six covers:

- **Chapter Twenty-Seven: “OD Practitioners as Agents of Social Change.”** Many OD practitioners work at the boundary, both inside and outside the organization. OD

practitioners involved in social change work often work to change organizations from the outside. This chapter is addressed to both new and experienced practitioners who would like to use their skills as external change agents in the service of progressive social change.

- **Chapter Twenty-Eight: “The Power of Emotional Intelligence and How to Create Resonance at Work.”** This chapter explores how emotions impact people’s relationships and performance at work; how a person’s emotional competence affects their leadership and the emotional reality of the organization; and how a resonant environment impacts people and organizations positively, a dissonant environment does just the opposite. Finally, a qualitative research methodology called “dynamic inquiry” is described.
- **Chapter Twenty-Nine: “Organization Network Dynamics and Analysis.”** People use webs of connections every day to solve problems, innovate, make decisions, and complete routine tasks. Every time they do so, they tap into networks. This chapter explores organization networks as a concept and a methodology. It describes the areas in which network interventions are most valuable to OD practitioners, explains the process for analyzing organization networks, and provides advice on moving forward to increase competence in network knowledge.
- **Chapter Thirty: “Working with Energy in Organizations.”** OD has sought to understand the interconnectedness among people, systems, and the environment. Increasing understanding of energetic forces and how to alter them gives practitioners more options for shaping interventions. This chapter embraces the fascinating world of energy, understanding

its impact on all levels of systems and how to effectively intervene.

- **Chapter Thirty-One: “Learning Systems and Organization Development.”** OD practitioners help clients learn from their own experience and that of others to more effectively and more efficiently realize their mission and stated goals. This chapter explains the overlap and relationship between OD and learning and offers a framework to intervene in organizational systems to promote learning in a manner consistent with traditional OD principles.

Part Seven concludes with three chapters:

- **Chapter Thirty-Two: “Kurt Lewin: Some Reflections.”** The contributions of Kurt Lewin to the field of organization development are unparalleled. He remains one of the most referenced authors in social science. This chapter is a reflection on Kurt Lewin’s life, contributions—including, field theory, change theory, leadership styles, group dynamics, experiential learning, social change, action research, and organization development—and his relevancy today.
- **Chapter Thirty-Three: “A Lewinian Lens on OD’s ‘Emerging Now.’”** Much has been said about Kurt Lewin, social psychologist, scientist, management thinker, and the “father of OD.” Too often these treatises fail to pay attention to his early German studies and the well-defined philosophical and scientific underpinnings upon which his practical studies are based. This chapter looks to these philosophical underpinnings to examine four major trends existing in the field of OD today—the “emerging now” of OD—through a Lewinian philosophical lens. These roots suggest the best way

forward for advancing the OD field to its most desirable future.

- **Chapter Thirty-Four: “The Future of Organization Development in a VUCA World.”** The volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) inherent in today’s organizational world is the “new normal.” It is profoundly changing how organizations of all kinds do business, and it is the emerging world into which OD practitioners and academicians must step in order to assist leaders and workers in organizations learn to deal with a new reality. The knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) once needed in organizations are no longer sufficient. Today we need organizations that are more strategic and capable of operating in a complex environment where critical thinking skills are required in order to adapt to volatility and uncertainty.

PART ONE
ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT AS A
PROFESSION AND FIELD OF PRACTICE

CHAPTER ONE

ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT AS AN EVOLVING FIELD OF PRACTICE

Robert J. Marshak

Organization development (OD) has been a recognized field of practice since the early 1960s with many of its origins in the 1940s, but it still proves difficult to explain what it is, what it does, and why you might want it or need it. The reasons for this seem twofold. First, it requires an understanding of an integration of several sets of knowledge united by an underlying philosophical belief and value system. Second, it is a field of practice that is continually evolving and expanding. Consequently, the range of definitions offered over the years all sound somewhat similar, and they also seem to miss the mark in explaining to outsiders, “So what exactly is OD?”

Consider these definitions:

- Organization development is an effort (1) planned, (2) organization-wide, and (3) managed from the top, to (4) increase organization effectiveness and health, through (5) planned interventions in the organization’s “processes,” using behavioral science knowledge (Beckhard, 1969, p. 9).
- Organization development refers to a long-range effort to improve an organization’s problem-solving capabilities and its ability to cope with changes in its external environment with the help of external or internal behavioral-scientist practitioners, or change agents, as they are sometimes called (French, 1969, p. 24).

- Organization development is a planned process of change in an organization's culture through the utilization of behavioral science technology, research, and theory (Burke, 1982, p. 10).
- Organization development is the process of increasing organizational effectiveness and facilitating personal and organizational change through the use of interventions driven by social and behavioral science knowledge (Anderson, 2012, p. 2).

Now, at this point in most discussions of “what is OD?” the author offers his or her or their definition of OD intended to make clearer what it is and what it does. No such effort is expended here. Instead, the intention of this discussion is to go behind the words to the underlying ideas and values that not only give definition to organization development but make it distinct from other forms of management and organizational consulting. First, the underlying knowledge and philosophical systems that help define what is and is not OD are described. Next, how the knowledge bases that support OD practices have evolved from the 1940s until the present is outlined. Finally, some of the tensions and dilemmas confronting OD at this point in its evolution are described.

The Field of Organization Development

There are some who would not describe OD as a field, partly because it draws from many academic disciplines and partly because it is a field of practice more than a field of academic inquiry. Nevertheless, over the years OD practices have been informed and defined by more or less integrated sets of theories, ideas, practices, and values and therefore qualify as a field of applied knowledge.

Consequently, to understand what OD is and what it does, we must first understand the dimensions of knowledge and values that in combination produce practices that are labeled as organization development.

There are three primary sets of knowledge and an underlying value system that leads to what is called organization development. The discussion that follows errs on the side of attempting to simplify and present essential characteristics. No attempt is being made to elucidate the full characteristics and nuances involved. In this sense, the discussion aspires to make clear some of the fundamentals for understanding organization development at the risk perhaps of appearing to be too simplistic or leaving some important dimension(s) out of the discussion.

Understanding Social Systems

The first set of knowledge, at its simplest level, is understanding the potential subject(s) of an intended development or change effort. Because OD seeks to foster the improved effectiveness of organizations and other social systems, a range of knowledge pertaining to the functioning of individuals, groups, organizations, and communities—separately and as integrated systems—is required. Thus organization development draws on theories and ideas predominantly from the behavioral or social sciences, but also physics and biology. However, as is explained in more detail later, OD does not draw equally from all types of theories and ideas about human behavior in organized social settings. Instead it tends to be based in those theories and ideas that are consistent with its underlying, and sometimes unarticulated, philosophical value system. So, for example, most organization development practices are predicated on the assumption that people are motivated by factors beyond purely economic incentives.

Understanding the Hows and Whys of Change

A central aspect of OD is fostering development and change in social systems. This means that the bodies of knowledge that help explain how individuals, groups, organizations, communities, and even societies change are all pertinent to organization development. How do we go about inducing, supporting, and/or accelerating change in a team, an organization, a community, a network of organizations? The range of ideas about change and development coming from, for example, education, training, economics, psychology, social psychology, sociology, anthropology, biology and physics is all potentially relevant to OD practice. Again, however, not all ideas about change are embraced by the underlying OD value system. For example, we might be able to force or coerce people to make certain changes, but this would not be considered organization development (and would in fact be refuted by OD practitioners).

Understanding the Role of a Third-Party Change Agent

The final set of knowledge helping define OD pertains to the role of the OD practitioner. When working with an organization to help bring about a desired change, the OD practitioner is not the person in charge. Instead the OD practitioner is a third-party change agent aiding the person or persons in charge as well as the system itself to bring about or encourage the desired changes. An OD practitioner, whether internal or external to the subject system, must understand the issues, politics, psychological processes, ethics, and other dynamics associated with being a third-party change agent working with people called clients in complex social systems. Here too, not all theories and ideas about the third-party role are endorsed

or embraced by organization development. Once again, it is those ideas and practices that are consistent with the underlying values and philosophy of OD that become part of the theories and practices associated with the role and responsibilities of an OD practitioner. For example, a third-party role wherein an expert tells people what they should do is an accepted if not essential part of a great deal of management consulting but is rejected in organization development as a general mode of practice.

These three sets of knowledge about (1) social systems, (2) how to change social systems, and (3) third-party change agent roles are the essential areas of expertise for an effective organization development practitioner. They are also insufficient to fully understand the theory and practice of OD as distinct, for example, from other forms of consulting intended to foster or induce development or change in organizations or other social systems. To make this distinction requires understanding the underlying philosophical value system of organization development and how it links and integrates selective aspects of each of the main bodies of knowledge making up various OD practices.

Understanding the Underlying Values and Philosophy of Organization Development

Organization development is often referred to as a values-based or normative field of practice. This has been true since its early beginnings in the 1940s with Kurt Lewin, as will be discussed below. While it has proven difficult to precisely enumerate the exact values that are the essential ingredients making OD more or less uniquely OD, it is possible to describe some of the broad characteristics of the underlying value system. At some considerable risk of oversimplifying, four key value orientations have helped to