

Which Skills Spell Success in OD?

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Organization development (OD) has gained increased recognition as a distinct discipline; consequently, the number of OD practitioners has exploded. This raises questions and sparks interest in determining what skills and abilities practitioners need for success in organization development. While some leaders in the field have addressed this issue, the average OD practitioner has not given much thought to the question. The study reported here was designed to answer this question partially.

Method

Initially, 20 OD practitioners attending an OD Institute Conference in 1979 were asked to identify OD skills using a three-category model developed by the authors. The data from this formed the basis for a questionnaire which was distributed to 600 randomly selected members of the OD Division of the American Society for Training and Development. They were asked to state their perception of the classification and relative importance of specific OD skills. They were also asked to perform two tasks. First, they were to choose which of three categories—self-awareness, analytical/conceptual and change/influence, as defined by Varney (1979) (see Table 1)—or a fourth category, "other," best

defines each of the 118 items in the questionnaire. Second, they were asked to rate the extent to which each item contributes to the success of three common intervention types (see Table 2). Definitions were provided for clarification and reference.

The data collected were analyzed to determine: if OD practitioners today confirm Varney's three-category model (self-awareness, analytical/conceptual, change/influence) as a means of classifying OD skills; and whether OD practitioners perceive some skills to be more important than others to the success of specific OD interventions.

Category confirmation

The results of a chi square test used to analyze a portion of the data indicated that practitioners made a purposeful category selection for each of the 118 items in the questionnaire. In addition, 56 of these 118 items met

the 60 percent placement criterion for definitive classification in one of the three categories (see Table 3). The confirmation of the three-category construct (rather than the fourth category, "other") for each item suggests that Varney's classifications also pertain to the remaining 62 items that did not meet the 60 percent placement criterion. Additional research could be conducted to determine whether these 62 items would be best described by a combination of two or possibly all three categories, or whether other categories could be used.

In examining the second question of this study (whether practitioners perceive certain OD skills to be more important than others to the success of specific interventions), limits were designated arbitrarily to establish an inclusion rule, thereby dropping out skills that did not meet the rule. We used this to judge

Table 1.

SELF-AWARENESS

Self-Awareness
Other Awareness—
Interpersonal
Self and Others
Personality Theory
Group Theory
Organization Theory

ANALYTICAL/CONCEPTUAL

Theory Building
Theoretical Mapping
Concept-Model Building
Systems Analysis—
Organization Diagnosis
Data Processing
Feedback and Presentation

CHANGE INFLUENCE

Change Strategy Design
Intervention Design
Persuasion-Power
Facilitation-Process
Intervention Styles
Teaching-Educative

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Table 2.

Intervention Type A: intergroup relationships between subsystems; involves gathering/collecting data by some method, getting the group together to own/work out their problems, evaluating results and insuring that people concerned continue to work toward the solutions they have found and agreed upon.

Intervention Type B: educational activities for upgrading knowledge, skills and abilities of key personnel at all levels; involves doing needs analysis, developing an educational activity/program to enable one or more persons to gain more skills or upgrade themselves and carrying out this activity/program.

Intervention Type C: planning and goal-setting processes for upgrading individuals, teams and larger systems; involves awareness of environment, facilitating and supporting a meeting where a "family group" or individuals set their goals and plans, facilitating and supporting individuals and groups in the system to carry out their goals and plans and ensuring that progress is being made (using measures set by individuals and groups to judge degree to which plans and goals have been fulfilled).

those skills contributing significantly to the success of an intervention. Items were sorted into two categories: those falling one standard deviation in the lower third of the range of scores and a mean score falling within the upper third of the range of scores.

Application of this rule generated lists of 22 skills (18.64 percent) for intervention type A, 14 skills (11.86 percent) for intervention type B and 18 skills (15.25 percent) for intervention type C which met the criterion for being perceived as more important than other skills to the success of the specific interventions:

- *Intervention Type A: Intergroup relationships between subsystems.*

- Use interpersonal skills
- Be perceptive
- Deal with resistance
- Use small group intervention skills
- Do team building
- Facilitate
- Encourage participation
- See different perspectives
- Create synergy
- Identify issues/problems
- Observe
- Be open
- Give feedback
- Seek consensus
- Listen
- Confront

- Assess leadership climate/cohesion
- Create open atmosphere
- Manage conflict
- Question
- Clarify
- Use psychological skills
 - *Intervention Type B: Educational activities for upgrading knowledge, skills and abilities of key personnel at all levels.*
- Train
- Educate people
- Speak
- Be brief/specific/clear
- Design
- Use interpersonal skills
- Be perceptive
- Conceptualize
- Relate concepts to behavior
- Use data
- Assess
- Elaborate
- Control situation
- Understand nonverbal cues
 - *Intervention Type C: Planning and goal-setting processes for individuals, teams and larger systems.*
- Use interpersonal skills
- Confidence
- Do goal setting
- Deal with resistance
- Be perceptive
- Assess leadership climate/cohesion
- Use data
- See macro view of organization
- Perceive power
- See different perspectives

- Clarify
- Focus on results
- Develop resources
- Counsel
- Confront
- Create open atmosphere
- Manage conflict
- Encourage participation

Several skills met the inclusion rule for more than one intervention type (see Table 4), and two of the original 118 items, *interpersonal skills* and *perceptiveness*, were perceived to be critical to the success of all three intervention types. It could, therefore, be deduced that these two skills are the most important skills included in the questionnaire.

Certain results stand out in terms of which skills are considered critical to the various intervention types and, at times, appear somewhat contradictory to logical expectations. For example, one might logically expect "use the data" to be included as critical to intervention type A or "encourage participation" and "create open atmosphere" for intervention type B. This, however, was not the case.

There appears to be no significant relationship between the skills perceived to be most important (the second portion of the questionnaire) and a specific category of skills (the first portion of the questionnaire). Rather, those skills perceived to be most important for each intervention type were distributed among Varney's three categories in the first section of the questionnaire.

Donovan and Warrick (1979) among others, have pointed out the increasing interest by schools to clarify what an OD practitioner needs to know to be successful. This study addresses this question from the average practitioner's point of view and provides data for course and program design. In addition, experienced practitioners may use the results to help evaluate their present skills for strengths and weaknesses. While this study was not intended to portray one skill as more important than another,

Table 3. Skills and Categories Meeting Placement Criteria

<i>Skill</i>	<i>Self-Awareness</i>	<i>Analytical/Conceptual</i>	<i>Change/Influence</i>
Ability to:			
Speak			X
Assess		X	
Diagnose		X	
Conceptualize		X	
Theorize		X	
Train			X
Synthesize		X	
Do action research		X	
Carry out analytical process		X	
Collect data		X	
Hypothesize		X	
Modify			X
Seek consensus			X
Do team building			X
Counsel			X
Facilitate			X
Sell			X
Relax	X		
Negotiate			X
See the obvious and abstract		X	
See macro view of organization		X	
Understand nonverbal cues	X		
Identify own limits	X		
Love	X		
Develop/use survey instruments		X	
Do a needs analysis		X	
Do strategic planning		X	
Give feedback			X
Express feelings	X		
Empathize	X		
Support	X		
Be silent	X		
Manage conflict			X
Formulate rationale		X	
Encourage participation			X
Know own values/self	X		
Use data		X	
Recognize subsystems		X	
Get commitments			X
Get authority to function			X
Educate people			X
Create synergy			X
Overcome fears	X		
Be open	X		
Deal with resistance			X
Care for self	X		
Possession of:			
Interpersonal skills	X		
AV skills			X
Humor	X		
Knowledge of organization/ systems theory		X	
Knowledge of history of organization		X	
Marketing/PR skills			X
Patience	X		
Endurance	X		
Politicking skills			X
Small group intervention skills			X

Table 4.

Cross-intervention skills comparison

<i>Skill Name</i>	<i>Int. A.</i>	<i>Int. B.</i>	<i>Int. C.</i>
Use interpersonal skills	X	X	X
Be perceptive	X	X	X
Deal with resistance	X		X
Encourage participation	X		X
See different perspectives	X		X
Confront	X		X
Assess leadership climate/cohesion	X		X
Create open atmosphere	X		X
Manage conflict	X		X
Be clear	X		X
Use data		X	X

to the exclusion of the other skill, the reported perceptions of other OD practitioners may help direct an individual's professional development efforts.

Finally, it is hoped that this study, by pointing out some of the skills needed for success, may increase the probability of successful OD interventions and may enhance the development of organization development as a more concrete concept made up of a specific and categorized body of knowledge, thus more readily understandable to the non-OD world.

Bibliography

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