

SURVEYING ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT SKILLS

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A 1979 survey of leaders in organization development (OD) conducted by the authors identified 40 major skills that we were able to categorize under four headings: (1) *Knowledge Skills*; (2) *Consulting Skills*; (3) *Conceptual Skills*; and (4) *Human Skills*. Respondents included 20 well known OD experts including Richard Beckhard, Robert Blake and Jane Mouton, Leland Bradford, Warner Burke, Wendell French, Larry Greiner, Gordon Lippitt, Craig Lundberg, Newton Margulies, William Reddin, Glenn Varney, and Edgar Schein, as well as 50 industry and government internal OD practitioners who lead the OD efforts in a wide variety of types and sizes of organizations. Figure 1 shows the skills compiled from the survey and provides a way for OD practitioners to evaluate their own OD skills.

Knowledge Skills

Since OD is a multidisciplinary field, OD practitioners need a

broad knowledge base. In addition to having a thorough understanding of OD principles, theories and techniques, they need to be familiar with Organization Behavior (individual, group, intergroup and whole organization behavior); the Behavioral Sciences (learning theory, motivation theory, behavior modification, etc.); Management; and at least have a general knowledge of Business (accounting, finance, marketing, management information systems, budgeting, etc.). Also needed is a familiarity with the latest in training technology (audio-visual equipment, relevant films, tapes and workshops, etc.) and an awareness of current OD developments. According to respondents, OD practitioners often become too involved in their day-to-day activities to keep up with current literature, conventions, and workshops pertaining to OD.

Consulting Skills

Although OD practitioners are often viewed as being involved in somewhat mysterious, glamorous and exciting activities, it is actual-

ly their expertise in fairly mundane skills that determines if they will have the opportunity to perform and implement their magic. For example, Proposal Writing, Report Writing, and Marketing Skills were frequently mentioned as important OD skills. Decisions on OD programs are often made based on a proposal and the ability of OD practitioners to market their programs and ideas. Report Writing is necessary to present the results of an organizational diagnosis, to provide progress reports, and to summarize the results of programs. Unless the reports are concise and useful, they are often not read, not used, or misused.

Some of the specialized skills needed in OD are skills in Diagnosing Organizations (using interviews, questionnaires and the analysis of organizational information to evaluate a whole organization or group), Synthesizing Data (evaluating and organizing data), and skills in Resolving Problems (individual, group, and intergroup problems), Team Building, Conflict Resolution (resolving conflicts), Process Consultation (evaluating

organizational processes such as how groups interact and make decisions), and Training and Developing People.

Almost all respondents listed organizational diagnosis as an important OD skill and many listed diagnostic skills as the most important OD skill. Also mentioned as important OD skills were: An Ability to Identify and Respond to an Organization's Real Needs, An Ability to Quickly Adapt to Changing Situations, An Ability to Quickly Establish Client Rapport and Trust, and An Ability to Obtain Lasting Results. The internal practitioners were especially concerned about OD practitioners who "don't hear what the organization really needs" or become so locked into their "packaged programs" that they become too rigid and inflexible to adapt to the real or changing needs of the organization, or who "don't do the necessary planning before, during and after an OD program to achieve lasting results."

Concern was also expressed about the need to quickly establish

rapport and trust with the client. OD practitioners usually work under tight time constraints in presenting programs and ideas to top management and in gaining the commitment necessary to achieve successful results. Wendell French described this skill as, "An ability to gain personal acceptance by the key client and client groups and transmit an understanding of the OD process to these people."

Conceptual Skills

An OD intervention often results in significant changes in the culture, values and processes of an organization. Therefore, it is important that OD practitioners develop A Sound Philosophical Base Concerning Human Behavior, Management, Organization Behavior, and Organization Development. Another important conceptual skill is the development of A Systems View of Organizations and the Environments in Which They Operate. Some of the internal practitioners called this learning to see the "Big Picture." Others stressed the importance of including in a

systems view the external environment (social, political, economic, technological environments) which is having an increasingly important influence on change programs.

One of the most frequently mentioned conceptual skills was An Ability to Visualize, Design, and Manage Long-Range Programs, Training, Interventions, and Follow-up Programs. Because of the heavy educational emphasis in OD, another conceptual skill that is important is An Ability to Understand and Communicate Theories, Principles, Models, and Ideas. Robert Blake and Jane Mouton described this skill as "An ability to translate theory and clearly communicate the principles involved." The final conceptual skill that is important is An Ability to Innovate. Imagination and creativity in innovating programs and interventions appropriate to the situation is needed to respond to the unique circumstances of each intervention.

The heavy emphasis on human skills that emerged from the

Figure 1.
SURVEY OF ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT SKILLS

| KNOWLEDGE SKILLS | CONSULTING SKILLS | CONCEPTUAL SKILLS | HUMAN SKILLS |
|--|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organization Development <input type="checkbox"/> Organization Behavior (Individual, Group, Intergroup, and Whole Organization Behavior) <input type="checkbox"/> Behavioral Sciences <input type="checkbox"/> Management <input type="checkbox"/> General Business (Accounting, Finance, Marketing, Management Information System, Budgeting, Etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Training Technology <input type="checkbox"/> An Awareness of Current Developments in OD | <input type="checkbox"/> Proposal Writing <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing Programs & Ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Diagnosing Organizations <input type="checkbox"/> Synthesizing Data <input type="checkbox"/> Report Writing <input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving <input type="checkbox"/> Team Building <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict Resolution <input type="checkbox"/> Process Consultation <input type="checkbox"/> Training & Development Skills <input type="checkbox"/> An Ability to Identify & Respond to an Organization's Real Needs <input type="checkbox"/> An Ability to Quickly Adapt to Changing Situations <input type="checkbox"/> An Ability to Quickly Establish Client Trust & Rapport <input type="checkbox"/> An Ability to Obtain Lasting Results | <input type="checkbox"/> A Sound Philosophical Base Concerning Human Behavior, Management, Organization Behavior, Learning Behavior, and Organization Development <input type="checkbox"/> A Systems View of Organizations and the Environments in Which They Operate <input type="checkbox"/> An Ability to Visualize, Design, and Manage Long-Range Programs, Training, Interventions, and Follow-up Programs <input type="checkbox"/> An Ability to Understand and Communicate Theories, Principles, Models, and Ideas <input type="checkbox"/> An Ability to Innovate | <input type="checkbox"/> A Genuine Caring for People <input type="checkbox"/> A Positive Attitude <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Awareness <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Discipline <input type="checkbox"/> Good Rational/Emotional Balance <input type="checkbox"/> Integrity <input type="checkbox"/> Helping Skills (Understanding, Empathetic, Good Listener and Coach, Good at Checking Out Perceptions, Assertive, Good at Giving and Receiving Feedback) <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitivity to Organizational Needs <input type="checkbox"/> Leveling & Confronting Skills <input type="checkbox"/> Persuasiveness & Persistence <input type="checkbox"/> A Willingness to Take Risks <input type="checkbox"/> An Ability to Successfully Handle Stress & Frustration <input type="checkbox"/> A Good Sense of Humor <input type="checkbox"/> An Ability to Model & Practice Healthy Behavior |
| <p align="center">OD SKILLS EVALUATION</p> <p>Evaluate yourself on each of the OD skills by placing the appropriate answer in each box. Total your scores and divide by two and compare the result below.</p> <p align="center">1 = Poor 2 = Below Average 3 = Average 4 = Good 5 = Excellent</p> <hr/> <p align="center">Excellent 90-100 Good 80-89 Average 70-79 Below Average 60-69 Poor Below 60</p> | | | |

survey results could lead one to conclude that while all of the skills are important, the human skills are the most important. The human skills of the OD practitioner provide a preview of what can be expected from an OD program and often many of the activities in the program are significantly effected by these skills. As one expert reported, "A practitioner lacking in human skills is unlikely to have the opportunity to practice his or her profession!" A Genuine Caring for People, A Positive Attitude, and Self-Awareness and Self Discipline were some of the human skills mentioned. A genuine caring for people and a positive attitude establish the climate from which the practitioner works and sets the tone for the program. Self-awareness is extremely important so the practitioner can assess his or her strengths and weaknesses and impact on others. Self-discipline is necessary to keep the program moving and to meet program deadlines.

Also mentioned was the need for a Good Rational/Emotional Balance. An OD practitioner needs to be objective but also needs to be in touch with his or her feelings and be able to express them constructively. The need for Integrity was often mentioned. Included in the descriptions of integrity were honesty, healthy values, and as Robert Blake and Jane Mouton described it, "An ability to resist compromising and accommodating the intervention when doing so goes against sound OD technology."

Helping skills include being understanding, empathetic, a good listener and coach, being good at checking out perceptions, being assertive, and being good at giving and receiving feedback. A Strong Sensitivity to Organizational Needs was emphasized particularly by the internal practitioners. Leveling and Confronting Skills, Persuasiveness and Persistence, and A Willingness to Take Risks were also recommended as important skills. One of the more im-

portant skills necessary for the psychological and physical health of OD practitioners frequently mentioned was An Ability to Successfully Handle Stress and Frustration. Finally, the respondents listed A Good Sense of Humor and An Ability to Model and Practice Healthy Behavior. In our opinion, the last skill is the most important of all of the human skills and places considerable responsibility on OD practitioners first to be careful what they preach and then to practice what they preach.

Conclusions

A dilemma often faced by persons responsible for developing OD curriculums for OD workshops or academic programs is deciding what people need to know to be a successful OD practitioner. This question is becoming more frequently asked as OD continues to experience rapid growth on an international scale and more OD programs are being offered. A recent study published in the Spring, 1979, issue of the *Academy of Management OD Newsletter* listed 23 academic institutions that now have programs leading to a degree (bachelors, masters, or Ph.D.), major or area of emphasis in OD. University Associates² has also compiled a recent list that describes additional programs in OD and the behavioral sciences. OD workshops are now offered by ASTD,³ the OD Network,⁴ the National Training Laboratories Institute,⁵ University Associates,⁶ the American Society for Personnel Administration (ASPA),⁷ the Organization Development Institute,⁸ the International Consultants Foundation,⁹ the American Management Associations¹⁰ and several other organizations. Hopefully, this study will provide useful information in answering the question regarding what OD practitioners need to know about OD and will also be useful for experienced practitioners in evaluating their present skills.

It should be pointed out, however, that a list of skills doesn't tell the complete story. Three obvious omissions to such a list are the Need for Experience, the Unique Capabilities of Different Individ-

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uals, and the Willingness to Compensate for Skill Weaknesses by Involving Others. The "seasoning" necessary for successful OD interventions can only partially be learned in a classroom setting. On the job experience is a must for accelerating the seasoning process. It is also important to keep in mind that success in OD is often based on a practitioner's unique capabilities rather than a prescribed list of skills. Edgar Schein recognized the danger of skills lists

that do not recognize the uniqueness of individuals as well as the situation when he pointed out, "The point that I have tried to make consistently is that one can approach an organizational change problem from different perspectives."

Finally, we would like to observe that the skills identified in the survey might be more fitting for Superwoman or Superman than for mere mortals such as OD practitioners! However, the prac-

itioner who recognizes his or her limitations can still be successful by placing a greater emphasis on involving members of the organization as well as other OD practitioners in an OD program.

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