It is the multiple definition of OD that causes controversy within the profession and uncertainty among others as to what OD is.

The Many Faces of the OD Professional

When organization development practitioners are asked to describe their work, one thing is certain: There will be almost as many different answers as there are respondents. The results of the most recent survey of OD professionals confirm the variability of the field, but also identify the shared beliefs, values and circumstances that unite a profession.

By LYNDA C. McDERMOTT

A recent survey of people who identify themselves as organization development (OD) professionals revealed that, while they use many different titles (see Table 1), the majority of OD professionals are white males who are internal consultants working in medium to large organizations. While the educational texts and professional literature suggest that OD professionals are involved in such activities as process consultation, team building and socio-technical design, in fact, the surveyed professionals spend the largest amount of time in skills education and training activities.

Not surprisingly, these same professionals view management development and employee training programs as the OD intervention having the highest current demand by their employers and clients. They do, however, foresee greater future demand for such interventions as team building, job redesign in automated environments and strategic and human resources planning.

Survey purpose and methodology

In the early 1980s a number of studies of the OD profession were conducted. Some attempted to define the field of organization development,[1] and some were designed to learn about those individuals who identified themselves as OD practitioners.[2]

The underlying theme of the studies

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was the recurring need for OD to define "its identity and uniqueness"[3] and viability, particularly in the context of the period's difficult economy. Another goal was assessing the future of OD: Would it become a more respected profession? What OD skills and technologies would be required? What types of OD training should be provided?

The purpose of the current research was to replicate and expand earlier studies by surveying a sample of individuals who identify themselves as OD professionals and who belong to one of three major organization development professional associations: the American Society for Training and Development's OD Division, the Academy of Management's OD Division or the Organization Development Network. The survey focused on the following information:

■ demographic statistics such as age, title, number of years in the field and type of employing organization;
■ differences between internal and external OD practitioners;
■ professional development needs and preferences;
■ interventions and applications, both current and future;
■ OD skills;
■ the status of OD as a profession.

The study used a survey instrument sent to a random sample of approximately 1,000 people who belonged to at least one of the three OD associations. The survey data were processed using the SAS software package for social sciences. Means, medians and tests for the significance of differences were used to analyze the data. Although the response rate of slightly more than 15 percent was lower than expected, the sample size was sufficient for projecting trends.

Survey results

The survey results are summarized in this section according to the major research topics. The results were generally consistent with those of previous studies of similar populations.

Demographics. The following are characteristics of the surveyed population.
■ Forty-five percent are between the ages of 35 and 44.
■ Seventy-three percent are male.
■ Ninety-eight percent are Caucasian.
■ Sixty-nine percent are married.
■ More than half live in the Northeast (27 percent), South (19 percent) or Midwest (20 percent).

Table 1—Titles of OD Professionals

Vice president, human resources

Director, administrator or manager of training and development

Management consultant

Training coordinator/specialist

Employer relations and organization development manager/specialist

Organization development or organization effectiveness consultant (associate)

Human resource or organization planning manager

Industrial psychologist

Staff development consultant

Professor of management/organizational behavior

Director of education

Personnel programs manager

Director of creative worklife center

Director of management development

Director, corporate services

■ Approximately 54 percent earn between $25,000 and $50,000.
■ The highest level of education for 53 percent is the Masters Degree.
■ For approximately 60 percent, their primary field of study was organization or human resource development or psychology.
■ The median level of experience in OD is six to ten years.
■ More than 93 percent are employed full time, with the majority (56 percent) being internal consultants.
■ Respondents have worked for as many as six employers, with the average being two employers.
■ Seventy-four percent give the highest probability to their continuing work with their current employer for at least one year; however a nearly equal number (71 percent) give the lowest probability to continuing with their current employer for 10 years.
■ Eighty-nine percent give the highest probability to continuing OD work for one year; however just over one-third give themselves a 10-in-10 chance of continuing in the field for the next 10 years.

Internal and external practitioners. Approximately 56 percent of the respondents are internal OD practitioners. The types of organizations in which they work include:
■ industry...69.4 percent;

■ government...8.2 percent;
■ education...8.2 percent;
■ health care...6.19 percent.

Less than five percent work for non-profit organizations, and less than five percent are employed by the military.

Internal consultants have worked for their current employer for an average of 8.6 years.

These organizations average 7.5 levels of supervision (up to the president), with an average of 3.1 levels of management above the internal OD professional. This suggests that most internal practitioners would be considered middle management.

The titles of persons to whom internal OD professionals report also indicate the middle management status of these respondents. Few report to a president or chairperson. Instead they report to such individuals as vice-president, human resources or director or manager of training and development.

External OD professionals spend a significant amount of time (40 percent) consulting with manufacturing clients. The other types of clients using external OD consultants are financial services, government and education.

Daily fees normally charged by these external consultants range from $150 to $1,800, the average being approximately $720 per day. Their maximum fees

range from $300 to $2,000, with an average maximum of $950 per day. The minimum fees charged range from $100 to $850, the average minimum fee being $470 per day.

To market their consulting services, external OD professionals use a variety of strategies, from brochures to cold calls. The most frequently used strategies are referrals from previous clients and networking. The least used are writing books and making cold calls. Cold calls, articles and books were judged to be the least effective marketing strategies, referrals from previous clients and networking the most effective.

Discussions with OD consultants suggest that there are many differences between external and internal consultants. However this study found only a few of any significance.

■ There is a difference in annual income between the two groups: 68.7 percent of internal professionals report earning between $25,000 and $49,999; 42.9 percent of external professionals report earning between $50,000 and $74,999.

■ OD professional development activities preferred by internal and external practitioners differ significantly in that internal professionals prefer specialized OD training programs and external professionals prefer team consulting.

■ There is a significant difference between internal and external professionals in terms of the problems they perceive they face. External professionals face such problems as lack of clients, lack of collegiality and lack of recognition of OD as a valuable field. Internal professionals face not being positioned correctly in the organization and lack of financial resources.

Professional development. OD professionals engage in a number of activities designed to keep them current. The most frequently used professional development tools are journals and books, followed by professional association conferences and specialized OD training programs.

The surveyed OD professionals subscribe to an average of 4.97 OD-related journals. *Training & Development Journal* is the periodical to which the largest number subscribe. *Harvard Business Review, Newsweek* or *Time, Training, The Wall Street Journal* and *OD Practitioner* are also popular.

Each respondent belongs to at least one OD-related professional association because of the original sample selection criteria. The largest number of respondents (72 percent) belong to the

Table 2—Primary Areas of OD Intervention

Intervention Area	Respondent Percentage
Skills education/training	29.6
Mission and planning process	15.6
Organization climate	15.6
Values and norms of the organization	9.6
Communication pattern	8.9
Decision-making procedures	8.9
Structure	7.4
Goals of the organization	2.2
Reward systems	2.2

American Society for Training and Development, for the organization's publications and for professional affiliation. The second largest number (55.3 percent) belong to OD Network, for professional affiliation and to receive the publications. The third largest number of respondents (28.3 percent) belong to the Academy of Management, again primarily for publications and professional affiliation. The next largest number—23 percent—belong to the National Training Laboratories Institute for Applied Behavioral Sciences (NTL), primarily for education and training benefits.

OD professionals expect their professional associations to represent the profession and provide services. Primarily they want the associations to encourage the use of OD theory and materials in business management and in other non-MBA professional training and education programs. In addition, they place priority on professional associations providing a forum for discussing and evaluating OD training programs; providing OD core skills and specialization workshops; and developing standards for professional competence and ethical behavior.

Interventions and applications. The field of OD is often defined in terms of the myriad interventions and applications used by OD professionals. It is this multiple definition of OD that causes controversy within the profession and uncertainty among others as to what OD is and what activities constitute "doing OD." This portion of the study identified types of interventions and applications used by OD professionals and elicited predictions of future demands for OD.

OD professionals spend the largest portion of their time in skills education and training activities (see Table 2). Areas of

organization culture or the mission/planning processes are the next primary areas of intervention.

OD professionals see the least current demand for such interventions as education in transpersonal psychology; team development for part-time member groups; designing industrial democracy systems; team development for job sharing; programs for the protection of employee rights; education in holistic health; self-healing and self-management; education in right-brain skills; and assistance with merger activities.

The respondents identified only one intervention for which they saw relatively high current demand: developing

> **OD professionals realize the need to be more knowledgeable of business functions; they value computer skills, quantitative analysis skills and knowledge of information systems.**

management development and employee training programs. Interventions that are somewhat in demand include team building with intact work groups; intergroup team building; surveying and diagnosing the general work environment; strategic planning and policy-making processes; implementation of goal setting (MBO) and budget development systems; design of performance evaluation systems; and design of reward systems.

When asked about future demands for

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Table 3—OD Skills

Skill Area	Mean (1 = Not Important) (7 = Very Important)
Open systems	6.2
Listening	6.2
Integrity	6.1
Organizational diagnosis	6.1
Leadership	6.1
Communication	6.0
Establishing trust and rapport	6.0
Giving and receiving feedback	6.0
Conflict resolution	5.9
Task skills (e.g., problem solving, decision making, planning, goal setting)	5.9
Group dynamics	5.8
Intergroup dynamics	5.8
Counseling and coaching	5.8
Designing and executing an intervention	5.8
Designing and managing large change processes	5.7
Power	5.6
Conceptual and analytical thinking skills	5.6
Aptitude to speak the client's language	5.6
Motivation	5.5
Organization development theory	5.5
Large system change theory	5.5
Organization design	5.5
Human resource planning	5.5
Computer skills	5.5
Sense of humor	5.5
Human resource management	5.5
Data analysis	5.4
Training skills	5.4
Negotiation skills	5.4
Interviewing	5.4
Management development	5.4
Learning theories	5.3
Ability to model credible behaviors	5.3
Organization theory	5.2
Process consultation	5.2
Reward systems	5.2
Political influence and selling skills	5.2
Entry and contracting	5.2
Designing meetings and workshops	5.2
Socio-technical analysis	5.1
Action research methods	5.1
Active learning skills	5.0
Information systems	5.0
Entrepreneurial skills	4.8
Public speaking and lecturing	4.8
Rational-emotional balance	4.4
Quantitative analysis	4.4

OD interventions and applications, without exception the respondents perceived an equal or greater demand over the next seven years for every intervention on the survey instrument.

Those interventions perceived to be most in demand over the next seven years include intergroup team building and team building with intact work groups; redesigning jobs and interaction patterns in computerized offices; strategic planning and policy-setting process; designing and implementing human resources planning systems; surveying and diagnosing the general work environment; designing management development and employee training programs; designing performance evaluation systems and reward systems; developing good labor/management relationships; team development of groups whose members work at remote locations; involvement in design of management information systems; redesigning total organizational structures; developing career and life planning programs; and competency-based selection and evaluation of executives.

OD skills. Just as the OD field is multiply defined in terms of its interventions, so is there a multitude of skills and traits considered important for the OD professional to possess. In a recent article, Warner Burke, Jan Margolis and this author agreed that "process is our most important product," and, therefore, process skills are important for an OD professional to possess.[4] The respondents to this survey agree: Process consultation and group and intergroup dynamics are among the skills evaluated as important for OD practitioners (see Table 3).

It is interesting to note that the skills and traits identified as most important are those traditionally associated with the OD field: listening, organizational diagnosis, open systems and integrity. However, OD professionals also realize the need to be more knowledgeable of business functions; they value computer skills, quantitative analysis skills and knowledge of information systems.

The skills identified as least important are psychopathology and therapy, cultural anthropology, accounting and economics.

The profession. When asked directly, "Is OD a profession?", more than 67 percent of the respondents answered yes, with 18 percent uncertain and 15 percent answering no. When given certain characteristics of a profession[5] and then asked if OD

qualifies, the responses were less definitive:

■ 74 percent believe OD requires training in liberal arts or the sciences;
■ 88 percent believe practicing OD requires advanced study of OD;
■ 26.9 percent believe OD has a supervised practice;
■ 76 percent believe OD has a specialized technology and vocabulary;
■ 12.8 percent believe the OD profession is governed by explicit ethical codes and licenses.

OD professionals are divided on the need for a code of ethics or a certification process. More than 41 percent of respondents do not believe certification should be required; however, 70 percent believe the OD profession needs a code of ethics.

Finally, the surveyed OD professionals believe that the important issues facing their field over the next seven years are:
■ resolving the dilemma between OD values and bottom line concerns;
■ increasing the credibility of OD;
■ quality control of the OD profession and practitioners.

Study implications and conclusions

This survey suggests, as have earlier studies, that the strategies and skills used by OD practitioners to assist organizations are varied. Whether we should conclude that OD is an "ill-defined" or a "richly multiple" field is still open to debate.[6]

The variability of OD technology leads to the question of whether OD practitioners will continue to use intra- and interpersonal interventions (team building, conflict resolution) or move toward interventions based on more competitively and profit-oriented models (strategic planning, zero-based budgeting, productivity improvement programs).

This survey suggests that the focus of OD work will move toward the development of systems that formalize OD theories and principles, and toward assisting organizations with human-technological change. It also suggests that the skills required of OD professionals in the future will continue to be the traditional OD skills of listening, organization diagnosis, open systems and process consultation. However, more technology-based business skills involving computers and information systems will also be required.

Finally, there are implications that OD

professionals should tap the knowledge and skills of professionals in marketing, engineering and data processing. This can increase OD's capacity to address the productivity and profit concerns of today's organization.

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PUZZLE QUESTIONS, PP. 14-15

ACROSS		DOWN	
3.	ODs consider themselves	1.	important skill
6.	largest portion of time spent in	2.	future demand
8.	need more knowledge of	4.	see 6 across
9.	professional membership	5.	prefer specialized OD training programs
10.	frequently used tool	7,12.	Primary OD field of study
11.	prefer team consulting	11.	6 to 10 years
13.	primary organization	ANSWERS ON PG. 94.	
14.	ineffective marketing tool		