OD—
FAD OR
FUNDAMENTAL?

*a reaction to the
diverse direction in
organization development*

*a reaction from the
Miami conference*

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The ASTD National Conference in Miami last spring saw the emergence of a new training and development theme that promises to be of undeniable importance. OD — organization development — is this new theme. And the OD Division provides an instrument for its expression. A novel theme in the training and development field is in itself significant. This one, which has been in the humming stage for a decade, is likely to be a hit. But will the theme linger or die? Will OD really help companies increase their business effectiveness, or will it simply consume time, energy, and expense, noisily implying much but producing little genuine change and development?

"OD" was used loosely at the ASTD Conference. Many asked, "What is it?" "What is it supposed to accomplish?" "What are the differences between OD and management development?" In one OD Division meeting, participants pleaded with the moderator for a definition of OD, but the moderator thought it would be unproductive to try to agree on one.

Great interest in "something" with acknowledged experts unable or unwilling to define that "something" is disturbing. Such a situation can as easily lead to a fad as a fundamental development. It suggests that OD is facing into a lull period of false starts and frustrating, floundering failures. Yet clarity at this juncture could do much to prevent these failures. With clarification of OD's meaning, training and development personnel could proceed into OD with confidence. Knowing clearly the benefits to be derived from OD, they could avoid the inevitable sour notes heard in any newly emerging theme. Clarity is needed for sound analysis and common-sense planning for use of OD as a means of strengthening the organization's performance.

A statement of what constitutes an "organization" would be academic. As for "development," there is little objection to the definition of development as change when it is preceded by "organi-zation." Nor is there any doubt that the general purpose of OD is to change an organization by developing it. But for an accurate and enlightening definition of OD, it is first necessary to examine its more specific purposes along with the assumptions that men make about change.

THE AIMS OF OD

OD provides for helping an organization to escape the rigidities of red tape and fixed procedures that hamper sound decision making. It aims at aiding the organization in setting its profit and performance objectives high and achieving them according to standards of excellence. It is designed to make management more diagnostic and analytical in searching for sound solutions to unsolved problems. It is also designed to strengthen the will of the organization's members to face and resolve their conflicts in constructive ways. It has as one of its major purposes getting all of them committed to its overall success so as to release untapped reservoirs of energy that will bring about outstanding achievements. It is deliberately designed to change the culture of an organization by helping it overcome the drag of outmoded practices and replace them with the drive and thrust so essential to good problem solving.

If these are the aims of OD as applied by men to change their organizations, how do they fit in with man's assumptions about change?

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT CHANGE

Identification of assumptions about change does not lead to "how to" suggestions or information on techniques of organization development. It goes more deeply than that. Basic dilemmas that training and development personnel must confront in considering any strategy that can be introduced to bring about change have been examined for these assumptions. Results have led to eight major points regarding OD. Managers may use these eight points as a springboard for evaluating possible

approaches to change within their organizations, to draw their own conclusions about the probable soundness of any one approach compared with any other.

Assumptions are at the core of human action. Action without assumptions is random. With assumptions, action may be coordinated. When assumptions jibe with reality, the basis for action is sound and the action will probably achieve its objective. Sometimes a training and development problem involves the choice between two or more sets of assumptions, and the basis for the choice is not clear. If the assumption that is acted upon fits in with reality, the change method may produce predictable results. Invalid assumptions usually lead to tactics which yield no improvement. They may even cut into performance while at the same time promoting unmanageable resistance. The appreciation of these hangup points is more important than the technical knowledge of tactics for applying a selected approach. Assumptions made in real life are not likely to be this definitive but these are the kind of assumptions that guide decisions about change.

The eight sets of assumptions examined here are not the only relevant ones and all are interrelated in complex ways. None is singular and independent of the others. They have been drawn from both observations and results of the few OD field experiments that have been conducted, including the most rigorous one to date, which showed significant productivity and profitability increases from OD.[1]

1. INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT, MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, OR ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT?

There are at least three sets of assumptions about what must be developed to achieve excellence in the organization — the individual, his membership skills, or the organization as a system. The three overlap. This contributes further to confusion in management's effort to make decisions regarding a sound development program.

Individual development. According to this view, each person is more or less autonomous, an independent contributor to corporate effectiveness. The organization whole is seen as equal to the sum of its parts. Each man's development to his maximum potential then results in optimal organization performance. Education or training, according to this view, is provided as needed to each person for his own development. The learning is expected to be applied more or less automatically and individually to improve performance. That is, transfer of training, whether behavioral, technical, or both, is assumed. Fadeout of training, if recognized at all, is disregarded. Emphasis is rather on such concepts as the cultural island, stranger training, advanced university management courses for executives — all consistent with assumptions about individual change.

Membership development. Membership development, on the other hand, reflects concern for dealing with transfer of training and the fadeout-of-training issue. Another step of development is provided under this assumption to increase the level of understanding among organization members so as to promote their effectiveness in cooperative endeavors. The improved interpersonal, team, or intergroup relationships are expected to contribute to the transfer of the training to the social system of the organization. The organization's *status quo* is accepted. Men are encouraged through development to use their knowledge, not only in operating, but in *cooperating* within it. Any new technical systems adopted are adjusted to the organization's culture, not vice versa. Problems analyzed are usually issues of cooperation among organization members.

Organization development. A third set of assumptions also recognizes the need for membership cooperation but in addition, brings the organization *status quo* into focus within the development effort, developing the total organization as a system itself. The rationale is this: Since members of an organization are interdependent, their combined effectiveness depends upon the quality of this very interdependence. This in turn is governed by the organization's *culture* — its rules, policies, customs, all of the historically embedded ways of thinking and doing things. So culture is the key to whether members apply themselves to achieve a high level of excellence of performance.

CULTURAL REFORMATION

Influences of the culture can have a synergistic effect, that is, can make the whole both more and different from the sum of its parts. Systematic management of the culture is the key to development. Unless those who lead the organization are willing to study its culture as a *primary* subject, investigating the basic principles underlying the organization at strategic policy and operational levels, probably very few of the negative influences of the culture will come under scrutiny and control nor will there be much real change. Many of what have become general organization beliefs are so buried in the thoughts and actions of the organization's members that although they interfere with performance, they are such silent influences that they are beyond the focus of attention. They are the corporate subconscious. OD must bring it to a level of awareness or some of the most negative influences on organization performance will never be controlled. A whole cultural reformation is needed for the organization to change its basic direction to achieve excellence.[2]

REFORMATION PREREQUISITES

There seem to be two important prerequisites to such cultural reformation. One is that all organization members, including the top executives, engage in development efforts to achieve flexibility of thought, dedication of effort, and a readiness to create a model for changes, implement it and promote them. Seen

as a mass in motion, the organization must overcome the moment of inertia before a change in movement can occur. Changing the organization requires much more widespread participation than comes from exercise of initiative by one or a few, as under individual development, or by pockets of executives, as in membership development. Greatest momentum is realized when one hundred percent of an organization's members are personally committing their efforts in a deliberate and systematic way. Progress begins, it has been found, when about sixty percent of an organization's members have been initiated into the development strategy. (See Table I.)

The other prerequisite to organization culture reformation is for the organization's leaders to test its principles against logic. No company is likely to attain excellence if it has come to adopt internal standards, to accept yesterday's achievements as the yardsticks for today and tomorrow.[2]

Examination of these three specific sets of assumptions about the target for development results in the first and probably the most critical point leading to a definition of OD. It is as follows:

The more the organization recognizes and provides for eliminating barriers to effectiveness that stem from the corporate culture, the greater the change of OD success.

2. EVOLUTION, REVOLUTION, OR SYSTEMATIC DEVELOPMENT

The very fact that change is thought of in various ways poses a dilemma. Change may be through evolutionary modifications or revolutionary shifts. Or change may be engineered according to specifications of *systematic development.*

Evolution. When men are unwilling or unprepared to confront their disagreements, change is usually evolutionary. Evolutionary change comes in small adjustments in response to emerging problems within the *status quo* framework. Such small adjustments rarely violate tradition. Nor do they promote either enthusiasm or resistance. Underlying these changes is the assumption that progress is possible if each problem is dealt with as it arises. If the change proves sound, it is repeated. This is problem-solving-as-you-go development. Only problems which force themselves into the focus of attention are dealt with. Because such changes often represent at least a little progress, organization leaders readily accept the evolutionary concept of change, neither recognizing its limitations nor testing its logic. *Status quo* arrangements of the system as a whole are accepted without question. But evolutionary processes are painfully slow. With all these limitations, the evolutionary approach is highly characteristic of most organizational life.

Revolution. When men reach a point of readiness to resolve conflicts by forcing others to compliance through suppression, they resort to revolution. Revolutionary changes are any that result in overturning the *status quo*, causing violation, rejection, or suppression of old expectations, or compelling acceptance of new ones. Revolutionary changes usually come about through the exercise of power and authority compelling compliance. These changes are rare. The exception is when a problem is seen as so intolerable that evolutionary, cat-step modifications are unacceptable. If there are any other possibilities, they go unrecognized. Revolutionary changes are usually championed by men so deeply frustrated that their overwhelming desire is for a speedy change of any kind and the relief that accompanies it after a long period of suffering. It may be dramatic — positive or negative. Negative side effects usually result.

Table I

The Greater the Organization Mass Engaged in Development, the

Greater the Impact on Reported Improvement

Percent of Managers Who Had Completed Grid Seminars	Percent of Managers Reporting Improvement in		
	Working with Boss	Work Group	Intergroup
100	49	55	61
40	21	27	23
35	7	23	16
18	− 1	17	8
0	− 4	2	−10

Note: Data are based on several cross-organization studies of managerial behavior. Results were correlated with percent of managers involved in Grid OD. At the zero end are results obtained in a control condition, i.e., no managers were involved in OD. The 100 percent end contains results where all managers of an organization had participated. Comparison shows an increase in improvement reported as number of managers participating increases, with the critical turning point somewhere between 40 and 100 percent. Data are insufficient to pinpoint the turning point precisely, but the question has been studied within organizations in a more clinical way. The best judgment to date suggests that the significant turning point is realized when about 60 percent of an organization's managers have participated in Grid OD.

Systematic development. This third approach is based on the design of a model of what would be ideal as specified by theory and logic and tested against probabilities projected over specific time periods. The model is a blueprint of what *should be*. The five specifications of systematic development are:

Specification	Description
(1) An ideal systematic model is drawn up which describes what *should be* at a designated time.	The model is based on theory, fact and logic, uncontaminated by assumptions from the *status quo* culture or from the past.
(2) An objective appraisal is made of the situation, or what *is*.	The actual or *as is* situation is described in a way that permits point-by-point comparison of actual circumstances and those that would exist if the ideal model were implemented.
(3) Gaps and discrepancies appear between the *is* and the *should be*, the actual and the ideal.	The gaps become motivational forces; the actual is analyzed for its strengths and weaknesses; motivation to close the gaps directs change; conditions to be rejected or replaced are identified; development steps are planned and programmed.
(4) The ideal model includes all relevant identifiable forces.	Those forces under direct organizational control and those emanating from the environment are included.
(5) Steering, correction and control mechanisms guide conversion from actual to ideal.	The situation is measured before change is initiated, at intervals, and when change is completed for facts for guiding further action.

Systematic development has several advantages. It relies upon fact, logic and theory. It brings about enthusiasm for change instead of resistance. The only limit upon how much change is possible through systematic development is in the abilities of men to think, analyze and reason. There is little risk, for changes can be pre-tested for probable consequences.

There are some disadvantages, too. The rigorous intellectual exercise required is most demanding and time consuming. And many managers are loathe to relinquish the excitement of fire fighting for such a demanding intellectual endeavor.

Evolution and revolution may seem to be natural ways in which change takes place. They appear throughout history. Systematic development, on the other hand, is like the scientific approach used in the design of experiments and the verification of results. It seems to be attuned to the times as society moves toward an ever more scientific basis.

Examination of the way change is viewed, then, suggests a second point for defining OD:

The greater the use of systematic development for change instead of reliance on evolutionary or revolutionary approaches, the greater the chance of OD success.

3. BEHAVIOR OR OPERATIONS DEVELOPMENT?

The choice is between two sets of assumptions about where to start developing an organization. Under one set, the organization's barriers to effectiveness lie in behavior. Under this school of thought, if the relationships between men and groups were sound, operational problems could be satisfactorily solved. The opposite assumption is that ineffectiveness is attributable to a lack of understanding of operations and know-how. Under this view, the important step is to aid managers in acquiring business, technical and management science skills that will ultimately result in operational success. What is needed, for example, is training in planning and scheduling, cash flow, systems and other advanced management techniques. Once understanding of these is raised to a high level, so the assumption is, there will be no behavior problems to prevent excellence. This is the management science view.

While each view leads to a different solution, neither by itself is "the problem." Human development efforts have affected operational results no less often than have courses in operations failed to improve performance. Nor are there any indications of good results gained from pursuing the two objectives separately but simultaneously.

The dilemma, however, *can* be resolved. Some operations troubles *are* caused by behavior problems. But the solutions that are applied are operations solutions and therefore fail because the truth that behavior *is* the cause has gone unrecognized. Yet no matter how perfect the behavior of managers, if they do not sufficiently comprehend business, management science and operations skills, the operations problems have little chance of being solved. Both operations and behavior must be recognized as points to be treated, but their interrelationship must also be recognized. A systematic treatment of both behavior variables and variables of business logic is needed.

Examination of the assumptions about the target for development — behavior or operations — leads to a third point to contribute to the definition of OD:

The more the behavior and operations aspects of organization problem solving are welded together in a deliberate change process, the greater the chance of OD success.

4. EDUCATION OR TRAINING?

Assuming that education results in mastery of concepts and principles, some men also assume that leaders can automatically apply knowledge gained through education to solve operations problems. This is "pure" concept learning. This assumption is seldom proved in practice. Concept education without skill in using the concepts makes "educated fools." On the other hand is training with its aim to master skills for performing an activity. Here the assumption is that if a man has know-how, he does not need to understand the principles underlying it.

This split is seen underlying the strategies of education and training techniques, both within organizations and in society as a whole. Some men, disillusioned with what they see as useless learning, have sacrificed formal education for how-to skill development. But there is little evidence that this influences man's capacity to think, to analyze problems, and to see cause-and-effect interrelationships. The inability to generalize in fact limits a man's capacity to resolve any unique problems that are unrelated to his skill training. Career potential of trained specialists may thus jeopardise their opportunities to advance to positions open to generalists.

An effective approach must avoid this split between education and training by providing for men to gain the basic fundamentals that lead to understanding of concepts and principles, yet at the same time adding a dash of training through which this understanding can be applied in operations.

Examination of the assumptions about training and education thus suggests a fourth point for the definition of OD:

The closer education and training are interwoven for understanding of concepts and ability to apply them, the greater the chance of OD success.

5. THINKING OR EMOTIONS?

Aside from operations, in the field of human behavior there is a rising awareness of how greatly behavior hinders an organization from effectively operating. Here the choice is between two schools of thought about instructional courses. One assumes that if a person can think, his feelings are of little consequence in shaping his behavior. The other assumes that emotions may hamper sound thinking and sees the solution to the problem in a person's becoming aware of his feelings and learning to understand and control them. Logically, then, on one side are development approaches focused upon thinking processes to the exclusion of emotions, while on the other are training approaches focused on feelings or emotions with little regard for the thinking related to behavior, conduct and performance.

Learning to understand behavior as a preliminary to changing it can be traced back to the earliest philosophers. One trend, evident almost from the beginning and not clearly interrupted until Dewey, was the intellectual analysis of qualities of the mind. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume tried to make explicit the nature of mental processes. Their studies proved disappointing for they had little impact on the way men used their minds in day-by-day activities. The importance of learning about one's own thought processes specifically and under circumstances that give rise to emotions escaped these scientists. Investigations of general laws of thought therefore contributed little to changing the capacity of man to think. Deweyism was a sharp departure from intellectual analysis through emphasis on experience-based learning. Its influence can be observed in approaches that emphasize personal growth and individual sensitivity understanding as the overall single objective of development. Within this trend, intellectual analysis is demoted and replaced by introspective analysis and feedback examination focused primarily on feelings and emotions.

INTELLECTUAL FRAMEWORK

These approaches with great appeal for one's own emotions are fascinating. But studying them without being able to tie what has been learned into a broader intellectual framework for comprehension does not seem to provide a sound basis or motive for changing behavior. This is why some aspects of the human relations movement have led observers to view it as training rather than education.[3] It has also led to university courses in logic or short courses in general semantics that focus on principles of thinking and place little if any stress on how emotions can divert logical thought.

Other groups that stress the development of the individual tend to concentrate on examination of feelings and emotions in specific situations. Yet they do little to further the understanding of principles of thought and behavior.

Up to the most recent past, there seems to have been no evidence of developmental endeavors in which these two aspects of behavior have been the focus of simultaneous learning. Yet in organization development efforts, a more valid approach can be spotted in its emerging stage, an approach that treats thinking and emotions as inseparable.

A fifth point for the definition of OD, then, has emerged from examination of assumptions about thinking and emotions:

The more the organization recognizes the interrelated aspects of thinking and emotions and provides for increasing man's insight and skill in maintaining clear thought, even in the presence of emotion-arousing events, the greater the chance of OD success.

6. CLOSED AND HIDDEN OR OPEN AND CANDID?

Few would argue that openness and candor in problem solving does not contribute to the validity of the solution to a problem. Open communication can bring about mutual understanding. Not only information but emotions, and not only convictions but doubts, can be exchanged fully and freely. But the common concept of openness carries with it a deeper problem. How open is open? How candid is candid? Can a relationship that is fully candid be too candid, even destructively so, in that men begin

to introduce irrelevancies — expressing themselves on matters having no bearing on their problem-solving capacity? In this issue lies an important block to clear thinking about relationships that can promote better problem solving.

The problem is brought further into focus through the comparison of relationships between therapist and patient, between husband and wife, between boss and subordinate. The degree of openness in a therapist-patient relationship is quite different from that between husband and wife. And both differ greatly from the kind of openness appropriate to a boss-subordinate relationship. As for the therapist-patient situation, the process of bringing forgotten memories and fantasies out in the open or revealing one's personal and subjective self-imagery is accepted as a means of getting to the roots of many problems of mental illness.

This kind of openness in a family or business relationship, however, is both unnecessary and inappropriate, jeopardizing mutual understanding and respect. A family relationship is enriched when the husband and wife make the deeper emotions within the relationship explicit, giving and receiving mutual help and support according to values of family living. Problems of mutual acceptance and affection are more likely to be solved if the husband and wife are able to talk openly about their problems. This kind of openness, however, is neither appropriate nor useful and is probably destructive in a business relationship.

RELEVANCE

The kind of openness in the boss-subordinate relationship is quite different from either of these. Yet more openness than is typical of most business relationships is a prerequisite to improved problem solving. If any fact or element of logic that is relevant to the topic under discussion in a boss-subordinate relationship is being withheld or distorted, involving either mental or emotional issues including attitudes and values, the chances of getting down to the bottom

of a problem and working out a good solution to it are probably slim. Nor are they any greater if openness is seen as giving expression to private matters or introducing matters irrelevant to the basis of the business relationship. The candor essential to straightforward boss-subordinate problem solving is not easily achieved, but if once it is, it seems to be highly rewarding.

Examination of assumptions about the degree of openness of business relationships therefore suggests another point in the definition of OD:

The nearer the participants in a boss-subordinate relationship can arrive at a level of candor for straightforward, man-to-man dealing, the greater the chance of OD success.

7. CONSULTANT INTERVENTION OR ORGANIZATIONAL SELF-TEACHING?

Another choice concerns who is expected to influence whom in OD. A look at history shows that as the corporation was emerging around the year 1500, early entrepreneurial businessmen and those whom they employed made up the only sources of initiative and control over it. With the advance of technology, many managers found it necessary to go outside their organizations for help from consultants to supplement their own knowledge. The consultant industry since the end of World War II has experienced truly gigantic growth.

The shaping of a corporation's affairs by a consultant from the outside has created a self-reliance-dependence paradox. If line managers in industry submit to a consultant's guidance, accepting what he offers as expert advice, they abdicate their normal line responsibilities. An attitude of dependency upon the consultant often emerges as his further assistance is sought, and this in turn has the effect of further reducing self-reliance and weakening initiative. But if a line manager rejects a consultant's expert advice, he is sacrificing a potential contribution that the specialized wisdom of the consultant can provide.

There are other alternatives. Line managers may compromise, accepting some but not all of the advice and guidance of the consultant, or the latter may exercise his influence under an agreement defining and limiting his sphere of influence. Such an agreement, however, is improbable, for if line managers could reach it, they would know enough not to need the expert counsel in the first place.

CONSULTANT DILEMMA

The paradox is just as clear from the consultant's view. He realizes that if his advice is given directly and taken on faith, dependency attitudes will be created which may eventually result in counter-dependent hostility toward him. Many a consultant therefore tries to avoid giving direct advice.[4, 5] But then the other side of the paradox appears. If he does not provide expertise, what contribution can he make? Consultants find it especially difficult to resolve this dilemma. They often try to avoid participation in contributing to content, employing various non-directive strategies, posing process questions or intervening in activities to rephrase what is being heard.

Two possible solutions to this problem are being evaluated. One is to aid "would be" consultants in acquiring special consultation skills on the assumption that consultant problems are traceable to a deficiency in consultation skills and if the skills are acquired, relationship problems will be solved. The other is to question the consultant concept. Here the assumption is that the problems in the client-consultant relationship contradict self-reliance and the exercise of individual responsibility and therefore the solution is to create conditions permitting men to learn to help themselves with the least possible support from the consultant. Consultant input under this view is limited to getting the client started, reviewing progress, and introducing alternatives at key decision points. All of these steps can be achieved through use of analytical instruments aiding leaders in diag-

nosing and planning for change on their own and also through teaching line managers the skills of diagnosis, evaluation, and planning for change.

Examination of the assumptions underlying this dilemma leads to a seventh point in the effort to define OD:

> The greater the line manager's reliance on his own initiative and individual responsibility for bringing about change, the greater the chance of OD success.

8. AUTHORITY-OBEDIENCE OR INVOLVEMENT-PARTICIPATION?

The use of authority-obedience for organizing and controlling human affairs is undergoing change. A new theory of human behavior is appearing. Men are seeking conditions under which they can become active participants, feel committed, have a voice in affairs to influence results. The beginning of this is found in the oldest institutions of democratic practice — in the emergence of the labor movement, the feminist activities of the early 1900's, in both ancient and modern civil rights history, in student protests, in the tribulations of religious institutions. Most important of all, it is stemming from the advancement of education which is providing men with more and more knowledge so that no longer are they willing to acquiesce in matters that contradict logic and understanding.

The behavioral sciences can provide a systematic basis for understanding this new trend, appreciating what lies behind it, and designing methods to bring about its orderly emergence. Involvement-participation confronting old authority-obedience ways is both local and worldwide. It cannot be suppressed for long through efforts to continue the old ways, for involvement-participation roots lie deep in man's emotions.

CONCEPT AND SKILL NEEDS

Involvement-participation for many reasons is looked upon as a better way of bringing together human activity, but at the same time a new problem is arising. The desire to do something, unfor-

tunately, is not necessarily the same as understanding what is to be done or the skill to follow through. Managing in ways that promote involvement-participation calls for leadership that is radically different from that required to implement patterns of authority-obedience. Such leadership involves understanding and skill. Subordinates cannot be expected to be able to perform well in involvement-participation situations. They first must acquire the concepts and skills of involvement-participation, and these are far more demanding skills than those required under the political democratic process — expressing oneself on majority rule or carrying a placard.

Though much desired, involvement-participation, even if possible, may not be a very sound basis of coordination and control because management does not have sufficient skills to make it so. The orderly emergence of involvement-participation can be achieved only through systematic development, for it provides a way to learn the concepts and skills for conducting business along involvement-participation lines. It can also provide for converting actual corporate conduct to involvement-participation.

Consideration of the choice for controlling human activity between authority-obedience or involvement-participation suggests a final point for defining OD:

> *The greater the use of concepts and skills for bringing about involvement and participation with understanding and agreement as the basis for communication, coordination, and control, the greater the chance of OD success.*

OD DEFINED

Proceeding from these eight points, then, OD might be defined as a systematic way of inducing change.

--based on a structural model for thinking (the ideal versus the actual);

--progressing in a programmatic sequence of steps from individual learning to organization application;

--focused upon those silent and often negative attributes of culture which

dictate actions that so frequently contradict business logic;

--with emphasis on confronting and resolving conflict as a prerequisite to valid problem solving;

--and employing a variety of techniques of organizational study and self-learning to bring about needed change.

Accepting this as at least a temporary working definition, we may now ask, "Where does OD stand?" Is it a fad or is it fundamental — will it persist?

OD — A WORLDWIDE THEME OF TOMORROW

Achieving a clear concept and definition of OD is one thing. Applying the concepts to achieve OD success — that is, changing the organization for the better — is quite a different matter. Approaches of earlier days that were viewed as organization development in comparison with those that have emerged in the past few years were only the beginning of an evolutionary unfolding of something that started as a social learning device and later became a method of group learning. The recognition of the organization as a unit of coordinated human action, welded together by economic and technical objectives, has come about over a long period of time. The recognition of an organization as an inclusive system for the application of systematic development steps is a new concept.

There is no reason for anything but optimism about the persistence of OD as it has recently emerged. Nor is there any reason why the same concepts cannot be applied, not only to corporate organizations or government agencies, but to society at large. Principles of development are the same regardless of the kind of organization to be changed. It is a matter of society's shifting its strategies for dealing with change from a passive reliance upon revolution or evolution toward systematic development strategies.

The fundamental OD theme, like others, may spread to many countries of the

world. There is no reason why it should not. While cultural root systems of societies predispose some to more authority-obedience social control than there is in ours, and while other societies seem more predisposed to involvement-participation than ours, underlying similarities strike the same note. Regardless of the variety of surface differences among organizations and peoples, the base notes of uniformity are strong. No organization is unique to the point of requiring its own special approach to change.

The OD theme, then, can be expected to be heard worldwide in the years ahead. For OD is not a fad but fundamental.

For the immediate future, the possible false starts and frustrating failures that now seem inevitable for some corporations can be avoided if their managements, in seeking change for the better, are willing to take a first step of appraising their cultures and their own organizational beliefs. Use of the eight points defining OD is a good starting point for testing and evaluating any approach to strengthening corporate performance that is proposed as "OD." Any approach that meets the requirements suggested by these points is highly likely to meet with success in raising the organization's level of excellence in performance.

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17