

**A panel of OD experts assesses the field,
and as part of a comprehensive set of forecasts
and policy judgments, charts the course for OD professionals.**

The OD Training Challenge

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As part of a comprehensive, year-long UCLA futures research project, some 65 prominent experts in the field of organization development were asked to forecast the likely impact of world-wide and national trends on the overall demand for OD over the next 20 years. The Delphi panel was carefully selected to ensure proper representation of the wide diversity of views and approaches which currently exist. Among other things, the experts assessed current conditions in the field, predicted the number of new professionals that will have to be trained, made judgments about the skills they should possess, and suggested desirable features future training programs should have. This article summarizes their conclusions about training OD professionals and examines the action alternatives open to professional associations like the American Society for Training and Development.

What is the State of Professional Practice?

Members of the panel, which included the officers of professional associations and practitioner training programs, became increasingly more critical of their own profession as the three-round

Delphi progressed. They concluded, for example, that OD's efforts are currently less than effective. When asked to evaluate OD's overall effectiveness on a scale of one to seven (from "not at all effective" to "very effective"), the mean (average) response was 3.1 with a standard deviation of .86 (two-thirds of all panel responses are within one standard deviation).

The panel was also critical of the quality of training possessed by OD practitioners now in the field. The panel's summarized judgment was that 42 percent of OD professionals now practicing are inadequately trained and supervised; 38 percent are adequately trained and 20 percent are excellently trained and supervised.

Consistent with this criticism, but perhaps more disturbing, were panel reports of undesirable practitioner behaviors and consequences. These ranged from reports of "displaying clearly incompetent behaviors," the most frequently reported behavior, to reports of "causing severe psychological damage to individuals" which occurred less than one-half as often. The relative frequency of these and other dysfunctional behaviors and results, together with examples written in by panel members, are summarized in Figure 1.

The panel also judged and compared the relative quality of var-

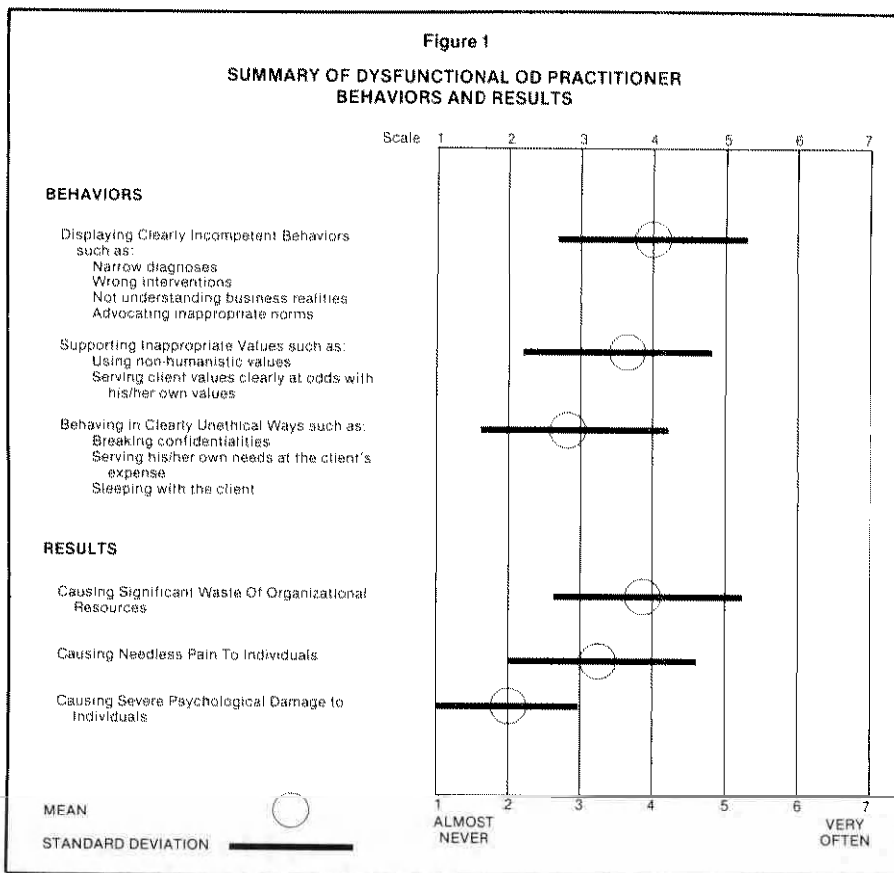
ious types of OD training programs. As illustrated in Figure 2, there was a clear preference for university-affiliated programs. While the doctorate received highest ratings, many panelists wrote in comments nominating the masters program as the most desirable in focus, time, and cost to produce the large number of competent practitioners that are needed. Non-academic programs received ratings that were generally below average. The panel composition was carefully designed to balance members with and without academic affiliation so that primary work role would not seem to explain the group's preferences on this issue.

How Many OD Practitioners Need to be Trained?

Despite OD's less than effective performance and the questionable quality of training received by many OD professionals, the panel forecasts that environmental conditions will force a significant increase in demand for practitioners over the next 20 years. They estimate that the approximately 3,000 full-time OD practitioners today will grow to 7,500 by the year 2000; and that the number of part-time practitioners will increase from 6,000 to 12,000. We have added factors to the panel's estimates to account for relatively short career paths within the pro-

profession as well as the percentage of those trained who never practice. We estimate that 15,000 to 18,000 practitioners will have to be trained over the next 20 years. This means that from 750 to 900 per year will require basic training and that a yet-to-be-determined number will need programs designed to maintain or improve skills or to provide advanced specializations. If we assume that the typical OD masters program produces 50 new practitioners per year, then 15 to 18 masters programs or their equivalents would be needed. While we are playing with numbers, let's put this scale of training in perspective. Training 900 OD masters graduates would compare with 53,000 masters in business administration graduated each year in the United States for a ratio of one to 60. If we convert the total number of projected practitioners to full-time equivalents, there would be in the year 2000 one OD professional per each 1,200 managers and administrators or one OD professional per each 12,000 employees in the total work force. All of the above estimates assume that environmental forces are the primary determinants of demand and that even without unusual professional association efforts, OD's effectiveness would improve.

The panel was also asked to consider the extraordinary measures that the professional associations could take which might lead to such improvements in OD practice that demand for OD services might be further stimulated. High on their list of recommended actions was making large improvements in the quality of OD professional education. If the extraordinary measures were accomplished, the panel asserted that overall demand for OD services would increase by 30 to 40 percent over normally expected levels. Again taking the panel's numbers, we made assumptions similar to those mentioned earlier, and estimated that the extraordinary efforts by the profession, including making large improvements in practitioner training, could stimulate the demand for an additional

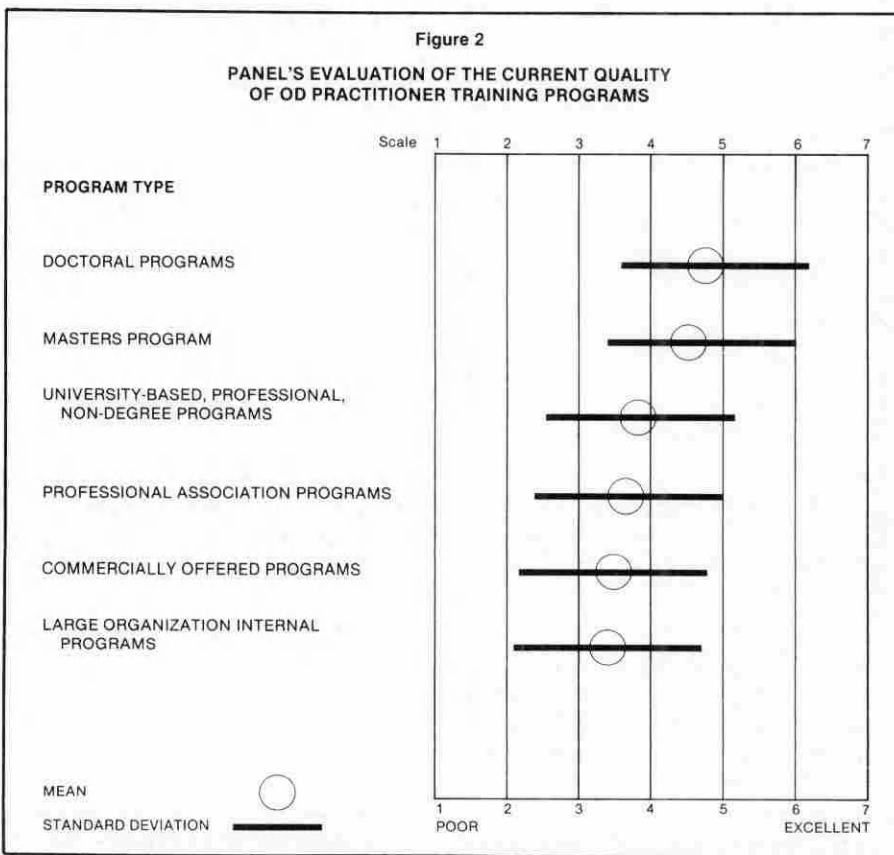


five to eight masters programs or their equivalent.

The panel was asked to name the "core" or common skills they believed every OD practitioner

ought to have in the year 2000 and to list the specializations they felt should be established in the field.

Core Skills: The panel carefully considered the content and size of





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the core skills list over the three rounds. In round one of the delphi inquiry, each panel member began by creating his or her own list of core skills on a blank page. Together the panel members produced a list of over 150 items which included a mixture of personality traits, prior work experience, theoretical knowledge, and various types of intervention skills. A central research committee integrated and categorized the lists in preparation for round two.

In round two, the panel was asked to judge the relative importance of each item as a core skill for the future, and to provide written comments on how the list should be improved or reframed. Some panelists protested the size of the list. They said that while many of the skills were desirable for the ideal practitioner of the future, it was not practical or desirable to define them all as necessary to define basic competence in the field. Round three consisted of two major steps for the panel: 1. to consider the "pros and cons" of whether a set of core skills ought to be established at all, and if so, how large the set should be; and 2. to re-evaluate each item to determine that it should be an essential core skill, and to re-estimate its relative importance.

The panel expressed strong preference (80 percent) that a set of core skills ought to be designed to guide the common education for all future OD practitioners. Three of the most frequently given reasons for establishing the core skills were to:

1. Increase the level of practitioner competence.
2. Provide the practitioner with good educational foundation so that he or she could readily and effectively learn new technologies.
3. Provide a rational basis for the systematic design of OD curriculum.

Some of the more cautious panel members expressed concern that experts would not be able to agree on a set of core skills that could be taught in a reasonable period of time. Others felt that core skills might be used to restrict entry into the field which they felt was un-

desirable. A generally accepted caution was that core skills should only serve as a guide for planning practitioner education and should not be used to establish rigid professional requirements.

The panel's final product is a list of 50 core skills that should form the basic education of all future OD practitioners and 34 "advanced skills, subsets of which are desirable for the "ideal" or mature practitioner of the future. The skills are organized in nine major categories ranked in order of importance in Figure 3. They range from highly-ranked, "general consultation skills" through last ranked, "collateral knowledge areas." Within each category are the individual skills ranked by relative importance within the category. Core skills are shown in the chart in bold typeface, and advanced skills are shown in normal typeface.

Specializations: The panel leans toward favoring formal support for specializations to develop within the field. However, training for such specializations should continue to be primarily field experience and, for the present, should not be taught in formal academic programs. Most of the panel felt that there should be between five and 10 specializations in the field, but there was little enthusiasm for any conceptual scheme for how to categorize them. Schemes for distinguishing specializations by "client industry" and by "organizational function" were tied for relatively low first rankings among the various systems suggested; thus no clearly recommended systems emerged from the study.

The panel did have strong agreement on many problems with specialization today, and they were equally agreed on ways to correct the problems in the future. Many OD consultants have developed marketable specialization "packages," yet do not possess the basic core skills necessary for good OD practice. Holding only one tool, they are often incompetent in diagnosis or deliberately biased in wanting to use their own technology regardless of situation. They tend to operate in an "ex-

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pert" mode violating the spirit of the OD collaborative mode.

In the future, the panel would encourage specialization only after thorough basic training in the profession's core skills. "General practitioners" would be present on all OD projects and guarantee quality in client relationship and diagnosis. Specialists would work on multidisciplinary teams collaborating on those aspects of problems where there was a good fit with their skills.

While agreeing generally that specialization was needed, there was substantial disagreement about the effects that specialization would have on the profession itself. The panel was split over whether specialization would cause the professional associations to become "hierarchical, rigid, and burdensome"; whether it would tend to fragment the field; and whether additional specialized training would make entry into the field ever more difficult.

The panel was queried about their preferences in expanding the production rate of various training

programs and how they would design an ideal program.

Training Program Expansion Plans: Among the various alternative practitioner training programs, the panel shows strong preference for expanding formal masters and doctoral programs, less preference for the university-affiliated non-degree programs, even less preference for both professional association and large organization programs, and wants no expansion at all in commercial programs.

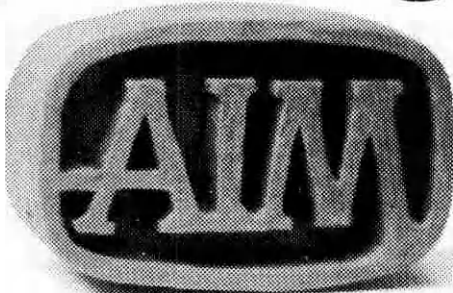
Selection of Trainees: If the panel had its way in designing an ideal graduate training program, most participants in academic masters and doctoral programs would have had prior line management experience. Many in masters programs and most in doctoral programs would also have had some OD experience. The reasons generally offered for these recommendations are that OD practice requires some general management knowledge and that inexperienced graduates of masters programs seem to have difficulty

finding entry level positions on OD staffs. Other panel members suggest that trainees who continue to hold OD-related jobs while in training, or arrange their own internships, have much more successful training program experiences.

Curriculum: The core skills described previously would comprise the curriculum. Emphasis would be placed on clinical skills training and supervised practicums at organizational sites. Larger than normal resources would be needed to pay the high costs of developing interpersonal and intervention skills.

Schedule and Duration of Training: If OD programs are to attract trainees with management experience, provisions should be made in scheduling to allow choice. Large metropolitan areas may be able to support a variety of schedules, including the traditional full-time day format, evening format, and intensive weekend format. More remote areas may have to depend on periodic intensive meetings at

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The panel generally agrees that their ideal core skills training period is four years at the present time. This includes two years' full-time equivalent of formal academic work and two years of supervised on the job practice. By the year 2000, the panel sees the ideal period extending to five years, two and one-half in the classroom and two and one-half in supervised practice. A few individual panel members expressed opinions that a more intensive schedule of immersion interspersed with supervised practicums could produce competent graduates in shorter periods.

Institutional Conditions: Strong preference was expressed for locating programs in urban universities close to good consulting opportunities, where experienced OD practitioners could be tapped for teaching roles, and where internships would be readily available.

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Leading universities would be desired sponsors because they would be most able to attract the highly qualified faculty and to finance the relatively high cost of clinical skills education. There is moderately strong preference that OD programs be located in one school in the university in order to achieve the economies of scale that enable high quality programs. It should be placed in a professional school with strong multidisciplinary approaches and where the administration would support highly innovative teaching methods. Locating the OD degree in one strong professional school would not preclude offering individual OD courses as part of professional training in other schools where no separate OD degree would be offered.

The panel was concerned about the traditional problem of balancing teaching, research and practice in a well-designed OD program. The panel tended to favor emphasis on practice and high quality teaching and not on research. One proposal for establishing OD centers or institutes which would deliberately integrate teaching, practice, and research, after the ideas of Alderfer and Berg (1975)¹ received a mean response of 4.2 with a standard deviation of 1.3.

Training Program Quality Control: More than one-half the panel favor moderate amounts of influence by professional associations over the quality of masters programs. Such influence would include limited participation and guidelines without accreditation or control.

Professional Associations

In addition to the OD Division of the American Society for Training and Development, there are several other OD professional associations:

- Academy of Management, OD Division
- American Psychological Association, Division 14
- Canadian OD Network
- International Association For Applied Social Sciences
- International Registry of Organization Development
- OD Network
- Organization Development In-

stitute

• Society International for the Development of Organizations and many other local chapter organizations.

Many of these organizations have been founded within the past 10 years and as they mature are beginning to strengthen their planning activities. Many of them are actively concerned about improving the quality of OD professional development. As their boards and membership continue their discussion of practitioner training issues and alternatives before them, they will have to decide their own policies and priorities for action. They will have to decide what they want to do in their own professional association and in what ways they may wish to coordinate some of their activities with actions by other associations.

In the course of this study, we received a number of suggestions for professional association action from the panel. Other suggestions arose during audience reaction to presentations we made to local professional associations. At this point in our continuing studies, we would like to invite the readers of the *Training and Development Journal* to reflect on the findings reported in this article and to contribute to the ongoing discussion of what our professional associations ought to do. If you would like to participate, complete the questionnaire printed in this article. In return, we will tabulate the results and report them back to you in a later issue of this journal.

REFERENCES

1. Alderfer, C. and D. Berg, "Organization Development: The Profession and the Practitioner," in Mirvis, P. and D. Berg (eds.), *Failures in Organization Development and Change*, Wiley Interscience, 1977.

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