

Export OD?

By FRANK MURRAY

In the past few decades, American business organizations, and to a lesser extent the nonprofit sector, have turned increasingly to the use of organization development (OD) as one more management tool in its arsenal. OD "interventions" like team-building, intergroup conflict resolution, survey-feedback, job enrichment and quality circles, designed and guided by behavioral scientists, have earned acceptance as a normal part of organizational life in many companies. How great has been the success and enthusiasm generated by these applications of the behavioral sciences, aimed at improving business results and enhancing employee job satisfaction? Enough for OD to have crossed frontiers to be exported outside of North America and the English-speaking world.

Companies in Latin America particularly have welcomed OD in their effort to increase effectiveness and become better companies to work for. They have done so by bringing in experienced North Americans, some of them Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking and some not, to guide the OD process. Latin American companies have also sent employees to the United States to learn about OD. These have returned home with their new knowledge and endeavored to install organization development in their own companies, sometimes with the help of experienced OD consultants.

What is the track record of organization development in Latin America to date? Is it so

culture-bound that it has failed in the effort to cross the cultural threshold separating it from countries with a distinctive way of thinking, acting and managing? Apparently not. OD technology has succeeded in rooting itself in alien soils. American-based organization development consultants travel regularly to Latin America to serve clients. And the number of

Some still insist that organization development techniques are culture-bound and value laden.

Latin American organization development practitioners, trained either in the United States or in their own countries, continues to grow. This year an international organization development congress in Monterrey, Mexico attracted more than 200 participants, most of them Latin American OD practitioners.

Nonetheless, some still insist that organization development is culture-bound, assert its techniques are value laden and warn it faces almost insurmountable obstacles when transferred to an alien cultural setting. Only after extensive research with local behavioral scientists, it is claimed, should any OD intervention be essayed.¹

For other reasons, some Latin

American OD practitioners—or would-be practitioners—claim the time has not come for organization development in Latin America. They complain that their fellow Latin Americans, because they lack the maturity and sophistication required by OD, are not yet ready for it and need to pass through a preliminary educational phase before reaching the level of sophistication needed for organization development work.

Two kinds of OD?

Are we faced here with contradictory perceptions of the same reality? I think not. The discrepancy in viewpoints stems from differing understandings of what organization development is.

According to one school of thought, the OD consultant arrives at the door of the client with a pre-established agenda. He or she is driven by a sense of mission and eagerness to convert the client organization in short order to participative management styles. Before determining whether the organization is ready or willing, this consultant moves quickly into unfreezing groups, equalizing power and promoting or provoking open confrontation of differences. For the consultant, these are important near-term goals, tried and proven remedies for the ailments of any client group or organization. This consultant possesses a clear notion of the proper and better organization development way and is impatient to bestow its blessings on the clients.

In another understanding of OD, the consultant recognizes the above as laudable and potentially beneficial goals, but is not convinced that they can be real-

Frank Murray is an independent training and organization consultant based in Ridgefield, Conn.

ized in a short time. This consultant, when working with clients both in his or her own as well as another culture, restricts himself or herself to providing data-gathering and diagnostic mechanisms and to guiding group interactions. He or she does this in such a way that the client organization develops its own agenda, moves at the pace it chooses and works in accord with its own style toward the objectives it has selected. The consultant does not cast himself or herself in the role of teacher.

Nor will he or she lecture on the desirability of shifting quickly toward a Theory Y or System Four management style, unless the client group manifests a need for this sort of theory input. Of course, this consultant, as a necessary condition for a mutually satisfactory client-consultant relationship, will require of his or her clients a desire to effect improvements and a minimal degree of respect for their fellow workers. But he or she will not prescribe the specific form of changes needed, nor hurry the clients toward decisions for which they do not yet feel ready.

When practiced according to the first understanding outlined above, organization development obviously is cast in a form that is much more culture-bound than the second. Consequently, it is far more likely to stumble over serious obstacles if transferred to another culture. It can run into problems and arouse resistance even within the cultural world in which it was born, if it attempts to transfer what has worked in one type of company to another with different norms, procedures and traditions. What makes this type of OD less transferrable? It doesn't recognize, nor does it wait to learn, that participative management, equalization of organizational power and open confrontation of differences may be extremely alien or untimely in another culture and, because of the different context, it may convey very different meanings and implications.

The client organization may appreciate participative manage-

ment, may want to adopt bottoms-up MBO and may recognize the benefits in equalizing organizational power. But for its own reasons—well grounded in reality or not—it may decide that the time has not yet come, that an abrupt changeover of this type will trigger a chain reaction with disastrous results. Therefore, it will resist when a consultant imposes his or her own agenda and needs, especially if the consultant is a native of another country.

Customized OD

In the second understanding of organization development, the consultant does not appear at the client organization with a blueprint for change already drawn. Instead, this consultant will modestly propose a method of gathering and analyzing data and making decisions that appears to fit the client's situation, needs and objectives. Jointly, client and consultant will make adjustments in the proposed method on the basis of the client's reactions to it. In every facet of his or her work with the organization, the OD consultant views himself or herself as a helper of change, not the principal agent of it. He or she will gently steer and not push clients toward facing key issues and making needed decisions.

This consultant's operating style is tentative and flexible. He or she takes care not to impose what has worked with the people "back home." Instead, he or she will shape techniques, mechanisms and interactions that can successfully guide the process of organizational change because they focus on issues considered important by the client. Free from the presumption that the consultant knows or is responsible for deciding what is best for the client organization, this consultant makes neither prescriptions nor recommendations and is therefore not seriously handicapped by not doing previous research in the client organization or culture. More pertinent to the consultant's role is involving

HRD '83 San Francisco

ENHANCING PRODUCTIVITY
23-24-25 MARCH 1983

Featuring
**Internationally-Known
Trainers, Speakers, and
Researchers in the Field
of Human Resource
Development
including . . .**

**Chris ARGYRIS
Bernard BASS
Warren G. BENNIS
W. Warner BURKE
Phyllis COOKE
Gerard EGAN
Leonard D. GOODSTEIN
Paul HERSEY
David KIPNIS
Malcolm KNOWLES
Susan MOHRMAN
Walter E. NATEMEYER
J. William PFEIFFER
Marc ROBERT
Stuart SCHMIDT
John M. SIMONDS
John H. ZENGER
and others**

CONFERENCE COORDINATORS

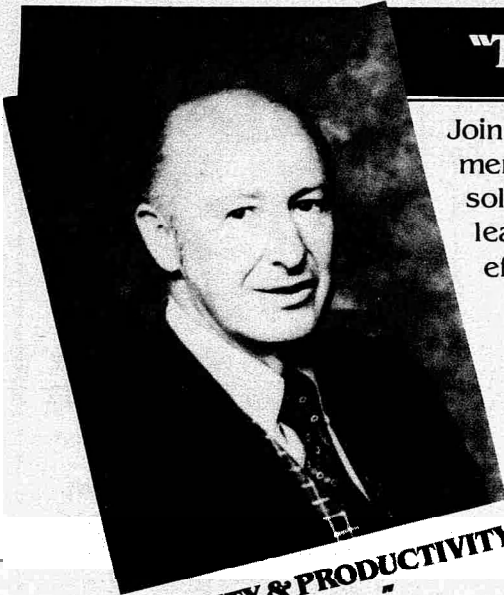
Dr. Paul Hersey
& Dr. J. William Pfeiffer
**For more information,
write or call:**

 **UNIVERSITY** 
ASSOCIATES, INC.

8517 Production Avenue
P.O. Box 26240
San Diego, California 92126
TOLL FREE 800-854-2143
(In CA, AK, & HI, call 714-578-5900)

Circle No. 153 on Reader Service Card

"The Original QC Circles Consultants"



**"QUALITY & PRODUCTIVITY
HAND IN HAND..."**
...WAYNE S. RIEKER

Join over 400 client companies with more than 50,000 U.S. QC Circle members. The QCC process teaches workers to identify, analyze and solve work related problems by improving morale, developing leadership skills and tapping the creativity of your work force...an effective process that improves attitude, quality and productivity!

Quality Control Circles, Inc. offers...

- Executive In House Seminars
- Flexible Implementation
- Experienced Professional Consultants

NEW!

- Banking/Office Materials
- Advanced Facilitator Training

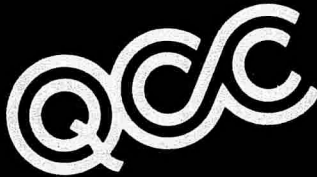
Oct. 19-22, 1982 Jan. 31-Feb. 3, 1983

FREE...

Quarterly Newsletter on Request

(408) 867-4121 • (408) 358-2711

Circle No. 146 on Reader Service Card



QUALITY CONTROL CIRCLES, INC. W. S. Rieker, President

Higgins & Root Bldg. • 2nd Floor
400 Blossom Hill Road • Los Gatos, CA 95030

and guiding the client organization through a process and odyssey of research that results in enhanced capability to make better and more timely decisions, congruent with their own values. This outcome flows from the sharing of insights, experience and expectations of organizational members that is the heart and essence of successful organizational development.

When OD is practiced according to the second understanding described above, it is easy to see that it will encounter far fewer obstacles when transferred to Latin America or any other culture. Nonetheless, organization development would be pretentious in guaranteeing to produce results in any and all situations. There are societies and companies, which at certain times in their history at least, resist change. In such circumstances, OD, an instrument

of change, will not be welcomed. Moreover, there are companies determined to effect changes of a kind or in a way not consonant with the humanistic values of organizational development. But companies, societies and cultures are not monoliths. And to determine which organizations or segments in a society represent insurmountable obstacles to OD is not a judgment to make lightly.

How much validity can be ascribed to the claim, made by some Latin Americans, that managers in their countries have not yet reached a degree of sophistication that permits them to be viable subjects of OD activity? Facts don't support the claim. A substantial number of organization development interventions of various kinds have been successfully carried out in Latin American countries, some of them with first-line super-

visors who rarely are college graduates. Such supervisors tend to be more set in their ways and less open to new ideas than higher level managers. Frequently, first-line supervisors exhibit wariness when first given the opportunity to participate in structured problem-solving sessions. These may strike them as alien to anything that has occurred in their many years with the company. But experience shows that, once given the chance to express their needs and ideas and see these translated into actions that remove obstacles to getting the job done, they soon turn into enthusiastic advocates of the organization development process—in Latin America as well as in the United States.

For organization development to succeed in other cultures, participants are not required to have a broad education, attend interpersonal skills labs or have ex-

posure to recent trends in American management styles. An OD intervention should not be made into a vehicle for the introduction of different ideas. Rather, it must present itself in the form of a mechanism flexible enough to promote a structured dialogue between organizational members geared to spill over into improved work procedures and greater interunit and interpersonal collaboration.

Culture bound vs. culture born

The issue of whether or not organization development is exportable boils down to: the kind of OD, what OD is, what its values and its methodology are and what exactly the role of an OD consultant is. One kind of organization development—culture-bound—runs into considerable obstacles when exported. It creates these by going overseas as a normative package of what is valued, accepted and proven to work in the United States. It doesn't permit access to the expression of another culture's traditions and work style and its way and pace of dealing with problems.

Another kind of organization development, flexible and willing to be grafted, eschews all but a minimum of values and norms as an operating principle. What is this minimum? Basically, recognition by the client group of a core of integrity and competence in their fellow workers; a desire to become a more productive and satisfied work group; and a willingness to accept the cost of change.

This kind of organization development strives to cast off its cultural baggage and reincarnate itself in the values and norms of the client organization. Therefore, though culture born, it succeeds when exported because the insights expressed and the decisions made don't come from a foreign consultant or a foreign-born OD technology. They flow organically from and build on the ideology, work style and organization history of the client company. These will not be

Get control of your training investment for just \$395 a month

Employee training is a big budget item. Stay in control with the NEW PHOENIX PRESENTATION SYSTEM. It has all the proven advantages of computer-based training (reduced training costs and improved worker productivity), PLUS a purchase option that gives you more control of your training investment.

The PHOENIX PRESENTATION SYSTEM IS:

- **LOW-COST** – \$395 a month lease fee is a 60% savings for those who do not currently require an authoring capability.
 - **FLEXIBLE** – The first six months lease fee is applicable to purchase of the complete PHOENIX System which includes author mode should your needs change.
 - **COMPATIBLE** – Works with all IBM CBT courses. In addition, all DELTAK and ASI computer-based training courses are available in PHOENIX format. Works on existing IBM hardware already available in your company.
 - **MORE EFFICIENT** – Additional functional benefits include LOWER CPU USAGE, LOWER DISK SPACE REQUIREMENTS, AND SIMPLER INSTALLATION than other CBT systems.
 - **DEPENDABLE** – Backed by Goal Systems' proven record of technical support.
- Get control of your training investment. The PHOENIX PRESENTATION SYSTEM gives you easy, cost-effective entry into computer-based training with the option to step-up when your needs grow. Call now **1-800-848-4640** (in Ohio call **614-888-1775**) for the best bottom line return on your training program. Free trial available in your shop.



Goal Systems International Inc.

Insure your success... software solutions by Goal.
5455 North High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43214

THE PHOENIX SYSTEM

Circle No. 124 on Reader Service Card

pure and perfect. However, if organizational members want to run the risk involved in decontaminating these impurities, organization development can be shaped to serve this purpose.

Other things equal, a local OD consultant at home or in his or her own language and culture, will do a better job than an out-

sider. When working in another culture, a seasoned organization development consultant will be conscious of his or her limitations. For example, agenda-setting questions posed by a foreign consultant, though articulated correctly and easily understandable, may be interpreted as recommendations or

The World According to Tandberg

The IS-9

The vibrant, exciting world of language comes to life easily with the incredible IS-9. Totally reliable and simple to operate, it allows the teacher to offer complete individual attention to the differing needs of each student.

We created the world's first microprocessor-controlled teaching system, making it very easy to say "Adios" to all other Language Learning Labs.



Tandberg of America, Inc.
1 Labriola Court
Armonk, New York 10504
(914) 273-9150
Toll Free (800) 431-2430

Circle No. 152 on Reader Service Card

even prescriptions. An astute consultant will be circumspect, read the group searchingly and at times state categorically: "What I've just done is put a question to you, a real question, which only you can answer; I'm not using a question to make a recommendation or to politely tell you what I think you should do."

My experience in working in other languages has taught me how difficult it is to "hear" what is not said. Rarely, if ever, will I say directly to a non-American group: "Several times you have come close to dealing with the issue of Juan's membership in this group, but have backed away from it each time. Since you have indicated it's an important issue, can we find a way to overcome your reluctance?" Instead, I will soften my statement: "Am I correct in sensing that you want to deal with the issue of someone's membership, but that you're finding it awkward?" The latter approach, which puts less pressure on participants, is advisable because of the consultant's lack of mastery of all the subtleties of the other culture.

Despite such limitations, new clients can be surprised by the rapidity with which an organization development consultant, though working in a foreign tongue, progresses in a new company or industry. How is this possible? It is because organization development operates not in the directive, decisional, content-expert mode, which requires intimate knowledge of a company or industry. Rather, it works in a facilitating, adjunct, complementary role, restricting itself to the people aspect of the business. It is this complementary, subordinate role of the OD consultant that keeps organization development—unlike T-groups and interpersonal labs—from being culture-bound. The operating mode of OD—called process consultation—facilitates and catalyzes the interactions and decisions of the client organization. It remains in control of the content and decides what, how, how much and how fast to

TANDBERG

ELS SPECIAL PROGRAMS BREAKS THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

You're an expert in training, but are you an expert in languages?

When procurement and development of international training contracts requires English language instruction, call on the experts—ELS Special Programs.

We design English courses specifically matched to your field—from Aeronautics to Zoology. Whatever your English language training needs are, we're the people to meet them.

In addition to our custom-designed training, the following ELS Special Programs are scheduled throughout the year:

- English for Executives
- Super Intensive English Programs (Individual or Small Groups)
- English for Aviation

ELS Special Programs also offers individual or small group instruction in Spanish.

For more information, write or call today!

ELS Special Programs
5761 Buckingham Parkway—ASTD
Culver City, California 90230
(213) 642-0988



No hablo inglés
لا أتكلم الانجليزية
私は英語を
話しません。

Circle No. 118 on Reader Service Card

change. Mechanisms and techniques supplied by the OD consultant create a climate and focus that make it easier for the client organization to do this.

The paucity of qualified organization development consultants in many countries is not the only reason why overseas organizations import American consultants to work with them. At times they hesitate to adopt a style as yet untried in their country. A U.S. consultant with a style he or she wants to test can alert them to the potential benefits and pitfalls of the contemplated change.

The popularity recently won by quality circles in American industry is a striking instance of organization development technology transfer in reverse. Quality circles, a typical, participative OD intervention with a history under other names, date back many years. Now, after Japan

has used them on a massive scale with factory workers to enhance productivity, quality circles have begun to proliferate in the United States.

Where lies the irony in American industry's enthusiastic adoption of Japanese-inspired quality circles? Quality circles are a vehicle of participative management. Yet, quality circles have flourished—as have their Chinese equivalent, “group think”—in a Japan and China whose social organization has been stereotyped as authoritarian and rigid, whereas in a supposedly egalitarian and adaptable United States, the introduction of quality circles is frequently resisted by autocratic supervisors.

Technology transfer, like other forms of communication between cultures, brings many mutual benefits. Can organization development be numbered among the technologies that have been

transferred successfully? Though the transfer has not yet reached extensive proportions, there is enough evidence available to demonstrate that OD need not be culture-bound. Technology, provided it is adjusted to differing cultural conditions, is transferable. Organization development, provided it is not misused by misguided practitioners, is transferrable and should be transferred. In enriching communication between people and across cultures, it makes its modest contribution toward a better world.

Reference

1. Bourgeois II, L.J. & Boltvinik, M. OD in cross-cultural settings: Latin America. *California Management Review*, Spring 1981, 75-81.