What Is OD

a survey
of line managers and professional trainers

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What is organization development? If you were to ask a number of managers, chances are they would give a wide variety of definitions, most of them couched in terms of technique rather than objective. In fact, for many managers – including OD practitioners – organization development seems to have little to do with organizations.

Two Surveys Utilized

This conclusion is drawn from two surveys conducted last year. In this paper, I will describe them and elaborate on what their findings imply for the practice of OD today.

The first survey sampled 320 line managers who had participated in Kepner-Tregoe's problem-solving and decision-making seminar. Two hundred sixty-two managers represented 56 industrial firms, while 58 came from 11 government agencies. We asked these managers three questions:

1. What does organization development mean to you?
2. What things are being done to make your company or unit function more effectively?
3. What things could be done to make it function more effectively?

The second survey was conducted among the 200 training and development managers who attended my session on OD during the 1972 ASTD National Conference in Houston, Texas. Of these, 102 were from industrial firms, 59 were from government agencies, and 39 were from other organizations such as banks, universities, insurance companies and retailing organizations.

In this survey we repeated the first question (What does organization development mean to you?) and then asked:

2. What are the most significant things being done in your organization that you would consider organization development?
3. How are you measuring the effectiveness of the activities described in question 2?

These three questions were discussed in small groups, followed by individual responses in writing. In this paper, the highlights of these two surveys will be

summarized, beginning with the responses of both groups to question 1. These are compared in TABLE I.

My first observation—and I consider it surprising—is that only 9 per cent of the line managers defined OD in terms of group training. One-third viewed it as meaning development and training of an individual, while 17 per cent viewed it in terms of structuring the organization, and 17 per cent viewed it in terms of systems and procedures. (It is interesting that systems and procedures were selected by 27 per cent of the government respondents and only 15 per cent of the industry respondents.)

My second observation is that OD clearly has many different meanings to line managers. There is no single definition which all managers use. A third observation is that line managers define OD mostly in terms of methods, techniques and strategies. They do not define it in terms of end results or corporate objectives. These two observations have important implications for the OD practitioner which will be discussed later.

Table I.

Summary

Question 1 -- What does Organization Development mean to you?

	PROFESSIONAL TRAINERS				LINE MANAGERS		
	Industry	Gov't.	Other*	Total	Industry	Gov't.	Total
1. Development and training the individual	14 (10%)	8 (10%)	10 (17%)	32 (11%)	101 (34%)	15 (22%)	116 (32%)
2. Development and training of the work group	14 (10%)	7 (9%)	5 (8%)	26 (9%)	26 (9%)	6 (9%)	32 (9%)
3. Structuring the organization	11 (8%)	6 (8%)	7 (12%)	24 (9%)	52 (18%)	9 (13%)	61 (17%)
4. Adaptation to change and growth	10 (7%)	3 (4%)	5 (8%)	18 (6%)	32 (11%)	9 (13%)	41 (11%)
5. Stress on the relationship of the individual to the organization or the group.	14 (10%)	9 (12%)	5 (8%)	28 (10%)	13 (4%)	3 (4%)	16 (4%)
6. Systems and procedures	37 (26%)	24 (31%)	13 (22%)	74 (27%)	43 (15%)	18 (17%)	6I (17%)
7. Improve the mission, goals of the organization (not systems for doing)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	3 (1%)	2 (3%)	5 (1%)
8. Don't know or vague, unclear answers. Just repeats question	10 (7%)	10 (13%)	6 (10%)	26 (9%)	24 (8%)	6 (9%)	30 (9%)
9. Climate/environment	7 (5%)	3 (4%)	3 (5%)	13 (5%)			
10. Use of behavioral science	23 (16%)	7 (9%)	6 (10%)	36 (13%)			

*Banks, Universities, Insurance, Retailing, etc.

The Responses

When we examined the responses of the professional trainers to question 1 we found they used the same categories but added two more: *climate/environment* and *use of behavioral science*. In defining OD they were as divided as the line managers. While 27 per cent defined it in terms of systems and procedures, the remaining responses were distributed almost equally among eight categories, including "don't know."

Whether a trainer came from industry, government or a service organization seems to have made little difference in how he or she responded. Size of organization also had little bearing on the response, except that trainers from large government and industrial organizations cited *use of behavioral science* to a greater extent than did trainers from small organizations.

Comparing the responses from the two groups to question 1 reveals the following:

1. Line managers view OD more in terms of individual training and organization structuring than do training and development managers.
2. Training and development managers place more stress than line managers on systems and procedures, on use of behavioral science, and on the relationship of the individual to the group.
3. There is a wider spread of responses among training and development people, including the significant additions of climate and behavioral science.
4. Professional trainers also view OD in terms of alternatives such as strategies, programs and activities rather than in terms of end results.

Responses to the second and third questions are displayed for the line managers in TABLES II and III and the professional trainers in TABLES IV and V. Although question 2 for the line managers avoided using the terms OD, their responses paralleled almost exactly their responses to question 1. To me this indicates that the line managers were defining OD in terms of what they saw happening in their own organizations.

Looking at question 3 for line managers, we find they feel improved communications, more training programs and courses, systems relating to the organization, and organizational structuring would make their companies function more effectively. It is

Table II.

Line Managers

Question 2 -- *What things are being done to make your company or unit function more effectively?*

	INDUSTRY	GOVERNMENT	TOTAL
1. Training programs and courses.	154 (38%)	28 (30%)	182 (36%)
2. Building a climate for self-development.	7 (2%)	2 (2%)	9 (2%)
3. Job rotation.	10 (2%)	1 (1%)	11 (2%)
4. Better selection and use of people.	9 (2%)	6 (7%)	15 (3%)
5. Installation of systems relating to the organization.	61 (15%)	18 (20%)	79 (16%)
6. Installation of systems relating to the individual.	39 (10%)	4 (4%)	43 (8%)
7. Improved communications.	41 (10%)	13 (14%)	54 (11%)
8. Organization structuring .	67 (16%)	16 (17%)	83 (17%)
9. Better data processing.	6 (1%)	0 (0%)	6 (0%)
10. Improved motivation and morale.	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0%)
11. More participation/teamwork.	3 (1%)	2 (2%)	5 (1%)
12. Little or nothing.	4 (1%)	1 (2%)	6 (1%)
13. No answer -- or vague unclear answer.	8 (2%)	1 (1%)	9 (2%)

interesting that these areas also had the greatest response to question 2 – "What things are being done to make your company or unit function more effectively?" A comparison of questions 2 and 3 for line managers suggests that much more work needs to be done in improving communications.

The responses of the trainer to questions 2 and 3 are quite apparent. The significant points are these:

1. Almost one-third responded to question 2 that organization planning/MBO was the most significant OD-like program being conducted in their organization; seminars and training received 26 per cent, while individual de-velopment and group problem solving each got only a 12 per cent response.

2. Measurement is weak. Eighteen per cent of the responses were that no measurement was being done, 16 per cent did not answer the question, and 14 per cent cited general judgments as the vehicle for measurement.

3. The patterns for different types of organizations (government, service, industry) are about the same – with one exception: as might be expected there is much less use of profit and cost effectiveness measures of OD activities in government than in industry and service organizations.

Table III.

Line Managers

Question 3 -- *What things could be done to make it function more effectively?*

	INDUSTRY	GOVERNMENT	TOTALS
1. Training programs and courses.	82 (24%)	11 (14%)	93 (22%)
2. Building a climate for self-development.	5 (1%)	1 (1%)	6 (1%)
3. Job rotation.	13 (4%)	1 (1%)	14 (3%)
4. Better selection and use of people.	15 (4%)	4 (5%)	19 (5%)
5. Installation of systems relating to the organization.	50 (14%)	18 (22%)	68 (16%)
6. Installation of systems relating to the individual.	17 (5%)	6 (7%)	23 (5%)
7. Improved communications.	78 (23%)	19 (24%)	97 (23%)
8. Organization structuring.	44 (13%)	13 (16%)	57 (13%)
9. Better data processing.	2 (1%)	2 (2%)	4 (1%)
10. Improved motivation and morale.	10 (3%)	2 (2%)	12 (3%)
11. More participation/ teamwork.	6 (2%)	4 (5%)	10 (2%)
12. Little or nothing.	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)
13. No answer -- or vague unclear answer.	21 (6%)	1 (1%)	22 (5%)

Contributions and Limitations

In addition to the three questions discussed above, training professionals at the Houston Conference were asked to respond to some other issues. The participants were divided into small groups and each group was asked to select the most significant question from the following list and discuss it. Each individual gave a written response following the discussion.

1. How can training aimed at improving the individual contribute to organization development? What are its limitations?
2. How can organizational structuring contribute to organization development? What are its limitations?
3. How can work or family group training contribute to organization development? What are its limitations?
4. How can long-range planning contribute to organization development? What are its limitations?

While the largest number of small groups selected the third question, concerning the contribution of work or family group training to OD, there was a somewhat surprising balance in the number of small groups that chose each question.

An analysis of the written remarks concerning contributions and limitations revealed no surprises. They were pretty much what one would expect from reading the literature by and for professional training and development people. Briefly, they can be summarized as follows:

1. With the exception of the second question, the contributions of each approach tend to cluster into two or three areas. The contributions of individual training to OD are seen primarily as an increase in the individual's knowledge and skills which, in turn, leads to an improved organization. The contributions of work or family group training to OD are seen as improved interpersonal relations, team work, communication, and commitment to group goals. The overwhelming response to the question about how long-range planning contributes to OD is that it provides goals and direction for the organization.

2. Lack of time, excessive costs, activity insufficient by itself as an OD effort and need for top management support were commonly cited as limitations to each of the four approaches.

3. A limitation of family group training is that its connection with organizational goals can be too readily lost.

4. Long-range planning suffers from several limitations that do not appear in other OD strategies: the results are unpredictable, the necessary flexibility may be lacking, and it may not be possible to judge accurately either the end results or the

Table IV.

Professional Trainers

Question 2 -- *What are the most significant things being done in your organization that you would consider Organization Development?*

	INDUSTRY	GOVERNMENT	OTHER*	TOTAL
1. Seminars/training programs.	39 (24%)	26 (33%)	12 (22%)	77 (26%)
2. Organization planning/ MBO.	56 (35%)	18 (23%)	16 (29%)	90 (31%)
3. Individual development, coaching, career planning.	16 (10%)	11 (14%)	8 (15%)	35 (12%)
4. Group problem solving, family team building.	22 (14%)	15 (6%)	9 (16%)	36 (12%)
5. None.	13 (8%)	10 (13%)	5 (9%)	28 (10%)
6. No answer.	4 (3%)	2 (3%)	3 (5%)	9 (3%)
7. Studies.	2 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (2%)	4 (1%)
8. Meetings.	3 (2%)	1 (1%)	1 (2%)	5 (2%)
9. Change agents, consultants.	5 (3%)	5 (6%)	0 (0%)	10 (3%)

*Banks, Universities, Insurance, Retailing, etc.

progress toward those results.

Definitions of OD

Before examining some overall conclusions based upon our two surveys, I wish to comment on the key elements in a definition of OD as drawn from some of the well-known practitioners. If we examine the writing of people like Kuriloff, Schmuck and Miles, Beckhard, and Vaill, some continuing themes emerge: OD is seen as a process that (1) is deliberate and planned, (2) is sustained for a long period rather than being a one-shot dosage of medicine, (3) is aimed at improving the effectiveness of the total organization, and (4) has utilized behavioral science methodology.

Two key points stand out from the literature in this field. First, there is a strong emphasis on the techniques and methods used to achieve the desired results. Second, there are definite values that are often not stated explicitly and yet these values guide both the selection of specific methods and the application of these methods to OD. Among these values are:

1. Organizations do not exist as ends in themselves, but rather as means to the end of fulfilling the needs of individuals in a free society.
2. Awareness in itself is a desirable end result. It is considered good to be aware of where the organization is headed and of the needs and abilities of the individuals in the organization. It is lack of awareness

Table V.

Professional Trainers

Question 3 -- *How are you measuring the effectiveness of the activities described in Question 2?*

	INDUSTRY	GOVERNMENT	OTHER*	TOTAL
1. Profit-Cost effectiveness.	13 (9%)	1 (1%)	3 (6%)	17 (6%)
2. Turnover, absenteeism, grievances.	7 (5%)	5 (7%)	4 (8%)	16 (6%)
3. Surveys of attitude, morale, etc.	14 (10%)	8 (11%)	11 (21%)	33 (12%)
4. Measuring individual effectiveness.	12 (9%)	2 (3%)	5 (9%)	19 (7%)
5. Post-course participant's evaluation and survey.	9 (6%)	6 (8%)	2 (4%)	17 (6%)
6. General management judgments.	20 (14%)	13 (18%)	5 (9%)	38 (14%)
7. None.	23 (17%)	16 (22%)	8 (15%)	47 (18%)
8. No answer.	22 (16%)	11 (15%)	8 (15%)	41 (16%)
9. Comparison of trained versus untrained groups over time.	0 (0%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)
10. Measuring results against goals.	10 (7%)	6 (8%)	5 (9%)	21 (8%)
11. Productivity.	10 (7%)	3 (4%)	2 (4%)	15 (6%)

*Banks, Universities, Insurance, Retailing, etc.

that leads ultimately to a dysfunctional organization.

3. There must be certain congruence between individual goals and organizational needs if the organizational goals are to be met satisfactorily.

4. Better interpersonal relationships will make it easier to achieve an organization's goals. Most writers consider that good relationships exist when there is empathy among people; when the relationships are marked by honesty and authenticity of feeling rather than manipulation; and when there is, if not necessarily agreement or even liking, at least mutual respect and a tolerance for differences. Again, the hypothesis that is usually accepted is that if these types of relationships exist, the organization can be more successful in relating flexibly, openly, and creatively to the changes and demands of its environment.

Conclusions

On the basis of this quick survey of the literature as well as our two surveys of line managers and training professionals, it seems to me there are several traps which OD may be falling into.

1. There is a definite tendency to define OD more in terms of its *methods and techniques* than in terms of organizational objectives. This can be seen in the responses of both line managers and professional trainers when they are asked, "What does OD mean to you?" This confusion of ends and means is something we have been fighting in the training profession for years, and the trap, of course, is that we may lose sight of the objectives. Indeed, unless we focus on objectives it is impossible to determine whether what we are doing is OD or not. Any training program or technique can be either OD or manager development depending on the objectives. Endless debates on which approaches are or are not OD are meaningless. Nothing inherent in any particular training technique makes it OD or not OD — only clear objectives can make this discrimination. Moreover, if we as professionals start to identify OD with a particular methodology we run the risk of excluding other methodologies that might be as good if not better for a particular task. Also, if line managers have confused OD with a particular technique, they may refuse to support an entire OD program simply because they don't like that particular technique. In fact it is this vulnerability to the preconceptions of line managers that has made so many practitioners unwilling to be formally identified with OD — they don't want to jeopardize their opportunity for successful intervention by having some manager say, "Oh, you're one of those sensitivity guys!"

2. There is too much internal focus with many OD activities. We are in danger of concentrating so much on what is happening inside (e.g., better communication, motivation, team work, etc.) that we will lose sight of the purpose of these improved internal workings — which is to better meet the organization's objectives. Indeed, of the four key organizational interfaces discussed by Lawrence and Lorsch, the interface between the organization and its environment receives almost no attention from OD practitioners. Yet if we say our goal is to improve organizational effectiveness then this is where we must start. And if we start here, we will be right in the middle of long-range planning, which for some companies might be the best means of intervention we could employ!

3. Too often the value systems that underlie OD efforts remain implicit and are not confronted openly. Besides being inherently dishonest, if these values are not shared values, line managers will come to feel they are being manipulated. As they sense these implicit values, they may reject the whole OD program out of hand as being a missionary effort serving objectives unrelated to those of their organization.

4. There is a danger that OD will be perceived as a cult. By keeping its values hidden, by focusing on internal techniques rather than end results and the outside environment, the OD practitioner could end up as a member of a special group that speaks its own language and is for all practical purposes isolated from its line manager clients. And, if line managers feel that because they don't understand the language or fit the mold we professional trainers

want them to, we may lose them as clients altogether and, in the process, destroy our entire effort at increasing organizational health.

Specific Suggestions

Let me conclude now with some specific suggestions to professional training and development managers about how we can make our OD efforts more effective.

First, although it is true that OD means different things to different people, OD practitioners should not waste their time trying to get line managers to understand what OD "really" is. Instead, we should begin with where managers are and work from that point to help them improve the effectiveness of their organizations.

We should determine their perception of OD, the organizational results they believe are needed, and how they perceive our OD activities in relation to these desired results.

Second, there is no single package of tools. Every organization is different, and for each we must learn to select the appropriate OD theories and techniques and discard the rest. With any effort, we should clearly specify and differentiate these key elements: (1) What organizational results are we striving toward? (2) How are we reflecting the relationship of the organization to its environment? (3) Which techniques and methods should be used? (4) Are these methods systematic and planned, longrange and continuing, supported by top management? (5) What values underlie our selection of end results and techniques? Are there alternative value systems? Have we made our value systems explicit and provided the opportunity for them to be confronted openly? (6) What theories of managerial and organizational be-

havior are we working from? Are they based upon assumptions that are essentially unproven?

Finally, keep in mind that there is no magic formula. The cause-effect relationships between activities and desired organizational results are difficult to measure, and we don't fully understand them. However, by following the guidelines I have suggested we can at least have a process to measure ourselves against. When we make mistakes, we then will have some basis for correcting our actions. When we have successes, we will have a base upon which to build

those successes into our future activities.

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