

4  
EDITION



# ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

The Process of Leading Organizational Change

Donald L. Anderson



## Organization Development

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# Organization Development

The Process of Leading Organizational Change

Fourth Edition

Donald L. Anderson  
*University of Denver*



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi  
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# Preface

It seems that every few years, the field of organization development (OD) finds itself at a crossroads. Some feel that the field has strayed too far from its founding humanistic values of democracy, diversity, autonomy, collaboration, and choice. They argue that OD is in danger of being diluted or collapsed into human resources roles, leadership development, and talent management. Others feel that the “touchy feely” old values deserve a fresh update and that OD practitioners have a great deal to contribute to organizational efficiency, effectiveness, and enhanced performance. They see the role of the practitioner as a business adviser who can incorporate humanistic values without being hypocritical.

I wrote (and continue to update) this book because I firmly believe that OD as a field of research and practice has much to offer to people in contemporary organizations who are struggling with an incredible amount of change. Old management styles no longer fit the needs of today’s workplace and workers. New organizational forms are emerging to cope with the increasing pace of change, globalization, digitization and the latest technologies, economic pressures, and the expectations of the contemporary workforce. Managers struggle to engage employees despite ever-present threats of downsizing and outsourcing. In such an environment, many employees find work to be less personally satisfying than they did before.

Skilled OD practitioners understand the dynamics of human systems and can intervene to encourage a healthy, engaging, and productive environment. Unfortunately, it has been challenging for many students to develop these skills. It generally requires “breaking in” to an OD department, finding a (hopefully skilled) mentor, and learning as much as possible through academic courses or self-discovery. While they are regularly tested on the job, managers and executives have few opportunities to develop their skills as change agents as well. Project managers, IT professionals, educators, and health care administrators all report that the skills of OD are applicable to their jobs.

My hope is that this book will provide theoretical and practical background in OD to give you an introduction to the basic processes of organization development and change. It will also give you a chance to practice in a safe environment where you can develop your skills. I hope you find the book to be readable but rigorous—practical and relevant but with a solid academic foundation—and comprehensive enough without being exhausting.

For this fourth edition, I have updated many sections of the book to reflect recent research and advances in practice while retaining classic approaches and foundational theories with which most practitioners ought to be familiar. Highlights of this new edition include the following:

- A new case study after [Chapter 7](#) that can be used as a multipart case (additional parts are located on the companion website)
- Additional examples of global issues in organization development
- Enhanced coverage of recent theory and practice in dialogic approaches to OD
- Discussion questions at the end of each chapter

- Activities, exercises, and role plays following most chapters
- New readings at the end of each chapter, where appropriate

My continued thanks to the students at the University of Denver as well as the clients who share with me their struggles in achieving change at work. As always, I am grateful to my family and friends, especially my wife, Jennifer, whose encouragement means everything.



## Exercises and Activities

Many chapters contain exercises, activities, and role plays that can be used to practice skills and apply concepts developed in several chapters of the book. This chart details which exercises and activities accompany which chapter and topic.

<i>Exercise</i>	<i>Chapter Topic</i>	<i>Page</i>
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Using Organizational Change Models	Chapter 4: Foundations of Organizational Change	95
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## Ancillaries

## Instructor Teaching Site

A password-protected instructor's manual is available at [study.sagepub.com/andersonod4e](http://study.sagepub.com/andersonod4e) to help instructors plan and teach their courses. These resources have been designed to help instructors make the classes as practical and interesting as possible for students.

**An Overview for the Instructor** offers the author's insights on how to most effectively use this book in a course on organization development and change.

**PowerPoint Slides** capture key concepts and terms for each chapter for use in lectures and review.

**Case Epilogues** provide additional information about the organizations or scenarios featured in the text.

**Discussion Questions** suggest additional topics to engage students during classroom discussions and activities.

**Sample Course Syllabi** provide models for structuring your course.

**A Test Bank** includes multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay exam questions for each chapter.

**Video Resources** for each chapter help launch class discussion.

## Student Study Site

An open-access student study site can be found at [study.sagepub.com/andersonod4e](http://study.sagepub.com/andersonod4e). The site offers videos of the author discussing the major stages of organization development, Web links to additional tools, and **Learning From SAGE Journal Articles**, with access to recent, relevant, full-text articles from SAGE's leading research journals. Each article supports and expands on the concepts presented in the book. This feature also provides discussion questions to focus and guide student interpretation.

This text is accompanied by *Cases and Exercises in Organization Development & Change, Second Edition* (ISBN 978-1-5063-4447-8), which follows the same chapter organization as this text. A bundle of this text with the cases and exercises book is also available.

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## Chapter 1 What Is Organization Development?

Think for a moment about the organizations to which you belong. You probably have many to name, such as the company where you work, a school, perhaps a volunteer organization, or a reading group. You are undoubtedly influenced by many other organizations in your life, such as a health care organization like a doctor's office or hospital, a church group, a child's school, a bank, or the local city council or state government. Using an expansive definition of organization, you could name your own family or a group of friends as an organization that you belong to as well. With just a few moments' reflection, you are likely to be able to name dozens of organizations that you belong to or that influence you.

Now consider an organization that you currently do not belong to, but one that you were dissatisfied with at some point in the past. What was it about that organization that made the experience dissatisfying? Perhaps you left a job because you did not have the opportunity to contribute that you would have liked. Maybe it was a dissatisfying team atmosphere, or you were not appreciated or recognized for the time and energy that you dedicated to the job. It could have been a change to your responsibilities, the team, or the organization's processes. Some people report that they did not feel a larger sense of purpose at work, they did not have control or autonomy over their work, or they did not find an acceptable path to growth and career development. Perhaps you've witnessed or been part of an organization that has failed for some reason. Perhaps it went out of business or it disbanded because it could no longer reach its goals.

You've likely had some excellent experiences in organizations, too. You may have had a job that was especially fulfilling or where you learned a great deal and coworkers became good friends. Maybe your local volunteer organization helped a number of people through organized fundraisers or other social services activities. Perhaps you joined or started a local community group to successfully campaign against the decision of your local city council or school board.

All of this is to demonstrate what you already know intuitively, that we spend a great deal of our lives working in, connected to, and affected by organizations. Some of these organizations function quite well, whereas others struggle. Some are quite rewarding environments in which to work or participate, but in others, organizational members are frustrated, neglected, and disengaged.

The purpose of this book is to introduce you to the field of organization development, an area of academic study and professional practice focused on making organizations better—that is, more effective and productive and at the same time more rewarding, satisfying, and engaging places in which to work and participate. By learning about the field of organization development and the process by which it is conducted, you will be a more effective change agent inside the organizations to which you belong.

## Organization Development Defined

Organization development (OD) is an interdisciplinary field with contributions from business, industrial/organizational psychology, human resources management, communication, sociology, and many other disciplines. Not surprisingly, for a field with such diverse intellectual roots, there are many definitions of organization development. Definitions can be illuminating, as they point us in a direction and provide a shared context for mutual discussion, but they can also be constraining, as certain concepts are inevitably left out, with boundaries drawn to exclude some activities. What counts as OD thus depends on the practitioner and the definition, and these definitions have changed over time. In a study of 27 definitions of organization development published since 1969, Egan (2002) found that there were as many as 60 different variables listed in those definitions. Nonetheless, there are some points on which definitions converge.

One of the most frequently cited definitions of OD comes from Richard Beckhard (1969), an early leader in the field of OD:

Organization development is an effort (1) *planned*, (2) *organizationwide*, and (3) *managed* from the *top*, to (4) increase *organization effectiveness* and *health* through (5) *planned interventions* in the organization's "processes," using *behavioral-science* knowledge. (p. 9)

Beckhard's definition has many points that have survived the test of time, including his emphasis on organizational effectiveness, the use of behavioral science knowledge, and the inclusion of planned interventions in the organization's functions. Some critique this definition, however, for its emphasis on planned change (many organizational changes, and thus OD efforts, are in response to environmental threats that are not so neatly planned) and its emphasis on the need to drive organizational change through top management. Many contemporary OD activities do not necessarily happen at the top management level, as increasingly organizations are developing less hierarchical structures.

A more recent definition comes from Burke and Bradford (2005):

Based on (1) a set of values, largely humanistic; (2) application of the behavioral sciences; and (3) open systems theory, organization development is a systemwide process of planned change aimed toward improving overall organization effectiveness by way of enhanced congruence of such key organizational dimensions as external environment, mission, strategy, leadership, culture, structure, information and reward systems, and work policies and procedures. (p. 12)

Finally, I offer a third:

Organization development is the process of increasing organizational effectiveness and facilitating personal and organizational change through the use of interventions driven by social and behavioral

science knowledge.

These definitions include a number of consistent themes about what constitutes organization development. They propose that an outcome of OD activities is organizational effectiveness. They also each stress the applicability of knowledge gained through the social and behavioral sciences (such as sociology, business and management, psychology, and more) to organizational settings.

## Making the Case for Organization Development

Perhaps the point on which most definitions agree is that the backdrop and purpose of organization development is change. As you have no doubt personally experienced, large-scale organizational change is rarely simple and met without skepticism. As Peter Senge and colleagues (1999) write, “Most of us know firsthand that change programs fail. We’ve seen enough ‘flavor of the month’ programs ‘rolled out’ from top management to last a lifetime” (p. 6). Because of its impact on the organizational culture and potential importance to the organization’s success, organizational change has been a frequent topic of interest to both academic and popular management thinkers. With change as the overriding context for OD work, OD practitioners develop interventions so that change can be developed and integrated into the organization’s functioning. Significant changes today are facing organizations and their teams and individual employees.

To become effective, productive, and satisfying to members, organizations need to change. It will come as no surprise to any observer of today’s organizations that change is a significant part of organizational life. Change is required at the organizational level as customers demand more, technologies are developed with a rapidly changing life cycle (especially high-tech products; Wilhelm, Damodaran, & Li, 2003), and investors demand results. As Rita McGrath (2013) writes, “Music, high technology, travel, communication, consumer electronics, the automobile business, and even education are facing situations in which advantages are copied quickly, technology changes, or customers seek other alternatives and things move on” (p. 7). This requires that organizations develop new strategies, economic structures, technologies, organizational structures, and processes.

Change is required of team members, who now are likely to work virtually in collaboration with members from around the globe. Cultural differences, changes in communication technologies, and a changing diverse workforce all combine to complicate how team members work together. Role conflict and confusion in decision processes and decision authority are common when members who have never worked together are thrown into an ad hoc team that is responsible for rapid change and innovation.

Change is also required of individuals. Employees learn new skills as jobs change or are eliminated. Organizational members are expected to quickly and flexibly adapt to the newest direction. Best-selling business books such as *Who Moved My Cheese?* teach lessons in ensuring that one’s skills are current and that being comfortable and reluctant to adapt is a fatal flaw. Leaders today need to adapt to matrix organizational structures and new participative styles of leadership rather than old hierarchical patterns and command and control leadership (Holbeche, 2015). For organizational members, change can be enlightening and exciting, and it can be hurtful, stressful, and frustrating.

Whether or not we agree with the values behind “change as a constant,” it is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Whereas some decry an overabundance of change in organizations (Zorn, Christensen, & Cheney, 1999), others note that it is the defining characteristic of the current era in organizations and that becoming competent at organizational change is a necessary and distinguishing characteristic of successful organizations (Lawler & Worley, 2006).

There are, however, more and less effective ways to manage change. Creating and managing change in order to create higher-performing organizations in which individuals can grow and develop is a central theme of the field of OD. When we speak of organization development, we are referring to the management of certain kinds of these changes, especially how people implement and are affected by them.



## What Organization Development Looks Like

It may be easiest to understand what organization development is by understanding what forms it takes and how it is practiced. The following are five examples of published case studies of OD in action.

## Example 1: Increasing Employee Participation in a Public Sector Organization

Public sector organizations, it has been noted (Coram & Burns, 2001), often face additional special challenges in the management of change. Bureaucratic structures, interfaces with regional governments and legislatures, political pressures, and legislative policies all complicate the implementation of new processes and changes to organizational practices. In the Republic of Ireland, a special initiative aimed to reduce bureaucracy in the public sector to gain efficiency, improve customer service, and improve interdepartmental coordination (O'Brien, 2002). Many programs of this type have been launched in other organizations as top-down mandates from senior management, causing frustration and decreased commitment among staff members who resisted the mandated changes.

One department wanted to do things differently. The offices were in the division of Social Welfare Services, a community welfare organization of 4,000 employees. Two Dublin offices (50 employees each) became the focus of this case. These offices chose to involve employees in the development of an initiative that would improve working conditions in the department as well as increase the employees' capacity for managing changes. A project steering team was formed, and it began by administering an employee survey to inquire about working relationships, career development, training, technology, and management. Follow-up data gathering occurred in focus groups and individual interviews. The tremendous response rate of more than 90 percent gave the steering team a positive feeling about the engagement of the population, but the results of the survey indicated that a great deal of improvement was necessary. Many employees felt underappreciated, distrusted, and not included in key decisions or changes. Relationships with management were also a concern as employees indicated few opportunities for communication with management and that jobs had become routine and dull.

The steering team invited volunteers (employees and their management) to work on several of the central problems. One team worked on the problem of communication and proposed many changes that were later implemented, including a redesign of the office layout to improve circulation and contact among employees. As the teams continued discussions, they began to question standard practices and inefficiencies and to suggest improvements, eventually devising a list of almost 30 actions that they could take. Managers listened to employee suggestions, impressed by their insights. As one manager put it, "I have learned that a little encouragement goes a long way and people are capable of much more than given credit for in their normal everyday routine" (O'Brien, 2002, p. 450).

The joint management–employee working teams had begun to increase collaboration and interaction among the two groups, with each reaching new insights about the other. As a result of the increased participation, "There appeared to be an enhanced acceptance of the change process, coupled with demands for better communications, increased involvement in decision making, changed relationships with supervisors and improved access to training and development opportunities" (O'Brien, 2002, p. 451).



## Example 2: Senior Management Coaching at Vodaphone

Vodaphone is a multibillion-dollar global communications technology company headquartered in the United Kingdom and was an early leader in the mobile telephone market (Eaton & Brown, 2002). Faced with increasing competition, the company realized that in order to remain innovative and a leader in a challenging market, the culture of the organization would need to adapt accordingly. Specifically, senior management realized that its current “command and control” culture of blame and political games would hinder the collaboration and mutual accountability needed to succeed in a competitive environment. Instead, the company wanted to encourage a culture of empowered teams that made their own decisions and shared learning and development, speed, and accountability.

Several culture initiatives were implemented, including the development of shared values, the introduction of IT systems that shared and exchanged information across major divisions that had hindered cross-functional learning, and the establishment of teams and a team-building program.

To support the initiatives and encourage a new, collaborative management style, Vodaphone implemented a leadership coaching program. Top managers attended the program to learn skills in conducting performance reviews, helping employees set goals, and coaching teams. Following the program, managers had one-on-one coaching sessions with a professional coach who worked with participants to help them set coaching goals and reflect on how successfully they were able to implement the skills learned in the program.

As a result of the program, managers began to delegate more as teams started to solve problems themselves. Teams began to feel more confident in their decisions as managers trusted them. Eaton and Brown (2002) attribute several subsequent company successes to the program, noting that it was critical that the coaching program was integrated with the other culture change initiatives that it supported. “Cultural change takes time,” they note, and “traditional attitudes to management do not die away overnight” (p. 287). However, they point out that a gradual evolution took place and the new cultural values are now the standard.

### Example 3: Team Development in a Cancer Center

Health care workers who have the challenge of caring for critically ill patients experience stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout at very high rates compared with workers in other fields. Without social support from friends or other coworkers, many workers seek to leave the field or to reduce hours to cope with the emotional exhaustion of such a demanding occupation. Consequently, many researchers have found that health care workers in particular need clear roles, professional autonomy, and social support to reduce burnout and turnover.

In one Canadian cancer center (Black & Westwood, 2004), a senior administrator sought to address some of these needs by creating a leadership team that could manage its own work in a multidisciplinary team environment. Team members would have professional autonomy and would provide social support to one another. Leaders volunteered or were chosen from each of the center's main disciplines, such as oncology, surgery, nursing, and more. Organization development consultants were invited to lead workshops in which the team could develop cohesive trusting relationships and agree on working conditions that would reduce the potential for conflict among disciplines.

In a series of three 2-day workshops over 3 months, the team participated in a number of important activities. Members did role play and dramatic exercises in which they took on one another's roles in order to be able to see how others see them. They completed surveys of their personal working styles to understand their own communication and behavior patterns. The team learned problem-solving techniques, they clarified roles, and they established group goals.

Three months after the final workshop was conducted, the facilitators conducted interviews to assess the progress of the group. All of the participants reported a better sense of belonging, a feeling of trust and safety with the team, and a better understanding of themselves and others with whom they worked. One participant said about a coworker, "I felt that [the workshops] connected me far differently to [a coworker] than I would have ever had an opportunity to do otherwise, you know, in a normal work setting" (Black & Westwood, 2004, p. 584). The consultants noted that participants wanted to continue group development on an ongoing basis.

## Example 4: A Future Search Conference in a Northern California Community

Santa Cruz County is located in Northern California, about an hour south of San Francisco. In the 1960s, the county had approximately 25,000 residents in an agricultural region and in a small retirement community. In the late 1960s, the University of California, Santa Cruz, opened its doors, and in the following years the county began to experience a demographic shift as people began to move to the area and real estate prices skyrocketed. By 1990, the population had reached 250,000 residents, and increasingly expensive real estate prices meant that many residents could no longer afford to live there. Affordable housing was especially a problem for the agricultural community. A local leadership group had convened several conferences but could never agree on an approach to the housing problem.

In the mid-1990s, a consortium of leaders representing different community groups decided to explore the problem further by holding a future search conference (Blue Sky Productions, 1996). They invited 72 diverse citizens to a 3-day conference not only to explore the problem of affordable housing but also to address other issues that they had in common. The citizen groups represented a cross-section of the community—from young to old, executives to farmworkers—and social services agencies. Attendees were chosen to try to mirror the community as a “vertical slice” of the population. They called the conference “Coming Together as a Community Around Housing: A Search for Our Future in Santa Cruz County.”

At the conference, attendees explored their shared past as individuals and residents of the county. They discussed the history of the county and their own place in it. Next, they described the current state of the county and the issues that were currently being addressed by the stakeholder groups in attendance. The process was a collaborative one; as one attendee said, “What one person would raise as an issue, another person would add to, and another person would add to.” There were also some surprises as new information was shared. One county social services employee realized, “There were a couple of things that I contributed that I thought everyone in the county knew about, and [I] listen[ed] to people respond to my input, [and say] ‘Oh, really?’” Finally, the attendees explored what they wanted to work on in their stakeholder groups. They described a future county environment 10 years out and presented scenarios that took a creative form as imaginary TV shows and board of supervisors meetings. Group members committed to action plans, including short- and long-term goals.

Eighteen months later, attendees had reached a number of important goals that had been discussed at the conference. Not only had they been able to increase funding for a farmworkers housing loan program and create a rental assistance fund, but they were on their way to building a \$5.5 million low-income housing project. Participants addressed a number of nonhousing issues as well. They embarked on diversity training in their stakeholder groups, created a citizen action corps, invited other community members to participate on additional task forces, and created a plan to revitalize a local downtown area. “Did the future search conference work?” one participant wondered. “No question about it. It provided a living model of democracy.”



## Example 5: A Long-Term Strategic Change Engagement

ABA, a German trading company with 15,000 employees, embarked on a major strategic change initiative driven by stiff competition (Sackmann, Eggenhofer-Rehart, & Friesl, 2009). A global expansion prompted the company to reorganize into a three-division structure. A decentralized shared services model, comprising 14 new groups, was created for administrative departments that would now support internal divisions. To support the culture of the new organization, executives developed a mission and vision statement that explained the company's new values and asked managers to cascade these messages to their staffs. This effort was kicked off and managed from the top of the organization.

The director of the newly formed shared services centers contacted external consultants, suspecting that a simple communication cascade to employees would not result in the behavioral changes needed in the new structure. The new administrative groups would have significant changes to work processes, and the lead managers of each of the 14 new groups would need assistance to put the new values and beliefs into practice. The consultants proposed an employee survey to gauge the beliefs and feelings of the staff and to provide an upward communication mechanism. Survey results were available to managers of each center, and the external consultants coached the managers through an interpretation of the results to guide self-exploration and personal development. Internal consultants worked with the managers of each of the new centers to facilitate a readout of the survey results with employees and take actions customized to the needs of each group. Consultants conducted workshops for managers to help them further develop personal leadership and communication skills, topics that the survey suggested were common areas of improvement across the management team. Over a period of 4 years, the cycle was repeated, using variations of the employee survey questions, a feedback step, and management development workshops covering new subjects each time.

Interviews and surveys conducted late in the process showed that employees had a positive feeling about change in general. Leaders reported noticing a more trusting relationship between employees and their managers characterized by more open communication. Center managers took the initiative to make regular and ongoing improvements to their units. Sackmann and colleagues (2009) noted the need for a major change like this one to include multiple intervention targets. This organization experienced "changes in strategy, structure, management instruments, leadership, employee orientation, and the organization's culture context" (p. 537), which required a broad set of surveys, coaching, and workshops to support. "These change supporting activities helped implement the change with lasting effect" (p. 537), they conclude.

As you can see from this and the previous examples, OD is concerned with a diverse variety of issues to address problems involving organizations, teams, and individuals. OD is also conducted in a diverse variety of organizations, including federal, state, and local governments (which are among the largest employers in the United States, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics), public sector organizations around the world, health care organizations, educational settings, and nonprofit and private enterprises. Interventions can involve a single individual, a small team (such as the cancer center team described earlier), multiple teams, or a whole organization. It can also consist of multiple targets of change, such as in the Vodaphone initiative that involved not only large-scale culture change but also the implementation of teams and individual coaching.



OD can also deal with multiorganization efforts, such as in the case of Santa Cruz County, or it can involve multiple national governments. The target of change can be something as seemingly simple as increasing employee involvement or developing coworker relationships, or it can be as potentially large as creating the vision or strategy of an entire organization or documenting the 10-year future of a large county.

## What Organization Development Is Not

Despite this seemingly expansive definition of what organization development is and what issues and problems it addresses, it is also limited. OD is not any of the following.

## Management Consulting

OD can be distinguished from management consulting in specific functional areas such as finance, marketing, corporate strategy, or supply chain management. It is also distinguished from information technology applications. Yet OD is applicable to any of these areas. When organizations attempt a conscious change, whether it involves implementing a new IT system; making changes in strategy, goals, or direction; or adapting to a new team leader, OD offers relevant processes and techniques to make the change function effectively. An OD practitioner would not likely use expertise in one of these content areas (for example, best practices in financial structures of supplier relationships or contemporary marketing analysis) to make recommendations about how an organization does this activity. Instead, an OD practitioner would be more likely to assist the organization in implementation of the kinds of changes that management consultants would advise them to make. Thus, OD makes a distinction between partnerships with a client where the consultant offers content advice and those where the consultant offers process advice. Consulting where the practitioner offers content advice falls under the heading of management consulting, whereas OD offers consultation on the process used to reach a desired goal. Most management consulting also is not based on OD's set of foundational values (a topic that we will take up in detail in [Chapter 3](#)). In [Chapter 5](#) we will discuss OD consulting in particular and differentiate it from management consulting activities with which you may be familiar.

## Training and Development

While individual and organization learning is a part of OD and a key value we will discuss in a later chapter, OD work is not confined to training activities. OD is not generally the context in situations in which learning is the sole objective, such as learning a new skill, system, or procedure. OD deals with organizational change efforts that may or may not involve members of the organization needing to learn specific new skills or systems. Many training and development professionals are gravitating toward OD to enhance their skills in identifying the structural elements of organizations that need to be changed or enhanced for training and new skills to be effective. Other aspects of the training and development profession, however, such as needs assessment, course development, the use of technology, or on-the-job training, are not central to the job of the OD practitioner.

In addition, most training programs are developed for a large audience, often independent of how the program would be applied in any given organization. While some OD interventions do incorporate training programs and skill building, OD is more centrally concerned with the systemic context that would make a training program successful, such as management support, job role clarification, process design, and more. As Burke (2008) writes, “Individual development cannot be separated from OD, but to be OD, individual development must be in the service of or leverage for system-wide change, an integral aspect of OD’s definition” (p. 23).

## Short Term

OD is intended to address long-term change. Even in cases in which the intervention is carried out over a short period (such as the several-day workshops conducted at the cancer center described earlier), the change is intended to be a long-term or permanent one. OD efforts are intended to develop systemic changes that are long lasting. In the contemporary environment, in which changes are constantly being made, this can be particularly challenging.

## The Application of a Toolkit

Many OD practitioners speak of the OD “toolkit.” It is true that OD does occasionally involve the application of an instrumented training or standard models, but it is also more than that. To confuse OD with a toolkit is to deny that it also has values that complement its science and that each OD engagement has somewhat unique applications. As Feyerherm and Worley (2008) write,

Too many clients ask, “How do I do x?” or “What tools are available to change y?” and too many OD practitioners, in an effort to be helpful, give the client what they want instead of what they need. The “tool” focus ignores assessment and risks, providing a band-aid in organizations without attacking core problems. (p. 4)

Students of OD who seek out tools without being knowledgeable about the OD process and the reasons for the use of the tools are likely to find themselves having learned how to use a hammer and enthusiastically go around looking for nails (only to realize that not every problem looks like the same nail). As Schein (1999) puts it,

Knowledge of many different kinds of interventions does not substitute for the knowhow of sensing what is needed “right now.” . . . In fact, having a skillset of interventions “at the ready” makes it harder to stay in the current reality because one is always looking for opportunities to use what one believes oneself to be good at. (p. 245)

OD is more than a rigid procedure for moving an organization, team, or individual from point A to point B. It involves being attuned to the social and personal dynamics of the client organization that usually require flexibility in problem solving, not a standardized set of procedures or tools. In [Chapter 3](#) we will discuss the values that underlie OD to better understand the fundamental concepts that explain how and why OD practitioners make the choices they do.

## Who This Book Is For

This book is for students, practitioners, and managers who seek to learn more about the process of organizational change following organization development values and practices. We will use the term *organization development*, as most academic audiences prefer, over the term *organizational development*, which seems to dominate spoken and written practitioner communication. We will also refer to the *organization development practitioner*, *consultant*, and *change agent* in this book as a single general audience, because these terms emphasize that OD is practiced by a large community that can include more than just internal and external paid OD consultants.

OD includes (and the book is written for) anyone who must lead organizational change as a part of his or her role. With the magnitude and frequency of organizational change occurring today, this encompasses a wide variety of roles and is an increasingly diverse and growing community. The OD practitioner can include the internal or external organization development consultant, but also managers and executives; human resources and training professionals; quality managers; project managers and information technology specialists; educators; health care administrators; directors of nonprofit organizations; leaders in state, local, and federal government agencies; and many more. We will also more frequently discuss *organizational members* than employees, which is a more inclusive term that includes volunteers in nonprofit groups and others who are connected to organizations but may not have an employment relationship with them. The term also is intended to include not just leaders, executives, and managers but also employees at all levels.

## Overview of the Book

This book provides an overview of the content of organization development, including theories and models used by change agents and OD practitioners. It also explores the process by which OD is practiced. The objective of the book is to acquaint you with the field of OD and the process of organization development consulting. The goal is to develop your analytic, consulting, and practitioner skills so that you can apply the concepts of OD to real situations. We will simulate these consulting situations through detailed case studies, which follow many of the skill development chapters, in which you will be able to immediately practice what you have learned in the chapter.

Chapters 2 through 5 will explore the foundations of the field, including its history, values, and an overview of the key concepts and research in organizational change. In these chapters you will learn how OD began as a field, how it has evolved over the past decades, and how most practitioners think of the field today. In [Chapter 3](#) we will discuss the underlying values and ethical beliefs that influence choices that practitioners must make in working with clients. [Chapter 4](#) provides a foundation in research into organizational change from a systems perspective, a common way of thinking about organizations. We will also discuss a social construction perspective on organizational change. In this chapter you will be exposed to models of organizational systems and organizational change that have influenced the development of many OD interventions. In [Chapter 5](#) we will define the role of the OD consultant, differentiating the OD consultant from other kinds of consultants, and describing the specific advantages and disadvantages to the OD consultant when the consultant is internal or external to the organization.

Beginning with [Chapter 6](#), the book follows an action research and consulting model (entry, contracting, data gathering, data analysis/diagnosis, feedback, interventions, and evaluation). We will discuss the major actions that practitioners take in each of these stages and describe the potential pitfalls to the internal and external consultant. [Chapter 6](#) describes the early stages of the consulting engagement, including entry and contracting. You will learn how a consultant contracts with a client and explores what problems the client is experiencing, how those problems are being managed, and how problems can be (re)defined for a client. In [Chapter 7](#) we will cover how practitioners gather data, as well as assess the advantages and disadvantages of various methods for gathering data about the organization. [Chapter 8](#) describes what OD practitioners do with the data they have gathered by exploring the dynamics of the feedback and joint diagnosis processes. This stage of the consulting process is especially important as it constitutes the point at which the client and consultant define what interventions will best address the problems that have been described.

[Chapter 9](#) begins by describing the most visible aspect of an OD engagement—the intervention. We will discuss the components of interventions and describe the decisions that practitioners must make in grappling with how to structure them for maximum effectiveness. Chapters 10 through 13 address the traditional OD practices with which most practitioners ought to be familiar, including interventions such as organization design, strategic planning, quality interventions, team building, survey feedback, individual instruments, and coaching and mentoring. These chapters also incorporate practices such as appreciative inquiry, future search, and Six Sigma. These interventions are organized according to the target of the intervention, whether it be



the whole organization, multiple groups, single groups, or individuals. In [Chapter 14](#) we will conclude our discussion of the OD process by exploring how organization development practitioners separate themselves from client engagements and evaluate the results of their efforts. In [Chapter 15](#) we will examine the practice of OD in different cultures and geographies by discussing how globalization impacts organization development. The book concludes in [Chapter 16](#) with a discussion of the future of OD, where we will discuss the applicability and relevance of OD to contemporary organizations, given trends in demographics, working conditions, and organizational environments.

Following trends in the corporate world, ethical issues in OD are gaining the attention of academics, clients, and practitioners. While we will discuss values and ethics in [Chapter 3](#), rather than leave ethical dilemmas to that chapter alone, we will also discuss ethical issues in organization development at relevant points throughout the book, when appropriate for the stage in the OD process being described.

Many chapters begin with an opening vignette and thought questions to set the stage for the topics covered in those chapters. Some of these vignettes present published case studies of successful and unsuccessful OD efforts. As you read the vignette and the chapter, consider what factors made the case more or less successful and what lessons the practitioner may have learned from the experience. You may wish to find the published case and read it for additional details not presented in the vignette. Reading published cases can help you develop a deeper appreciation for the complexities of OD work and learn from the successes and struggles that others have experienced. At the end of each chapter you will find questions for discussion, exercises, activities, and/or role-play simulations that can help you develop your OD skills through realistic scenarios where you can practice in a safe environment.

## Analyzing Case Studies

The case studies included in this book are intended to help you learn the role and thought process of an OD consultant or change agent through realistic examples. By reading and analyzing case studies, you will actively participate in applying the theory and concepts of OD to complex, real-life situations that consultants find themselves in every day. These cases are all based in practitioners' real experiences—names and some details have been changed to protect the client's and practitioner's anonymity. By stepping into a practitioner's shoes, you will be challenged to make the tradeoffs and choices that managers and consultants are asked to make. The cases will help you develop the problem-solving and critical-thinking skills that are central to the value that a practitioner brings to a client. Ideally you can discuss these cases with others who have analyzed them as well, and together you can identify the central issues in the cases and debate the most appropriate response. In this way, you will be assimilating knowledge that you have about organizations, change, human dynamics, and the concepts and theories of OD. You will learn the logic behind the choices that managers and practitioners make, and you will gain practice in making your thought processes explicit. The cases in the book will build on one another in complexity, so you will need to integrate what you have learned from previous chapters as you analyze each case.

The case studies in this book are written as mini-plays or scenes to provide a richly detailed scenario in which you can imagine yourself playing a part, in contrast to many commonly published case studies in which a few short paragraphs provide all of the detail available for analysis. Since a good deal of OD and change management involves noticing and responding to the human and relational dynamics of a situation in addition to the task and content issues, the scenes in this book provide both in order to give you practice in becoming an observer of people during the process of organizational change. The cases in this book also are situated in a number of diverse types of organizations in which OD is practiced, including educational environments, health care and nonprofit organizations, and for-profit businesses. Each of these types of organizations brings with it unique challenges and opportunities for the OD practitioner.

Each case provides a slice of organizational life, constructed as a brief scene in which you can imagine yourself playing a part, but which will require your conscious thinking and reflection. Cases present situations with many options. As Ellet (2007) writes, "A case is a text that refuses to explain itself" (p. 19). It requires you to take an active role to interpret it and discover its meaning. Fortunately, unlike the passage of time in real life, in written cases time is momentarily paused to give you the chance to consider a response. While you do not have the opportunity to gather additional data or ask questions of participants, you do have the ability to flip back a few pages, read the situation again, and contemplate. You can carefully consider alternate courses of action, weigh the pros and cons of each, and clarify why you would choose one option over another.

As a result of having to make these choices, you will hone your ability to communicate your rationale for your decisions. Classmates will make different choices, each with his or her own well-reasoned rationales. Through discussion you will sharpen your ability to solve problems, understanding the principles behind the decisions that you and your classmates have made. You will learn about how your own experiences shape your assumptions and approaches to problems. You will be challenged to develop your skills to provide evidence for

your reasoning, defend your analyses, and explain your thinking in clear and concise ways for fellow practitioners and clients alike. You may find that these discussions prompt you to change your mind about the approach you would take, becoming convinced by a classmate's well-reasoned proposal, or you may find that your reasoning persuades others that your approach has the greater advantages.

Regardless, you will learn that there is no single right answer at the back of the book or to be shared by your instructor after you have struggled. For some of the cases in this book, your instructor may share with you what happened after the case concluded. This information may provide support for the approach you would have taken, or it may make you think that your approach was incorrect. Instead of seeking the right or wrong answer, however, asking yourself whether your proposal was well reasoned given the circumstances is more important than knowing the exact outcome of the case. While you have the opportunity to do so, use the occasion of the case study and the discussion to play with various alternatives. Here, the process may be more important than the outcome.

The following tips will help you get started with case study analysis:

1. Read the entire case first, and resist the temptation to come to any conclusions the first time you read it. Allow yourself to first gather all of the relevant data about the situation before you propose any solutions or make any judgments about what is happening or what the client needs to do.
2. Use the tools and methods outlined in each chapter to help you think through the issues presented by the case. You will find worksheets, models, principles, and outlines that can assist you in identifying and categorizing problems, selecting and prioritizing interventions, and organizing ideas to respond to the client. Use charts and diagrams to map out organizational structures and underline key phrases and issues. Write questions that come to mind in the margins. Read the case multiple times to ensure that you have not missed a key detail that would indicate to a client that you had not been paying close attention.
3. Realize that like real life, case studies contain many extra details and describe multiple issues. Organizational life is messy and complex, and not all of these details are helpful or necessary to the consultant or change agent. A consultant helping a team redefine roles and responsibilities may be doing so in an environment in which the company has acquired a competitor or quarterly results were disappointing. Part of the practitioner's role is to sort the useful primary information from the unnecessary secondary information (or information that is unnecessary for the immediate problem). This is part of the value of these case exercises and a logic and intuition that you will develop as your skills and experience grow. Ask yourself what the client is trying to achieve, what he or she has asked of you, and what the core issues and central facts are.
4. Similarly, in any response to a client or reaction to a case, resist the temptation to comment on everything. An OD practitioner can help to prioritize the most pressing issues and help the client sort through the complexities of organizational life. It could be that part of the reason the client has asked for help is that the number of possibilities for action are too overwhelming to decide what to do next.
5. When you are prepared to write a response or an analysis, ask yourself whether you have addressed the central questions asked by the case and whether you have clearly stated the issues to the client. Once

your response is written, could you send that, in its present form, to the client described in the case? In that regard, is the analysis professionally written and well organized to communicate unambiguously to the client? Will the client understand how and why you reached these conclusions?

6. As you write your analysis, ask yourself how you know any particular fact or interpretation to be true and whether you have sufficiently justified your interpretation with actual data. Instead of boldly stating that “managers are not trained for their roles,” you could write, “Only 2 of 10 managers had attended a management training course in the past 5 years, leading me to conclude that management training has not been given a high priority.” The latter uses data and makes the interpretation explicit; the former is likely to invite criticism or defensiveness from a client. This does not mean that directness is not appropriate, only that it must follow from the evidence. We will describe the considerations of the feedback process in depth in this book.
7. When you have finished your own thinking and writing about the case, and after you have had the opportunity to discuss the case and options for action with classmates, take the time to write down your reflections from the experience (Ellet, 2007). What did you learn? What principles might apply for the next time you are confronted with these choices?

## Summary

Today's organizations are experiencing an incredible amount of change. Organization development is a field of academic study and professional practice that uses social and behavioral science knowledge to develop interventions that help organizations and individuals change successfully. It is a field practiced in almost all kinds of organizations that you can imagine, from education to health care, from government to small and large businesses. Changes that OD practitioners address are diverse as well, including organizational structures and strategies, team effectiveness, leadership coaching, and much more. OD is not management consulting or training and development, and it is neither short term nor the mere application of a standard procedure or toolkit. OD practitioners can include many kinds of people for whom organizational change is a priority, such as managers and executives, project managers, and organizational members in a variety of roles.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Think of a job that you have held. It may be your current job, or it may be a job that you had in the past. Now take a few moments and write down several reasons why you found that job or work environment to be a positive or rewarding experience, or several reasons why you found it to be a negative or unrewarding experience. Share your ideas with a classmate. Did you note any similarities or differences? What OD interventions discussed in [Chapter 1](#) do you think might have been helpful in this organization?
2. Without looking back at the definitions in this chapter, how would you describe organization development to a friend, colleague, or potential client? Now compare your description to the definitions in the chapter. How is your definition different?
3. Have you ever participated in an organization development project or intervention? What was your experience?

## For Further Reading

Beckhard, R. (1969). *Organization development: Strategies and models*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

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Marshak, R. J. (2006). Organization development as a profession and a field. In B. B. Jones & R. Brazzel (Eds.), *The NTL handbook of organization development and change: Principles, practices, and perspectives* (pp. 13–27). San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer.

## Chapter 2 History of Organization Development

If you have just heard the term *organization development* (OD) used recently, you may be surprised to learn that the practice of OD is now into its seventh decade (even though the term itself first began to be used in the 1960s; see Sashkin & Burke, 1987). Like the business and organizational environments where it is practiced, OD has grown and changed significantly during this time. This chapter highlights different strands of research and practice to illustrate how each of these traditions of OD can be seen, explicitly and implicitly, in how it is practiced today. Eight major traditions of OD research and practice are described here, though these blend together and intersect one another, and the themes in these eight traditions can be seen throughout later chapters. These trends follow one another more or less historically, though there is significant overlap and influence among each of them.

By becoming aware of the history of OD, you will be more aware of how it has been defined throughout its life, as well as the changes that the field has undergone from its historical roots. In addition, you will better understand how today's practice of OD has undergone many years of research and practice to reach its current state.

The eight strands of OD research and practice discussed in this chapter are as follows:

1. Laboratory training and T-groups
2. Action research, survey feedback, and sociotechnical systems
3. Management practices
4. Quality and employee involvement
5. Organizational culture
6. Change management, strategic change, and reengineering
7. Organizational learning
8. Organizational effectiveness and employee engagement



## Laboratory Training and T-Groups

By most accounts, what has come to be known as organization development can be traced back to a training laboratory effort that began in 1946–1947 in Bethel, Maine, at what was then known as the National Training Laboratory (NTL) in Group Development. The laboratory's founders, Kenneth Benne, Leland Bradford, and Ronald Lippitt, were inspired to develop NTL by the dedicated work of a fourth scholar and their predecessor, Kurt Lewin. A German immigrant who had arrived in the United States in the early 1930s to escape the sociopolitical environment of his home country, Lewin was a social psychologist on the faculty at the University of Iowa. His interest was in studying patterns of group behavior, social problems, and the influence of leadership on a group. At its core, Lewin's work was an effort to understand and create personal and social change, with the objective of building and growing democracy in society (see Benne, 1964; L. P. Bradford, 1974; Hirsch, 1987; Kleiner, 1996).

In the 1940s, with his graduate student, Ron Lippitt, Lewin studied boys' clubs, specifically boys' reactions to different styles adopted by group leaders. Among the research findings, they noted that group leadership significantly influenced the boys' patterns of behavior observed in their groups, and when the group leader's style changed, so did the behavior patterns in the groups after a short adjustment period (Kleiner, 1996). Spurred on by the consequences of these results, in 1945 Lewin established a Research Center for Group Dynamics (a phrase Lewin invented; see L. P. Bradford, 1974) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

In the summer of 1946, a significant and unexpected finding occurred that dramatically changed the research and practitioner landscape at the time. It was at this time that the practices that became the T-group were discovered by Lewin and his students. The Connecticut Interracial Commission had asked Kurt Lewin to develop a workshop for community leaders in association with the Commission on Community Interrelations of the American Jewish Congress. The objective of the workshop was to assist community leaders in developing solutions to problems that they faced in their communities, specifically addressing problems in the implementation of the Fair Employment Practices Act. Participants included not only community leaders but also businesspeople, social workers, teachers, and other interested citizens. Instead of making attendees passively sit through lengthy lectures, speeches, and presentations by experts, which many of them had been expecting, organizers developed a workshop in which participatory group discussion, role playing, and teamwork would be the primary activities (Hirsch, 1987). Group leaders debated whether subgroups should be homogeneous (e.g., all teachers, all social workers) or mixed (Lippitt, 1949). These two considerations (group participation and composition) continue as key questions for the OD practitioner today.

For the researchers at the Research Center for Group Dynamics, it was an unusual opportunity to observe group processes and to understand how participants learned from their experiences in order to develop new skills that they could use when they returned to their communities. In addition, the workshop fit with the values that the researchers had espoused at the time. Kenneth Benne would later say,

I saw it was an effort to help volunteers from various parts of Connecticut to begin to see themselves as agents of change in their responsible roles as citizens. . . . It seemed to me that this was research designed to serve both the purposes of social action and the purposes of more refined and powerful methods of training people for action. (quoted in L. P. Bradford, 1974, p. 19)

As a workshop designed for both social change and social research, each subgroup had a researcher assigned to it for note-taking and observation purposes.

Each evening, following the discussion session, the researchers convened to discuss the day's events to document observations, code interaction, and interpret group behavior. A few of the participants in the day workshops learned of these researcher meetings and asked if they could sit in and observe. The researchers agreed and opened the sessions to other participants who were free to attend if they wished.<sup>1</sup> The researchers continued their process of reflecting on and interpreting the participants' actions during the day while the participants listened. At one point, one of the researchers stated that he had seen one woman, who had been a cautious and quiet participant earlier, become a more lively contributor that day as a result of being assigned to a leadership role during a role-playing activity. Rather than allowing this observation to pass without comment, the researchers invited the woman (who was present at that evening's discussion, listening to the observation being shared) to discuss the hypothesis and to share her own interpretation. The woman agreed that, yes, it had been more enjoyable to participate as a result of being assigned to the leadership role. She found herself surprised by how much she was energized by the discussion and how much she changed from initially being uncomfortable participating to being disappointed when the discussion came to an end (Lippitt, 1949). This exchange led to a promising new pattern in which researchers reported on their observations and the participants listened, reflected, and shared their own interpretations of their own behavior.

Attendance at the evening sessions soared in subsequent days, with almost all participants attending, and this led to the researchers' conclusion:

Group members, if they were confronted more or less objectively with data concerning their own behavior and its effects, and if they came to participate nondefensively in thinking about these data, might achieve highly meaningful learnings about themselves, about the responses of others to them, and about group behavior and group development in general. (Benne, 1964, p. 83)

Lewin seemed to know instinctively that this was a potentially powerful finding, remarking that "we may be getting hold of a principle here that may have rather wide application in our work with groups" (quoted in Lippitt, 1949, p. 116). The training group (or T-group) was born.

The following year, 1947, the first T-group session took place at the National Training Laboratory in Bethel, Maine. T-group sessions were designed to last 3 weeks and comprised approximately 10 to 15 participants and one or two trainers. The trainers were not leaders of the group, but facilitators and observers of the group's processes. They posed questions and suggested activities, but remained listeners who encouraged

participation and truthfulness rather than directing group activity (Hirsch, 1987). The content and topic of the group's work was developed out of its own chosen goals and objectives; no specific problem-solving tasks were mandated in the T-group's unstructured format. In open and honest sessions in which authenticity and forthright communication were prized, group members spent time analyzing their own and others' contributions, as well as the group's processes. Regardless of whatever process the groups followed, the common objective of each T-group was to create interpersonal change by allowing individuals to learn about their own and others' behavior, so that this education could be translated into more effective behavior when the participants returned home. As the word spread about the effectiveness of the T-group laboratory method, managers and leaders began to attend to learn how to increase their effectiveness in their own organizations. Attendance was aided by a *BusinessWeek* article in 1955 that promoted "unlock[ing] more of the potential" of employees and teams ("What Makes a Small Group Tick," 1955, p. 40). By the mid-1960s, more than 20,000 businesspeople had attended the workshop (which had been reduced to a 2-week session), in what may be considered one of the earliest fads in the field of management (Kleiner, 1996).

The research that Lewin began more than 70 years ago had a significant influence on OD and leadership and management research. His research on leadership styles (such as autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire) profoundly shaped academic and practitioner thinking about groups and their leaders. His influence on his students Benne, Bradford, and Lippitt in creating the National Training Laboratory has left a legacy that lives on today as NTL continues to offer sessions in interpersonal relationships, group dynamics, and leadership development. The fields of small-group research and leadership development owe a great deal to Lewin's pioneering work in these areas. Though the T-group no longer represents mainstream OD practice, we see the roots of this method today in organization development in team-building interventions (a topic addressed in detail in [Chapter 11](#)). Lewin's research also influenced another tradition in the history of organization development—action research and survey feedback.

## Action Research, Survey Feedback, and Sociotechnical Systems

Recall that Kurt Lewin had founded the Research Center for Group Dynamics in 1945 at MIT to develop research findings and translate them into practical, actionable knowledge that could be used by practitioners to improve groups and solve their problems. Lewin called this model *action research* to capture the idea that the research projects at their core always had both pragmatic and theoretical components, and that rigorous scientific methods could be used to gather data about groups and to intervene in their processes (Cunningham, 1993). Two important developments during this time were a survey feedback process and the field of sociotechnical systems.

## Survey Feedback

While Lewin and his colleagues were developing the T-group methodology, an effort was taking place at the University of Michigan, where a Survey Research Center was founded in 1946 under the direction of Rensis Likert. In his PhD dissertation at Columbia in 1932, Likert had developed a 5-point scale for measuring attitudes (a scale known today as the Likert scale). One of the first “clients” brought to Michigan was that of the Office of Naval Research, which was “focused on the underlying principles of organizing and managing human activity and on researching techniques to increase productivity and job satisfaction” (Frantilla, 1998, p. 21). The contract with the Office of Naval Research provided needed and important funding for Likert’s work on management practices in particular, culminating in a 1961 book, *New Patterns of Management*, which reported the results of his funded research. (These findings are discussed in the next section.)

The Survey Research Center’s goal was to create a hub for social science research, specifically with survey research expertise. Sensing an opportunity to improve their organizations, derive economic success, and develop a competitive advantage, some organizations proposed survey research projects to the center but were denied because the center aimed to focus on larger projects of significant importance beyond a single organization and to share the results publicly. These two criteria (addressing questions of larger significance and making the results known to other researchers and practitioners) formed the core of the action research process. One such project that met these criteria was a survey feedback project at Detroit Edison.

Members of the Survey Research Center conducted a 2-year study at Detroit Edison from 1948 to 1950. The survey of 8,000 employees and managers was administered to understand perceptions, opinions, and attitudes about a variety of aspects of the company, such as career progression and opportunities for advancement, opinions about managers and colleagues, and the work content and work environment itself. The survey also asked supervisors specifically about their opinions about managing at the company, and invited senior leaders and executives to offer additional perceptions from the perspective of top management. The researchers sought to understand not only how employees at Detroit Edison felt about the organization but also how the results of this project could be used to understand, instigate, and lead change in other organizations. There were four objectives of the research project:

1. To develop through first-hand experience an understanding of the problems of producing change
2. To improve relationships
3. To identify factors that affected the extent of the change
4. To develop working hypotheses for later, more directed research. (Mann, 1957, p. 158)

Following the initial data collection, feedback was given to leaders and organizational members about the survey results. Mann (1957) described the process of sharing this feedback as an “interlocking chain of conferences” (p. 158) in which initially the results were shared with the top management, assisted by a member of the research team. At this meeting, participants discussed the results, possible actions, and how the results would be shared with the next level of the organization. Next, each of those participants led a feedback discussion with his or her team about the research results, also conducting action planning and discussing how

the results would be shared with the next level. This pattern continued throughout the organization. At each level, the data relevant to that specific group were discussed. Mann noted that the leaders in each case had the responsibility of presenting the data, prioritizing tasks, taking action, and reporting to their supervisors when they had reached an impasse and needed additional assistance to produce change. The researchers observed that this series of feedback meetings had a very positive influence on initiating and leading change in the organization, but they had been unable to substantiate this observation with data.

In 1950 that changed with a second study conducted in eight accounting departments at Detroit Edison that had participated in the first survey. For this stage of the research, managers reviewed the two sets of survey results with employees (those from the first 1948 survey and those from this second 1950 survey) and again conducted action planning. One difference from the first round, however, was that a natural field experiment was set up. In four of the eight departments, after the initial feedback meeting, no action was taken based on the survey results (two intentionally as “control” departments; two due to personnel changes that made it impossible to continue to include them in the experiment). In the four departments that did take action, managers developed action planning programs that differed significantly from one another. Some programs took as long as 33 weeks, while others took 13; some departments met as frequently as 65 times, while others met as few as 9. Some department action programs involved all employees, while others were limited to the management team. Almost 2 years after the programs were initiated, a third survey was conducted in 1952 to assess the impact of the programs that the managers had developed. Thus, the experiment allowed the researchers to compare the 1950 and 1952 data for groups that had taken significant action and those that had taken no action.

The researchers found that among the groups that had taken action based on the survey results, employees reported a positive change in perceptions about their jobs (such as how important it was and how interested they were in the job), their supervisors (such as the manager’s ability to supervise and give praise), and the company work environment (such as opportunities for promotion or the group’s productivity) compared to the groups that had taken no action. Moreover, Mann (1957) reported,

Employees in the experimental departments saw changes in (1) how well the supervisors in their department got along together; (2) how often their supervisors held meetings; (3) how effective these meetings were; (4) how much their supervisor understood the way employees looked at and felt about things. (p. 161)

Mann added that the change was even stronger in groups that involved all levels and employees in the action planning process. The researchers then could conclude that the conference feedback model they had developed was an effective one, in which data were collected and fed back to organizational members who took action to initiate changes based on the data and discussion of it.

Today, action research, following a model similar to what was done at Detroit Edison, is the foundation and underlying philosophy of the majority of OD work, particularly survey feedback methodologies. This model forms the basis of the OD process that we will discuss in greater detail in [Chapter 5](#). Employee surveys are

now a common strategy in almost all large organizations, and action research feedback programs have become one of the most prevalent OD interventions (Church, Burke, & Van Eynde, 1994). We will discuss the use of survey methodologies specifically as a data gathering strategy again in [Chapter 7](#).

## Sociotechnical Systems

Sociotechnical systems (STS) was developed in the 1950s, driven by the action research philosophy described earlier, at about the same time as the Detroit Edison survey research project was taking place. The concept of sociotechnical systems is generally traced to a study of work groups in a British coal mine reported by Trist and Bamforth (1951), and was further pioneered at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London by Fred Emery (1959). The Trist and Bamforth study outlined social and psychological changes in work groups that occurred during a transition to more mechanized (versus manual) methods of extracting coal. They write that the study of coal workers shows that there is both a technological system (the mechanics) and a social system (relationships in work groups) in organizations that exert forces on an individual worker, and that the health of the system must take into account these two factors. The technological system consists of not just information technology as we might think of it today, but the skills, knowledge, procedures, and tools that employees use to do their jobs. The social system consists of the relationships between coworkers and supervisors, communication and information flow, values and attitudes, and motivation. In STS, OD interventions examine more than the social system, but in addition “arrangements of people and technology are examined to find ways to redesign each system for the benefit of the other in the context of the organizational mission and needs for survival” (Pasmore, Francis, Haldeman, & Shani, 1982, p. 1182). Cherns (1976), in describing and summarizing common sociotechnical design principles, acknowledged that those involved in work design often focused heavily on only one of the two systems, writing “that what they are designing is a sociotechnical system built around much knowledge and thought on the technical and little on the social side of the system” (p. 784).

Importantly, the technological system and social system interact with one another. An important principle of STS is that of joint optimization, which explains that “an organization will function optimally only if the social and technological systems of the organization are designed to fit the demands of each other and the environment” (Pasmore et al., 1982, p. 1182). One method by which joint optimization can be achieved is through an autonomous or semiautonomous work group, where members have some degree of ownership, control, and responsibility for the tasks that need to be performed. To jointly optimize both the social and technical systems of the organization requires an understanding of

1. the social processes that occur in organizations and the variety of theories and methods that exist to make more efficient use of human resources;
2. the technological processes used by the organization and the constraints that it places on the design and operations of the social system;
3. the theory of open systems, because no two organizations are exactly alike or are faced with the same environmental demands; and
4. the mechanics of change, both in the execution of the initial sociotechnical system design and in provision for the continual adaptation of the organization to new environmental demands. (Pasmore & Sherwood, 1978, p. 3)

Once a thorough diagnostic stage is completed to understand the social and technical system, the practitioner



might propose interventions that could include “restructuring of work methods, rearrangements of technology, or the redesign of organizational social structures” (Pasmore & Sherwood, 1978, p. 3). As we will learn about more in the next section, findings of studies conducted at the time provided empirical evidence that involvement and participation in both the social and technical systems contributed to employee motivation and productivity.

Sociotechnical systems theory and practices are followed today by OD practitioners. Several global versions or variants have been developed as North American STS, Scandinavian STS, Australian STS, and Dutch STS, all with foundationally similar yet distinct approaches and philosophies (van Eijnatten, Shani, & Leary, 2008). Despite the fact that early studies of STS may have concentrated on manufacturing or physical production environments, there is increasing recognition that STS concepts have an important role to play today in our understanding of knowledge work, or how information technology and automation combine with social collaboration practices to affect our work environments.

## Management Practices

Based in part on findings from survey feedback and sociotechnical systems projects, several research programs in the 1960s prompted researchers and practitioners to adopt different ways of thinking about management practices. The aim of these research programs was to offer alternative ways of managing in contrast to the dominant methods of the time. Four notable research programs include (1) MacGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, (2) Likert's four systems of management, (3) Blake and Mouton's managerial grid, and (4) Herzberg's studies of worker motivation.

Douglas MacGregor, a scholar at MIT and a colleague of Lewin's during his time there, significantly affected thinking about management practices in 1960 with the publication of his book *The Human Side of Enterprise*. In it, he suggested that "the theoretical assumptions management holds about controlling its human resources determine the whole character of the enterprise" (p. vii). He believed that managers held implicit and explicit assumptions (or "espoused theories") about people, their behavior, and the character of work, and he noted that it was quite easy to hear how those theories influenced managers. In fact, he gave each of his readers an assignment:

Next time you attend a management staff meeting at which a policy problem is under discussion or some action is being considered, try a variant on the pastime of doodling. Jot down the assumptions (beliefs, opinions, convictions, generalizations) about human behavior made during the discussion by the participants. Some of these will be explicitly stated ("A manager must himself be technically competent in a given field in order to manage professionals within it"). Most will be implicit, but fairly easily inferred ("We should require the office force to punch time clocks as they do in the factory"). It will not make too much difference whether the problem under discussion is a human problem, a financial or a technical one. Tune your ear to listen for assumptions about human behavior, whether they relate to an individual, a particular group, or people in general. The length and variety of your list will surprise you. (MacGregor, 1960, pp. 6–7)

MacGregor argued that managers often were not conscious of the theories that influenced them (remarking that they would likely disavow their theories if confronted with them), and he noted that in many cases these theories were contradictory. Not only do all actions and behaviors of managers reflect these theories, MacGregor believed, but the then-current literature in management and organizational studies also echoed these assumptions. He categorized the elements of the most commonly espoused assumptions about people and work and labeled them Theory X and Theory Y.

Theory X can be summarized as follows:

1. The average human being has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if [possible].
2. Because of this human characteristic of dislike of work, most people must be coerced, controlled, directed, threatened with punishment to get them to put forth adequate effort toward the achievement

of organizational objectives.

3. The average human being prefers to be directed, wishes to avoid responsibility, has relatively little ambition, wants security above all. (MacGregor, 1960, pp. 33–34)

In contrast to the assumptions about personal motivation inherent in Theory X, Theory Y articulates what many see as a more optimistic view of people and work:

1. The expenditure of physical and mental effort in work is as natural as play or rest.
2. External control and the threat of punishment are not the only means for bringing about effort toward organizational objectives. [People] will exercise self-direction and self-control in the service of objectives to which [they are] committed.
3. Commitment to objectives is a function of the rewards associated with their achievement.
4. The average human being learns, under proper conditions, not only to accept but to seek responsibility.
5. The capacity to exercise a relatively high degree of imagination, ingenuity, and creativity in the solution of organizational problems is widely, not narrowly, distributed in the population.
6. Under the conditions of modern industrial life, the intellectual potentialities of the average human being are only partially utilized. (MacGregor, 1960, pp. 47–48)

MacGregor wrote that adopting the beliefs of Theory Y was necessary to bring about innovative advances in products, technologies, and solutions to existing problems, and that managers would need to shed some of their existing assumptions about controlling people in favor of a more expansive and humanistic orientation to human behavior in organizations. His work went on to recommend several ways to put Theory Y assumptions into practice, including documenting job descriptions, restructuring the performance appraisal process, and more effectively managing salary increases and promotions.

At about the same time as MacGregor was arguing for a new set of assumptions about management, Likert (1961, 1967) studied four alternative ways of managing, the foundations of which correlate strongly with MacGregor's work. He agreed with MacGregor's assessment of the current state of management, writing that "most organizations today base their standard operating procedures and practices on classical organizational theories. These theories rely on key assumptions made by well-known practitioners of management and reflect the general principles they expound" (Likert, 1967, p. 1). Likert conducted a study in which he asked managers to think of the most productive and least productive divisions in their organizations and to place them on a continuum reflecting their management practices, which he labeled as Systems 1 through 4:

*System 1: Exploitative authoritative.* Managers use fear, threats, and intimidation to coerce employees to act. Information flow is downward and comprises orders being issued to subordinates. Upward communication is distorted due to fear of punishment. Decisions are made at the top of the organization. No teamwork is present.

*System 2: Benevolent authoritative.* Managers occasionally use rewards but also punishment. Information flow is mostly downward. Most decisions are made at highest levels, but some decision making within a narrow set of guidelines is made at lower levels. Some teamwork is present.

*System 3: Consultative.* Managers use rewards and occasional punishment. Information flow is both

downward and upward. Many decisions are made at the top but are left open for decision making at lower levels. Teamwork is frequently present. Goals are set after discussion of problems and potential solutions.

*System 4: Participative group.* Managers involve groups in setting and measuring goals. Information flow is downward, upward, and horizontal. Decision making is done throughout the organization and is characterized by involvement and participation. Teamwork is substantial. Members take on significant ownership to set rigorous goals and objectives.

Likert (1961, 1967) found that managers reported that the most productive departments were run using a participative group management style, and that the least productive departments were led by managers who modeled an exploitative authoritative style. Despite this finding, Likert reported that most managers adopted the latter, not the former, style. To stress the point more forcefully, Likert (1967) followed up this perception data with quantitative data that showed a rise in productivity after a manager began to increasingly adopt the System 4 behaviors of participative management.

A third research program attempting to demonstrate a new set of management values and practices was that of Blake and Mouton. In *The Managerial Grid*, Blake and Mouton (1964) noticed that management practices could be plotted on a chart where the manager demonstrated a degree of “concern for production” and a “concern for people.” Each of these could be mapped on a grid, with a score from 1 (*low*) to 9 (*high*). A high concern for production but a low concern for people was referred to as a “9,1 style.” A manager adopting this style would demonstrate behaviors such as watching and monitoring employees, correcting mistakes, articulating policies and procedures, specifying deadlines, and devoting little time to motivation or employee development. Blake and Mouton advocate a 9,9 approach to management in which managers demonstrate both a high concern for production and a high concern for people, noting that one value of this style is that there is no inherent conflict between allowing the organization to reach its goals and demonstrating a concern for people at the same time. The 9,9 style, they argue, creates a healthier environment, because “people can work together better in the solutions of problems and reach production goals as a team or as individuals when there is trust and mutual support than when distrust, disrespect, and tensions surround their interactions” (Blake & Mouton, 1964, pp. 158–159). Blake and Mouton’s grid OD program, detailed in subsequent volumes (Blake & Mouton, 1968, 1978), defined a five-phase intervention program in which managers are trained on the grid concept and complete team-building activities, work on intergroup coordination, and build and implement the ideal organization.

As a fourth example of research in management practices, in a research program beginning in the late 1950s, Frederick Herzberg began to explore the attitudes that people had about their jobs in order to better understand what motivates people at work. A number of studies had sought to answer the question “What do workers want from their jobs?” throughout the previous decades, with contradictory results. In interpreting the studies, Herzberg suspected that job satisfaction was not the opposite of job dissatisfaction. In other words, he believed that different factors might be at play when workers were satisfied with their jobs than when they reported being dissatisfied with their jobs.

Through a series of in-depth interviews, Herzberg and a team of researchers set out to investigate. They asked people to reflect on important incidents that had occurred to them in their jobs—both positive and negative—and asked participants to explain what it was about that event that made them feel especially good or bad about the job.

The results showed that people are made *dissatisfied* by bad environment, the extrinsics of the job. But they are seldom made satisfied by good environment, what I called the *hygienes*. They are made satisfied by the intrinsics of what they *do*, what I call the *motivators*. (Herzberg, 1993, pp. xiii–xiv)

In the initial 1959 publication and through subsequent studies, Herzberg explained the key motivators that contributed to job enrichment, in what has been called his motivation-hygiene theory:

- Achievement and quality performance
- Recognition for achievement and feedback on performance
- Work itself and the client relationship
- Responsibility
- Advancement, growth, and learning

At the same time, Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) point out that hygiene factors will not necessarily contribute to job satisfaction, but can cause job dissatisfaction. “When feelings of unhappiness were reported, they were not associated with the job itself but with conditions that *surround* the doing of the job” (p. 113), such as

- Supervision
- Interpersonal relationships
- Physical working conditions
- Salary
- Company policies and administrative practices
- Benefits
- Job security

Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman explain that their research on motivation illustrates why contemporary managers had such a difficult time motivating employees. Then-popular management programs for supervisors and wage incentive programs addressed hygiene factors of supervision and monetary compensation, but did little to address the factors such as achievement and work itself that truly motivated employees.

The work of MacGregor, Likert, Blake and Mouton, and Herzberg is illustrative of an era of research in which scholars and practitioners began to rethink commonly held assumptions about management and human behavior. In many ways it is remarkable how MacGregor’s optimistic views of human nature and motivation in Theory Y, in contrast to what he saw as the dominant view of managerial control articulated in Theory X,

continue to be as relevant to conversations today as they were more than 40 years ago. At the time, OD had not yet made significant inroads into organizations. Managers strongly held negative assumptions about human behavior characteristic of MacGregor's Theory X or Likert's exploitative authoritative style, and while there was already evidence that alternative styles worked more effectively, executives continued to seek proof of OD's effectiveness (Mirvis, 1988). Consequently, these writers sought to persuade the practitioner community that there was a more optimistic and humanistic alternative to management. Some of the assumptions inherent in these three research programs have become dominant values in OD. The foundational values inherent in the humanistic orientation articulated in Likert's participative management style and Blake and Mouton's 9,9 style strongly influenced the field of OD. These values remain as hallmarks of OD practice today, and they are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

## Quality and Employee Involvement

A fourth historical tradition in the development of the field of OD evolved as organizations began to increasingly adopt some of the management styles described in the previous section, involving employees more in the management and operations of the organization, beginning particularly in manufacturing and industrial environments. This development appeared to be more strongly embraced in the late 1970s and 1980s, when industry firms realized a growing competitive threat to the U.S. manufacturing industry as a result of developments in Japan (G. S. Benson & Lawler, 2003). As firms realized that the quality of the product strongly impacted the profitability and competitiveness of the organization, they began to pay attention to management styles that would increase workers' ability and motivation to improve quality. As a result, they began to involve employees in noticing defects and taking action to prevent them or to correct them.

After World War II, Japan began to invest in increasing its manufacturing capabilities and quality programs (Cole, 1999). Two important authors who were instrumental in the development of quality practices in Japan (and subsequently the United States) were W. Edwards Deming and Joseph M. Juran.

Deming had been invited to Japan in 1950 for a series of 12 lectures on process control. Deming's quality control method (later called "total quality control" and then adapted to "total quality management," according to Sato, 2012) emphasized statistical methods by which processes could be measured. Thus, a manufacturing system could measure and control processes to result in a narrow range of acceptable defects in the end product. Deming's (1986) work *Out of the Crisis* brought many of his ideas to an American audience, famously condensed into his "14 points," which he described as "the basis for transformation of American industry" (p. 23). Among his 14 points were such recommendations as "minimize total cost," "institute training on the job," "drive out fear, so that everyone may work effectively for the company," "break down barriers between departments," and "put everybody in the company to work to accomplish the transformation. The transformation is everybody's job" (pp. 23–24).

Like Deming, Juran also lectured on quality in Japan in the 1950s, where he was invited after the publication of his *Quality Control Handbook* (1951). Juran argued that quality had two main characteristics: fitness for use and freedom from defects. Juran popularized the Pareto Principle, the idea that explains 80 percent of quality defects by 20 percent of the causes. In addition, Juran developed a perspective on quality termed the *Juran Trilogy*, where quality is the result of quality planning, quality control, and quality improvement (Godfrey & Kenett, 2007).

Partly inspired by the work of Deming and Juran, Japanese manufacturing firms created the *quality circle* in the 1950s and 1960s as a method to involve employees in improving quality in their organizations. Thompson (1982) explains:

A quality circle is a small group of employees and their supervisor from the same work area, who voluntarily meet on a regular basis to study quality control and productivity improvement techniques, to apply these techniques to identify and solve work-related problems, to present their

solutions to management for approval, and to monitor the implementation of these solutions to ensure that they work. (p. 3)

The assumption is that typically employees understand the work in their immediate area best and have the most knowledge about how it can be improved. Quality circles involve employees in improving the work environment and the quality of the output by making suggestions to upper management for areas of improvement. Upper management then is free to accept or decline the suggestions. Employees participate of their own accord but are usually given additional compensation or incentives when they do contribute. Research on the effectiveness of quality circles shows mixed results in terms of productivity and improved output (Cotton, 1993), but it is clear that the use of quality circles in American companies reflected an interest in increasing quality, motivation, and participation through employee involvement (Manchus, 1983).

Also taking a cue from Japan's success, in 1981, after studying and observing Japanese management styles that appeared to result in higher productivity and greater quality, William Ouchi proposed Theory Z (a concept modeled after MacGregor's Theories X and Y) in which he suggested that "involved workers are the key to increased productivity" (Ouchi, 1981, p. 4). Ouchi's book described to Americans how the Japanese style of management worked, with long-term or even lifetime employment for workers, performance reviews and promotions or career movement after only a very lengthy observation period, and shared decision making and responsibility. These values were directly contrary to those held by American managers and made the American values more explicit by comparison. Thus, Ouchi's argument is a follow-up to the management practices arguments made in earlier decades but also took advantage of American business's interest in Japanese management styles and improved competitiveness through employee involvement practices.

Quality circles are part of a family of approaches known as *employee involvement* practices. Employee involvement generally describes any attempt to include workers in order to develop greater commitment, productivity, and quality by granting them decision-making authority, giving them information about the organization (such as goals and finances), and providing incentives (Cotton, 1993).

The quality tradition continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, manifested in quality programs such as ISO 9000; Total Quality Management; and in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Six Sigma. Quality programs such as these, while not always characterized as OD programs, are important to the OD practitioner as they almost always involve some degree of personal and organizational cultural change and often involve an OD practitioner or change agent to help facilitate this change. Today we see evidence of this trend in OD through the pervasive use of self-managed work teams that are given control and ownership of their work as well as how the team functions and is managed. We will discuss some of these programs in [Chapters 11](#) and [13](#).

Up to this point in its history, OD focused on solving internal problems in the organization, centered on change first and foremost at the individual level. Seo, Putnam, and Bartunek (2004) contrast this phase, which they call *first-generation OD*, with *second-generation OD*, which they argue consisted of approaches that gave "explicit attention to the organizational environment and the organization's alignment with it" (p. 85). Beginning in the 1980s, with an increasingly global and more frequently and rapidly changing environment,



along with advances in technology, organizations were forced to more quickly adapt to new market conditions. As a result, OD interventions became more highly focused on systemwide concerns rather than on those of individuals. Seo et al. write that first-generation OD approaches assumed that changing the individual (through T-groups, survey feedback mechanisms, changing a manager's assumptions or behaviors, or increasing employee involvement in teams) would gradually mushroom into change at a system level. They write that "in the turbulent environments of the 1980s and 1990s, however, individual and group development became less important to organizational effectiveness unless the organization as a whole continued to be attuned to its rapidly changing environment" (p. 86). Burnes and Cooke (2012) have noted that this period represented a shift from an academic focus on OD to a "practitioner OD" (p. 1405).

Even in the 1970s, some writers began to criticize the "soft" T-group model as the foundation for OD work, and OD became more focused on applications in business settings to further business objectives (Mirvis, 1988). With the challenges prompted by a new environment in the 1980s, second-generation OD approaches began to target changes at the level of the entire system. Increasingly, OD practitioners began to look externally at the organization's connection to its environment and to conduct transformative change at the structural and system level. OD interventions became more oriented to strategic change with specific goals for the intervention, in contrast to earlier, open-ended interventions most evident in the T-groups of the 1940s and 1950s. This trend toward using OD efforts to result in strategic change and increased productivity became most evident in the popularization in the early 1980s in a tradition of work in organizational or corporate culture.

## Organizational Culture

A 1980 *BusinessWeek* article brought the concept of corporate culture into the popular vocabulary of managers and executives searching for a competitive advantage. It reviewed such well-known companies as AT&T, IBM, and PepsiCo, highlighting the corporate values that drove their success and promoting the idea that a company's strategy and culture must be in alignment for the organization to succeed, directly linking corporate results with organizational culture. The article concluded that if strategy and culture were not in alignment, either the strategy or the corporate culture must change ("Corporate Culture," 1980).

The concept of a "culture" predominantly originates from the field of anthropology and conjures images of social scientists observing distant countries and social groups. Similarly, OD practitioners and those who study corporate or organizational cultures have been called "organizational anthropologists" (Smircich, 1985, p. 65), whose task it is to decipher not only "how things are done around here" (a common definition of culture) but also the hidden meanings and assumptions that characterize how organizational members interpret and make sense of what is happening, or "how people think around here."

Culture has been defined in various ways, but most agree that a shorthand definition of culture is "the shared attitudes, values, beliefs, and customs of members of a social unit or organization" (Walter, 1985, p. 301).

Schein (2004) provides a more detailed definition:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valued and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17)

Culture consists of symbols and the shared rules and norms that comprise a collective mind-set within the organization. For example, an announcement that a senior vice president is leaving the company ostensibly to "pursue other opportunities" could be interpreted by organizational members as a sign that the company's future is questionable or that the division led by the senior vice president is not meeting its goals, or it could instill confidence that senior leaders are held accountable, bolstering morale in the division. What may appear to be a bizarre interpretation from an outsider's point of view often makes perfect sense to those well versed in the cultural norms and interpretive patterns that have been adopted by someone inside the organization. These cultural patterns become easier to identify and read the longer the time spent in the organization. Cultures perpetuate themselves through socialization, particularly when new members to the culture are reprimanded for violating cultural norms or rewarded for assimilation (Schein, 2004).

Two popular books from 1982 called attention to the concept of culture and its importance to managers and executives. Peters and Waterman's (1982) book *In Search of Excellence* documented the cultural values of the most successful business firms of the time, such as a bias for action and being close to the customer. They argued, as did Deal and Kennedy (1982) in *Corporate Cultures*, that organizations can improve productivity

and profits by changing the culture, accomplished by changing cultural values. Some organizational values, such as believing that the organization is impervious to competitive threats, jeopardize certain adaptive behaviors (such as environmental scanning and a drive toward transformative change). Values changes can be accomplished by reinforcing new patterns, telling new stories, using different language and communication patterns, and adopting a different decision-making style.

The commonsense culture perspective as a lens on organizational life began to dominate practitioner and academic literature as managers and consultants became interested in strategies to intervene in and change organizational culture. Managers began to search for the magical elements of the “right” culture that would be the key to success, while some writers debated whether intentional culture change was possible (Martin, 1985) or ethical (Deetz, 1985). Among academic audiences, the culture perspective, as it came to be known, spread quickly because it resonated with those researchers dissatisfied with quantitative and experimental methods and who were interested in alternative ways of understanding organizations (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001; Ott, 1989). Some critiqued the organizational culture concept, arguing that conceiving of an organization as a single, monolithic culture ignores organizational subcultures that have their own shared meanings, one possible explanation for within-organization conflicts.

Organizational cultures also exist within local or national cultures that have their own influences on the behaviors of organizational members. Consequently, “culture” as an explanation for behavior or as a target for change can be limiting. For example, is an engineering manager in Singapore who works late into the evening doing so because that is how things are done in Singapore, because that is how things are done at this particular company, because that is how engineers work, or for some other reason? Culture may be a useful concept as a lens on what is happening, but it is clear that it is not the only explanation.

Nevertheless, to the OD consultant, symbolic and cultural observations about an organization remain a powerful source of data (we will consider the role of culture in data gathering in [Chapter 7](#)). Honing one’s skill in observing and understanding organizational culture allows the OD consultant to better understand potential obstacles and areas of resistance to any change. It focuses the practitioner on underlying assumptions and implicit meanings that organizational members cannot always articulate explicitly. We will discuss the concept of culture change in organizations in more detail in [Chapters 12](#) and [13](#), especially as culture has become a relevant concept in mergers and acquisitions.

## Change Management, Strategic Change, and Reengineering

A sixth strand of organization development practice grew rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s. It went by several labels, such as *strategic change* and *change management*, and manifested in part in the practice of transformational change, or reengineering. OD practitioners began to connect their work to larger, organizationwide goals, with a firm foundation in theories and research in organizational change. Change has always been a central theme in OD, but it was in the 1980s that academic research and practice increasingly began to adopt the language of strategic change. It was at this time that practitioners began to realize that change was at the center of organizations. It was more frequently a part of conversations among executives and employees, becoming a hallmark of how organizations function and the rationale for many decisions. Writers and practitioners alike noticed that the best organizational strategy would make little difference unless it was implemented effectively. The ability to effectively adopt change became the difference between successful and mediocre organizations.

The use of OD theories and concepts made sense to those involved in strategic change efforts. Not only do organizations need to focus attention on such external issues as market conditions, customer needs, competitive positioning, and financial concerns, they also must manage change internally. Traditionally, strategic planning has a history in economics and finance, and it is focused on the organization and its environment. OD has been more focused on people with a history in the social sciences. In the 1990s and 2000s, practitioners increasingly saw that the two fields have much to offer one another. When a corporation must shift its strategy to better position itself competitively, the change required is both external and internal, as employees must be informed, involved, and motivated to help make this shift (Worley, Hitchin, & Ross, 1996). Even writers who direct their work to business executives and who focus on the economics of strategy also often include sections on communication, education, goals, objectives, and rewards, admitting that even the best strategy is of little use unless executed properly, and that the alignment of employees and strategy is critical (e.g., R. S. Kaplan & Norton, 2001). Many writers see that the field of OD offers the field of strategic planning the ability to address the human and personal aspects of organizational change, while a focus on strategy requires OD practitioners to better understand the business, internally and externally, and the context for change.

The change management movement encouraged practitioners to address the organization's vision, mission, goals, and strategy. Practitioners connected this vision and goals to the organization's social, political, technological, and cultural elements to ensure consistency, remove barriers, and involve multiple levels of the organization. This has had a significant influence on how OD is done today, as it has required that OD practitioners understand the environment and its challenges to the organization (whether it be a business, educational system, nonprofit organization, or government entity). Models and theories of organizational change are such a foundation of organization development work and such an important background for the OD practitioner that we devote our entire attention to them in [Chapter 4](#), and we discuss the reengineering movement more specifically in [Chapter 13](#).



## Organizational Learning

Personal learning and development has been a theme of organization development work since the first T-groups were run in the 1940s, and researchers had been writing about organizational learning since that time. Arguably the major contributor to the field of organizational learning has been Chris Argyris. Argyris (2008) writes that organization learning is defined as “the detection and correction of error” (p. 53), which many people erroneously define as problem solving. To truly be learning, Argyris (1991) argues,

managers and employees must also look inward. They need to reflect critically on their own behavior, identify the ways they often inadvertently contribute to the organization’s problems, and then change how they act. In particular, they must learn how the very way they go about defining and solving problems can be a source of problems in its own right. (p. 100)

To help understand the process of organizational learning, Argyris introduces the concepts of single-loop learning (correcting mistakes as they occur) and double-loop learning (in which we question or modify policies, objectives, or practices to prevent errors the next time; Argyris & Schön, 1978). Still a third kind of learning, deutero-learning, occurs when organizational members understand how and when they learn, and develop an environment in which learning can occur (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Argyris notes that many professionals are skilled and rewarded for single-loop learning but that these same skills often inhibit them from double-loop learning. When solutions to problems fail, our defensive mechanisms prevent us from stopping to question, analyze, and therefore learn.

To illustrate why organizations often fail to learn and explain the defensive mechanisms that inhibit learning, he defines two implicit models of managerial thinking, called Model I and Model II (Argyris & Schön, 1996). Managers who adopt Model I thinking set their objectives and work at them, strive to win and curtail losses, reduce the expression of feelings (particularly negative ones that would be embarrassing to oneself), and take an objective, rational stance. Such thinking, Argyris and Schön point out, encourages the manager to behave as an individual in a self-protective manner, resulting in defensiveness and blame of others in a competitive, political environment. When this behavior is widespread, managers (and the organization as a whole) fail to explore issues at any deeper level, insulating the manager from information that contradicts beliefs already held and promoting a failure to learn from mistakes. By contrast, managers adopting Model II thinking promote “valid information, free and informed choice, and internal commitment” (p. 117). That is, they take a stance of inquiry from a cooperative standpoint rather than a stance of advocacy from a competitive one. This results in a less defensive position and creates a spirit of joint problem solving where learning can take place.

In the 1990s, organizational learning became popularized with practitioner audiences with the publication of Peter Senge’s (1990) book *The Fifth Discipline*. The popularity of the concept was due, in part, to some of the same reasons why strategic change became a concept of interest. Organizations were changing rapidly, with new markets, rising customer expectations, and shorter product life cycles, and the most successful organizations were also those that were able to learn from previous mistakes and to adapt to new routines.

Some have argued that the concept of organizational learning is also highly connected to and grew quickly as a result of interest in organizational culture, as cultural understanding (how we work here and what we know about how this organization functions) is really a manifestation of what the organization has learned about itself (Normann, 1985; Weick & Ashford, 2001). In addition, culture is not just composed of the beliefs that people have about the organization, but the ways that they behave. These behaviors are learned, relearned, and changed over time. Thus, organizational learning is also connected to the cultural stories that help organizational members interpret their history and apply it to present problems (Levitt & March, 1988).

Reflecting the trend in thinking about larger, systemwide concerns in organizations, Senge (1990) wrote that many organizations have a “learning disability” in that they fail to think systemically about problems. He argued that learning could occur more quickly if individuals in organizations were to build capacity in the following five areas:

- *Systems thinking.* The ability to see the organization as a system, to see how parts interrelate and affect one another, and to see how structures and systems influence behavior
- *Personal mastery.* The choice to engage in and commit to a personal vision, goals, and development
- *Mental models.* Learning to recognize the unarticulated ideas and ideologies that comprise our worldviews and color our interpretations
- *Building shared vision.* The leadership ability and responsibility to rally organizational members around a single vision that motivates action
- *Team learning.* The ability to engage in a dialogue among team members so that the team can recognize patterns that hinder their productivity

Though some argue that many of the concepts in Senge’s work are not new, just restatements of historical OD concepts (Weick & Ashford, 2001), it is clear that this restatement garnered the attention of many managers and OD practitioners.

Researchers and writers quickly picked up on organizational learning as interest in the concept blossomed after publication of Senge’s book. An initial challenge was how to recognize when and how an organization actually learned. Outcome-based theories of learning were prevalent, as one could notice when an organization had chosen a different path from a previous one. But how could a manager or OD practitioner promote learning in a team or organization? An outcome-based definition of learning gave way to concerns about the process by which learning is encouraged and practiced (Dodgson, 1993).

As the concept of organizational learning became more well known and adopted among OD practitioners, several techniques were developed to promote organizational learning. One of the most commonly used has been a learning history (Roth & Kleiner, 1998), in which organizational members discuss and document problems, choices, solutions, and thinking in a narrative document. In addition, Argyris and Schön (1996) advocate an exercise in which managers write down a conversation in two columns: on the right side they write what was said, and on the left they write what they were thinking during the conversation. The result is a rich intervention in which managers can see the ways in which they might more effectively move to Model II thinking and behavior.

The concept of organizational learning gained a following in OD because its primary concern, growth and development of individuals and teams, resonated strongly with the founding rationale and values of the field. Organizational learning has now become both an evaluation mechanism of OD effectiveness and an intervention in itself. An international academic and practitioner community now comprises the Society for Organizational Learning, which evolved from a center founded in the early 1990s by Senge. Organizational learning plays a major part in both the values of OD and the practices that we will discuss in later chapters on values and intervention strategies.



## Organizational Effectiveness and Employee Engagement

It may be too soon to characterize organizational effectiveness (OE) and employee engagement as a trend in the development of the field of organization development. Nevertheless, many practitioners are directing their attention toward conceiving of OD as organizational effectiveness, though the academic literature does not appear to be making this same shift. In some practitioner circles, *organizational effectiveness* is supplanting *organization development* as a preferred term, perhaps because of the continued perception today that OD is a “soft” practice not connected to the organization’s business objectives. It is not entirely clear whether in this new term *organizational effectiveness* differs substantially from OD as practitioners define it, though the former expression stresses the results the organization obtains from an intervention, but at the expense of the emphasis on personal and organizational growth that comes from the term *development*. The term *organizational effectiveness* is not a new one, clearly, as you will recall its inclusion in Beckhard’s (1969) well-known definition of organization development. Indeed, academic researchers have been working to define the characteristics, precursors, and determinants of OE for many years (see Cameron & Whetten, 1981). Many early studies of OE concentrated on quantitative and objective measures on outcomes of what constitutes an effective organization. Thus, by adopting this term and referencing this research history, we may be seeing a shift in the practitioner community away from the qualitative (interpersonal, cultural, growth, and learning) aspects of OD toward being able to quantitatively prove the value of an OD intervention.

To contrast with this organizationwide view of effectiveness, *employee engagement* is a second term that is being widely adopted by managers and OD practitioners. The term “refers to the individual’s involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work” (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002, p. 269). Literature on an individual’s job satisfaction, productivity, and motivation is substantial. Some see engagement as a broader concept than these others, however, suggesting that “employees who know what is expected of them, who form strong relationships with co-workers and managers, or who in other ways experience meaning in their work, are engaged” (Luthans & Peterson, 2001, p. 378). The current interest in employee engagement may be reflective of a return to a concern with the health of the individual to complement the emphasis on organizational concerns and outcomes. Thus, the current reference to employee engagement may be a counter-response to the quantitative movement in organizational effectiveness, resurrecting what is lost by substituting the bottom-line business connotation of OE for OD. Today, the Gallup organization conducts a widely used employee engagement survey called the Q12.

As you can see, threads of OD’s history remain with us in contemporary practice. [Table 2.1](#) summarizes the eight strands of OD reviewed in this chapter and shows how OD’s history influences the field today.

Throughout the book we will see examples of these practices today and learn more about them in detail, and in [Chapter 16](#) we will examine future trends in organization development.

**Table 2.1** History of Organization Development

<i>Period</i>		<i>Theme</i>	<i>Influence Today</i>
1940s	First-Generation OD	Laboratory training and T-groups	Small-group research Leadership styles Team building
1950s		Action research, survey feedback, and sociotechnical systems	Employee surveys Organization development processes Sociotechnical systems theory and design
1960s		Management practices	Participative management
1970s		Quality and employee involvement	Quality programs such as Six Sigma, Total Quality Management, and self-managed or employee-directed teams
1980s	Second-Generation OD	Organizational culture	Culture work, specifically in mergers and acquisitions
1980s–1990s		Change management, strategic change, and reengineering	Currently practiced; systems theory, large-scale and whole-organization interventions
1990s		Organizational learning	Currently practiced; appreciative inquiry
2000s		Organizational effectiveness and employee engagement	Currently practiced

## Summary

Organization development has evolved, adapted, and changed dramatically in the decades since the first T-groups were initiated. Early practitioners and researchers concentrated on individual growth and development through T-groups; action research, survey feedback activities, and sociotechnical systems; and emphases on management practices and employee involvement, whereas later approaches beginning in about the 1980s emphasized larger, systemwide concerns such as culture, change management, and organizational learning. Throughout its history, with new experiences and research programs, academics and practitioners have built on previous practices in order to develop the content and process of OD work to continue to change individuals and organizations. We see elements today of each of these trends in the history of OD.

Consequently, OD is not a one-size-fits-all approach to organizational change, nor is it a methodical set of rigid practices and procedures, but it consists of multiple methods, perspectives, approaches, and values that influence how it is practiced. Depending on what a client is trying to achieve, the OD consultant may adapt and adopt a number of practices and approaches, traditional and well tested or cutting-edge and less well known, in order to develop an appropriate intervention strategy that makes sense for the client organization. Many, perhaps most, of these approaches have their roots in the traditions of OD that we have discussed in this chapter. As we cover the process and content of OD throughout this book, you will see how the field retains traces of its history in contemporary practice.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What are the differences between first-generation OD and second-generation OD? What are the major changes between these two generations of OD practice? What do you think have been the losses or gains in the second generation of OD practice?
2. Think about any past work experiences you have had and analyze your experiences with the theories described in this chapter, such as the management styles as described by Likert, Theory X and Theory Y, or Blake and Mouton's managerial grid. Can you understand a former manager's behavior through the lens of one of these theories?
3. Think about the motivators and hygiene factors discussed in Herzberg's theory. Do the factors that motivate you reflect what Herzberg found? Has motivation changed since Herzberg's research? If so, how? Has what motivates you changed over time?

## For Further Reading

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- Bradford, L. P. (1974). *National Training Laboratories: Its history, 1947–1970*. Bethel, ME: National Training Laboratory.
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- Burnes, B., & Cooke, B. (2012). The past, present and future of OD: Taking the long view. *Human Relations*, 65, 1395–1429.
- Kleiner, A. (1996). *The age of heretics: Heroes, outlaws, and the forerunners of corporate change*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Lewin, K. (1951). *Field theory in social science*. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.
- Likert, R. (1961). *New patterns of management*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- MacGregor, D. (1960). *The human side of enterprise*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Seo, M., Putnam, L. L., & Bartunek, J. M. (2004). Dualities and tensions of planned organizational change. In M. S. Poole & A. H. Van den Ven (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational change and innovation* (pp. 73–107). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

<sup>1</sup> The historical record differs as to how enthusiastic the researchers were about this development. Some have written that the participants were “encouraged” to sit in on the sessions by the researchers (French & Bell, 1999, p. 33), some remark that the request to sit in was simply “assented to” (Hirsch, 1987, p. 18), and others emphasize the “anxiety” (L. P. Bradford, 1974, p. 35) and “misgivings” (Lippitt, 1949, p. 114) that the researchers felt by the request.

## Chapter 3 Core Values and Ethics of Organization Development

As we discussed in the previous chapter, organization development (OD) consists of more than just the application of surveys and tools or facilitating meetings, though these are all general activities that can fall within the scope of an OD engagement. As each client application of OD principles and practices is somewhat unique, OD is not the rigid following of a systematic procedure. It involves the kinds of assessments, dialogues, and decisions that we cover in detail throughout this book. Consequently, developing OD skills is less about learning a standard toolkit and more about internalizing the factors that influence an OD practitioner's decisions. Those decisions are guided by a set of values and ethical beliefs about how organizations should be run, how people should be treated, and how organizational change should be managed. OD values and ethics help to direct choices about what client engagements to accept, what data gathering strategy to employ, how feedback to the client should be managed, what interventions to select, and how the intervention should be structured. In this chapter, we will define the core values held by OD practitioners and describe the ethical beliefs that influence their choices and decisions.

The values that have been adopted by OD practitioners have been formed and shaped by its history, so many of the pronouncements of OD values that you will see in this chapter will resonate with what you read in [Chapter 2](#). The work of MacGregor, Likert, and others resulted in a series of statements about the best ways to manage people in organizations, and over time these have been internalized and shaped into a series of explicit values for the field of OD.

## Defining Values

A great deal of psychological research and writing has defined and examined the concept of values and how values affect our thinking and behavior.<sup>1</sup> Rokeach (1973) defined a *value* as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence” (p. 5). Values express what a person believes should happen or ought to happen, and they are relatively stable and enduring from situation to situation, though they can also change and become more complex, particularly as a person gains more experience. Value statements are organized into a person’s value system, which is “a learned organization of rules for making choices and for resolving conflicts” (Rokeach, 1968, p. 161). As a system, values help us decide what action to take and how to assess both our actions and the actions of others.

## Why Are Values Important to the OD Practitioner?

Values are significant for organization development because they are the underlying beliefs that are enduring and broader than any single consulting engagement or intervention. Values have been a part of the field since its founding, and they have held such an important place in the practice of OD that the field has been somewhat derisively referred to as a “religious movement” (Harvey, 1974). Yet failing to take values into account leaves OD as a list of intervention techniques to be studied without understanding the reasons why those interventions were developed or when the practitioner should apply them. Management scholar Edgar Schein (1990a) wrote of his frustration in completing a questionnaire about OD intervention techniques that “I did not see OD as a set of techniques at all, but as a philosophy or attitude toward how one can best work with organizations” (p. 13). Margulies and Raia (1990) put the point more bluntly, noting that OD

*is value-based and more importantly its core values provide the guiding light for both the OD process and its technology. The very identity of the field is reflected in the existence and application of the values it advocates. Without them, OD represents nothing more than a set of techniques.* (p. 39)

Others agree, going so far as to predict that the future of OD rests on the applicability of its core values to practitioners and clients (Wooten & White, 1999).

Values are important to OD practitioners for the following reasons:

1. *They guide choices about how to proceed.* Returning to our values helps to guide us when we are uncertain how to proceed with a client or when we have multiple courses of action that are possible. When a client does not know which solution is best, for example, the OD value of participation and involvement may encourage the practitioner to recommend including organization members in the decision about which solution is most desirable. OD values can give direction and tend to specify guiding principles rather than exact behavior.
2. *They provide a larger vision that extends beyond any individual intervention.* For the OD practitioner, values provide a constancy of purpose that is greater than any single consulting engagement, providing a larger mission for one’s career. Many OD practitioners hold values of environmental and social responsibility and social justice, and they see results in those areas as enduring effects of their work. Developing better working conditions in more humanistic and democratic organizations is an overarching value that many practitioners hold, core beliefs that endure regardless of the situation.
3. *They distinguish OD from other methods of consulting and change.* OD and other types of management consulting share important similarities but also important differences. One of these differences relates to the values of OD work. Focusing interventions and the consulting process to ensure growth, development, and learning is a key value that does not show up as a purpose of most other management consulting activities. “It is the humanistic value structure and concern for people that *differentiates* organization development from many of its competing disciplines” (Church, Hurley, & Burke, 1992, p.



14).

4. *They can help to prompt dialogue and clarify positions.* Being explicit about our values and the choices they prompt can help OD practitioners and clients understand one another's behavior. The OD practitioner can explain why he or she believes in a certain course of action by articulating the values underlying this choice, and the manager or client can do the same. We can learn from one another's perspectives and discover underlying similarities and differences (as well as avoid repeating the same conflicts over and over). A client who decides not to implement a mentoring program may still believe in the value of individual growth and shared learning, but may believe that the time is not right for this particular program. The consultant can then work with the client to develop another program that meets the client's needs and also maintains the same objectives and underlying values.
5. *They can help us evaluate how we did.* Values can be a starting point for evaluation of an engagement (as we will discover in [Chapter 14](#)) or a point for personal reflection and self-evaluation as a consultant. Whether we acted in accordance with our values and helped to further those values is an important point of learning and evaluation after any engagement.

## Core Values of Organization Development

Several humanistic assumptions underlie the core values of the field. By humanistic we mean that individuals deserve respect, are trustworthy, and want to achieve personal growth and satisfaction (Wooten & White, 1999). Humanistic values also include a belief in the equity and equality of people, democratic principles, and a belief in human dignity and worth. “Broadly defined, this humanistic orientation can be summed up as ‘improving organizational life for all members’” (Church et al., 1992, p. 11). Adapting from predecessors Likert, MacGregor, and Blake and Mouton, Tannenbaum and Davis (1969) articulated the transition in values taking hold in organizations at the time. [Table 3.1](#) summarizes the alternative values espoused by OD practitioners.

**Table 3.1** Organization Development Values

<i>Away From . . .</i>	<i>Toward . . .</i>
A view of people as essentially bad	A view of people as essentially good
Avoidance of negative evaluation of individuals	Confirming them as human beings
Seeing individuals as fixed	Seeing them as being in process
Resisting and fearing individual differences	Accepting and utilizing them
Utilizing an individual primarily with reference to his or her job description	Viewing him or her as a whole person
Walling-off the expression of feelings	Making possible both appropriate expression and effective use
Game-playing	Authentic behavior
Use of status for maintaining power and personal prestige	Use of status for organizationally relevant purposes
Distrusting people	Trusting them
Avoiding facing others with relevant data	Making appropriate confrontation
Avoidance of risk taking	Willingness to risk
View of process work as being unproductive effort	Seeing process work as essential to effective task accomplishment
Primary emphasis on competition	Greater emphasis on collaboration

**SOURCE:** Tannenbaum, R., & Davis, S. A. (1969). Values, man, and organizations. *Industrial Management Review*, 10(2), 67–86.

Expanding on the definitions listed on the right side of [Table 3.1](#), Margulies and Raia (1972) were among early proponents of OD's humanistic values, which they described as follows:

1. Providing opportunities for people to function as human beings rather than as resources in the productive process.
2. Providing opportunities for each organization member, as well as for the organization itself, to develop to his [or her] full potential.
3. Seeking to increase the effectiveness of the organization in terms of *all* of its goals.
4. Attempting to create an environment in which it is possible to find exciting and challenging work.
5. Providing opportunities for people in organizations to influence the way in which they relate to work,

the organization, and the environment.

6. Treating each human being as a person with a complex set of needs, *all* of which are important in his [or her] work and in his [or her] life. (p. 3)

Many who read this list of humanistic values for the first time have an initial feeling that they are worthy values to hold, but they see them as too idealistic to implement in practice, specifically in a competitive organizational environment in which business results are necessary. The OD practitioner sees the possibilities for an improved organizational life in which personal and organizational goals are not at odds. This means, perhaps most fundamentally to OD's values, that personal effectiveness, challenge, learning, fulfillment, and satisfaction can be gained at the same time that the organization's effectiveness and objectives are also realized. We will return to this point later in the chapter.

In the next sections we will examine several of OD's current values in more detail, summarized in [Table 3.2](#).

## Participation, Involvement, and Empowerment

Participation is perhaps the most foundational of OD's democratic values. Recall the discussion of Likert's participative management strategy described in [Chapter 2](#). Participative management, and OD activities that support it, offer the ability for employees to contribute to the decision-making process and to have more control and autonomy over their work (Skelley, 1989). This value means that organizational members should be involved and included in decisions and organizational changes that impact them, because "people support what they help create" (Beckhard, 1969, p. 27; Wooten & White, 1999, p. 11). Schein (1990a) writes that the essence of OD is "that change in human systems will not come about without the active involvement of the members of the system who will undergo the change" (p. 16). Change, in this respect, is not imposed on a group or demanded of an individual. Instead, the practitioner's charge is to help the organization develop and manage the change that it seeks to create, giving the opportunity for participation and thereby transitioning ownership to organization members. Creating occasions for participation in decision making means giving employees a choice to contribute (for example, to offer an opinion or to express a perspective) but stops short of mandating it. Providing opportunities for involvement and participation does not necessarily mean that all organizational members will be enthusiastic about the outcome, but it does mean that they will have had an opportunity to express an opinion and potentially to shape it. In this respect, participation is a very important aspect of organizational members' being able to express themselves and achieve personal fulfillment through membership.

**Table 3.2** Current Values in Organization Development

- Participation, involvement, and empowerment
- The importance of groups and teams
- Growth, development, and learning
- Valuing the whole person
- Dialogue and collaboration
- Authenticity, openness, and trust

Participation is not, however, a silver bullet to eliminate all organizational problems. As Pasmore and Fagans (1992) argue, "One cannot conclude based on any reasonable review of the literature . . . that simply involving people in decision making will produce positive benefits to either those involved or the organization as a whole" (p. 378). Instead, more complex factors are at play. Organizational members may not be prepared or trained to participate. For example, inviting employees to solve complex problems may not be effective if they do not have the skills to do so. Moreover, participation can be a risky prospect in many organizations, where members can feel suspicious of being asked to step outside of long-held hierarchical patterns. This is true particularly since organizations have not created the conditions in which members can participate competently, as Argyris (1957) noted a half-century ago. Characteristics of organizational structure (e.g., a tall organization), relationships (e.g., expectations of who may participate given what status), and societal

expectations (e.g., values of not being confrontational or oppositional) all inhibit an individual's choice to participate (Neumann, 1989). Finally, increasing participation can actually be detrimental to members if it is not authentic. Organizational leaders must not choose to involve employees solely for symbolic reasons. Instead, they must develop an environment in which authentic participation is possible and organizational members can have a legitimate impact.

## The Importance of Groups and Teams

Beckhard (1969) writes that “the basic building blocks of an organization are groups (teams)” (p. 26). They are central categories in the organizational system and, as a result, the major target for many interventions. Organizational members almost always belong to at least one, if not several, interdependent teams, organized by function (e.g., marketing, human resources) or level (e.g., vice presidents, second-shift managers), for example. French (1969) writes that organization members generally want to participate in at least one group of this type (the immediate department being the most common), to both contribute and to be accepted, and that group effectiveness is at least in some way dependent on the group’s taking some of the major task and maintenance responsibilities of the leader. These groups both reflect and affect the larger organization’s functioning, since the successful functioning of finance, marketing, or sales affects other departments that depend on them. Therefore, successful team functioning is essential to larger systemwide success. Coghlan (1994) concludes, “As the success of an organization’s change endeavors depends on an effective utilization of teams and groups to move the change through an organization, skills at understanding and facilitating groups and teams are essential for the management of change” (p. 22). Because of their prevalence and importance, paying attention to the health of groups and teams is a key value in OD.

In addition to formal groups and teams, individuals are also members of informal groups of colleagues, friends, and associates, often from multiple departments, that exert a powerful impact on an individual’s behavior. Formal and informal group norms and cultural beliefs of groups comprise the unwritten code of behavior, and these codes are taught to new members. Understanding these norms and codes, what they tell individuals about how to behave, and what impact they have on the organization is an important part of understanding the group’s ability to contribute to organizational change.

## Growth, Development, and Learning

Perhaps the value that differentiates organization development from most other management and consulting work is its emphasis on growth, development, and learning. Think about your own beliefs, skills, and attitudes compared to what they were 5 or 10 years ago. In small or perhaps more significant ways, you are likely to be different. You have learned from mistakes or perhaps changed a belief or habit based on experience. In organizational settings, people are no different. They are, and the organization itself is, “in process,” meaning that we see people and organizations as constantly evolving and changing. For OD consultants, this value implies that we choose not to give up on a person or group during challenging times, instead finding ways to help them grow and develop. This runs counter to the notion that unsuccessful people should be terminated and unsuccessful departments should be disbanded. Instead, it means first understanding the factors inhibiting success and then providing opportunities for change. This optimistic view of people and groups also implies that engagements and interventions should be constructed as opportunities for learning, so that the organization can learn not only to solve the immediate problem but also to learn how problems or situations like this one can be addressed next time, without fostering dependence on a consultant. Ideally, this learning process will become ingrained into the organization itself so that learning is increasingly a normal part of leadership and management (Schein, 1987).



## Valuing the Whole Person

Recognizing and valuing a person as a “whole person” means three things. First, it is often the case that a person who has been in a job or followed an educational path for any length of time can become typecast or pigeonholed by professional category, as an accountant, a marketing person, a receptionist, a manufacturing line employee, and so on. Consequently, work assignments and problems are brought to that person in accordance with people’s existing labels for him or her and assumptions about professional knowledge and interests. The accountant will not be brought a customer service problem, the receptionist will not be invited to contribute to a public relations problem, and the manufacturing line employee will not be asked for an opinion on an engineering problem. Presumably, this is because this is how labor is organized, but it is also due to assumptions about what kinds of work people want to do. People also want variety, or perhaps may be interested in a career change, and organizations can structure opportunities to recognize organizational members’ multiple interests and skills. Consider what a manufacturing employee knows about the construction and engineering of products or what a receptionist knows about customer service and public relations problems. They can be very knowledgeable about areas outside their immediate job descriptions. It is also true that “most people desire to make, and are capable of making, a much higher level of contribution to the attainment of organization goals than most organizational environments will permit” (French, 1969, p. 24). Unfortunately, many organizations hold their members back from greater contributions. Organizations can provide support for learning, growth, and development that recognizes that people can make contributions beyond those for which they were originally hired.

Second, recognizing organizational members as whole people respects their feelings as people. They may be especially enthusiastic about a recent success and deserve genuine congratulations, or they may desire an opportunity to celebrate the organization’s success with colleagues. They may be worried about taking on new responsibilities, concerned about new expectations, or angry at a policy change. OD interventions aim to respect these expressions of emotion and to acknowledge them. The expression of anger and conflict is a natural and normal reaction to organizational change and ought not to be ignored or suppressed.

Finally, respecting the whole person means acknowledging and recognizing diversity and the benefits that individual differences bring to an organization. We come to organizations with multiple identities—gender, age, race, national origin, religion, disability, economic background, and so on. Many organizational practices have historically resulted in ignoring or silencing alternative voices (Prasad, Pringle, & Konrad, 2006). This has been especially true for members whose identities were not identical to those of management. The result has been that ideas and contributions from members with rich backgrounds and experiences have frequently not been heard or included. Recognizing the diverse identities of organizational members implies paying explicit attention to, valuing, and respecting the unique contributions of all members.

## Dialogue and Collaboration

As early as 1969, Beckhard noticed that “one of the major problems affecting organizational effectiveness is the amount of dysfunctional energy expended in inappropriate competition and fighting between groups that should be collaborating” (p. 33). Indeed, the same can be said of individuals. A key value in organization development is the creation of healthy environments that promote collaboration rather than competition, with the assumption that a win-win solution is both possible and more desirable than conflict. This does not mean that the suppression of conflict is desired; in fact, the opposite is true. OD interventions seek to bring conflicts to light where they can be addressed in a healthy manner through open dialogue, rather than to allow the suppression of conflict that continues to fester unspoken. Moreover, the goal is for organizational members to learn how to recognize hidden conflict and to deal with it in an appropriate manner.

## Authenticity, Openness, and Trust

According to Burke (1977), in a review of organization development trends, authenticity was on its way to overtaking democracy as a primary value in the field. When we create competitive environments, organizations develop as contexts in which it is valued and rewarded to withhold information or mislead to gain status and authority. Collaborative practices cannot succeed in that environment. Instead, they demand that we act in an authentic manner. Being authentic means being straightforward, genuine, honest, and truthful about one's plans, opinions, and motivations. This has implications for how managers communicate with employees, for example, in providing an honest explanation for a project (what the project is intended to accomplish and why) as well as one's own opinions and beliefs about it. Authentic leadership demands consistency in words and actions as followers look to leaders' behavior to assess whether their talk is forthright and can be trusted (Goffee & Jones, 2005). Leaders demonstrate trust by giving employees information; explaining organizational direction, values, principles, and rationales; including them in dialogues and discussions; and allowing them to make decisions. This value applies not only to organizational members but also to OD practitioners, who must be authentic with clients in order to expect the same in return. This means confronting clients where appropriate and being honest with the client in the assessment of the data and one's own feelings.

No intervention or organization holds to all of the values listed here as static entities. In fact, it is probably not useful to think of values as categories, but instead to think of them as a project or objective. Many practitioners think of OD values not as states (e.g., an organization is or is not participative, is team-oriented or individual-oriented), but rather as a continuum or direction. They represent movement away from traditional notions about organizational bureaucracy and human behavior (like Theory X, discussed in [Chapter 2](#)) and toward alternative humanistic views about individuals and groups. Any consulting engagement or intervention strategy successfully modeling OD's core values can be seen as moving an organization toward these values rather than turning on one value and turning off another as you would a light switch. This belief demonstrates the value of being "in process," that organizations and individuals are continually growing and changing.

## Changes to OD Values Over Time and the Values Debate

The humanistic roots of organization development began with its foundation as a field interested in individual growth and self-awareness. OD has always had theoretical, practical, and humanistic components, with focus varying in one of these three areas at times in its history (Friedlander, 1976). Recently, however, as we discussed in [Chapter 2](#), the movement toward organization effectiveness has taken a greater hold in OD as practitioners are more frequently asked to consult on organizationwide changes.

Two surveys of OD practitioners (one in the early 1990s, the other in 2012) can provide some insight into how OD practitioners see the importance of values to their work. In the first of these, Church, Burke, and Van Eynde (1994) found an increase in practitioners' values toward achieving business effectiveness outcomes (such as increasing productivity, enhancing quality, or developing a competitive advantage) over traditional humanistic values (such as openness, collaboration, and other values described above). (Compared with these first two categories, practitioners ranked lower on the list those values related to the external environment, such as caring for the natural environment and enhancing corporate citizenship.) In fact, the major values in both categories (business effectiveness and humanistic concerns) were ranked almost equally in their importance to practitioners. The researchers noted that contemporary practice deals much more frequently with organizationwide, bottom-line results and that experiential activities for individuals and groups are no longer the mainstream of organization development practice.

In the follow-up survey 20 years later, Shull, Church, and Burke (2013) noted quite a few similarities in the results. Practitioners continue to be focused on business effectiveness, but not to the detriment of humanistic values. They write that "OD practitioners remain largely focused on employee welfare and driving positive change in the workplace. Humanistic values such as empowering employees, creating openness of communication, promoting ownership and participation, and continuous learning remain strong" (Shull, Church, & Burke, 2014, p. 25). Fewer practitioners reported that OD has a "touchy feely" reputation, but they also noted a perception that the traditional values of the field are weakening (a perception that was held most strongly by newer practitioners).

This business results emphasis in organization development targets bottom-line results that can involve downsizing and job changes for individuals. Many observers have sounded a note of alarm about the business effectiveness addition to OD's humanistic values (see Nicoll, 1998), noting that if OD were to move significantly away from its humanistic roots in favor of organization efficiency and productivity, OD would be "unrecognizable from its origins" (Church et al., 1992, p. 14) and that "a realization of this trend in the extreme . . . would mean the end of OD as a distinct field" (p. 7). However, not all agree that a focus on business effectiveness is harmful to the field of OD. Some have argued that the humanistic values of OD have adapted pragmatically to contemporary organizational challenges (Margulies & Raia, 1990) and that this is just another adaptation to needs. Others note that there may be a generational gap developing between those who have been in the field for a long time, who lament the addition of efficiency and profitability to OD's foundational values (and the concomitant watering down of its humanistic roots), and those who are new to practicing OD, who see OD interventions as a means to help clients achieve the business outcomes they seek

(Hultman, 2002). David Bradford and Warner Burke (2005) write that there is a downside to OD's insistence on humanistic values, noting that they produce a group of practitioners advocating for their own values and who are perhaps naive about the varying circumstances in which certain values should be emphasized over others.

Implemented appropriately, humanistic concerns and business effectiveness need not be always contradictory objectives, since "we must be concerned with both the people being affected and the way in which they work (the process), as well as what they actually produce (the outcome)" (Church et al., 1994, p. 35). Ultimately, if the job of the OD practitioner is to assist the client in helping them achieve what they desire to achieve, this can be done within the broad context of OD's core values and ethical beliefs. This is not to say that there are no challenges or tensions, however, to holding to these beliefs. For example, what is the consultant's responsibility in helping a client redefine job responsibilities for employees who do not desire to change job tasks? The OD practitioner must hold to the conviction that achieving personal effectiveness and business outcomes are not always by necessity contradictory ends, and the practitioner must therefore learn to navigate the challenges and tensions to holding OD values, being conscious of the choices being made.

## Challenges to Holding Organization Development Values

Schein (1990a) and Church et al. (1992) see tensions and challenges to the practitioner in holding to the values described above:

1. *Financial and economic tensions.* OD practitioners are frequently either external consultants needing to sell clients on an approach or internal practitioners working with managers of the same organization. In either case, it is easier to describe approaches to solving a problem than to engage in a philosophical statement about values to a potential client. External consultants making a living in OD may find it easier to talk with clients about OD techniques versus holding nebulous values-based dialogues. They may decide to accept an engagement that does not fit with their values over declining the invitation of a paying client. Church et al. (1992) refer to this as a “tension of being driven by ego gratification, personal success, and financial rewards versus championing traditional humanistic values in the consulting process” (p. 20).
2. *The push to see OD as technology.* OD practitioners find it tempting to quickly and arbitrarily use favorite tools or the latest technique in an attempt to be cutting edge. Businesses and consulting practices have evolved that promote specific OD techniques so that both consultants and clients may be enamored with a popular approach or a sales pitch. In any case, the excitement over a new technique may overshadow the values on which it is based or the necessity of implementing it in the first place. Margulies and Raia (1990) write, “Many practitioners have become routine in their applications; they have succumbed to management pressure for the quick fix, the emphasis on the bottom line, and the cure-all mentality. . . . They seem to have lost sight of the core values of the field” (p. 38). Many students and new practitioners of OD in particular become enamored with books outlining “101 new OD interventions” without full knowledge of when and why they would be applied.
3. *Management culture and expectations.* Speed and productivity are key values of business culture in the United States. Managers seek rapid solutions to immediate problems and want to be able to quantitatively prove the value of spending money on a consultant. A consultant who spends time with surveys, conducting interviews, giving feedback, or facilitating meetings may appear to be producing very little and taking a long time to do so. This culture of productivity and expectations of speed pushes OD practitioners away from the rigor of values-based diagnostic processes and into rapid discussions of solutions and intervention programs. This creates a “tension between projecting one’s own values and normative beliefs onto client organizations versus being only a facilitator for serving management’s interests” (Church et al., 1992, p. 20). Managers may see a practitioner who discusses values as out of touch with contemporary organizational challenges.
4. *Research.* Academic research projects that sought to compare and contrast methods and techniques used in OD work have pushed practitioners to see OD (and the field to evolve) as a set of techniques that resulted in certain outcomes rather than to examine whether those techniques appropriately applied the core values of the field (Schein, 1990a).



## Statement of Organization Development Ethics

Ethics follow from values in guiding practitioners in how to implement and enact values. Ethical beliefs outline more and less desirable behaviors, based on a set of underlying values such as those defined above (White & Wooten, 1985). In a survey of organization development and human resources professionals in the early 1980s, practitioners admitted that there was no widespread definition of ethics for the field. Several scholars collaborated on an early draft of a statement, which was further revised. An annotated version was published in a book in 1990 by William Gellermann, Mark Frankel, and Robert Ladenson. The statement of ethical guidelines for OD professionals is reprinted in the appendix to this chapter. This statement contains many of the categories of OD values discussed earlier in this chapter, including client-centered values.

This clear statement of ethics has many followers and will be a useful guide for you throughout this book. Ethical conflicts do occur for OD professionals, and we will explore some of them in later chapters.



## Summary

The values of organization development are a significant part of its identity, and they distinguish OD from other methods of consulting. Its values help practitioners with making choices about how to proceed in an intervention. They clarify our thinking and help to establish a dialogue with clients about what we value and why. They also provide a method for evaluating our work and give practitioners a larger purpose for their work. OD's values include participation, involvement, empowerment, groups and teams, growth, development, learning, thinking of organizational members as whole people, dialogue, collaboration, authenticity, openness, and trust.

Recently, business effectiveness has been added to this list of humanistic concerns to include values such as quality, productivity, and efficiency, which some highlight as a potential conflict with OD's humanistic values tradition. In any case, values conflicts do occur as OD practitioners must cope with economic and cultural forces that push them to see OD as a set of tools or intervention techniques and to neglect the values that underlie these techniques. Finally, a statement of OD ethics has been developed as an explicit statement of desired practitioner behaviors that are based on OD's values.

## Questions for Discussion

1. List four or five of your own personal values. How do these affect your actions? How do your values relate to the values of OD covered in this chapter?
2. Of the OD values listed in [Chapter 3](#), are there any that you think should carry greater weight than others? Which ones? Why?
3. Think of an organization of which you have been a member. Did that organization model any of the values in this chapter well? How so?

## For Further Reading

Gellermann, W., Frankel, M. S., & Ladenson, R. F. (1990). *Values and ethics in organization and human systems development: Responding to dilemmas in professional life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Margulies, N., & Raia, A. P. (1972). *Organizational development: Values, process, and technology*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

White, L. P., & Wooten, K. C. (1985). *Professional ethics and practice in organizational development*. New York, NY: Praeger.

## Exercise: What Would You Do?

Consider the statement of ethical guidelines for OD practice in this chapter's appendix. What do you think a practitioner should do when confronted with these scenarios? Identify the item(s) in the ethical statement related to each situation.

1. You have learned of a possible project that would allow you to practice your new OD skills with a nonprofit organization. While you have not led a workshop like this before, you are enthusiastic about the opportunity, and this could be a great career move that would also help a deserving organization. You would agree not to charge the group for your services. What ethical considerations exist for your participation? Would it matter if this group would compensate you for your time? Would it matter if this was a private company and you were already employed there?
2. As the manager of corporate quality, you ask members of your staff to interview 15 key stakeholders to determine their support for a new training initiative. Your staff summarized the data for you and reviewed the summary in a staff meeting. It becomes clear that two of the executives are strongly opposed to the initiative, and two are strongly in favor of it. It occurs to you that you could benefit from knowing who the supporters are so that they could convince the opponents to support your initiative. What ethical considerations exist in this situation? Can you ethically ask your staff to share the names of the supporters? What if your staff offered no promises of anonymity to the interviewees? Would it matter if the subject was a sensitive one?
3. As a favor to a friend who manages a small team of six professionals, you agree to facilitate a team meeting. Fearing that the meeting would become contentious, your friend asks you to steer the discussion away from several issues that she knows will cause an argument. Knowing that these conflicts are the source of the team's troubles and are necessary discussion points to help the team improve, should you bring up the issues anyway and help the group resolve them, or should you heed your friend's request?
4. You are the director of operations for the emergency department of a local hospital. Recent state regulations now mandate that certain paperwork be completed before and after each patient's visit, and you have redesigned the intake processes to adjust for these requirements. You need the administrative and nursing staff to be on board with these changes, and you know they will be resistant. How might OD values of participation, involvement, empowerment, collaboration, and openness suggest what to do next?

## Appendix

# Statement of Ethical Guidelines for Practice for OD-HSD (Organization Development–Human Systems Development)

We commit ourselves to acting in accordance with the following guidelines:

## I. Responsibility to Ourselves

- A. Act with integrity; be authentic and true to ourselves.
- B. Strive continually for self-knowledge and personal growth.
- C. Recognize our personal needs and desires and, when they conflict with other responsibilities, seek whole-win resolutions.
- D. Assert our own interests in ways that are fair and equitable to us as well as to our clients and their stakeholders.

## II. Responsibility for Professional Development and Competence

- A. Accept responsibility for the consequences of our actions and make reasonable efforts to ensure that our services are properly used; terminate our services if they are not properly used and do what we can to see that any abuses are corrected.

- B. Develop and maintain our individual competence and establish cooperative relationships with other professionals.

### 1. Develop the broad range of our own competencies. These include:

#### a. Knowledge of theory and practice in

- i. Applied behavioral science generally
- ii. Leadership, management, administration, organizational behavior, system behavior, and organization/system development specifically
- iii. Labor union issues, such as collective bargaining, contracting, and quality of working life (QWL)
- iv. Multicultural issues, including issues of color and gender
- v. Cross-cultural issues, including issues related to our own ethnocentric tendencies and to differences and diversity within and between countries
- vi. Values and ethics in general and how they apply to both the behavior of our client system and our own practice
- vii. Other fields of knowledge and practice relevant to the area(s) within OD-HSD on which we individually concentrate

#### b. Ability to

- i. Act effectively with individuals; groups; and large, complex systems.
- ii. Provide consultation using theory and methods of the applied behavioral sciences.
- iii. Cope with the apparent contradiction in applying behavioral science that arises when our “science” is too particular or theoretical to be applicable or when our real approach is intuitive and not clearly grounded in science.
- iv. Articulate theory and direct its application, including creation of learning experiences for individual; small and large groups; and large, complex systems.

### 2. Establish collegial and cooperate relations with other OD-HSD professionals. These include:

- a. Using colleagues as consultants to provide ourselves with feedback or suggestions about our own development and to minimize the effects of our blind spots.
- b. Creating partnerships with colleagues to enhance our effectiveness in serving clients whose needs are greater than we can serve alone.

- C. Recognize our personal needs and desires and deal with them in the performance of our professional roles and duties.

- D. Practice within the limits of our competence, culture, and experience in providing services and using techniques.

- 1. Neither seek nor accept assignments outside our limits without clear understanding by clients when exploration at the edge of our competence is reasonable.

2. Refer clients to other professionals when appropriate.
3. Consult with people who are knowledgeable about the unique conditions of clients whose activities involve specific areas in which we are inexperienced or not knowledgeable:
  - a. In special functional areas (such as marketing, engineering, or R&D)
  - b. In certain industries or institutions (such as mining, aerospace, health care, education, or government)
  - c. In multicultural settings (such as when we practice in settings in which there is significant diversity in the race, ethnicity, or gender of the people involved)
- E. Practice in cultures different from our own only with consultation from people native to or knowledgeable about those specific cultures.

### III. Responsibility to Clients and Significant Others

- A. Serve the long-term well-being of our client systems and their stakeholders.
  1. Be aware of the beliefs and values relevant to serving our clients, including our own, our profession's, our culture's, and those of the people with whom we work (personal, organizational, and cultural).
  2. Be prepared to make explicit our beliefs, values, and ethics as OD-HSD professionals.
  3. Avoid automatic confirmation of predetermined conclusions about the client's situation or what needs to be done by either the client or ourselves.
  4. Explore the possible implications of any OD-HSD intervention for all stakeholders likely to be significantly affected; help all stakeholders while developing and implementing OD-HSD approaches, programs, and the like, if they wish help and we are able to give it.
  5. Maintain balance in the timing, pace, and magnitude of planned change so as to support a mutually beneficial relationship between the system and its environment.
- B. Conduct any professional activity, program, or relationship in ways that are honest, responsible, and appropriately open.
  1. Inform people with whom we work about any activity or procedure in which we ask their participation.
    - a. Inform them about sponsorship, purpose and goals, our role and strategy, costs, anticipated outcomes, limitations, and risks.
    - b. Inform them in a way that supports their freedom of choice about their participation in activities initiated by us; also acknowledge that it may be appropriate for us to undertake activities initiated by recognized authorities in which participants do not have full freedom of choice.
    - c. Alert them to implications and risks when they are from cultures other than our own or when we are at the edge of our competence.
    - d. Ask help of the client system in making relevant cultural differences explicit.
  2. Seek optimum participation by people with whom we work at every step of the process, including managers, labor unions, and workers' representatives.
  3. Encourage and enable people to provide for themselves the services we provide rather than foster continued reliance on us; encourage, foster, and support self-education and self-development by individuals, groups, and all other human systems.
  4. Develop, publish, and use assessment techniques that promote the welfare and best interests of clients and participants; guard against the misuse of assessment techniques and results.
  5. Provide for our own accountability by evaluating and assessing the effects of our work.
    - a. Make all reasonable efforts to determine if our activities have accomplished the agreed-upon goals and have not had any undesirable consequences; seek to undo any undesirable consequences, and do not attempt to cover them up; use such experiences as learning opportunities.
    - b. Actively solicit and respond with an open mind to feedback regarding our work and seek to improve our work accordingly.
  6. Cease work with a client when it becomes clear that the client is not benefiting or the contract has been completed; do not accept or continue work under a contract if we cannot do so in ways consistent with the values and ethics outlined in this Statement.

- C. Establish mutual agreement on a fair contract covering services and remuneration.
  - 1. Ensure mutual understanding and agreement about the service to be performed; do not shift from that agreement without both a clearly defined professional rationale for making the shift and the informed consent of the clients and participants; withdraw from the agreement if circumstances beyond our control prevent proper fulfillment.
  - 2. Ensure mutual understanding and agreement by putting the contract in writing to the extent feasible, yet recognize that:
    - a. The spirit of professional responsibility encompasses more than the letter of the contract.
    - b. Some contracts are necessarily incomplete because complete information is not available at the outset.
    - c. Putting the contract in writing may be neither necessary nor desirable.
  - 3. Safeguard the best interests of the client, the profession, and the public by making sure that financial arrangements are fair and in keeping with appropriate statutes, regulations, and professional standards.
- D. Deal with conflicts constructively and minimize conflicts of interest.
  - 1. Fully inform the client of our opinions about serving similar or competing organizations; be clear with ourselves, our clients, and other concerned stakeholders about our loyalties and responsibilities when conflicts of interest arise; keep parties informed of these conflicts; cease work with the client if the conflicts cannot be adequately resolved.
  - 2. Seek to act impartially when involved in conflicts among parties in the client system; help them resolve their conflicts themselves, without taking sides; if it becomes necessary to change our role from that of impartial consultant, do so explicitly; cease work with the client if necessary.
  - 3. Identify and respond to any major differences in professionally relevant values or ethics between ourselves and our clients; be prepared to cease work, with explanation of our reasons, if necessary.
  - 4. Accept differences in the expectations and interests of different stakeholders and realize that those differences cannot always be reconciled; take a whole-win approach to the resolution of differences whenever possible so that the greatest good of the whole is served, but allow for exceptions based on more fundamental principles.
  - 5. Work cooperatively with other internal and external consultants serving the same client systems and resolve conflicts in terms of the balanced best interests of the client system and all its stakeholders; make appropriate arrangements with other internal and external consultants about how to share responsibilities.
  - 6. Seek consultation and feedback from neutral third parties in cases of conflict involving ourselves, our clients, other consultants, or any of the systems' various stakeholders.
- E. Define and protect confidentiality in our client relationships.
  - 1. Make limits of confidentiality clear to clients and participants.
  - 2. Reveal information accepted in confidence only to appropriate or agreed-upon recipients or authorities.
  - 3. Use information obtained during professional work in writings, lectures, or other public forums only with prior consent or when disguised so that it is impossible from our presentations alone to identify the individuals or systems with whom we have worked.
  - 4. Make adequate provisions for maintaining confidentiality in the storage and disposal of records; make provisions for responsibly preserving records in the event of our retirement or disability.
- F. Make public statements of all kinds accurately, including promotion and advertising, and give service as advertised.
  - 1. Base public statements providing professional opinions or information on scientifically acceptable findings and techniques as much as possible, with full recognition of the limits and uncertainties of such evidence.
  - 2. Seek to help people make informed choices when they refer to statements we make as part of promotion or advertising.
  - 3. Deliver services as advertised and do not shift without a clear professional rationale and the informed consent of the participants or clients.

#### IV. Responsibility to the OD-HSD Profession

- A. Contribute to the continuing professional development of other practitioners and of the profession as a whole.
  - 1. Support the development of other professionals by various means, including:



- a. Mentoring with less experienced professionals.
  - b. Consulting with other colleagues.
  - c. Participating in reviews of others' practices.
- 2. Contribute to the body of professional knowledge and skill, including:
  - a. Sharing ideas, methods, and findings about the effects of our work.
  - b. Keeping our use of copyright and trade secrets to an appropriate minimum.
- B. Promote the sharing of professional knowledge and skill.
  - 1. Grant use of our copyrighted material as freely as possible, subject to a minimum of conditions, including a reasonable price based on professional as well as commercial values.
  - 2. Give credit for the ideas and products of others.
  - 3. Respect the rights of others in the materials they have created.
- C. Work with other OD-HSD professionals in ways that exemplify what the OD-HSD profession stands for.
  - 1. Establish mutual understanding and agreement about our relationships, including purposes and goals, roles and responsibilities, fees, and income distribution.
  - 2. Avoid conflicts of interest when possible and resolve conflicts that do arise constructively.
- D. Work actively for ethical practice by individuals and organizations engaged in OD-HSD activities and, in case of questionable practice, use appropriate channels for dealing with it.
  - 1. Discuss directly and constructively when possible.
  - 2. Use other means when necessary, including:
    - a. Joint consultation and feedback (with another professional as a third party)
    - b. Enforcement procedures of existing professional organizations
    - c. Public confrontation
- E. Act in ways that bring credit to the OD-HSD profession and with due regard for colleagues in other professions.
  - 1. Act with sensitivity to the effects our behavior may have on the ability of colleagues to perform as professionals, individually and collectively.
  - 2. Act with due regard for the needs, special competencies, and obligations of colleagues in other professions.
  - 3. Respect the prerogatives and obligations of the institutions or organizations with which these colleagues are associated.
- V. Social Responsibility
  - A. Accept responsibility for and act with sensitivity to the fact that our recommendations and actions may alter the lives and well-being of people within our client systems and within the larger systems of which they are subsystems.
  - B. Act with awareness of our own cultural filters and with sensitivity to international and multicultural differences and their implications.
    - 1. Respect the cultural orientations of the individuals, organizations, communities, countries, and other human systems within which we work, including their customers, beliefs, values, morals, and ethics.
    - 2. Recognize and constructively confront the counterproductive aspects of those cultures whenever feasible, but be alert to the effects our own cultural orientation may have on our judgments.
  - C. Promote justice and serve the well-being of all life on earth.
    - 1. Act assertively with our clients to promote justice and well-being, including:
      - a. Constructively confronting discrimination whenever possible.
      - b. Promoting affirmative action in dealing with the effects of past discrimination.
      - c. Encouraging fairness in the distribution of the fruits of the system's productivity.
    - 2. Contribute knowledge, skill, and other resources in support of organizations, programs, and activities that seek to improve human welfare.
    - 3. Accept some clients who do not have sufficient resources to pay our full fees and allow them to pay reduced fees or nothing when possible.
    - 4. Engage in self-generated or cooperative endeavors to develop means for helping across cultures.

- 5. Support the creation and maintenance of cultures that value freedom, responsibility, integrity, self-control, mutual respect, love, trust, openness, authenticity in relationships, empowerment, participation, and respect for fundamental human rights.
- D. Withhold service from clients whose purpose(s) we consider immoral, yet recognize that such service may serve a greater good in the longer run and therefore be acceptable.
- E. Act consistently with the ethics of the global scientific community of which our OD-HSD community is a part.

Finally, we recognize that accepting this Statement as a guide for our behavior involves holding ourselves to standards that may be more exacting than the laws of any countries in which we practice, the ethics of any professional associations to which we belong, or the expectations of any of our clients.

**SOURCE:** Gellermann, W., Frankel, M. S., & Ladenson, R. F. (1990). *Values and Ethics in Organization and Human Systems Development: Responding to Dilemmas in Professional Life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Reprinted with permission.

## Case Study 1: Analyzing Opportunities for Organization Development Work at Northern County Legal Services

Read the Northern County Legal Services case and consider the following questions:

1. What is it like to work in this environment? How do you respond to Julie as a leader? Compare Julie as a leader with some of the descriptions of leadership styles provided in [Chapter 2](#).
2. What organizational, team, and individual problems can you identify? What opportunities for organization development work do you see?
3. How do the opportunities you have identified illustrate the values and ethical beliefs of organization development identified in this chapter?

“Good morning. Northern County Legal Services,” Christina said. “How can I help you? Yes, I see. Okay, why don’t I schedule a time for you to stop by and talk with one of us about your situation and we can see how we can help? I’m free on the 12th at 3:30 p.m. Does that work for you? Excellent. And you know where our office is located? Yes, right across the street. Good. I’ll look forward to speaking with you then.”

It was already packed in the office of Northern County Legal Services (NCLS), a nonprofit organization located just outside the downtown district. In the small waiting room, nearly 20 clients waited for assistance while a team of staff members handled walk-in visitors and made appointments. With no air-conditioning, the room was starting to get hot on the sunny August afternoon as the chairs filled up.

“I’m sorry. Mr. Gaines? I think you’re next.” Christina looked at the growing crowd.

“Oh, no, no, no, no.” A tall woman rose from her chair and stepped forward, raising her voice. “I’ve been here since 10 a.m. and I was here first. I’m next. He needs to wait his turn.” She looked around the room for support, and some heads nodded as those waiting began to look at one another in frustration.

“Yes, I’m sorry that you’ve waited so long, but Mr. Gaines had made an appointment,” Christina said.

“Yeah, for 11:30,” Mr. Gaines scoffed.

“It will only be a few more minutes until someone is with you,” Christina offered.

“You need to get more organized,” the woman said as she rolled her eyes. She returned to her seat, fanning herself with a 2-year-old copy of an entertainment magazine.

Christina looked her watch: 12:20. Her parking meter was already expired. “Have a seat, sir, and I’ll be right with you.” She grabbed her purse and quickly headed to the front door. “And just where do you think you’re going, Miss?” a voice came from the waiting room. “She can’t take it anymore,” another voice offered, as laughter rose from the corner.

Christina ran the four blocks to where her car was parked. There was already a yellow envelope with a \$25 parking ticket lodged under her windshield wiper.

Northern County Legal Service’s mission is to match clients who cannot afford legal counsel with a lawyer willing to offer pro bono services. NCLS specializes in housing and employment law but also matches clients with attorneys who assist with almost any legal need, including domestic violence and family law. The service is free to clients (though some pay for some services on a sliding scale based on their income). The remainder of the funding comes from grants, and the center is staffed almost entirely by a group of 15 volunteers and law school students. Students form the majority of the staff, and they receive internship credit, usually volunteering at the center during their third year of law school. Most students participate in the center only for one semester, and competition among students is tough to receive one of the volunteer slots.

The one full-time employee is a director, Julie, who has been at the center for about 2 years. Aside from running the office, managing volunteers and students, finding attorneys, and conducting training workshops for both students and volunteer attorneys, Julie’s main

concern is funding, which is a constant issue.

The small office where NCLS is housed consists of a waiting room and four offices. Julie keeps one of the four offices as her own, and the other three are taken by students or volunteers who work for 10 to 20 hours per week, usually in 4- to 6-hour shifts. Each of the four offices has a computer, and there is one printer shared by the center. At any given time, there might be as many as eight volunteers who share the three offices, meeting with clients to perform the “intake” functions.

The intake process begins with a client who arrives on a walk-in or appointment basis, and the initial meeting usually lasts for about an hour. Depending on the client’s need, the intake paperwork consists of three to six pages of single-spaced questions that the staff members ask clients in order to be able to provide the most help. Intake forms also contain client demographic data, such as household income and household size, which is needed for the center to compile monthly, quarterly, and annual statistics that grant funders require in order to measure the center’s progress.

It was 7:30 a.m. as Julie walked into the office. The phone was already ringing, but she let it go to voice mail as she turned on her computer and quickly sorted through the phone messages that had piled up since she left yesterday afternoon. Nothing that couldn’t wait until later in the morning, she thought. In the waiting room, the staff began to gather for the monthly staff meeting. This is the time when Julie covers the statistics for the prior month with the staff, gives updates, and answers questions.

“Good morning.” Julie looked around the room. About two-thirds of the staff were seated in the uncomfortable assorted chairs, which had been donated or purchased at minimal cost over the past several years. “Today I want to cover a few things. First, the importance of getting the intake paperwork complete; second, scheduling; and third, timely filings.” She looked around the room at the bleary-eyed group, many of whom held coffee cups as they avoided eye contact.

“Fine? Good. Melinda? I noticed that many of you are making the same mistake as Melinda in failing to fully complete page 6 of the housing intake form. For example, here’s the copy of the one you completed last week. Where the form asks for service date, we really need that to complete the filing motion for the client. If we don’t have it, we have to call them to get it. I’ve noticed a few of these that have been blank in the past week or two. Does everyone understand that?” Heads nodded in agreement.

“Where do we put the intake form for housing after it’s done?” Eric asked.

“In the intake inbox on the filing cabinet in Julie’s office,” Monica offered.

“I thought that was only for urgent motions,” Eric said. “I’ve been putting the nonurgent ones in the inbox in the hallway.”

“That’s right,” Julie said. “Actually I’d prefer it if you handed the urgent ones directly to me and put the nonurgent ones in the hallway box. You can put the urgent ones in my box if I’m not here.”

“What’s urgent?” Monica asked.

“Urgent means if it’s been 4 or 5 days since the client received an eviction notice,” Julie said. “The fifth day is the most critical.”

“What do we do if you aren’t here but it’s been 5 days?” Monica asked.

“Then you can either call my cell phone and let me know that it’s waiting, or you can call an attorney from the list,” Julie said. “Or you can do it yourself but wait to file it until I can verify it after you’re done.”

“Do we do that for the domestic violence restraining order requests also?” Annette asked.

“No, those should be filed in the top drawer of the cabinet until another staff member can take the intake form and call a volunteer attorney to take the case,” Julie said.

“Why can’t I just call immediately to get the process started more quickly?” Annette said. “If I’ve done the intake, why can’t I just continue to the next step?”

Julie was beginning to get frustrated. “Look, everyone, we went over this in training. It’s important that this all be handled as we discussed it before.”

Julie continued as, out of earshot, Annette leaned over and whispered to Monica, “Yeah, training was what, like an hour? I still don’t understand why there are so many procedures.”

"I know," Monica said, "and I feel so incompetent about housing law. My specialty has been family law. I'd rather learn about that part of the center, but I keep getting these eviction intakes. And the paperwork is incredible. I spent an hour with a client yesterday and only got about two pages' worth of information. I ran over my next appointment trying to get the rest."

"I had the same experience," Annette said. "The clients have such detailed histories, and they need to share their whole story. I talked to a woman whose boyfriend shoved her against a wall and broke her wrist. She started to cry, and I was thinking that I can't very well interrupt her and say, 'Sorry, ma'am, but that's Question 65. We're still on Question 14, so can you tell me your combined annual income?' And I had three of those same intakes yesterday. I went home completely drained last night."

Monica nodded. "I've heard stories like that, too. The part I hate is when I have to pick up the paperwork out of the inbox and file the motion when I didn't do the intake. The other day Julie started shouting at me because I missed a note on an intake that Christina did and I had to refile the motion. I almost missed the deadline but I stayed 2 hours later than usual and got it all done. It was gratifying but emotionally exhausting. It's hard even to come in sometimes. I wonder, are we even making progress here?"

"Now what's she talking about?" Annette looked up at Julie.

"So that's why you need to make sure that Dave has your weekly schedule, so he can keep the appointment schedule accurate with hourly time blocks for intakes," Julie concluded.

Julie returned to her office. There were two messages from the Dylan Foundation president wanting to know about last quarter's statistics. He had threatened to pull funding for next year unless the center began to show more progress in winning cases where disabled clients were about to be evicted. She knew that the staff had done great work recently, but they had only begun to compile the statistics and she could not yet prove it with charts and graphs. He'd be fine after she met with him, she thought. She made a mental note to bring two recent success story case studies to her meeting with him.

Rafael appeared in the doorway. "Julie, what do we do when the service date on the subpoena doesn't match the date on the submission form? Can you show me how we address that in the reply?"

"Yes. Well, actually, ask Kyle because I showed him the same thing last week," Julie answered.

"Kyle's not here until 3, and I have to have the motion done for the client to pick up at noon," Rafael said.

"Okay. Just give me a few minutes and I'll be right there," Julie replied.

"Thanks," Rafael said.

Jean was right behind him. "Julie, I have an urgent housing motion here that needs to be filed. Do you want this now?"

Julie took the intake form and looked through it. A woman with a \$900 monthly income and an infant son and 2-year-old daughter received an eviction notice for being one day late on her \$800 rent. A court filing would be due tomorrow.

"I have a meeting this afternoon and can't do it today. Why don't you put it in the hallway box and maybe someone can get to it today? Otherwise, I'll get to it tomorrow," Julie said.

Jean paused for a moment. "Okay, I'll do that," she said.

<sup>1</sup> Rokeach (1973) and other psychologists over the past decades have done a great deal of work to distinguish among values, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and so on. For our purposes in this chapter, these distinctions are not critical.

## Chapter 4 Foundations of Organizational Change

In 1996, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* hired a new editor, Cole Campbell, to address declining readership and increased competition. Among the changes instituted in the newsroom was a shift away from reporters being assigned to beats and toward journalistic reporting teams. The staff was generally enthusiastic and optimistic that this change would be a positive one that would increase the paper's quality, and they welcomed the team-based governance structure. The vision was that teams comprising members from the news and business divisions would collaborate on customer-focus and problem-solving initiatives to improve the paper. As the change was instituted, however, morale declined. Several mid-level editor and reporter positions were eliminated or restructured, and both reporters and editors had to reapply for jobs as team members or leaders in the new structure. Many staff members were frustrated that they were not consulted or involved in making the changes successful. Soon reporters began to dislike working in teams and declared that nothing had actually changed in the quality of the paper. Many award-winning and highly respected journalists left the paper voluntarily, citing the changes in the newsroom. In 2000, Campbell resigned. Circulation had declined from 320,000 to less than 295,000 during his 4-year tenure (Gade & Perry, 2003).

- What could have been done differently to make this change successful?
- What factors do you think contribute to making a successful change?

As you have no doubt experienced, achieving change is difficult. This story of organizational change at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* has likely been replicated at countless organizations. While it may be tempting to blame the leader and to dismiss failed attempts as yet another example of poorly managed change, it is beneficial to understand what happened in situations like this one and what other explanations are possible. They can teach us about where attempts at change go wrong and how organizational change should be managed differently.

As we have discussed in previous chapters, organization development (OD) was primarily concerned early on with incremental changes that organizations could experience through interventions that targeted individual development. In recent years, with an emphasis on organizational effectiveness, OD has directed attention toward larger-scale and strategic change. Organizational change is the context (and purpose) of OD work, and a key competency of OD professionals is understanding the nature of organizational change, including what factors help to make changes succeed and what factors cause them to fail. In this chapter we will explore the nature of organizational change, including how researchers and practitioners think about change. We will explore the levels and characteristics of changes that organizations seek to make, and we will look at the research and writings of scholars and practitioners that develop theoretical models for how changes occur, as well as the fundamental issues that make changes successful.

To do that, we will also delve briefly into organizational theory. We will discuss two ways of looking at organizations: as systems and as they are socially constructed. The organization-as-system model has evolved from general systems theory over the past 50 to 60 years. Organizations-as-socially-constructed is a relatively more recent evolution of organizational theory, becoming prominent in the past 20 to 30 years. While these approaches are contradictory in some respects, containing some fundamentally different assumptions at their core, these ways of looking at organizations offer useful and different insights. They suggest approaches to organizational change that can help practitioners as they interpret how to best help a client achieve change in a particular organization. As you learn about these perspectives and models of organizational change in this chapter, keep in mind the practical challenges faced by those who lead organizational change and whether

there is one perspective or approach that resonates more with you and your experiences.

You may be wondering why we need to delve into such theoretical detail just to understand how to manage organizational change at a practical level. The answer is that our approach to change depends on the underlying assumptions and beliefs that we have about how organizations work. In other words, “The way change facilitators think about causes of change determines how they contract, assess, intervene, and evaluate during their interactions with client organizations” (Olson & Eoyang, 2001, p. 7). As we have noted in previous chapters, it is important for OD practitioners to be conscious and intentional about the choices they make and to avoid adopting an intervention or model simply because it is fashionable. By learning more about the assumptions behind the models, you will be a more thoughtful and successful practitioner of organizational change.

## Levels and Characteristics of Organizational Change

When we talk about organizational change, we are referring to many different kinds of changes that occur at many levels. Changes can occur at the individual level when people learn new skills or develop new ways of working through mentoring, coaching, or education and training. Changes can occur at the group or team level as teams develop new ways of working with one another, define their goals and objectives, and learn ways of addressing conflict. Groups can also learn how to work more effectively with other groups (intergroup change) to solve problems or address interdependencies. Changes occur at the organizational level through the development of new strategies and processes, visions for a new desired future, and major system practices that affect all organizational members. Changes can also occur at suprasystem levels, where multiple organizations are implicated. These can involve changes, for example, between multiple organizations (such as mergers and acquisitions); between organizations and government agencies; or between cities, states, or nations.

Practitioners and scholars have noticed that organizational changes differ on a number of dimensions.

Changes vary in several ways:

1. *Planning.* Organizational change can be planned or unplanned. Organizational members can be conscious and intentional about the changes that they want to make, often due to environmental factors, strategic or market needs, or other influences. Changes can also be unplanned, perhaps in response to an immediate threat or crisis. Weick (2000) contrasts planned changes with emergent changes, which are the “ongoing accommodations, adaptations, and alterations that produce fundamental change without a priori intentions to do so” (p. 237). Organization development as a field has primarily been concerned with the successful implementation of planned organizational change (Beckhard, 1969) or intentional change programs developed intentionally to improve the organization or address a deficiency.
2. *Magnitude.* OD literature differentiates between first-order and second-order change (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). First-order change consists of “incremental modifications that make sense within an established framework or method of operating,” and second-order change is defined as transformational changes that “are modifications in the frameworks themselves” (Bartunek & Moch, 1987, p. 484). First-order changes tend to be alterations or changes to existing practices rather than a rethinking or reinvention of the practice. Implementation of a computer system that simply automates existing work practices is an example of first-order change, where existing work practices are modified within the existing understanding of how the work is done, maintaining its current purposes, objectives, and processes. First-order change reflects an evolution of existing definitions rather than a revolution or redefinition. Rethinking how the entire organization used the computer system, including redefining roles, processes, values, and implicit meanings, would be considered second-order change. Because second-order change tends to reflect a more substantial shift, some refer to this type of change as “organizational transformation” (Bartunek & Louis, 1988). Chapman (2002) writes that, historically, most OD models reflect concerns with first-order change rather than second-order change. Others refer to differences in magnitude of organizational change by the labels *transactional* or *transformational* (Burke & Litwin, 1992), *evolutionary* or *revolutionary* (Burke, 2002), and *incremental* or *transformational*



(Kindler, 1979).

3. *Continuity*. Weick and Quinn (1999) distinguish between episodic and continuous change. Episodic change is defined as distinct periods of change, usually infrequent and explicitly defined. When seen in this way, episodic change is usually framed as a response to a stable condition in which adverse conditions are present that force a change. Continuous change, on the other hand, reflects the idea that the organization is never truly out of a state of change, and that even in minute ways, change is always occurring.

## **Models of Organizational Change: Systems Theory and Social Construction Approaches**

Scholars and practitioners have developed a number of models to explain how change occurs. Some of these models are based on years of empirical research, whereas others are based in practitioners' experiences of witnessing and implementing change in organizations. These models explain change differently based on different underlying theoretical assumptions about organizations, people, and work. In the first section, we will examine systems theory and models of organizations and organizational change that share systems theory's assumptions; in the second, we will discuss the social construction perspective and models of organizational change consistent with that approach.

## Organizations as Systems

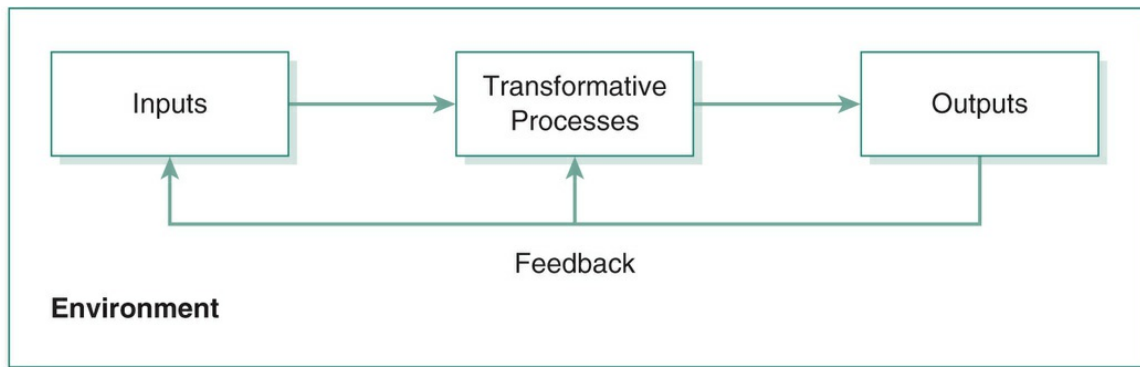
The first lens that we will use to look at an organization is as a system. Systems theory can be traced to an Austrian biologist, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, who wrote a series of books and articles beginning in the 1940s (see Bertalanffy, 1968) about the systemic interconnections of the natural world. Living organisms and the physical environment, Bertalanffy noted, displayed interconnectedness among their various parts. Fruit trees under stress due to weather conditions such as drought or extreme heat, for example, produce less fruit in order to conserve energy. General systems theory, according to Bertalanffy, was about understanding the characteristics of these natural systems and the underlying laws that defined their interconnections. Rather than investigate only the subparts of these organisms in isolation from one another, general systems theory tried to understand how the subparts related to one another.

Katz and Kahn (1966) were among the first to adapt this perspective to organizational theory. “All social systems, including organizations,” they wrote, “consist of the patterned activities of a number of individuals” (p. 17). They argued that open systems (natural and organizational) displayed common characteristics, such as the importation of energy or inputs, a throughput or transformation process, an output, feedback, homeostasis or equilibrium, and others. Systems theorists refer to these systems as “open” versus “closed” because the system is interconnected with its environment (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972). Most theorists emphasize, however, that the natural system metaphor for organizations can be taken too far, since “social structures are essentially contrived systems” (Katz & Kahn, 1966, p. 33). See [Figure 4.1](#) for a visual depiction of an organizational system.

To better understand these characteristics of a system, consider an automobile factory as an example. Inputs consist of raw materials such as the engine, doors, tires, and so on (or even more fundamental inputs such as sheet metal, plastic, or glass). The factory works with these raw materials through assembly, painting, and other construction processes. The output is a functioning automobile of a certain kind with certain characteristics. The cars are sold for money, which is used to purchase more raw materials, create new car designs, open more factories, and so on. Feedback processes (such as inventory numbers, sales rates, and sales revenue) create information that is fed back into the system to ensure that the system maintains equilibrium and that it can adapt appropriately to environmental conditions.

The system maintains equilibrium through market and consumer demands. For example, if cars are not being sold (for example, due to competition, economic conditions, or other environmental factors) and too much inventory exists, the factory will slow down production to adapt to these conditions. If demand is high, feedback to the factory will result in higher production rates (again adapting to what is demanded by the environment). When demand declines, without storage or conservation of resources (for example, retaining some money so that the organization can still function even when sales rates are lower than expected), the organization will cease to exist. Systems theorists call this property of systems “negative entropy,” meaning the system needs to cope with expended energy without any incoming energy to assist the system in surviving. Moreover, all of these parts and functions are internally interdependent, so that changes in one part of the system will result in changes in other parts of the system (Nadler & Tushman, 1983).

**Figure 4.1** An Organization as a System



Within these systems, certain functional specialized roles and procedures exist to aid the system in functioning properly. Production workers, for example, work on a specific component of the assembly process. Managers and executives help the system's parts to function effectively and monitor the feedback from the internal and external environment. Procedures help the system to reproduce its processes in standardized ways. The overall organizational system also consists of a variety of interconnected subsystems that depend on one another. For example, the factory depends on human resources to hire and train employees properly. The entire system depends on finance to pay employees, to provide budgets used to purchase raw materials, and to collect money from customers. These departments exist as subsystems within the overall organizational system.

Open systems thinking is the process of considering how people, processes, structures, and policies all exist in an interconnected web of relationships. Systems thinkers see the whole of an organism or organization as larger than the sum of its parts, and as systems that exist within other systems of which they are a part (Burke, 2002). Mayhew (2006) writes that systems thinking is about analyzing the organization on three levels: events, patterns, and structure. Whereas *events* are single occurrences of an episode, *patterns* are the multiple and repetitive “archetypes” (Senge, 1990) that allow events to happen in the same way time after time. These patterns exist in *structures* that support and reinforce them. Systems thinking, as Senge (1990) describes it, consists of seeing the interrelationship of structures and components rather than simple and “linear cause-effect chains” (p. 71). Correcting organizational problems requires systems thinking rather than simple linear thinking (A caused B to happen) in order to solve the root of the problem rather than correcting the immediate, surface-level symptoms of the problem (asking questions such as “What caused A? Are there other causes?”). In other words, it requires analyzing structures and patterns rather than isolated events.

Systems theory has been a popular approach in organizational studies because it resonates with how we understand organizations to work at the most general level. Organizations produce something—whether it is a product, such as cars or breakfast cereal, or a service, such as financial consulting or providing Internet access. Changes in the environment, such as legislative or regulatory changes, cause organizations to adapt to new rules. Poor quality inputs lead to problems in transformation processes and result in poor quality outputs. Erroneous information in the feedback process creates unnecessary or problematic changes in the system. Aspects of the system are interdependent on one another, and problems in one part of the system create problems in other parts of the system. These statements about organizational systems provide a commonsense explanation for how organizations and their subsystems seem to us to work.



## The Value of Systems Theory for OD Practitioners

For OD practitioners, systems theory offers a number of benefits. First, it can offer useful explanations for human behavior in organizations with attention to roles and structures rather than individual idiosyncrasies. Instead of seeing individual differences, OD practitioners can note where systems may encourage certain behavior patterns, usually subtly and without conscious decision. If a call center regularly measures the number of calls completed per hour, then call-takers may be motivated to quickly complete calls at the expense of careful diagnosis and resolution of customer problems. Service managers may be motivated to dispatch replacement parts for customers via overnight mail (thereby inappropriately increasing expenses) in order to increase customer satisfaction (for which they will receive a bonus). The measurement and rewards system in both cases directs a certain behavior on the part of call-takers and service managers. Narrow job definitions and roles in one division may result in no employee taking responsibility for a certain problem as employees act in accordance with what the system has asked them to do in defining the role they occupy. Structured role definitions can explain how and why certain people interact with each other in patterned ways (for example, the emergency room nurse may take instructions from the attending physician). The systems theory perspective helps us see role-based interactional patterns rather than isolated actions of single individuals.

Second, understanding the system and its dynamics gives OD practitioners a more appropriate place to begin interventions for change, since the object of change is often best directed at the system level rather than the individual level (Burke, 2002). For example, inadequately maintained or broken equipment can reduce factory output levels. Instead of blaming the production manager's poor management skills for low factory production yields, or placing blame on factory workers for slow work, the systemic issue is a more direct cause. When an organization has unhappy customers due to a quality problem, instead of conducting training for customer service representatives on how to deal with angry customers, the quality problem should be addressed as the source of the problem. Katz and Kahn (1966) wrote that this attention on training was a common error in organizations—and little change results from it:

It is common practice to pull foremen or officials out of their organizational roles and give them training in human relations. Then they return to their customary positions with the same role expectations from their subordinates, the same pressures from their superiors, and the same functions to perform as before their special training. (p. 390)

An organization that fires an unproductive employee and hires a highly paid, skilled replacement often discovers that the new employee is no more successful because the role exists in a structure (say, low budget, little decision-making authority) where virtually no employee could succeed. As Senge (1990) puts it, "When placed in the same system, people, however different, tend to produce similar results" (p. 42). OD practitioners can delve more deeply into the causes of problems and interconnections among groups, looking at systemic problems rather than at individuals or individual components of the system as the primary sources of error (M. I. Harrison & Shirom, 1999). This can lead to more fruitful targets for change.

Third, because changing one part of the system also results in changes to another part of the system, OD practitioners can be more deliberate about changes that are being proposed, and possible negative results can be predicted. If bonuses are given to sales executives who sell a certain product, the factory likely will need to produce more of that product than others. If computer equipment is not replaced in order to reduce expenses, then additional expenses likely will be incurred in repairing equipment. If insurance claim application processing can be completed 2 days more quickly after a work process redesign, then the payment processing department that processes approved claims may have more work to complete more quickly than it can handle. Taking systemic issues into account may mean a more successful organizational change, as undesirable or “downstream” outcomes can be predicted and addressed before they become problems of their own. The organization as a whole can be internally consistent about the changes it wants to make.

## Models of Organizational Change Consistent With a Systems Theory Approach

As might be expected given its popularity as a theoretical model for organizations, models of organizational change consistent with a systems theory approach predominate. What they may lack in specificity, they make up in helping the practitioner to see patterns and their relationships in a broader sense. We can thus see patterns in a large volume of data (in fact, we can use these models to analyze data, a point we will return to in a later chapter). They can help us see possible relationships that we may have missed, and they can help us see missing pieces that we might have expected to see but did not. Finally, they can help us see possible areas for change (Burke, 2002). The model may point out the influence of one area on another that may prompt us to note that we devote too much attention to the first topic and not enough to the latter. In short, models are like colored lenses that highlight some aspects of the terrain while they may obscure others, but in any case, they will help us see new things that we may not have seen before.

Four common models of organizational behavior and change consistent with a systems theory perspective are Lewin's three-phase model, the Nadler-Tushman congruence model, the Burke-Litwin model, and the Weisbord Six-Box Model. Each of these offers a different perspective on organizational analysis, highlighting a different approach to organizational change.

### Lewin's Three-Phase Model of Change and Force Field Analysis

Kurt Lewin (1951) offered a three-phase model of organizational change in which he described change as a process of (1) unfreezing, (2) moving, and (3) refreezing. Current organizational practices need to be released (or unfrozen) to be changed. Once they are changed, they need to be refrozen as newly adopted regular practices. Lewin pointed out that two forces worked together to maintain equilibrium in an organization: forces promoting a change and forces promoting the status quo. Change can occur only when forces of change are greater than forces maintaining the status quo. This can happen in two ways: if forces promoting change are increased or forces maintaining the status quo are decreased.

For example, imagine that a company is going to introduce a new financial software system. Forces supporting the change might be that (1) the new system will permit a more sophisticated analysis of the company's financial results, (2) the new system will be more accurate than the current system, and (3) the system can be integrated into the current contracts and manufacturing systems. Forces resisting the change might be (1) the need for extensive employee training, (2) the cost of implementing the system, and (3) the reluctance on the part of employees who have had a bad experience with similar implementations. Lewin's model points out that change will not occur if the training, cost, and resistance are greater than the benefits that the system offers (see [Figure 4.2](#)).

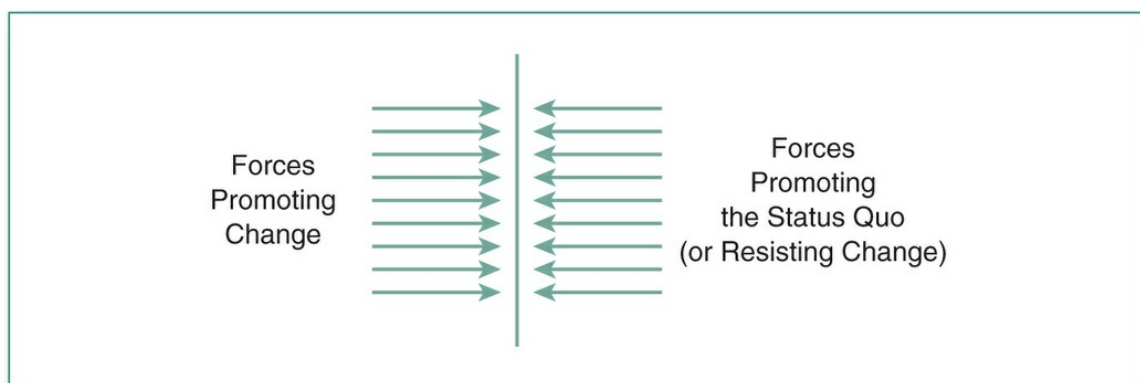
Lewin's is an easily grasped description of change that has been widely adopted by managers and practitioners. It explains that to embrace something new, something else must be left behind. The organization must be freed from prior practices and must work to sustain the change when it is implemented. The model also



reminds us that organizational members must be prepared for a change, and that levels of resistance can mean that the organization remains in a frozen state until we work to unfreeze it. Members must be practically or symbolically released from previous practices in order to change them, and following a change, conscious attention must be paid to reinforcing the change in order to help it stick. A popular adaptation of Lewin's model refers to an organization's current state, a transition state, and a desired state (Beckhard & Harris, 1977). Despite its popularity among practitioners, many scholars have noted that an "organization-as-ice-cube" model is, however, an oversimplification of a much more complex process, particularly since organizational practices are never exactly frozen (Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992).

Lewin's concept of force field analysis has become a useful tool for OD practitioners to use with clients. The tool can help organizational members understand what factors would support a given change effort and what resistance might prevent the change from being adopted. Some practitioners use the model as a formal assessment, asking team members (separately or in groups) to rate the strength of the forces for and against change on a scale from 1 to 5 to prioritize actions where energy should be directed (see Schwering, 2003, for a variation on this approach).

**Figure 4.2** Kurt Lewin's Force Field Analysis



## The Nadler-Tushman Congruence Model

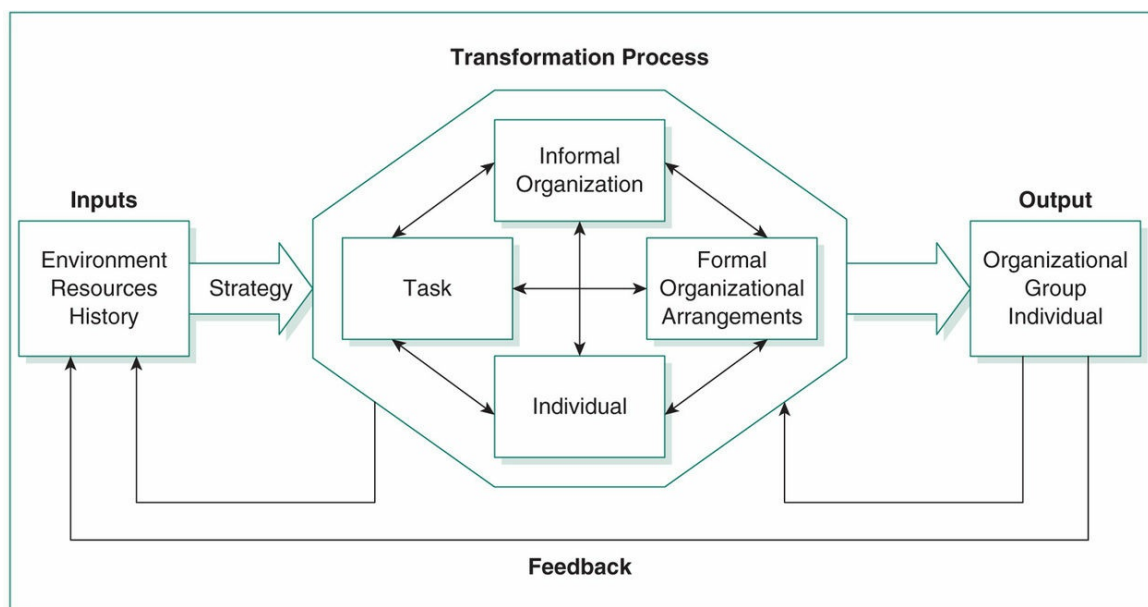
Noting that systems theory is "too abstract to be used for day-to-day organizational behavior-problem analysis" (Nadler & Tushman, 1983, p. 114), Nadler and Tushman have offered an expanded version of systems theory that contains additional concepts intended to be more useful to practitioners (see [Figure 4.3](#)). Nadler (1981) also explains that this model is particularly useful for organizational change. The premise behind the model is this:

The model puts its greatest emphasis on the transformation process and in particular reflects the critical system property of interdependence. It views organizations as made up of components or parts which interact with each other. These components exist in states of relative balance, consistency, or "fit" with each other. The different parts of an organization can fit well together and thus function effectively, or fit poorly, thus leading to problems, dysfunctions, or performance below potential. Given the central nature of these "fits" among components in the model, we will talk about it as a *congruence model of organizational behavior*, since effectiveness is a function of the

congruence among the various components. (Nadler & Tushman, 1983, p. 114)

Like the traditional model of systems theory described earlier, notice that inputs, transformation processes, outputs, and feedback are also included as part of the congruence model. Each of these has been expanded in this model. Inputs include environment, resources, and history, and are merged with organizational strategy to influence transformation processes. Market demands, human resources, technology, capital, information, and prior patterns all comprise the organization's inputs. Strategy is included in the congruence model as it determines what the organization will work on and how the organization must work to achieve its outputs. Outputs are now more specifically defined not only as the "tangible" product of the organization's processes, but outputs also consist of organizational, group, and individual performance. Nadler and Tushman include job satisfaction, stress, and other individual outputs as products of the work environment as well. Transformation processes have been expanded in the congruence model to include four important elements that relate to one another: task, individual, formal organizational arrangements, and informal organization. The task component encompasses the work to be done, but also the skills and knowledge required to do it and the degree of independence or judgment required. The individual component includes employees' knowledge and skills, engagement and motivation, preferences and attitudes, and other influences on individual behavior. Formal organizational arrangements include explicitly defined processes and organizational structures, job definition, metrics, the physical layout and environment, and other officially specified aspects of the work. Informal organization is defined as the less explicitly defined or tacit understandings, processes, methods, and norms that comprise how work is actually done.

**Figure 4.3** The Nadler-Tushman Congruence Model



SOURCE: Nadler, D. A., & Tushman, M. L. (1983). A general diagnostic model for organizational behavior: Applying a congruence perspective. In J. R. Hackman, E. E. Lawler III, & L. W. Porter (Eds.), *Perspectives on Behavior in Organizations* (2nd ed., pp. 112–124). New York, NY: McGraw-

Hill. Used with permission of McGraw-Hill Education.

Together, these four elements are defined as the primary components of the organization. They interact together in more or less consistent ways as the organization produces its outputs. Nadler (1981) writes about a fundamental notion of the congruence model:

At the core of this systems-based perspective is the assumption that the interaction among the organizational components is perhaps more critical than the characteristics of the components themselves, and that as systems, organizations fundamentally work better when the pieces fit together. (p. 194)

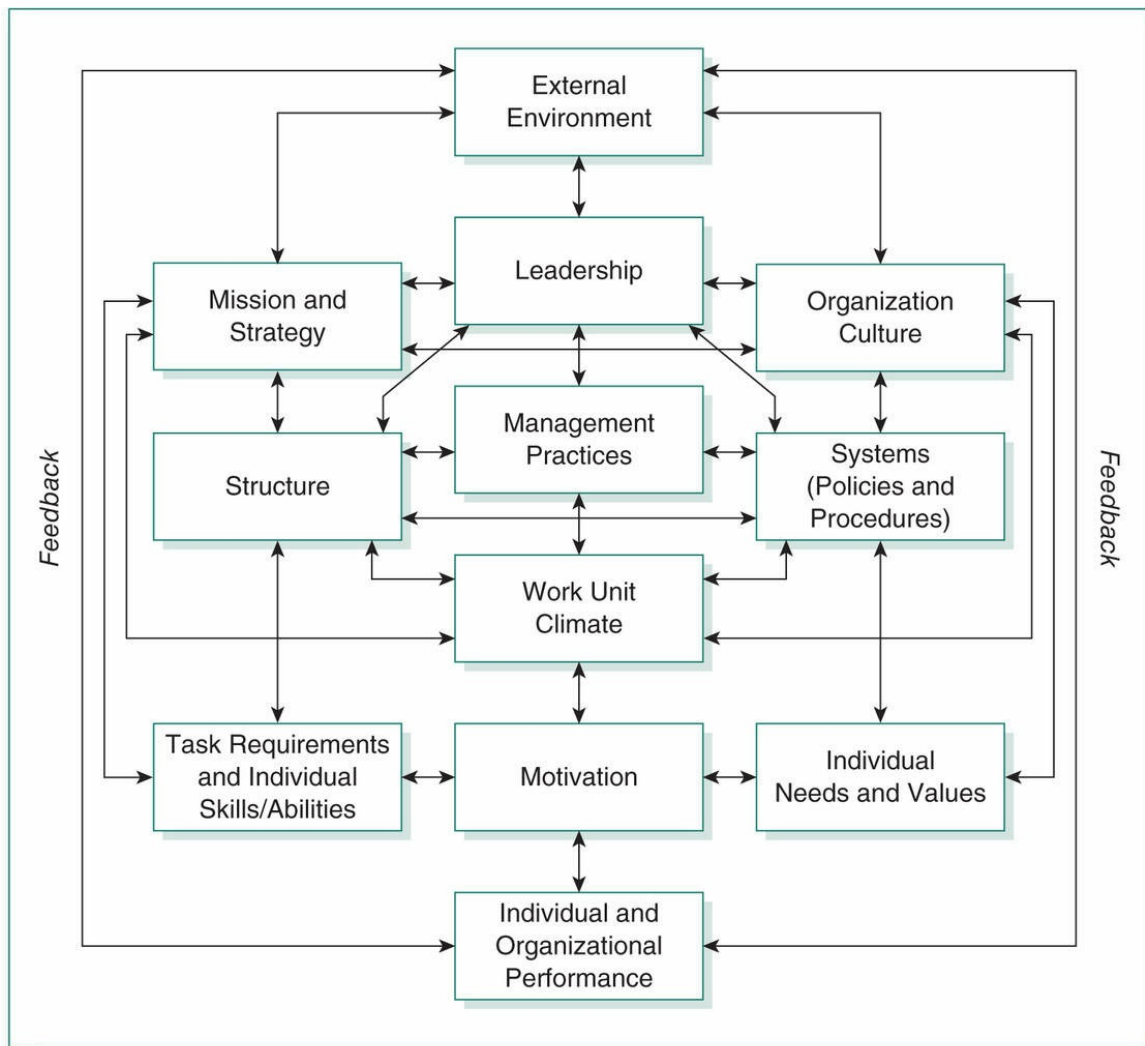
Nadler and Tushman (1983) refer to this as the “congruence hypothesis,” or the idea that the better the congruence between components, the more effective the organization. When an organization has a market demand to produce a new product (new input and new output), that demand requires a specific task to produce the output. If the task’s demands require skills and knowledge that individuals do not possess, then there will be a congruence gap (or low “fit”) between task and individuals. Organizational effectiveness can be achieved only if the fit is increased.

The model points to areas that affect one another so that changes in other parts of the system can be noted and controlled. Nadler (1981) explains that when parts of a system are changed, they may increase or decrease the “fit” or congruence with other parts of the system. When change happens, other components of the organization may resist the change and encourage regression to the prior state. Thus, Nadler points to the need to motivate change (the individual component), manage transitions, and pay attention to political dynamics of change as well.

## **The Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change**

Burke and Litwin (1992) praised many of the models of organizational change that had been developed up to the early 1990s, but they also saw them as overly simplistic. Many of these models had real-world proven utility and had been developed from practitioners’ own experiences. Some prior models could not, however, predict the impact of an organizational change with certainty on other elements of the organization, and other models lacked empirical testing. Burke and Litwin developed their model of organizational performance and change as a causal model that could be empirically tested, that would specify the variables that would be affected by a given change, and that would take into account both first-order (transactional) and second-order (transformational) change (see [Figure 4.4](#)). Theirs is explicitly a model of organizational change based in systems theory that is intended to follow from its basic tenets.

**Figure 4.4** The Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change



SOURCE: Burke, W. W., & Litwin, G. H. (1992). A causal mode of organizational performance and change. *Journal of Management*, 18, 523–545. Reprinted with permission from SAGE Publications, Inc.

Many observers have remarked on the complexity of this model and express confusion about the number and direction of the arrows. Burke and Litwin acknowledge that the model is complex but state that change is such a complex phenomenon, the model is still likely a simplified version of what actually occurs during change. Similar to systems theory, the external environment at the top of the model represents inputs, the individual and organizational performance box at the bottom of the model represents the output, and all other boxes between these represent the throughput processes. Arrows indicate the greatest directions of influence among the variables, but the downward arrows, they believe, have greater influence on lower boxes than do the upward arrows to the variables above them. Burke and Litwin write that all boxes generally affect all others, but the arrows in the model represent the most important causal links. They define each component as follows:

- *External environment.* Any outside condition or situation that influences the performance of the organization

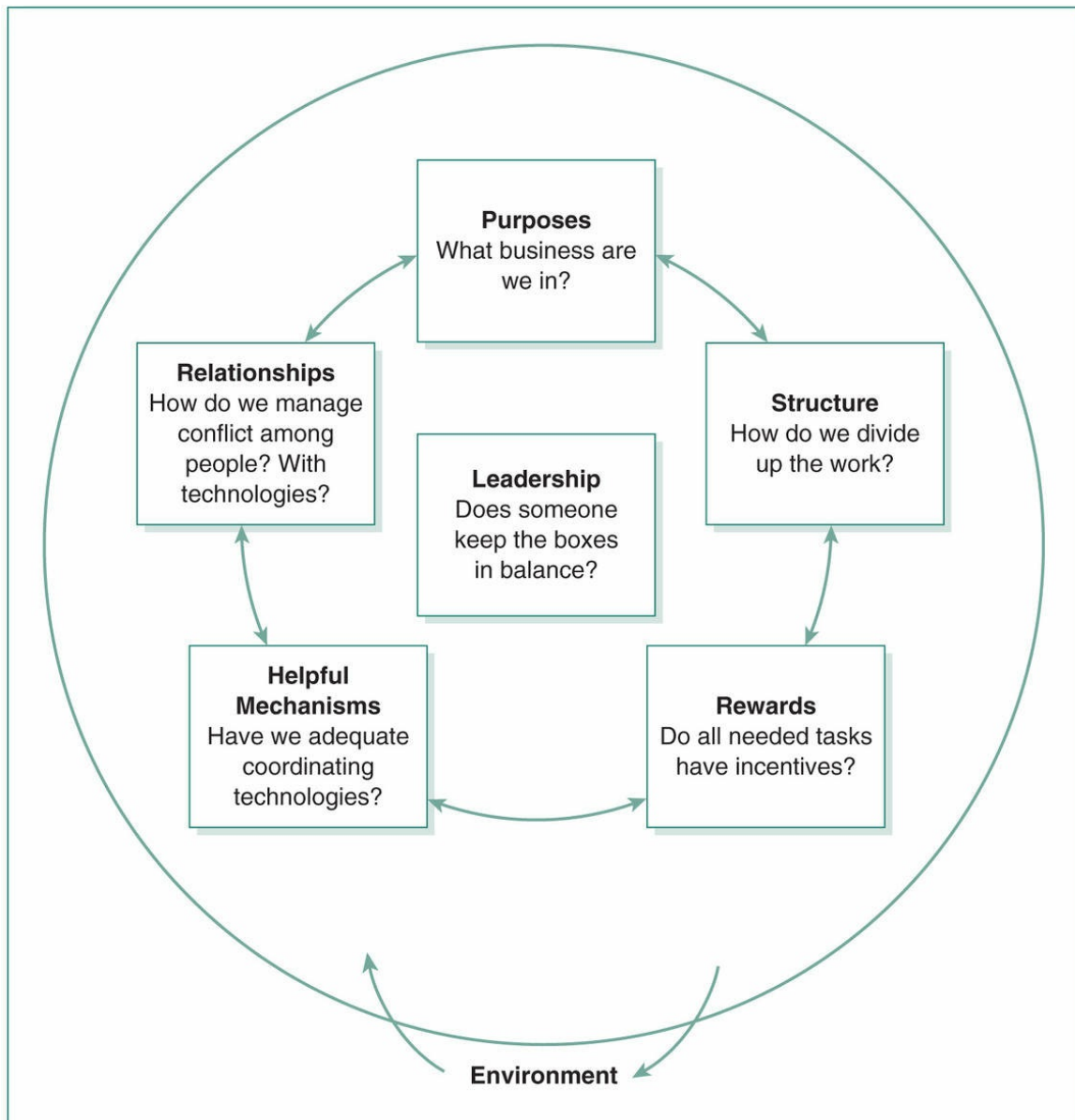
- *Mission and strategy.* What employees believe is the central purpose of the organization and how the organization intends to achieve that purpose over an extended period of time
- *Leadership.* Executive behavior that provides direction and encourages others to take needed action
- *Culture.* “The way we do things around here”; culture is the collection of overt and covert rules, values, and principles that guide organizational behavior and that have been strongly influenced by history, custom, and practice
- *Structure.* The arrangement of functions and people into specific areas and levels of responsibility, decision-making authority, and relationships
- *Management practices.* What managers do in the normal course of events to use the human and material resources at their disposal to carry out the organization’s strategy
- *Systems.* Standardized policies and mechanisms that are designed to facilitate work
- *Climate.* The collective current impressions, expectations, and feelings of the members of local work units
- *Task requirements and individual skills/abilities.* The behavior required for task effectiveness, including specific skills and knowledge required for people to accomplish the work assigned and for which they feel directly responsible
- *Individual needs and values.* The specific psychological factors that provide desire and worth for individual actions or thoughts
- *Motivation.* Aroused behavioral tendencies to move toward goals, take needed action, and persist until satisfaction is attained
- *Individual and organizational performance.* The outcomes or results, with indicators of effort and achievement; such indicators might include productivity, customer or staff satisfaction, profit, and service quality (Burke, 1993, pp. 130–132)

Burke and Litwin write that the model attempts to integrate notions of transformational and transactional change. The factors most influential in transformational change are due to environmental causes, so the top four boxes (external environment, mission and strategy, leadership, and organization culture) have the greatest influence on performance. During transactional change, the other boxes below this level (structure, management practices, and so on) are the major factors of interest. Burke (2002) has described several cases in which applications of the model have been successfully tested.

## Weisbord’s Six-Box Model

Strictly speaking, Weisbord’s Six-Box Model, first elaborated in a 1976 article, was not explicitly articulated as a model of organizational change (see [Figure 4.5](#)). In later years, however, Weisbord’s model has become a popular diagnostic model to illustrate elements of a system that are out of sync with other parts of the system, in particular to explore how formal and informal systems are often misaligned or contradictory. Consequently, it has become a popular model among practitioners for analyzing and conducting organizational change (Birnbaum, 1984; M. W. Ford & Evans, 2001).

**Figure 4.5** Weisbord’s Six-Box Model



SOURCE: Weisbord, M. R. (1976). Organizational diagnosis: Six places to look for trouble with or without a theory. *Group & Organization Studies*, 1, 430–447. Reprinted with permission.

Weisbord refers to the model as a “radar screen” (Weisbord, 1976, p. 431) depicting the interrelationships among six of an organization’s component parts. Based on his experience, the model categorizes six common problem areas in an organization and helps to illustrate how symptoms can be seen in a systemic light. Each of the boxes has both formal (espoused and official) and informal (how things work in practice) components, and a complete diagnosis must attend to both. The model’s six boxes are as follows:

- *Purposes*. This box includes formal goal clarity (how well the goals are explained) and informal goal agreement (how well the goals are truly understood and acted upon).
- *Structure*. How well does the organizational structure match the needed outputs? Is the organizational structure followed or undermined in daily practice?

- *Rewards*. Does a (formal) reward system exist, and does it actually produce results, making employees feel as if their contributions are being rewarded (informal)?
- *Relationships*. This concerns the degree to which people can work interdependently and manage conflict successfully.
- *Helpful mechanisms*. What formal mechanisms exist to facilitate work, such as budget processes, meetings, reviews, or other communications? How well do these helpful mechanisms meet their objectives?
- *Leadership*. How do leaders lead? What do they state as their formal expectations? What norms do leaders informally role model or informally communicate?

When formal and informal components of the boxes are not in alignment, the organization may be expending energy maintaining both a formal system and an informal one that may or may not be functioning as needed. It is not the case that one of these systems is better than the other, but understanding how these six boxes function formally and informally can give insight into why an organization may be experiencing problems and where to begin interventions for change (Weisbord, 1976). Additional gaps may exist between the organization and its environment, between individual work and the organization's goals, or between different organizational units. It is this formal and informal gap analysis that Weisbord and others have noted is an especially important aspect of the model. Weisbord's Six-Box Model thus gives great insight into the internal functioning of a system. As some have noted, this advantage of the Six-Box Model may be its drawback as well, as it attends less to elements of the external environment and issues such as scarce resources or demands of external stakeholders (M. I. Harrison & Shirom, 1999). It also gives less insight into which gaps may be more serious than others. By placing leadership in the center of the model, it may also overemphasize the role of leadership and understate the role of individual employees in the functioning of the organization.

This model, like the other three models, is consistent with the approach suggested by systems theory, that an organization exists in interaction with its environment, and that managing problems, misalignments, and holes between various components is a key to successful organizational functioning. This has been the dominant approach in OD and organization theory (Shaw, 1997). Assumptions about organizational components and analysis of "fit" remain a key feature of diagnostic recommendations in the practitioner literature (e.g., M. I. Harrison & Shirom, 1999). This approach can be enhanced, however, by another perspective, to which we now turn.

## Organizations as Socially Constructed

*The story goes that three umpires disagreed about the task of calling balls and strikes. The first one said, "I calls them as they is." The second one said, "I calls them as I sees them." The third and cleverest umpire said, "They ain't nothin' till I calls them."*

—Simons (1976; cited in Weick, 1979, p. 1)

A second view of organizations is a more recent evolution in organizational theory, and it offers a different perspective on change than the models we have just seen. The intellectual history of the idea of social construction in organizational studies is usually traced to Berger and Luckmann's (1967) seminal work *The Social Construction of Reality*, and it has been particularly influential in organizational theory over the past 3 decades. Consider that in our everyday language, or even in texts such as this one, organizations are frequently personified as actors in their own right. We speak of working "in" an organization, thinking of an organization as a container or physical environment. We speak of organizations "adapting" to their environment, or the production department "deciding" to increase output. Classical organizational theory actually considered organizations to be "living things" with "a concrete social environment, a formal structure, recognized goals, and a variety of needs" (Wolf, 1958, p. 14). Yet organizations are not people, and a number of important ideas are obscured when we personify them.

The social construction view argues that organizations are not exactly things at all, but that the organization is really a concept developed out of our own actions and language. Some scholars suggest that the study of organizations is really the study of the process of organizing, with the verb form emphasizing the active role we take in creating our organizations. If you consider an organization that you know well and try to point to what "it" is, you may point to a building to show where it is located or show an organizational chart as an abstract representation of how that organization is structured, but you will not have pointed to the organization. (The building could still exist without the organization, for example.) Drawing boundaries between the organization and its environment can be an equally challenging exercise. Consider the city in which you live as an organization and try to delineate what is "inside" and what is "outside" it. There is city hall and its employees, but what about the citizens, or those who do business in the city but live in another, or the developers who built the local shopping mall? Are they to be considered part of the organization as well, or do they belong in the environment category? From this perspective, the boundary between the organization and its environment is not a sharp or easily defined one, and can even sometimes be fluid from interaction to interaction. Weick (1995) writes that "*environment* and *organization* conceal the fact that organizing is about flows, change, and process" (p. 187). The terms *organization*, *boundary*, and *environment* in systems theory become more complex and perhaps less meaningful when we start to delve more deeply into how to define them.

The view of organizations as socially constructed differs sharply from the systems theory perspective in many respects. It challenges the prevailing assumptions of systems theory that organizational environments, inputs,



processes, outputs, feedback, and so on are self-evident concepts and categories with predefined singular meanings on which we all agree. Instead, it sees those concepts and categories as created, developed, and infused with meaning by organizational members. The quote above about baseball umpires illustrates the primary difference between systems theory and social construction. In systems theory, the process of pitching to a batter, calling balls and strikes, and tallying outs and so forth would describe a subprocess in a baseball game. While accurate on its surface, it omits the process of constructing meaning (defining what count as balls, strikes, and outs) from an umpire's perspective that actually creates the possibility of the game existing (imagine if all umpires agreed to refuse to interpret a pitch!).

As a second example, let's return to the illustration cited previously about the automobile factory and feedback processes, where information such as sales revenue figures fed back into the factory tells them to build more cars. The revenue figures themselves, as numbers, mean nothing on their own. Instead, they must gain meaning through the process of interpretation. An organizational member (a manager or executive, presumably) must interpret the sales figures and decide (based upon a preexisting agreement, past experience, or even just a hunch) that the numbers mean that enough cars have been sold that additional inventory will be needed. Here, it is the manager's interpretation and judgment that give the data meaning for the organization. Indeed, an incredible amount of information exists in organizational environments that must be given meaning (think, for example, of the competitive landscape, Wall Street expectations, financial performance, past history of the firm, union agreements and employment conditions, customer expectations, and much, much more). To say, as systems theory does, that the environment specifies how the organization must act to achieve equilibrium omits the process of making and creating meaning, and developing and sharing interpretations, that explains how and why organizational members decide to take action. (Notice how few organizational members are mentioned in the descriptions of systems theory.) One could never gather all relevant information before a decision. Instead, information is selectively gathered, made sense of, and shared to create a socially constructed truth that organizational members will use for decisions and action (March, 1994). The category of "environment" is thus invented and invested with meaning by organizational members, and it does not exist outside of their interpretation. Weick (1995) calls this concept *sensemaking*, which he defines as "placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding, and patterning" (p. 6).

Interactions and language are important areas of attention in the social construction perspective because it is through regular interaction and dialogue that organizations are developed and change can occur. As J. Kenneth Benson (1977) wrote, "People are continually constructing the social world. Through their interactions with each other social patterns are gradually built and eventually a set of institutional arrangements is established. Through continued interactions the arrangements previously constructed are gradually modified or replaced" (p. 3). Thus, sensemaking is an ongoing process, not something with a defined beginning or ending (Weick, 1995). (This idea reinforces the value of OD, discussed in the previous chapter, that organizations and individuals are always in process.)

The social construction perspective has become an attractive one for both researchers and practitioners because it resonates with what we experience in organizations as we make sense of our activities and the

actions of others. It also respects the ambiguity and multiple meanings that many organizational members experience and the necessary interpretive processes that characterize much of organizational life. Decisions are considered and rationalized based on complex and contradictory facts. Roles are negotiated and enacted, not predetermined by job descriptions. Press releases and executive communications are scrutinized, debated, and examined for hidden meanings. We leave conversations with colleagues to begin other conversations, sharing information and interpretations in each conversation. Multiple contexts and facts can be brought to bear on any situation to result in ambiguous and inconsistent interpretations. For many students of organizational studies, the social construction perspective fills in the missing elements of systems theory to provide a richer and more dynamic view of how organizations work. It describes how members experience organizations as social environments where interaction is fundamentally how work is accomplished and sensemaking is how it is understood and experienced. Particularly in less mechanistic, manufacturing-oriented environments, in today's knowledge-intensive organizations, the machine view of organizations assumed by systems theory seems less accurate when applied to the globalized and fragmented "postmodern" organization of the 21st century. Many believe that the social construction approach more effectively captures this new reality (Bergquist, 1993).

## The Value of the Social Construction Approach for OD Practitioners

The social construction perspective has gained a following among organization development practitioners because it offers several distinct benefits. First, like systems theory it offers a useful (but different) explanation for human behavior. It explains why, for example, organizational members would be less willing to take risks after witnessing a layoff in another division in which risk taking was common. Perhaps a logic has been developed in which members believe that taking risks means that losing one's job is likely. As a second example, consider that perhaps an executive decides to terminate a product line that is losing money. Instead of seeing this as a one-dimensional decision based on input from the environment, the social construction perspective helps to articulate the complexities in collecting, interpreting, and sharing the information used to make and communicate the decision. The social construction perspective directs the OD practitioner's attention to the cultural processes of sensemaking that result in action.

Second, the social construction perspective emphasizes the active role that members take in creating the organization. Members may decide to create a new department, change a structure, adopt new titles, or change a process. While an individual member may not have the choice to change a certain policy, the policy is one developed by organizational members and created for the organization's benefit. Relationships among supervisors and employees are not confined to rigid role-based interactions, but are multidimensional and can be friendly, cold, formal, sociable, and so on. Relationships between coworkers or departments are more complex than simply sharing orders or instructions between them and can be cooperative or contentious, relaxed or rigid. The social construction perspective illustrates the active choice that we make in creating these systems and relationships. This implies that OD practitioners should create situations in which people can choose a different organization to create, such as new policies, processes, roles, or relationships. Accepting this adaptability gives practitioners and organizational members the freedom to create changes that they desire to see (within boundaries, frequently, that we also agree to respect). While this does not deny the importance of leadership in change or the financial or environmental realities, it places an equal emphasis on everyday conversations that occur in the organizational network among all participants.

Third, the social construction perspective helps OD practitioners to see the importance of communication in creating change (J. D. Ford & Ford, 1995):

Stories, myths, rituals, and language use are not simply reflections of organizational meanings; they are the ongoing dynamics that constitute organizational life. Meanings, then, do not reside in messages, channels, or perceptual filters. Rather, they evolve from interaction processes and the ways that individuals make sense of their talk. (Putnam, 1983, p. 40)

Words and their context are important, and the interpretive processes that we use to make sense of words often go unexplored. Consider a situation in which an organization, under financial pressure and rumors of layoffs, is required by law to send out an annual benefits notice to all employees. The notice states that following an involuntary termination, employees are eligible for continued medical benefits for a length of

time following termination. From the perspective of the human resources benefits department, this is an ordinary compliance activity, but from an employee's perspective, it could be alarming to receive such a notice unexpectedly mailed to one's home, considering the context. OD practitioners can become attuned to context, language, and interpretation mechanisms and help organizational members become more explicit about their interpretations. They can understand the context for interpretation of any particular message and make better recommendations about how communication will be received. Jeffrey and Laurie Ford (1995) write that communication is not just another part of change, but it is the primary means by which change occurs.

Finally, the social construction perspective stresses that organizational change has as its foundation a change in meaning. Sensemaking logics lie beneath values, beliefs, and attitudes, as well as organizational practices, identities, and processes. Simply changing a practice, a role, a title, or a department name does not always change the underlying interpretive processes that members have adopted. Consequently, the approach assumes that change can best be accomplished when organizational members have the opportunity to work together to define new practices (Weick, 1995).

## Approaches to Organizational Change Consistent With a Social Construction Perspective

Approaches to organizational change consistent with a social construction perspective look quite different from those explained earlier that are consistent with a systems theory perspective, as they recognize that change is a “messy” and unpredictable phenomenon (Shaw, 1997). Calling these approaches “models,” in the sense that we have just seen, is also misleading because they question the very structures that systems theory assumes. Instead of locating organizational change in categories such as leadership, strategy, or rewards, the social construction perspective explains change as a change in interpretive mechanisms, conversations, communication, meaning, and cognitive schema. “This, in turn, implies that a primary way to effect change in social systems is by changing the prevailing discourse,” write Marshak and Grant (2008, p. 39).

In fact, the very idea of organizational change is rethought in this perspective. Weick (2000) argues that “the breathless rhetoric of planned transformational change, complete with talk of revolution, discontinuity, and upheaval, presents a distorted view of how successful change works” (p. 223). He argues that most models contrast change with inertia, whereas if we recognize that organizations are never really in inert states at all, we become more interested in the ongoing “ebb and flow” (p. 230) of organizational life. As Jeffrey Ford (1999) points out, what constitutes a change is ambiguous and can mean different things to different people. Most change models tend to presume that a change is a single, easily identifiable phenomenon that members could point to and identify as “the change.” Most practitioners and organizational members, however, recognize that change has multiple parts, some of which may or may not be successful, and that these have multiple meanings for various audiences. A widespread organizational change affects different employee groups in different ways, so a single definition of the change may not be possible. Instead, as we have learned, the social construction approach is interested in what the change means to people, recognizing that this meaning may shift and adapt at various points in time. Consequently, social construction approaches to change tend to emphasize continuous change rather than episodic change, privileging the role of language and discourse in change (Weick & Quinn, 1999).

Jeffrey Ford (1999), for example, argued for a definition of organizational change as “shifting conversations,” in which people use different language to understand and accomplish change. When change occurs, it does so “when one way of talking replaces another way of talking” (Barrett, Thomas, & Hocevar, 1995, p. 370). Jeffrey and Laurie Ford (1995) describe four different kinds of conversations that occur during organizational change: conversations that initiate change, conversations that seek to understand change, conversations for performance, and conversations for closure. No one mix of conversational types is right for every change, they note:

The successful implementation of change is a function of conversations that reflect the evolving context and progress of the change, including the results produced and breakdowns to be resolved. Identifying an appropriate conversational pattern, therefore, is a pragmatic issue of determining which type of conversation is most likely to work in the current situation, trying it, seeing what

happens, and making adjustments in and to subsequent conversations. What this means is that change managers may find a conversational mix that is effective in one change but ineffective in another. (J. D. Ford & L. W. Ford, 2008, p. 448)

This approach can explain how, when change does not proceed as expected, certain conversations may not have taken place at all, or may have taken place unsuccessfully.

This model of change-as-communication calls into question the categories discussed in earlier models (e.g., structure, systems, leadership, culture), because those factors are only relevant to the extent that organizational members draw upon them in conversation. Understanding how a change is proceeding depends on careful study and attentive listening to how language has changed (Anderson, 2005b). Echoing MacGregor's recommendation to listen carefully to managers' implicit theories, Jeffrey and Laurie Ford (1995) write, "Managers' assumptions about how ideas are related can be discovered through a study of their conversations about change, particularly during conversations for understanding" (p. 563). Thus, this approach sees change not as an abstract set of influences among boxes, but as a series of conversations where change can be discussed and debated, and new ideas can emerge.

Also proposing a social construction model for change in their popular work *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*, Kegan and Lahey (2001) have written about seven new language shifts that leaders can encourage to support change:

1. From the language of complaint to the language of commitment
2. From the language of blame to the language of personal responsibility
3. From the language of "New Year's Resolutions" to the language of competing commitments
4. From the language of big assumptions that hold us to the language of assumptions that we hold
5. From the language of prizes and praising to the language of ongoing regard
6. From the language of rules and policies to the language of public agreement
7. From the language of constructive criticism to the language of deconstructive criticism (pp. 8–9)

They argue that these seven languages play a role in conversations that we have at individual, team, and organizational levels, and that they often inhibit us from making the changes we seek to make. New conversations can encourage greater learning and achieve change.

The role of the change agent implied by social construction models of change is to facilitate an appropriate environment for these conversations. Managing change in this vein is more like coaching an improvisational jazz band than turning a series of levers and dials on a machine. Creating change does not mean rigidly following the same set of rules through a well-defined process no matter what is trying to be changed, but being inventive and creative with how it is achieved, negotiating among different stakeholders to produce the dialogues that need to happen for change to succeed. In this approach, "the job of a change agent . . . is to initiate, maintain, and complete conversations so as to bring into existence a new conversational reality in which new opportunities for action are created and effective action takes place" (J. D. Ford, 1999, p. 492). How effective change is depends on how well new conversations are initiated and adopted. Marshak and

Grant (2011) argue that multiple levels of conversation exist at which to intervene to accomplish change: the intrapersonal (cognitive frames and schema), the personal (one's own language choices), the interpersonal and the small group (conversations occurring between individuals or in groups), and the organizational level (official discourses and statements of mission and values). Each of these conversations is in some way implicated in effective change.

Jeffrey and Laurie Ford (2008) have developed a practical tool called the conversational profile for change managers to use in analyzing and interpreting the four kinds of change conversations described earlier. They invite managers to log their conversations during a period of 2 weeks or so. Managers write, as in a journal, who participated in the conversation and what was said, as close to a verbatim record of the conversation as they can recollect. Managers then identify which types of change conversations they have engaged in most frequently, and they can then alter their approach if the results of those conversations have not resulted in the outcome they expected or desired.

After seeing analysis of their conversations and results, managers come to their own conclusions about what might be missing or not working; that is, develop a hypothesis, which they can then test by altering either the type of conversations they use or the content of those conversations. (p. 455)

Managers might realize, for example, that they engage in conversations for understanding, assuming that action will follow, but that they have not been explicitly engaging in conversations for performance in which actions are discussed.

## New Paradigms in OD

In addition, related to the social construction approach to change, new paradigms are emerging in organization development that take the social construction philosophy quite seriously. One of these has been influenced by the study of self-organizing systems in biology and other disciplines. The complex adaptive systems perspective, like the social construction approach reviewed above, rejects the notion of the organization as a machinelike set of interconnected and systematized parts that form a predictable whole. Instead, this view sees the organization as ever-changing based on emerging patterns of self-organization created by the interactions of those agents acting as part of it (Olson & Eoyang, 2001). This approach rejects the belief inherent in systems theory that systems are generally alike and general principles can be applied to predict how they will react and respond. Instead, complex adaptive systems thinking believes that individuals and organizations respond differently depending on the circumstances, so behavior cannot be predicted and controlled so systematically. This implies that managing change does not work from a top-down perspective, as in systems theory, but instead, “the role of the change agent is to use an understanding of the evolving patterns to . . . affect the self-organizing path, to observe how the system responds, and to design the next intervention” (Olson & Eoyang, 2001, p. 16). For many observers, this approach resonates because it highlights how changes can adapt and spread throughout a system to illustrate how even small changes made to a single project team can have expansive effects across the organization.

Another of these emerging paradigms, a dialogic approach to OD, similarly supports the notion that changes in an organization can be continuous and emergent, and that they are based in the narratives and changing conversations of organizational members. This view also takes seriously the notion that the organization and its changes are not objectively real phenomena (nor that there is agreement about them) that exist apart from the reality defined and ascribed to them by organizational members. In fact, there are likely to be multiple and competing discourses about change circulating at any given time. What does this view imply about the role of the OD practitioner? To fully appreciate the implications of the dialogic perspective on OD, we will postpone a more complete description of this perspective until the next chapter, when it can be effectively contrasted with a classic diagnostic OD process.

At this point, you may be wondering which of these explanations of organizational change is the most appropriate one to use. Each offers benefits and contains drawbacks, making some elements of the organization visible while it obscures others. From a philosophical perspective, there are some fundamentally incongruous assumptions between the two schools of thought, so buying into multiple perspectives would seem impossible (e.g., the nature of organizational structure as representing an empirical reality versus being socially constructed).

From a practitioner’s pragmatic view, however, each of these models offers unique insight into a client’s environment. For some, what matters is not so much which model is right, but instead which model helps to facilitate additional understanding and is most consistent with both a practitioner’s approach and the client’s need. For example, in a highly structured hierarchical environment or in a stable organization not experiencing rapid change, clients may be more drawn to systems theory approaches. Alternately, in a rapidly



changing or uncertain environment, practitioners may find it enlightening to examine a team's language during meetings to better understand how the team is arriving at decisions or how team member conflicts reflect different underlying assumptions. Using multiple models may also help to illuminate new aspects of a situation, since being overly wedded to one particular model may blind the practitioner to important information (Burke, 1993). What is important is to be conscious of the assumptions of the approach being taken and the consequences of those assumptions.

## Practices in Leading Change

No matter the model of change that guides it, many scholars and practitioners believe that there are several practical steps and ideal leadership practices that will facilitate change. Kotter (1996) has outlined eight steps that leaders should follow in instituting a major change in their organizations:

1. *Establishing a sense of urgency.* Fight complacency about current performance by examining current performance and measuring it against competitors or other benchmarks.
2. *Creating the guiding coalition.* Build a team of energetic, capable leaders who have expertise and credibility to lead the change.
3. *Developing a vision and strategy.* Create an engaging description of the future and the path that will be taken to get there.
4. *Communicating the change vision.* Communicate regularly, using multiple media, in jargon-free language, what the change will mean and why organizational members should be enthusiastic.
5. *Empowering broad-based action.* Remove organizational, systemic, skill, and policy barriers to making the change successful.
6. *Generating short-term wins.* Implement a number of immediate and visible changes to prove the success of the change effort and provide motivation.
7. *Consolidating gains and producing more change.* Overcome the tendency to become complacent and continue to promote even greater changes.
8. *Anchoring new approaches in the culture.* Ensure that new employees and new leaders represent the desired culture. (p. 21)

## Summary

Organizational change is the explicit purpose of most organization development work. Practitioners intervene in organizations at the individual level, at the level of group or team, with multiple groups or teams, at the whole organization level, and between organizations, states, or nations. Change can be planned or unplanned, one-time or continuous. It can also be first-order change, or minor modifications within existing patterns, or it can be second-order change, which are creations of new frameworks and patterns.

Scholars and practitioners have developed models and approaches to explain how change occurs, and each model has benefits and drawbacks. Some of these models are based in systems theory, seeing an organization as a set of input, throughput, output, and feedback processes. Lewin's three-phase approach to change as unfreezing, moving, and refreezing, as well as the Nadler-Tushman congruence model, the Burke-Litwin model of change, and Weisbord's Six-Box Model all are consistent with the basic tenets of systems theory. These models explain how change can be successful when the basic components of the organization fit together effectively, and that changes to one area often result in necessary and perhaps unintended changes to another area. A different approach to change has a social construction perspective at its core, which sees organizations as they emerge and unfold in communication patterns. This approach sees change as a continuous process rather than a specific project.

With a good understanding of organizational change, the OD practitioner can be more conscious of the most appropriate interventions that will help produce change. In the next chapter we will focus more specifically on the practitioner's role, how an OD practitioner works with a client, and the process that the OD practitioner follows during change.

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## Questions for Discussion

1. The chapter lists a number of models for organization and approaches to organizational change. Which model or approach appeals to you most? For example, are you drawn to a systems theory or social construction approach? Why?
2. Considering these models, and your own knowledge of organizations, develop your own model that could inform an OD practitioner leading an organizational change. What does your model include or leave out, and how does it differ from those in this chapter?
3. Search the Internet for the websites of organization development and other management consultants. Try to find an explicit or implicit model of organization or organizational change that they recommend. How do these relate to the approaches presented in this chapter?

## For Further Reading

Burke, W. W. (2002). *Organization change: Theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ford, J. D. (1999). Organizational change as shifting conversations. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12, 480–500.

Ford, J. D., & Ford, L. W. (1995). The role of conversations in producing intentional change in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 20, 541–570.

Holbeche, L. (2006). *Understanding change: Theory, implementation and success*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Elsevier.

Hosking, D. M., & McNamee, S. (Eds.). (2006). *The social construction of organization*. Herndon, VA: Copenhagen Business School Press.

## **Exercise: Using Organizational Change Models**

Read the three descriptions below of organizational change projects. Use any of the models or approaches to organizational change described in this chapter to analyze the situations.

## Example 1

The director of the training department decided to implement an online system for tracking different projects that trainers were working on. Management wanted to use reports from the system for two reasons: first, to prove to senior executives that more trainers were needed, and second, to measure the productivity of the trainers. Trainers were asked to log in to the system every week to describe the project, estimate how long it was anticipated to take, and update current progress on the project. Many employees were angry at having their work monitored so closely, and many believed that it was an attempt by management to determine which trainers were unproductive and could be laid off. Trainers responded by dividing projects into subprojects, and they began adding those subprojects into the system to demonstrate that they had more work to do than their colleagues. When three or four colleagues would collaborate on a project, each entered the work separately, making it appear that multiple projects were being worked on even though all entries referred to the same project. Eventually the system was shut down because it was not providing accurate information about the status of the department's workload.

## Example 2

Committed to a “strengths-based” approach to education, one middle school principal announced that all students should have an opportunity to learn in a way that reflected their own learning styles. In an unprecedented move, she asked that all teachers reexamine their curricula to find ways to implement the new philosophy. This took teachers by surprise in a school that generally had a traditional and conservative approach to instruction. Many teachers at the school were unfamiliar with this approach, and no training was provided except for a brief overview given by the principal herself. Some teachers were reluctant to try what they termed “fringe” and “untested” techniques, while others felt that the approach was inconsistent with their personal teaching philosophy. Still others felt that the investment of time to do curriculum revisions would not be worth it. No teacher brought these concerns out into the open for fear of engaging in conflict with the principal. Teachers who did adopt the new method found that students appreciated the changes. Parents who found out about the approach began to complain to the principal that not enough classic “reading, writing, and arithmetic” work was being done in the classroom.



### Example 3

Owners of a block of condominium units in a suburban city were struggling to find buyers for units in a building that had recently been completed. Market research from the owners, which was supported by statistics from the city planning department, indicated that new, younger residents to the city could not afford the sales price and that they preferred rental units as well. Owners petitioned the city to change one of the condominium buildings to an apartment building. In addition, to take advantage of government incentives, they wanted to make it the city's first affordable housing complex. At the city council meeting, residents who lived close to the building complained that they did not want "low income" housing in the city. Some argued that rental units would eventually become "run down" by careless short-term residents. Other citizens supported the proposal's attempt to bring a diverse energy to the city that would become popular with local artists and students. The city council decided to convene a task force to study the city's policies and practices with respect to affordable housing. Current and prospective residents came together in a series of forums sponsored by the city to agree on a plan that had the support of both groups.

## Chapter 5 The Organization Development Practitioner and the OD Process

Once upon a time, I did a wild and crazy thing. I accepted an offer from one of my clients to become their senior vice president for organization development. Because most of my career has been as an outside consultant and I had never even been a junior vice president of anything, this was quite a leap. But, because I had worked for almost a year with the management team of which I would be a part, and I respected, liked, and trusted the other members of the team, particularly the COO and the soon-to-be-my-boss CEO, I decided to take the leap. . . . Every day is a new game, and well, marriage changes everything. (O'Connell, 2001, p. 274)

- What do you think are the greatest differences between being an internal and external organization development practitioner?

To this point, we have discussed the history and foundations of the field of organization development (OD). We have also explored the values and ethics of OD practitioners and described how the process of organizational change is the general context for most OD work. In this chapter, we will explore the practitioner's role in the OD process more deeply and begin to introduce some of the common issues in practitioner–client relationships that we will explore throughout the book. We will differentiate OD consulting from other types of consulting that you may be familiar with, we will explore internal and external consulting relationships, and we will identify the profile of an OD consultant, including the educational background, experience, skills, and competencies needed to be a successful consultant. We will conclude this chapter by discussing the OD consulting process in detail, following an action research model that will become the outline for subsequent chapters in the book.

## The Consulting Relationship and Types of Consulting

As we have already discussed, OD practitioners include a much larger group than those who hold the title of consultant. They include executives, managers, project managers, and others who devise and implement organizational change, no matter the role. Hanson and Lubin (1995) believe that OD work is highly consistent with a manager's work, from a manager's role as an administrator and supervisor, to a manager's work in promoting learning, development, problem solving, teamwork, and more. "Fundamental to their work are their skills and competencies as social change agents" (p. 87). OD can provide concepts, tools, theories, and techniques that help managers, executives, and other organizational members in implementing change.

In addition to these groups, many organizations employ OD consultants to assist with change. Consultants work closely with managers and executives as change agent partners to help the organization accomplish its objectives. This consulting relationship can be defined as follows:

A voluntary relationship between a professional helper (consultant) and a help-needing system (client), in which the consultant is attempting to give help to the client in the solving of some current or potential problem and the relationship is perceived as temporary by both parties. (Lippitt, 1959, p. 5)

The consultant's role generally exists as an outsider to the client's system. Less formally, in popular terminology a consultant is someone who gives advice, opinions, counsel, or mentoring, typically in an area of specialized expertise. This definition is both applicable and misleading when applied to the role of the OD consultant.

An OD consultant has a particular kind of role and responsibility in a consulting engagement. Schein (1969, 1999) has described common consulting models or approaches, those of the expert and doctor-patient, that are familiar to many readers (to this I add the mechanic model). By *models*, we mean that these are common perspectives or assumptions that clients have about consulting and consultants. Each of these models of consulting differs in important ways from the role of the OD consultant. As a result, it is important for OD practitioners to understand what expectations and assumptions the client may be bringing to the consulting relationship.

## Expert Model

Schein (1999) refers to the expert consultant as the “purchase of expertise” or “selling and telling” (p. 7) model of consulting. This is a common consulting role among information technology consultants, financial consultants, strategists, supply chain consultants, and others who are hired by a client specifically for knowledge and expertise in a narrow subject area. An expert consultant is often hired when an organization does not possess resources internally to complete a project. Expert consultants are usually hired to solve a specific problem or implement a solution that the client has chosen. Consequently, expert consultants often enter situations in which clients have already identified a problem and perhaps may have even chosen a solution to be implemented by the expert. A client who hires a technology consultant, for example, has already decided that technology is the problem. Not surprisingly, technology solutions will be the only ones offered by the consultant. The client hiring an expert consultant has often already framed the problem as a gap in knowledge that the expert can fulfill. This approach presents several difficulties. Since the consultant’s specialized knowledge is usually greater than the client’s, supervising the consultant’s work is especially challenging (Freedman & Zackrisson, 2001). As a result, “the client gives away power” and “is vulnerable to being misled” (Schein, 1999, p. 8). For this model to work effectively, Schein notes that the client must have already conducted an accurate assessment and clearly defined the problem for the consultant.

## Doctor–Patient Model

Most of us have experienced what happens when we visit a physician for an unknown medical problem. Typically, the doctor asks a number of questions that the patient answers, with the patient unaware of the implications of the question or the response: “Where does it hurt?” “When did you first notice it?” “How often have you felt this way?” “Is the pain isolated to this one area or does it spread?” Following this diagnostic series of questions asked for the doctor’s benefit, the doctor announces the result and the solution: “I think you have sprained your ankle. Take one of these twice a day, elevate your ankle, and place ice on it for 20 minutes at a time until healed.” The patient leaves satisfied that the problem has been solved, and the doctor is satisfied to leave the patient once the solution has been identified.

Though it is a very popular and easily assumed model of consulting, it presents several problems. When clients adopt the doctor–patient consulting model, they are looking for someone who will analyze their situation and prescribe a solution to the problem. The responsibility for gathering data, processing information, making a diagnosis, and choosing solutions rests on the consultant. The primary responsibility for implementing the solution relies on the patient/client. While the doctor–patient model is a less time-consuming model (Cash & Minter, 1979), success in this model relies on the ability of the consultant to accurately gather information about the client’s situation, diagnose the underlying problem, and prescribe an appropriate intervention. Rarely can the consultant alone do this accurately, however. Members of the organization may not know how or may not want to give accurate information to the consultant. In addition, the doctor–patient model frequently results in low success following implementation. Often no one other than the consultant has seen the data or believes that the diagnosis is the correct one. As a result, interventions that are completed tend to be for the consultant’s benefit, not the client’s, so long-term change is unlikely. Even when the problem is successfully solved, clients likely will not know how to solve the problem themselves (Schein, 1987). The next time a problem occurs, the client is forced to call the consultant again.

## Mechanic Model

Related to the doctor–patient model is a third popular model for consultants, called the mechanic model (Kahnweiler, 2002). Many who visit an auto mechanic, for example, have little interest in the technical details involved in the inner workings of their cars. When we have a problem, we often tell the mechanic something like “It’s making a grinding noise when I turn left,” and we want to pick up our car a few hours later, pay the bill, and leave. The mechanic is responsible for figuring out what is wrong and fixing it. If the repair does not successfully solve the problem, the responsibility is the mechanic’s, not ours. We do not want to see complicated diagrams or explanations of how the mechanic discovered the source of the problem, removed the broken part, replaced it, and verified that the solution worked. Most of all, we do not want to get our hands dirty under the hood, inspecting parts and learning more about the car’s functions. It is good enough for us when the problem has been fixed.

The mechanic model underlies interaction with clients who have little patience or time to deal with problems. It is rarely a successful consultant role. It is occasionally the result of a client’s actively chosen ignorance of the details of a problem or a solution. Clients preferring a mechanic-consultant would prefer to place a phone call to a consultant, describe a problem (“Jim and Ted can’t get along”; “Our team never gets anything done”), and wait for the consultant to return to report that the problem has been fixed. The mechanic model gives the consultant responsibility over virtually every aspect of the problem and the solution, and it permits the client to relinquish both accountability and responsibility for the problem. Unsuccessful solutions or problems that recur can be blamed on a poor consultant. Clients avoid the messy and sometimes uncomfortable processes “under the hood” and are not forced to confront their own role in the problem being experienced. It goes without saying that in this consulting model the client rarely gains any insight into the process of assessing problems and implementing solutions.

## The Organization Development Consulting Model

Organization development consulting differs in significant ways from each of the three models just described, even though clients frequently approach an OD consultant with one of these alternative models in mind. Consequently it is the consultant's responsibility to invite the client to share expectations about roles and working expectations early on so that misunderstandings can be corrected and implicit expectations can be made explicit. We will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter how consultants do this when we discuss the process of contracting. [Table 5.1](#) compares organization development consulting with the three models discussed here.

In contrast to the expert model of consulting, OD consultants are hired as experts in process consulting and human systems rather than in specific content areas, though content expertise in areas such as operations, finance, marketing, or strategy can help a consultant more quickly identify with the client. Schein (1969, 1999) calls OD consulting "process consulting" to set it apart from consulting in which the practitioner offers content expertise. In general, however, OD consultants view clients as the experts, because they are the most knowledgeable about the organization, people, culture, processes, problems, and history of the organization. They are generally more knowledgeable than the practitioner about what interventions may or may not work best, in what order the activities should be conducted, who should be interviewed or surveyed, where the most fruitful data may be gathered, and how data should be interpreted for subtle and underlying cues. Seeing the client as the expert puts the consultant in a more humble position in which he or she can ask the client relevant questions to unleash the client's hidden knowledge and then offer useful insights from an outsider's perspective (Schein, 1999).

**Table 5.1** How Organization Development Consulting Differs From Other Approaches

	<i>Expert</i>	<i>Doctor–Patient</i>	<i>Mechanic</i>	<i>Organization Development</i>
Responsibility for data gathering	Primarily client	Consultant	Consultant	Shared
Responsibility for diagnosis	Client, with consultant recommendations	Consultant	Consultant	Shared
Responsibility for selecting interventions	Primarily consultant	Consultant	Consultant	Shared
Responsibility for implementing change	Client, with consultant recommendations	Client	Consultant	Shared

In contrast to the doctor–patient model, OD consultants often prefer to conduct data gathering and decide on a diagnosis jointly with a client. OD consultants prefer an equal relationship in which the client has primary responsibility for the problem and the solution as opposed to the consultant taking ownership of the problem

and solution. As a result, the consultant's role is to assist the client in the diagnostic process in a partnership. As Schein (1987) notes, joint diagnosis is important for the following reason:

The consultant can seldom learn enough about any given organization to really know what a better course of action would be or even what information would really help. . . . However, the consultant can help the client to become a sufficiently good diagnostician. (p. 9)

Moreover, the success of an intervention tends to be greater when clients and consultants jointly agree upon a diagnosis and intervention strategy. This is being addressed more frequently in real doctor–patient interactions as well, as research has indicated that when physicians and patients agree on a medical diagnosis, patients are more satisfied with the interaction and are more likely to adopt the physician's treatment recommendations (Bass et al., 1986; Stewart et al., 2000).

In contrast to the mechanic model, in OD engagements the client has a significant role to play in understanding and making sense of the problem and in implementing the solution. The client's active participation is necessary to ensure that once the consultant leaves the engagement, the intervention can be a sustained change. Without a client's active participation, the results are likely to be short lived.

In contrast to both the doctor–patient and mechanic models, a primary objective of any consulting engagement is for the client to learn the OD process so that problem-solving skills (including gathering data, diagnosis, and interventions) are transferred to the client. In fact, Schein (1999) writes, “Unless clients learn to see problems for themselves and think through their own remedies, they will be less likely to implement the solution and less likely to learn how to fix such problems should they recur” (p. 18). Some beginning consultants see perpetuation of a client's ignorance as advantageous. After all, they think, if I teach clients how to solve these problems themselves, won't my own services be obsolete and I will be out of a job? There are several problems with this view. It goes against one of OD's core values to contribute to growth, learning, and development. When a consultant holds this belief and acts upon it, it contributes to a power imbalance in which the client is encouraged to be helpless, needy, and reactive, while the consultant maintains power and control. In many organizations, this relationship imbalance is typical among organizational members and it often contributes to some of the conflicts and organizational problems that the consultant has been brought in to help solve. It is therefore hypocritical for the consultant to advocate a new kind of relationship among organizational members when the client–consultant relationship is not a role model for it. Last, the OD process is not a set of secrets that are closely guarded and revealed only to paying clients. Clients who do not see progress are less likely to call a consultant back to solve the same problem, but clients who have learned how to address problems on their own are more likely to call a consultant again to solve a different problem and to recommend a consultant to colleagues and friends. You might have noticed in the description of OD consulting that the relationship between the client and the consultant is especially significant. Indeed, Schein writes that this is the “decisive factor” (p. 242) as to whether the engagement will be helpful to the client.

In summary, the OD consultant is a different kind of consultant, one who maintains multiple and unique roles and deals with a diverse set of circumstances and problems. For many practitioners this is why it is an



interesting and rewarding profession. The OD consultant, according to Marshak (2006), must be a professional practitioner who is also a skilled diagnostician, social scientist researcher, interventionist, educator or trainer, facilitator, and coach. Learning to successfully perform these roles in a consulting engagement requires content knowledge, process knowledge, and interpersonal skills. In the next section we will explore the profile of the OD practitioner in greater depth.

## OD Practitioners: Who Are They and Where Do They Work?

As we noted in [Chapter 1](#), change agents who do OD work are a diverse community, consisting of managers, HR professionals, IT project managers, and more. Some organizations employ internal consultants who hold the titles of organization development consultant, organizational effectiveness consultant, or human resources specialist. These are generally roles in which the practitioner is hired as a full-time employee to provide internal consulting to managers, executives, and teams that are experiencing problems or implementing change. OD consultants who work as internal practitioners in an employee capacity generally work in the human resources department, but larger organizations may also have OD consultants reporting to a business area instead, particularly in business areas in which implementing change is a frequent project, such as in information technology.

Some observers have noted that where an organization has an internal OD function, it is often “buried within HR,” where internal consultants lack access to executive clients and “it is difficult for OD practitioners to experience positive regard, much less have organizational influence” (Burke & Bradford, 2005, p. 9). Burke (2004) has described the advantages and disadvantages of five possible scenarios in which the OD function is (1) a division of HR, (2) a freestanding unit in the organization, (3) a decentralized function where OD practitioners report to business units, (4) an integrated part of every HR function (such as compensation, benefits, etc.), and (5) a part of the strategic planning function. He concludes that while the latter two are not common structures for an OD function, there may be benefits to strengthening the organization and the field by integrating OD with both human resources and strategic planning for systemwide change.

Organizations also employ external OD consultants who work independently or as part of a larger consulting practice. Often the external consultant is contacted directly by an executive or manager, generally establishing a contract with the external consultant on a per-project basis, even if the consultant has a long-term relationship with the client organization. These consultants may have several client engagements at any given time, sometimes travelling between sites, depending on the magnitude and time commitment required of the engagement.

## Internal Versus External Consulting: Advantages and Disadvantages

In the chapter's opening vignette, one consultant made a career transition from being an external to an internal consultant. Whether one chooses a career path as (or to hire) an internal or external consultant, there are many advantages and disadvantages to either role. [Table 5.2](#) explores some of the pros and cons of holding these two roles.

**Table 5.2** Advantages and Disadvantages of Internal and External Consulting

	<i>Internal Consulting</i>	<i>External Consulting</i>
Advantages	<p>More knowledge of organizational culture, history, and practices</p> <p>Already has relationships with organizational members</p> <p>Perceived as having a longer-term view and potentially greater stake in success of outcome</p> <p>Earns a regular salary</p> <p>Less need to market services</p>	<p>More experience with a variety of clients</p> <p>Does not enter organization with bias from past experience with organizational members</p> <p>Less political involvement; can be truthful with less consequence</p> <p>May have greater "star power"</p> <p>Organizational members may feel more comfortable sharing confidential information without fear of leaks</p>
Disadvantages	<p>May be blind to seeing some issues because of history with culture</p> <p>Less variety in clients, industries, and issues</p> <p>May be presented with ethical challenges where it is hard to refuse</p> <p>May be confronted with confidentiality concerns, particularly with an internal manager</p> <p>Organizational members may be reluctant to share sensitive information for fear that it may leak internally to colleagues</p> <p>May be seen as an agent for management</p>	<p>May have trouble seeing the hidden meanings or subtle issues</p> <p>Must build relationships and trust with organizational members</p> <p>May be perceived as short term</p> <p>Must seek out clients to earn paycheck</p> <p>May have recommendations perceived as selling or extending work unnecessarily</p> <p>May not be able to follow through beyond interventions to see long-term results</p>

Clearly these advantages and disadvantages will vary among consultants and among organizations. Some organizational members, for example, place a high degree of trust in an outsider's perspective and may discount the recommendations of those inside the organization, assuming that consultants must be more skilled if they maintain client relationships and earn a salary as an independent consultant. In other organizations the opposite is true: Internal perspectives are more valued than external ones, and those solutions "not invented here" are suspect. In some organizations, internal consultants may be trusted with

confidential information more easily, and external consultants may find it hard to draw out information from organizational members. In other organizations, internal consultants may be perceived as already taking on management's side, and external consultants may be seen as more neutral and a positive symbol of "change to come" (Kaarst-Brown, 1999). Internal consultants may face increased pressure to avoid being honest with clients for fear that they will retaliate. These consultants do themselves and their clients a disservice when they "collude" with clients by refusing to confront difficult issues (Scott, 2000). External consultants may do the same to avoid angering a client who may be important to future business. Indeed, some challenges are common to both roles.

Because there is no perfect scenario, organizations can sometimes reap advantages by having both an internal and external consultant work together throughout a project, from data gathering through interventions. An internal consultant can provide background information to the external consultant throughout the project, and the external consultant can point out issues that the internal consultant may have missed.

## **Ethical Issues for Internal and External Consultants**

Ethical issues differ for internal and external consultants. For example, internal consultants may face increased pressure from peers or coworkers to violate a client's confidentiality by disclosing the existence or purpose of an engagement, what participants said during an interview or in a focus group, or even simply to disclose what problem the consultant was contacted to discuss. An internal client may not want information shared widely about the existence of an executive team-building engagement, a reorganization, or a merger/acquisition, and the consultant has the ethical responsibility to maintain this confidentiality. While it may be awkward to respond to a colleague that those areas are confidential, it can be especially challenging for an internal consultant to deal with when the consultant's manager or the vice president of human resources is asking. The most effective way to deal with this challenge is to predict it and to develop working agreements between consultants and managers about what information will be or cannot be shared. Block (2011) calls this "contracting with your boss" to clarify expectations and assumptions and to anticipate the issue before it becomes a problem.

## The Organization Development Consulting Profession

A number of professional associations have been formed for OD practitioners. The National Training Laboratories, the Association for Talent Development (formerly the American Society for Training and Development, which hosts Communities of Practice of interest to OD practitioners), the Organization Development Network, and the OD Institute are targeted toward the practitioner community. Among academic associations, the most popular are the Organization Development and Change division of the Academy of Management and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology. Academic journals such as the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *Human Relations*, and *Leadership and Organization Development Journal* frequently publish articles of interest to both practitioners and academic readers. Practitioner-oriented journals include *OD Practitioner* and *Organization Development Journal*.

A sample of about 400 members in these groups was studied by Church, Burke, and Van Eynde (1994), who found that practitioners were about equally split between being internal and external consultants. The majority held master's or doctoral degrees, had been practicing in the field of OD for just over 11 years, represented a wide variety of industries (including real estate, health care, education, military, and automotive), and had diverse educational backgrounds. Many (over half of those surveyed) maintained active relationships with the academic world through teaching, administration, or participation on advisory boards. A new version of the study published in 2013 reported similar demographic characteristics of OD practitioners (Shull, Church, & Burke, 2013).

## Becoming an OD Consultant

While there are an increasing number of academic and professional programs that teach OD concepts and practices, not much has changed since Burke (1993) wrote that “there simply is no clear and systematic career path for becoming an OD consultant” (p. 185). There is not yet a single, universally accepted certification or degree that would qualify one to be an OD consultant. In fact, skills and levels of experience differ greatly among OD practitioners, who may specialize in certain intervention types such as coaching, team building, strategic planning, or organization design. Bunker, Alban, and Lewicki (2005) note that “knowing that someone is an ‘OD practitioner’ does not tell you much about the person’s training, preparation, background or expertise and skill base” (p. 165). Like our clients, OD practitioners are a diverse community.

Most observers agree that a background in the social and behavioral sciences is a good starting point to expose beginners to introductory OD concepts. Burke (1993) recommends academic training in areas such as organizational psychology, group dynamics, research methods, adult learning, career development, counseling, OD, and organizational theory. Head, Armstrong, and Preston (1996) and McLean (2006) also recommend courses in business, since most OD work is done in that context, a point echoed by Burke and Bradford (2005), who concur that the OD consultant needs to “understand the language and how profit is made and costs contained according to various business models” (p. 8). Supplementary study in areas such as organizational communication, sociology, public administration, and political science can also provide useful concepts that can add to a practitioner’s theoretical and practical knowledge. Participation in groups such as professional associations, conferences, and training courses offered by those associations can be good ways to increase one’s knowledge of OD concepts and to expand a professional network. Practical experience, however, is a prerequisite to successful consulting, so shadow consulting with a skilled mentor is among the best ways to gain experience. Those wanting to break into the field might volunteer to help an internal consultant with a project at work. Assisting an internal consultant with data gathering, data analysis, taking notes during interviews, or simply sitting in on a workshop or facilitated meeting can be excellent ways to watch OD work in action. In addition, a popular way to gain experience is to seek pro bono opportunities to work with a nonprofit group. One caveat: Because it is important to present oneself ethically and not to overstate one’s level of knowledge, working with an experienced consultant is usually necessary until the beginning consultant gains enough experience to be able to take on the engagement alone.

Individual development and growth is a personal exercise. Different individuals will need and want to develop in different areas of competency and skill. As Varney (1980) put it, “Professional development comes through a variety of different kinds of experiences” (p. 34) that are customized to the individual. Participating in a program or activity because it is popular or because it is available may not be the best choice. Reading journals, attending conferences, observing other consultants, and obtaining an advanced degree are all possible options depending on the practitioner. In summary, while there are multiple paths to a career in OD, there are also many opportunities for those eager and motivated to develop the necessary knowledge, skills, and experience.





## Skills and Competencies for OD Consultants

There have been many attempts to define the set of skills and competencies that a practitioner needs to be considered a fully competent organization development professional.<sup>1</sup> Some of these efforts have been conducted by individual researchers, some have been sponsored by professional associations, and some have been associated with a college or university OD program. Each has offered a different set of skills and competencies, and a single approach has not yet been adopted (Eubanks, Marshall, & O'Driscoll, 1990). Moreover, these skill and competency definitions differ in whether they describe interpersonal skills, behavioral skills, or knowledge of content areas needed to be successful (O'Driscoll & Eubanks, 1993). Varney (1980), for example, describes three areas in which OD practitioners need to be skilled: (1) self and impact awareness; (2) conceptual, analytical, and research skills; and (3) organizational change and influence skills. Focusing on behaviors that contribute to successful results, Eubanks et al. (1990) list six competency categories: using interpersonal skills, managing group process, using data, contracting, implementing the intervention, and maintaining the client relationship. Sullivan and Sullivan (1995) present no fewer than 187 essential competencies for internal and external OD consultants in a list that has been revised more than a dozen times since the late 1970s.

[Table 5.3](#) presents a subset of core and advanced skills contained in many of these surveys of OD competencies. The list is indeed daunting, but rest assured that it is unlikely that any single practitioner will be highly skilled in all of these areas. Some practitioners choose deep expertise in a number of these areas instead of breadth in all of them (McLean, 2006). Nonetheless, most of the interpersonal skills on this list are needed, whether one specializes in large-group interventions or one-on-one coaching. Many of the intervention areas described in this chart are covered later in this book.

## The OD Consulting Process and Action Research

Recall from [Chapter 2](#) that *action research* was the name that Kurt Lewin gave to the process of using social scientific research practices to gather data about groups, intervene in their processes, and evaluate the results of the intervention. Action research is described as follows:

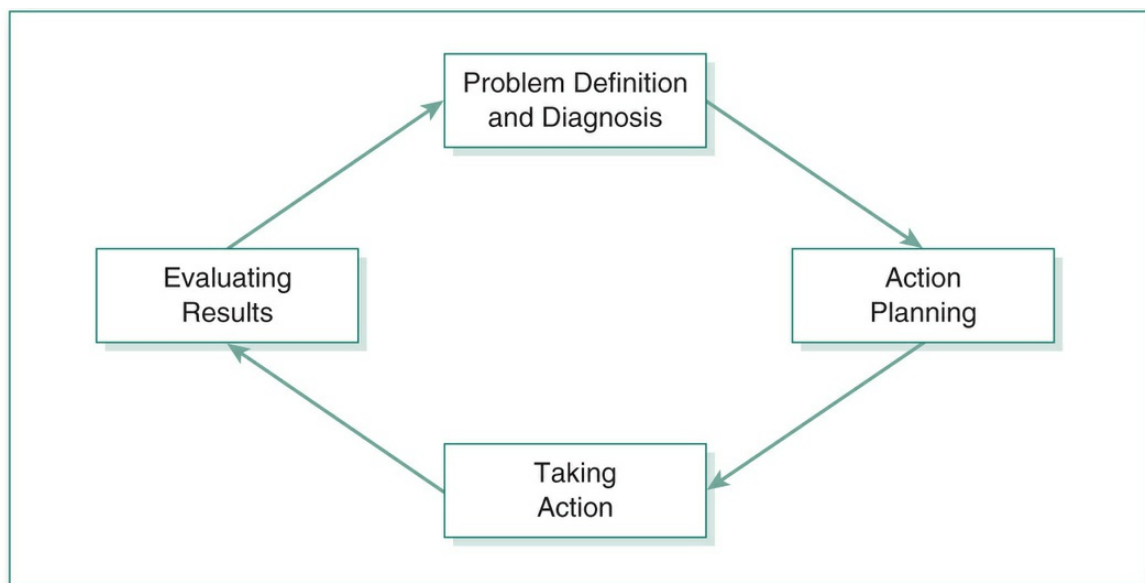
A participatory democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. . . . It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual personas and their communities. (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 1)

Lewin envisioned that research findings would not only improve practices in the immediate organization but also be shared widely to improve theory, which would be used by other practitioners in their own organizations. Thus, action research projects owe a debt not only to the organization and its sponsor but also to other practitioners and to the research community at large (Clark, 1972; Greenwood & Levin, 1998). The term *action research* encompasses a number of activities, such as defining the problem, planning a research process, understanding and evaluating theory, and more. In its ideal form, action research is a scientific process (Cunningham, 1993) in which the researcher is actively engaged *with* those experiencing the problem versus conducting research *on* them (Heron & Reason, 2001). Thus, participation by organizational members in diagnosing the issues and solving the problem is a key feature of action research. Action research projects generally proceed in the manner described in [Figure 5.1](#), where an initial problem prompts diagnosis, planning action, taking action, and evaluating results. Once results are evaluated, the cycle begins again.

**Table 5.3** Example Competencies for Success as an Organization Development Consultant

<i>Interpersonal Skills and Personal Characteristics</i>	<i>Organizational Behavior</i>	<i>Data Collection and Analysis</i>	<i>Training and Development</i>	<i>Business and Management Knowledge Areas</i>	<i>General Professional Skills</i>	<i>Consulting Skills</i>	<i>Interventions</i>
Self-awareness and self-management Objectivity/ neutrality Imagination Flexibility, dealing with ambiguity Honesty/integrity Consistency Building trust and rapport Open-mindedness Listening Sense of humor Risk taking Political awareness Persuasiveness Collaboration Tact and diplomacy Role modeling Rational-emotional balance Negotiation Managing stress	Organizational theory Strategy Open systems Motivation and rewards Change theory Organization design Power Leadership Conflict Organizational culture Mergers and acquisitions Group development Change management Change resistance and stakeholder engagement Communication (metaphors, stories, etc.)	Research design Interviewing skills Survey preparation Data analysis (quantitative and qualitative) Statistical analysis Participant observation Interpreting and reporting results Measurement and testing	Adult learning Instructional design Training delivery skills Assessment of learning Performance management Technology and learning	Finance and accounting Human resources management Sales and marketing Information systems and technology Operations and production Legal issues	Public speaking Written communication Translating theory into practice Project management Ethical issues for OD consultants Cross-cultural knowledge	Entry and contracting Design of data gathering program Diagnosis Designing interventions Giving and receiving feedback Evaluating results of interventions	Strategic planning Vision/mission development Goal setting Process analysis and redesign Role development and clarification Restructuring Coaching and mentoring Team building Future search conferences Appreciative inquiry Quality approaches (Six Sigma, Total Quality Management) Conflict resolution Facilitation skills

**Figure 5.1** A General Action Research Cycle



Traditional action research programs strive to contribute to both theory and practice, bridging the divide between them, and this has been a central objective of OD throughout its history. The purpose is not just to create new theory but to create new possibilities for action where theory and action are closely intertwined (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001): The two components of action (practice) and research (theory) are combined in practice as they are in the name.

Over time, however, many believe that the gap between theory and practice has widened as practitioners have devoted less attention to contributing to theoretical knowledge (Bunker et al., 2005). Regardless, action research and OD consulting share similar objectives in developing a participative and inclusive process where

practitioners and organizational members jointly explore problems, initiate action, and evaluate outcomes, and where the overall purpose is social or organizational change. What is also similar in both OD consulting and action research is the disciplined reexamination and analysis of actions and data to evaluate results (Freedman, 2006).

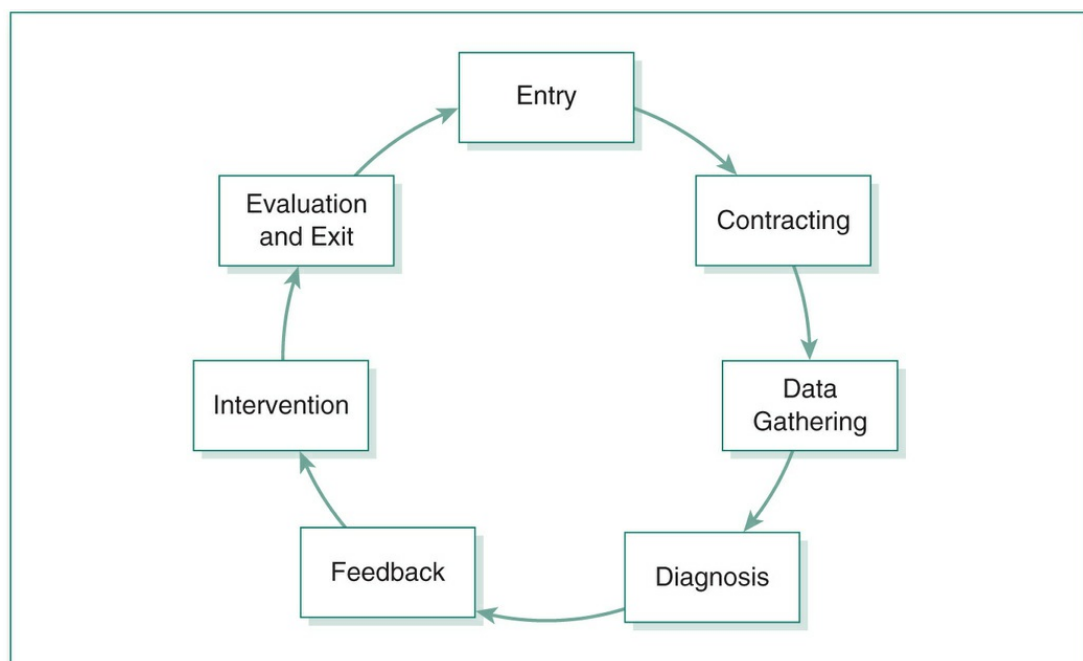
Though practitioners today may not necessarily see contributions to theoretical knowledge to be a central objective of every OD project, practitioners have adopted an OD consulting process that generally follows an action research model, borrowing the major tenets of action research. While different practitioners may label the phases differently, the consulting process in [Figure 5.2](#) is generally consistent with what most OD practitioners do.

Let's look at each of these stages in turn:

*Entry.* The first stage of the consulting process is entry, which begins with an initial contact between a consultant and a client.

*Contracting.* Next, the consultant and client come to agreement on what work will be accomplished. The client makes the request by describing the problem or OD consulting opportunity, and the client and consultant discuss the engagement and how to create a successful consulting relationship. The consultant responds with a formal or informal proposal about what he or she will do.

**Figure 5.2** Stages of the Consulting Process



*Data gathering.* Third, data are gathered about the situation, the client, the organization, and other relevant aspects of the problem. This can involve one or more methods or sources of information.

*Diagnosis and feedback.* Next, the client and consultant jointly analyze and interpret the data. The consultant engages with the client in a dialogue to make sense of the feedback from the data gathering stage. The problem may be reevaluated, additional data may be gathered, or an intervention strategy

may be developed.

*Intervention.* The consultant and client agree on what intervention(s) would best address the problem or opportunity, and the intervention strategy is carried out.

*Evaluation and exit.* The consultant and client evaluate the outcomes of the intervention(s) and whether the intervention(s) have resulted in the desired change.

Additional data are gathered at this point and the client and consultant may agree to terminate the engagement or to begin the cycle again (reentry, recontracting, etc.).

The consulting model looks like a linear process, but most consulting engagements rarely proceed in such a step-by-step manner. The process is more iterative than linear. In other words, this diagram displays the OD process as a sequential organized process, but these points are better thought of as topic areas rather than stages of a process. Consultants and action researchers both return to different stages throughout the engagement, gathering additional data where needed, or validating the process with the client and recontracting as new issues emerge. During the intervention stage, more data may be gathered, returning to a previous point in the process. Feedback and discussion about an intervention plan may prompt the consultant and client to return to the contract and renegotiate mutual needs.

## A Dialogic Approach to OD

In the past several years, the social construction approach to organizational change described in [Chapter 4](#) has been extended in OD. Reflecting on the influence that the social construction approach has had, some authors argue that OD must be fundamentally different from a social construction perspective, contrasting the classic six-stage *diagnostic* approach to OD reviewed above with an alternative *dialogic* approach. This dialogic approach reflects a different underlying philosophical foundation from the diagnostic or classic approach.

Consider that the classic approach described above in many ways reflects the philosophy of systems theory approaches to change reviewed in [Chapter 4](#). A practitioner enters the system to discover what is happening in it, presents the facts back to the client, and makes recommendations for change, typically attempting to directly change the behavior of the individuals in the organization. Little is acknowledged about the practitioner's own role or the process of jointly making sense of the data by practitioners, clients, and organizational members. This model assumes a relatively stable system until the intervention stage that directly attempts to change some aspect of the system, after which the time comes to “refreeze” the system in its new form. The ability of the practitioner to arrive at a kind of “truth” about the reality of the system and present these findings back to the client is assumed. From a dialogic approach, these assumptions do not resonate.

## Foundational Assumptions of Dialogic OD

The notion of diagnosis is different in dialogic OD. What if we were to acknowledge that there is no real single “truth” in the organization and that “there is no way of grasping what is real in a way that somehow steps outside of our discursively shared horizon of meaning” (Hutton & Liefoghe, 2011, p. 79)? What if we instead recognize that in any organization there are going to be multiple versions of these truths and that the environment is ever changing? Any diagnosis would be seen as partial, temporary, fleeting, and influenced by the perspectives of those doing the diagnosis. Indeed, dialogic OD tries to avoid diagnosis (at least directed by the practitioner), but instead tries to help organization members raise their own consciousness of “how social reality is being coconstructed in their system with the purpose of creating alignment and support for change” (Bushe & Marshak, 2009, p. 364). The focus shifts to a set of emergent and participative understandings rather than one imposed diagnostic conclusion proposed by the practitioner.

In addition, the nature of change in dialogic OD reflects social construction assumptions. Recall from the last chapter that the social construction approach assumes that change occurs when there is a change in meaning in the organization, and thus conversation.

Rather than a focus on open systems, dialogic OD is based, in part, on a view of organizations as dialogic systems where individual, group, and organizational actions results from socially constructed realities created and sustained by the prevailing narratives, stories, metaphors, and conversations through which people make meaning about their experiences. (Marshak & Bushe, 2013, p. 1)

If organizations are conversational systems, this view holds, then changing the organization means finding ways to change the conversation. “Instead of attempting to seek change solely through techno-structural or human processes interventions, they implicitly focus on meaning making, language, and ‘discursive phenomena’ as the central medium and target for effecting change” (Marshak & Grant, 2008, p. 36). Whereas diagnostic OD might try to directly change an individual’s behavior, dialogic OD works to reframe the existing meanings, narratives, and stories that underlie why people choose the actions they choose in the first place so that they will choose new behaviors themselves.

Incorporating these new philosophical underpinnings, Bushe and Marshak (2009) describe four characteristics of dialogic organization development practices:

- The change process emphasizes changing the conversations that normally take place in the system.
- The purpose of inquiry is to surface, legitimate, and/or learn from the variety of perspectives, cultures, and/or narratives in the system.
- The change process results in new images, narratives, texts, and social constructed realities that affect how people think and act.
- The change process is consistent with traditional organization development values of collaboration, free and informed choice, and capacity building in the client system. (p. 362)

Notice in the final statement that the diagnostic and dialogic approaches are not entirely incompatible. Bushe and Marshak (2009) point out that diagnostic and dialogic OD share a commitment to “strong humanistic and democratic values,” where “greater system awareness is encouraged and facilitated,” “consultants stay out of content and focus on process,” and practitioners hold a “concern for capacity building and development of the system” (p. 360). Both diagnostic OD and dialogic OD recognize that there needs to be a process of discovery where organizational members come to an enhanced consciousness about themselves, the team, and/or the organization as a whole. Here, the approaches part ways, as the dialogic view pushes practitioners to “explicitly recognize that fostering greater awareness in a system is not always the same thing as objective and formal data collection and diagnosis facilitated or conducted by an external consultant” (p. 364). Within this view, the diagnostic approach to OD is seen as putting the practitioner in a privileged role of discovering an objective reality and presenting it to the client. The diagnostic approach, critics argue, ignores the role of the practitioner in participating in the process of defining a fleeting and one-sided reality that is ever changing. In dialogic OD, the discovery process takes on a practice of shared inquiry where organizational members themselves bring the data to light.

## **A Dialogic OD Process**

If the diagnostic consulting process follows the six stages described above, what might a dialogic OD consulting process look like? Bushe and Marshak (2014) distinguish between two different forms of dialogic OD practice: a structured approach, and a process consultation approach.

In a structured dialogic approach, practitioners work with leaders or sponsors to design events that are conducive to open dialogues about the future. These are not workshops to implement changes that leaders

have already decided to make; rather, they are open events designed “to unleash, catalyze, and support the multitude of motivations and ideas among participants” (Bushe & Marshak, 2014, p. 201), and as a result they might invite a larger and more diverse group of participants. Bushe (2013) has articulated a structured dialogic OD approach that incorporates the philosophy of dialogic OD and the social construction approach to change. [Figure 5.3](#) explains this approach.

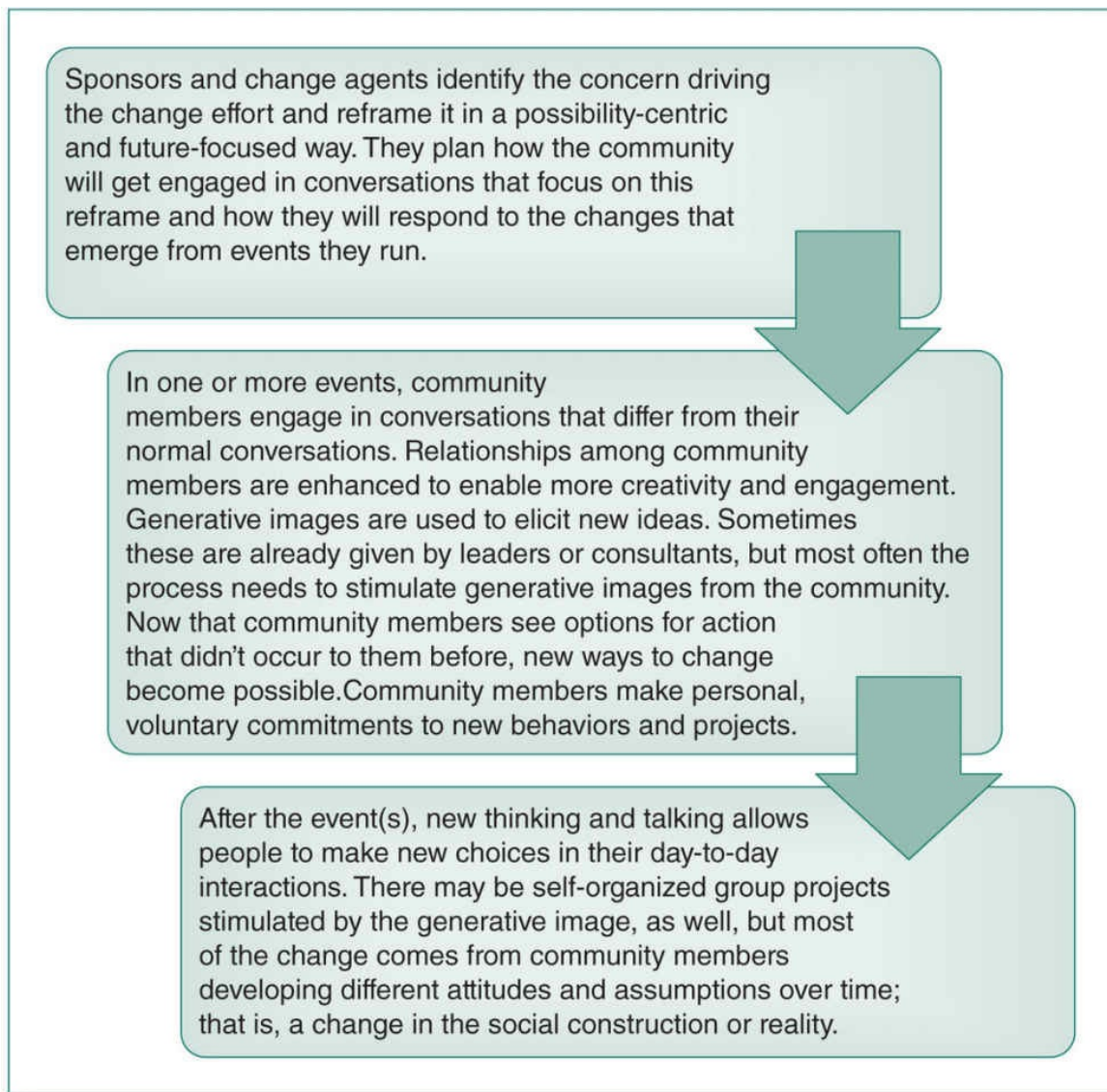
In the dialogic OD event, note the importance of what Bushe terms the “generative image,” defined as “ideas, phrases, objects, pictures, manifestos, stories, or new words . . . [that] allow us to see new alternatives for decisions and actions . . . [and] generate change because people like the new options in front of them and want to use them” (Bushe, 2013, p. 12). Consider the shift in thinking and possible options for change when a hospital staff begins to think of “encouraging wellness” instead of “eliminating sickness,” or when manufacturing operations workers examine options for change that will “allow us to make products we are proud of” instead of “emphasize a reduction in quality defects.” Usually this generative image is a term or idea that has not been considered before as part of the prevailing discourse (Bushe & Storch, 2014), so developing the generative image requires participants to be willing to engage in a new way of thinking.

Notice several points in this process that follow the philosophy of dialogic OD described above: the importance of framing conversations through questions, creating dialogic events where the questions can be discussed, the self-organization of organizational members to generate ideas and meanings, and the new reality that emerges.

In a second approach that they term *dialogic process consultation*, Bushe and Marshak (2014) explain that formal events of the kind described above are not necessary for the practitioner to intervene. Dialogic process consultation does not attempt to offer programmatic and predictable processes and outcomes. Rather, practitioners can intervene into an ongoing team conversation, for example, to point out the implications of a dominant metaphor being used by the team, where the practitioner is “working in the everyday communicative actions that people engage in as they organize themselves” (Goppelt & Ray, 2015, p. 373). The authors describe this as “jumping into the flow” of the conversation, asking questions, actively participating, sharing insights, and offering alternatives.

**Figure 5.3** Example of a Structured Dialogic OD Consulting Process





SOURCE: Bushe, G. R. (2013). Dialogic OD: A Theory of Practice. OD Practitioner, 45(1), p. 12.  
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Whether they are structured dialogic OD practices or dialogic process consultation, Bushe and Marshak (2015b) write that in dialogic OD, one or more of the following change processes occurs:

*Change Process 1:* A disruption in the ongoing social construction of reality is stimulated or engaged in a way that leads to a more complex reorganization.

*Change Process 2:* A change to one or more core narratives takes place.

*Change Process 3:* A generative image is introduced or surfaces that provides new and compelling alternatives for thinking and acting. (pp. 20–23)

Clearly, while they share some underlying values, there are some areas of incompatibility between dialogic and diagnostic approaches to OD. While the remainder of the book will follow the classic stages of the OD consulting process described earlier, we will return to the dialogic approach to OD later in order to

understand how it implies a different kind of “discursive intervention” (Marshak & Grant, 2008, p. 38). As you might expect, because their assumptions differ, dialogic OD interventions and diagnostic OD interventions are also different. This also implies that the role of the OD practitioner is different in a dialogic OD process. In [Chapter 13](#) we will examine how dialogic interventions are managed and how they can be distinguished from the other more traditional intervention types that we will review in later chapters.

In the next chapter, we will cover the first two stages of the consulting model in depth: entry and contracting. In [Chapter 7](#) we will focus on data gathering, and in [Chapter 8](#) we will discuss diagnosis and feedback, followed by an introduction to interventions in [Chapter 9](#). Chapters 10 through 13 will describe intervention types, and in [Chapter 14](#) we will describe how consultants evaluate the success of interventions and consulting engagements, and how practitioners approach the process of exiting an engagement.

## Summary

The function of the organization development consultant is varied as the consultant plays multiple roles throughout the consulting engagement, from facilitator to coach, teacher to researcher. The OD consultant is a specific type of consultant who approaches organizational problems differently than would a consultant taking on an expert, doctor–patient, or mechanic role. Expert consultants are hired for specialized content knowledge in a particular field. Doctor–patient consultants are hired when consultants possess content knowledge and clients want to be told what the solution is. Mechanic consultants are hired when the client wants the consultant to deal with virtually all elements of the problem and to propose and implement a solution. By contrast, the OD consultant works jointly with the client throughout the consulting engagement and also strives to share problem-solving knowledge with the client to increase the client’s ability to solve the problem alone next time. The OD consultant can be an internal or external role, each of which holds advantages and disadvantages for the consultant and the client.

The varied roles of an OD consultant have implications for the knowledge and skills required to be a successful practitioner. While no practitioner is likely to be an expert in the competencies listed in [Table 5.3](#), the list can become instructive for those who wish to enter the field and to increase their personal development.

OD practitioners follow a consulting process modeled on that developed in action research programs. Key practices adopted from action research include involving organizational members in the process, conducting data gathering, joint evaluation and interpretation of data, joint diagnosis about an intervention strategy, and joint evaluation of the outcomes. In addition, a recent development in OD contrasts this diagnostic process with a dialogic process that is intended to involve organizational members in a collaborative process of constructing a new social reality founded in changing language.

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## Questions for Discussion

1. There are advantages and disadvantages to being an internal and external consultant. Many of these are listed in this chapter. Can you think of others? Based on your reading of the roles of an internal and external OD practitioner, which role do you think is easier? More rewarding? Which role do you think you would prefer?
2. [Table 5.3](#) lists many recommended competencies for organization development consultants. Look back at that table and underline those where you feel that you have strong skills. Circle those where you think your skills are weaker. How might you make use of your strong skills? How might you develop your weaker skills? Which of these competencies do you see as mandatory or absolutely necessary? Which do you see as beneficial but not required for a practitioner?
3. If you were a manager hiring an organization development consultant, for what kinds of projects would you prefer an internal consultant? An external consultant? What skills would you look for?

## For Further Reading

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- <sup>1</sup> For examples, see Carey and Varney (1983); Esper (1990); Eubanks et al. (1990); Eubanks, O'Driscoll, Hayward, Daniels, and Connor (1990); Freedman and Zackrisson (2001); Head et al. (1996); McLean (2006); McLean and Sullivan (2000); O'Driscoll and Eubanks (1992); Scott (2000); R. Sullivan and Sullivan (1995); Varney (1980); Warrick and Donovan (1979); Worley and Feyerherm (2003); Worley and Varney (1998).

## Chapter 6 Entry and Contracting

The client was a petrochemical plant with 1,000 employees in a North American corporation. . . . At the plant, we were greeted with statements of goals ranging from hard-nosed interest in increasing productivity to enlightened aspirations for improving human relations in the organization. But whether the outcomes desired of OD were utilitarian or humanitarian, the nature of OD was, for virtually all members of the organization, shrouded in mystery. As is generally true, prospective clients in this organization had a difficult time understanding what they were getting themselves into. At a meeting to discuss the possibility of working with cross-functional task forces, for example, the consultants sketched in typical fashion the outlines of a team-building scenario. They stressed the importance of the group's willingness to help themselves, held out the possibility of increased self-awareness, and emphasized the absence of any guarantees of improved effectiveness. In response, one member of the task force remarked, "This is the strangest sales pitch I've ever heard" (R. E. Kaplan, 1978, pp. 45–47; Kaplan notes that the initial stages of the consulting process took 2 years).

- How would you describe the organization development (OD) process to a potential client?
- How would you clarify the OD practitioner role in an initial client meeting?

In any consulting engagement, well before the team-building session is planned or the strategic planning meeting is designed, a great deal of time is invested in setting up the intervention for success. This is done in the first three stages of the consulting process: entry, contracting, and data gathering. In [Chapters 6](#) and [7](#) we will describe the purpose and structure of these phases for both the client and the OD practitioner. By the end of these two chapters, and the case study that follows them, you will more clearly understand the importance of these three stages, and you will be able to apply what you have learned about contracting and data gathering by developing a data gathering strategy that will seek to reveal the underlying issues behind a problem presented by a client.

In this chapter we will first discuss the entry process, in which the client and consultant make contact for the first time. In this stage, the client presents an initial description of the problem or request, and the OD practitioner must consider whether and how to continue the relationship. In the contracting process, the practitioner and client explore both the formal and psychological contractual elements of their relationship, such as further exploring the problem, the request for consulting support, each other's needs and roles, and how the engagement will progress. The consultant must determine who the client is, a trickier proposition than it may seem. With a successful foundational relationship established, the consulting engagement has a much greater likelihood of success.

It is difficult to overstate the consequence of these phases, since many (perhaps most) problems that occur later on can be attributed to shortcuts or omissions in contracting. Investing time early on can save considerable time later. Cunningham (1993) describes this fact persuasively:

The planned change process requires more time in the formative sequences of the process. Participants or organizational members are involved in the definition of the need, and have the opportunity to use their creativity in developing the idea and its proposal. As a result, less time may be needed during the implementation stage for making adaptations or dealing with resistances. The investment of time in assessing and focusing can significantly reduce the amount of time required to

implement and institutionalize the change. It should also reduce the possibility of having to scrap an unworkable idea and start over again. (p. 68)

While consultants and clients find it tempting to jump to solutions, assuming they have a good understanding of the problem, skipping the early phases of the consulting process can have serious consequences later on.

## Entry

Entry is the first step in the consulting process and consists of the first contact with a client before the formal contracting process has begun. It can occur in the form of an unsolicited phone call from an acquaintance, or may it occur as the result of informal networking or even a discussion on a plane or train with a stranger.

Gaining entry occurs generally as the result of a number of intentional and accidental factors. For external consultants, gaining entry is often as the result of marketing and selling one's expertise or success to a potential client. External consultants are more likely to use strategies such as networking, phone calls, direct mail, websites, or presentations at conferences to build awareness among potential clients (Freedman & Zackrisson, 2001). Even for internal consultants, marketing one's services is a part of the job. Geirland and Maniker-Leiter (1995) recommend that internal OD practitioners give presentations, lead lunchtime "brown bag" discussions, create marketing materials, and "take all opportunities to speak before any audience in the company" (p. 45). These marketing events can give examples to internal audiences of how an OD engagement can add value and provide results.

While most think of entry in these pragmatic terms, comprising a process of marketing, taking the first phone call, agreeing to take on the assignment, and scheduling a meeting to develop a contract, the entry phase has greater symbolic significance and complexity. Beyond these events, the entry process is the first stage in the consultant's becoming connected to the social environment of the organization, including building relationships with organizational members who understand first and foremost that the consultant will only be a temporary member (Glidewell, 1959). Thus, the entry phase should also be seen as the first stage in a relationship and trust-building process, and the consultant's actions during this stage will be perceived as at least symbolic of the working relationship to come. A good entry process will thus entail the consultant listening carefully to the client, showing good faith in expressing care and concern for the client's request. Glidewell (1959) argues that during this stage, the client wants reassurance that the consultant not only understands but shares the client's goals and values. It is the first impression that a potential client has of a consulting relationship.



## Ethical Issues During the Entry Stage

It is during the entry stage that the consultant has the first hints about the type of project being requested. Just as clients often approach consultants with assumptions of a different model of consulting in their minds (as discussed in [Chapter 5](#)), clients often request projects that consultants are unable to (or should not) fulfill for one or more reasons. This occurs most often when a client asks for a consultant to perform an activity that is inappropriate for the OD practitioner role. Examples of inappropriate consulting activities include advice and counsel to a client on the qualifications or behaviors of specific individuals or job applicants, or confidential advice to a client on the performance or structure of a team. Borderline activities include those activities that fall into the “expert” consulting role, when the consultant is asked to offer content advice (French & Bell, 1999). In some cases, the entry conversation between practitioner and client can reveal the influence of organizational politics on the decision to bring in an OD practitioner. The consultant may be selected to function as a scapegoat to eventually be blamed for the problem, or the project may be designed to fail so the client can remind organizational members how difficult the manager’s job is.

When a client wants to hire a consultant to sit in on a team meeting and tell her or him “what’s really going on in those meetings” or “what you think of the leader or team members,” these activities put the consultant in an uncomfortable and unethical position. Ethical challenges can be even greater when the client prefers to keep the consultation hidden from or misrepresented to organizational members. When the consultant role, which must be founded on trust of and by organizational members, begins with a misrepresentation, the consultant and organizational members may no longer be working toward the same objectives. It is at this point, when a client begins to suggest what the consultant considers an inappropriate role, that the consultant should be quick to point out the limits of the consulting activity before misunderstanding occurs. Schein (1969) writes of making these limits explicit early, “so that they don’t function as traps or sources of disappointment later on if and when I refuse to go along with something the client expects of me” (p. 83).

Ethical problems can occur when consultants misrepresent or overstate their background or experience (educational background, experience with similar problems, organizations, or industries; White & Wooten, 1983). In their zeal to be hired for an assignment, consultants may also overpromise results, offer an “armchair” diagnosis without background data, or agree to implement an intervention strategy without additional analysis. Even statements to the client such as “We’ll have it taken care of,” “This is easy,” or “I’ve fixed this before,” while reassuring to the client, offer promises that the consultant may be unable to keep.

## Who Is the Client?

A central question to be answered during entry and the initial phases of the engagement is “Who is the client?” On the surface this appears a simple question, especially for internal consultants who may already know the voice on the other end of the phone. Even for internal consultants, however, defining the client is not a simple matter (Geirland & Maniker-Leiter, 1995). Cummings and Worley (2001) write that “it is not unusual for an OD project to fail because the relevant client was inappropriately defined” (p. 46). Schein (1997) has developed an instructive typology of six “client types” that complicate how the client can be defined, noting that “one can find oneself not knowing for whom one is working, or working with several clients whose goals are in conflict with each other” (p. 202):

1. *Contact clients* are the initial points of communication in the client organization.
2. *Intermediate clients* are those who are included in meetings or from whom data are gathered during the course of the engagement.
3. *Primary clients* have responsibility for the problem the consultant is working to address. Primary clients generally are the ones paying for the consultant’s services.
4. *Unwitting clients* will be affected by the engagement or intervention but may not know of the engagement activity or that it will concern them.
5. *Indirect clients* are not known to the consultant but are conscious that they are stakeholders in the outcome.
6. *Ultimate clients* consist of the larger system or organization, “or any other group that the consultant cares about and whose welfare must be considered” (Schein, 1997, p. 203).

The consultant often meets a number of people during the entry phase, and sorting out who is a primary client and who may be an intermediate client can be a challenging endeavor. A contact client may indeed be the primary client or may be a peer, assistant, or subordinate of the primary client contacting the consultant on his or her behalf, and who will later introduce the consultant to the primary client. A contact client eventually may also become an intermediate client, participating on the project at a later time. The primary client may make a request that conflicts with the goals and objectives of the ultimate client. Differentiating between client types is instructive to the consultant who “is always dealing with more than one part of the client system, and some parts may not have the same needs or expectations as do others” (Schein, 1997, p. 203). Being clear about these needs can sensitize the consultant to the potentially conflicting needs that may exist and that may be necessary to be accounted for later.

Many practitioners approach the client question differently. Some argue that the entire organization or system should always be thought of as the client. Burke (1994) argues that the client is not always a single individual or the larger system, but the client should be thought of as the *relationships* between individuals, groups, and the larger organization. This means that all of the consultant’s actions and decisions are directed toward improving these relationships rather than satisfying the demands of a single individual or small group. Schein (1997) describes how the client can change depending on the target of the intervention. When interpersonal issues are involved, then the relationship can be seen as the client. When one group or multiple groups are

involved, then the group process can be seen as the client. When multiple systems are involved, society at large can be seen as the client. It may appear to be an insignificant decision, but defining the client can be instructive to the consultant and can help frame how the problem is defined, how and what data are gathered, and what interventions are selected. Reminding oneself who the client is, especially when a difficult decision presents itself, can help to clarify allegiances and desired outcomes, and to guide the consultant's next steps.

The entry phase usually concludes with a scheduled face-to-face or telephone meeting at a later time, delay of a potential contract until a later date, or termination if either consultant or client is unwilling to continue.

## Contracting

Contracting is the process of developing an agreement with a client on the work to be performed. It is a particularly important time, when communicating about the client–consultant relationship is of interest to both the client and the change agent/consultant. It is also the most natural time when both parties are interested in discussing mutual expectations, clarifying roles, and setting expectations about the work to be done by both parties. It also can correct (or cause) misunderstandings, as the following personal example illustrates.

As an eager young consultant, I took on an assignment for a senior executive, enthusiastic about the opportunity to work on an important project. The client was frustrated that many projects in the division were missing their goals, either missing deadlines or over budget. He wanted to understand how the division could get back on track with projects. Willing to jump in and be of assistance, and flattered by the opportunity, I asked very few questions in our initial interview. Knowing the importance of data gathering, I agreed to come back to him in 3 weeks with additional data from employee interviews.

The interviews seemed to go well. Employees freely shared their opinions about the problems they found in working on projects for the executive. They vocally complained about the time it took him to make decisions, the seemingly impossible budget constraints they were placed under, and the lack of communication from the management team about linkages between major programs that required them to conduct last-minute rework. I summarized the feedback and brought it to the executive at a feedback meeting. So that we could jointly develop solutions to the problems that had been posed, I left a page titled “Next Steps” blank in the presentation.

At the feedback meeting, the executive listened intently without saying a word. I summarized the top areas of feedback that the employees had shared with me, including the issues related to his own style. He did not speak during the presentation, until at one point he began flipping through the pages, scanning the feedback and looking for something. He reached the blank page and interrupted, holding the page at arm’s length. “This is it?” he asked. “Well,” I stammered, “we’re going to develop those together.” His frown clearly told me that I had missed his expectations. He wondered where my recommendations were for fixing his problem. Only at that point did I share my expectations about my role, his role, and the process for us to work together. With mismatched expectations about the role of the consultant (his more closely approximating the mechanic model described in the previous chapter), we were unable to agree on what to do next. He filed the presentation and chose to take no action.

Had I asked more (and better) questions during our initial interview, I could have clarified his expectations much earlier. What did he want to see from me? Could he provide an example of the problems he saw, and how had he tried to solve this problem before? How long had this been going on? What role in the project did he want to take? What action did he anticipate taking? I missed the opportunity to negotiate role expectations, to clarify my own actions, and to delve into the client’s description of the problem in ways that could have opened up an opportunity for joint problem solving and exploration of deeper issues.



## What Is Contracting?

The contracting conversation is a time to explore some of the initial issues that have prompted the client to call, but also to clarify how the consulting process will work, from negotiating expectations to discussing roles and outcomes. While contracting usually begins with a face-to-face meeting before a project begins, it is not confined to that single meeting. Contracting is a continual process, and consultants return to validate agreements and negotiate expectations at many points throughout the engagement. Weisbord (1973/1994) writes, “I’m never finished contracting. Each client meeting requires that I reexamine the contract” (p. 409).

The word *contracting* can conjure frightening images of lengthy documents and unwieldy legal forms, and as a result many internal consultants believe that this does not apply to them. However, a contract can come in many forms, from a simple phone call or e-mail to a formal written legal agreement. Whereas external consultants and their clients generally expect to develop a written agreement on the services to be performed that cover minimally the work to be performed, the time frame of the engagement, and the financial compensation to be paid, many internal consultants bristle at the notion of a contract of any kind. They think that clients will be frustrated by their attempt to nail down expectations and timeframes, sometimes under the mistaken impression that they do not have the right as internal consultants to share their own needs and requirements. Moreover, they are sometimes placed in situations in which they cannot refuse a client’s request, and they assume that they cannot make requests of the client as a result. However, all consultants should be reminded that generally the client has invited the consultant’s assistance and (usually) wants the engagement to be successful. Most clients appreciate an explanation of the consultant’s process and a statement of what must be done to make the engagement a success. While developing written documents allows both parties to clarify their understanding, for internal consultants this does not need to be an overly formal document, drawn up by attorneys or notarized (Gallant & Rios, 2006). A follow-up e-mail may be sufficient to allow the client to clarify anything that the consultant may have missed or misunderstood.

When consultants fail to contract, they do not realize that even not contracting is actually contracting. By not setting expectations in advance, the consultant gives the impression of compliance with the client’s framing of the issues, definition of the process, and tacit assumptions about roles. Not only does it become more difficult to negotiate changes after this time, but it can frustrate both client and consultant and strain the relationship.

Thus, contracting, according to Schein (1969), has both formal and psychological components. The formal contract consists of topics that one might initially think of when developing an official professional agreement, such as the agreed-upon time span of the relationship, steps in the consulting process, and payment to be made to the consultant. The second part of the contract is psychological and may not even be documented. The psychological contract for the consulting relationship is just as important as the formal contract. It is an explicit agreement about the consulting relationship, such as how the client and consultant will communicate with each other, building a relationship ideally on authenticity and openness. “The psychological contract consists of a preliminary definition of the organization’s problems (from the CEO’s point of view) and an agreement concerning what each party may expect of the other” (Boss, 2000, p. 122). [Table 6.1](#) lists some of the initial questions that might be part of the psychological contract. Not all of these questions will be

answered in the first client meeting, but the answers to initial questions may point to areas that can be addressed in later meetings with the client or other members of the organization.

**Table 6.1** Some Questions to Have Answered During the Entry and Contracting Phases

*About the Presenting Problem*

(The client may be unable to describe the problem in such detail. In these cases, exploratory diagnostic activities may be appropriate to help the client develop an initial statement of the problem.)

What problem is being experienced? How does it appear? When is the client most aware of the problem? Can the client give an example of a recent time when it was witnessed?

What are the consequences of the problem to the organization, its customers, or its employees? What could the client do better if the problem were solved?

What does the client think caused the problem?

How long has the problem occurred?

Who is involved in the problem? What is the client's role in the problem?

Has the organization experienced this problem before? What has the organization done about this problem in the past? With what results?

Is there energy/resistance for fixing this problem? Why now? Where is there energy and where is there resistance? Who is hurt most by the problem? Does anyone benefit from this problem's existence?

What is the client asking the consultant to do?

*About the Consulting Relationship*

How will the client be involved in the engagement?

What expectations does the client have in terms of how to work together? (Consider number and frequency of meetings, communication preferences such as voice mail, e-mail, telephone, or in-person meetings. Also state the practitioner's preferences in each of these areas.)

How should the client and consultant communicate? Approach one another with disagreements or requests? How will they each react when this occurs?

What kind of confidentiality is required?

How will the consultant role and project be described and framed to organizational members?

How will progress be evaluated along the way and at the end?

How will the client and consultant know when the engagement should end?

*About the Consulting Engagement*

What time pressures are there? When should the engagement (or its stages) be completed? Can time extensions be negotiated if progress is being made?

Who else will be involved? Other consultants or employees?

How will the consultant provide feedback to the client? Are there limits to what feedback is being requested?

Who will get a copy of the final report, if there is one?

*About the Organization*

(Ask these questions only if the answers cannot be obtained before the meeting through research.)

What are the organization's products and services?

Who are the key executives? How is the organization structured?

How large is the organization or group involved? What is its experience with change recently? Has it experienced other changes like this one?

What is the organization's culture like? What norms or values are espoused formally or followed informally? What is the general attitude or level of engagement of organizational members?





## The Purpose of Contracting

Contracting has a number of purposes:

1. *To further explore the problem.* Clients sometimes call a consultant with a vague idea of what the problem is and what needs to be done, but these initial statements of the problem can be little more descriptive than “We have a communication problem” or “We’re not meeting our goals.” Thus, the consultant’s objective during the contracting phase is to understand the root of the problem and its components: how the problem is experienced, when it was first noticed, who is involved, how the organization has tried to solve it and with what results, and what barriers have prevented the problem from being solved to this point. The consultant can more clearly understand the problem’s impact on the organization and how solving (or failing to solve) the problem will affect the business. While this is contracting, it is also an early stage of data gathering and diagnosis. Some clients may not have a good understanding of the problem, and thus the practitioner may wish to conduct an initial set of diagnostic activities (discussed in the next chapter) as a starting point.
2. *To clarify the client’s goals and objectives for the request.* The contracting meeting is the appropriate time to elucidate what the client expects to see when the engagement is finished. The discussion of goals and objectives for the project will also determine how the engagement will be evaluated, and failing to specify this in advance will lead to a wandering scope of the project and an evaluation phase in which it is virtually impossible to show success. Weisbord (1973/1994) recommends that goals and objectives be stated as concretely as possible. Instead of “improved communication” or “better meetings,” goals are more clearly stated and more likely to be met when they can be as specific as possible, such as “I want our meetings to start and end on time, covering each of the topics on the agenda” or “I want team members to approach each other with conflicts rather than coming to me.” Without these goals specified, the engagement is on a “flight to nowhere” with the potential to “end up in a worse place than you started” (Freeman, 1995, p. 26). The client and consultant should discuss how the engagement will be terminated by agreeing on how they know the goals have been met. In addition, the consultant can assess whether the client has motivation to investigate the problem or whether the request is at heart a desire on the client’s part to have a change agent implement a solution already chosen.
3. *To allow the client to get to know the consultant, the consultant to get to know the client and the organization, and for both parties to validate that the project is one that the consultant has the knowledge and skills to accept.* The consultant should do as much early research as possible on the organization’s customers, products and services, and history. During the contracting meeting, both consultant and client can get to know one another if they do not already. Importantly, the consultant can explain the role and purpose of OD to clarify any misconceptions for a client who may never have approached an OD practitioner before. The change agent can ask additional questions about the organization’s norms and culture. The client can assess the practitioner’s content and interpersonal skills and assess whether a good relationship can be established and whether the consulting process meets the client’s needs. By exploring the problem, the practitioner has a better idea of the range of potential approaches and can be assured that this engagement matches the consultant’s skill level. The practitioner can validate that it is a project that he

or she is willing and able to accept. The contracting meeting is not the opportunity for “grandstanding” by reciting one’s résumé, past client list, successful engagements, or educational background (Stroh & Johnson, 2006, p. 20). Instead, the practitioner should plan to do more listening than talking.

4. *To understand the organization’s commitment to change.* By asking questions about the problem and the client’s suggested approach, the consultant can validate the likelihood of being able to carry out an intervention. One OD practitioner shared a story about contracting with a client who had an urgent request to help implement a technology system that was being piloted in just a few weeks. Organizational members were already resisting the pilot and angry about the changes. The practitioner asked what the client would do if she recommended that the pilot be postponed. The client replied that she would go forward anyway because the system was already late. Without much opportunity to change, the engagement would have been frustrating for both consultant and client and both agreed that a consulting engagement probably was unnecessary.
5. *To create an environment in which consultation can succeed by agreeing on mutual roles and needs.* This includes both the client’s role in the engagement and what the consultant will do. The contracting meeting is the time for both client and consultant to share their expectations about their involvement and mutual support for one another during the project. The consultant must explain his or her needs for support. Different consultants develop their own lists of needs over time based on experience, but generally include such items as time needed from the client, public commitment, required meetings, communication preferences, involvement from other staff members, and other organizational resources needed (e.g., office space, computer equipment). The client may need the practitioner to schedule meetings formally rather than drop in, to let the client determine the timing of meetings with certain stakeholders, or to limit requests for organizational members’ time to a certain number of hours per week.

The practitioner should also explore the client’s role in the project, from participating in data gathering and diagnosis to planning and carrying out the desired interventions. Recall that the consulting relationship is an equal partnership and that the client “owns the problem and the solution” (Schein, 1999, p. 20). The contracting meeting is the time to discuss the implications of this value and what it will require in terms of the client’s own time and actions. Schein (1969) writes that as a consultant it is important that he or she not be seen as the one “selling” ideas across the organization or pushing for change, but instead helping the client to clarify this process and to implement solutions.
6. *To clarify time pressures and expectations.* The client and consultant should explore time expectations for not only the overall engagement but also the stages along the way, from data gathering and feedback to implementing interventions and measuring outcomes. Time pressures can intervene if either the consultant or client has commitments during the course of the engagement that would cause them to be absent or to put parts of the project on hold.
7. *To clarify how the client and consultant will interact.* This involves not only practicalities such as the number and schedule of meetings but expectations for an equal relationship in which authenticity and honesty are necessities. Many consultants, especially internal ones, see themselves in a “one-down” position due to role or status in the organization, working “for” the client rather than “with” the client.

As a result, they often fear direct statements and view them as confrontational. They avoid confronting a client with questions such as “Why don’t you want to collaborate with your colleague on this project?” or “What is your own role in this problem?” By not approaching the relationship equally, the consultant fails to act authentically, ignoring difficult issues and leaving the tough problems unexplored. As Weisbord (1973/1994) states with his clients, “Part of my job is to raise sticky issues and push you on them. You have a right to say no to anything you don’t want to deal with. If you feel free to say no, I’ll feel free to push” (p. 408). Setting up the relationship in this way and getting the client’s reaction to these expectations can help to begin the relationship with an equal partnership.

8. *To clarify confidentiality needs.* As Block (2011) puts it, confidentiality is a concern “since you are almost always dealing with a political situation as well as a technical one” (p. 64). OD practitioners frequently handle sensitive personal concerns, from executive coaching sessions to career development to team-building activities. In some organizations, using a consultant can be a mark of defeat, signaling a failure to solve a problem alone. The change agent needs to be sensitive to a client’s fears and anxieties about hiring a consultant and should use the contracting meeting to clarify these concerns. The practitioner should explore who is entitled to know about the existence of the consultation, how the consulting project will be positioned with others, and who will have access to data or receive copies of reports or other documents. If a possible result of the consulting engagement is a layoff, reorganization, work redesign, or process changes, how should the practitioner respond when questions arise from organizational members about the possible consequences of the engagement? Internal consultants need to speak with clients about whether or how the consultant’s manager will know of the purpose and outcomes of the consultation. The most important point about client confidentiality is that it is the client’s decision, not the practitioner’s, and the client’s wishes must be respected. If at any time the consultant has a doubt about the nature or extent of the confidentiality agreement, this must be clarified immediately with the client.
9. *To plan next steps.* By the conclusion of the contracting process, both consultant and client should have an understanding of what each person will do next. This may involve, for example, submission of a formal proposal or contract, an agreement that the consultant will validate what was heard in an e-mail or memo, or that data gathering can take place. Contracts can be written as a formal letter, a document or memo accompanied by a letter, or simply an e-mail. Regardless of the form they take, most contracts should include the elements described in [Table 6.2](#).

## Success in the Contracting Meeting

A successful contracting meeting has occurred if the consultant and client have come to agreement on the process for moving forward with the engagement, have appropriately negotiated needs and roles, and are each satisfied with the relationship. Holding a contracting meeting can be a challenge with several pitfalls, however, and consultants should do three things as they conduct the contracting meeting:

1. *Listen.* Many practitioners are tempted to interrupt a client's description of the situation or problem by explaining their experience addressing similar problems with other clients. Other practitioners, desiring to demonstrate knowledge and expertise, present a laundry list of educational credentials and high-status clients. However, rarely does a client, in the middle of an explanation of a high-anxiety, perhaps personal problem, want a consultant to interrupt and talk about the consultant's self. Putting the client and the client's situation first means careful and active listening as well as waiting until the right moment to speak. Let clients have the opportunity to express themselves first, doing most of the talking initially.
2. *Ask questions carefully and sensitively.* Practitioners need to ask questions (see [Table 6.1](#), p. 126) to learn more about the situation and the potential for a successful engagement. Schein (1969) recommends two types of questions:

**Table 6.2** Elements of a Contract

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Statement of the problem as explained by the client</li><li>2. Implications of the problem on the business or organization</li><li>3. Methodology or approach to the engagement<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Data gathering proposal, including what data are to be gathered and from whom</li><li>b. Specific requests that the client has for the project</li></ol></li><li>4. Timetable for the overall engagement, with milestones listed for intermediate stages</li><li>5. Agreed-upon needs and roles<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. The client's needs and role</li><li>b. The consultant's needs and role</li></ol></li><li>6. Confidentiality</li><li>7. Fees</li><li>8. Qualifications to take the engagement</li></ol> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

I usually ask questions which are designed to (1) sharpen and highlight aspects of the presented problem, and (2) test how open and frank the contact client is willing to be. If I feel

that there is hedging, unwillingness to be critical . . . and/or confusion about my potential role as consultant, I will be cautious. (p. 83)

A practitioner's questions can sometimes come across as an attack on a client or the organization ("Why hasn't something been done earlier about this problem?"). At other times, the practitioner can ask so many questions that the client may feel as though the discussion is wandering away from the immediate problem or become overwhelmed by the barrage of questions. A practitioner can narrow an exhaustive list of questions to ones that the client can address immediately and ones that can be discussed at another time or through another mechanism, such as e-mail, a follow-up telephone call, or interviews with other organizational members.

3. *Do not accept a role, activity, or framing that does not meet your needs for a successful engagement without being explicit about it.* Practitioners must be clear about what they absolutely must have in order to work with a client. These "must haves" can include compensation, time, support, or other resources from the client, and they can include relationship issues such as honesty and accountability. When clients and practitioners cannot agree on these issues, they must make a decision about whether and how to proceed. Block (2011) describes the process of getting "stuck" in contracting and how practitioners should address it. They may choose to forgo one of their must-have issues (perhaps settling for lower fees, fewer client meetings, or a shortened cycle time) or they may renegotiate the offer (agreeing to a shorter cycle time if the scope of the engagement is narrowed). Regardless of what the practitioner chooses, this should be a conscious choice. Listening to the uncomfortable gut feeling a practitioner may have about the low likelihood of an engagement's success is instructive. The practitioner can put this reluctance into words and more clearly set up the engagement for success by negotiating these wants and even turning down an engagement if it is unlikely to succeed.

## Recontracting

Recall Weisbord's (1973/1994) statement that a consultant is never finished with contracting. Each meeting with a client is an opportunity to evaluate progress, retain previously discussed roles and processes, or change them based on past experience or anticipated future needs. Recontracting in this sense is an implicit evaluation and renegotiation that occurs at each stage. In addition, recontracting can be done explicitly. For example, this is necessary when any of the following occur:

- New information gathered during the data gathering stage expands or narrows the scope of the agreed-upon engagement.
- The consultant feels that additional data gathering is necessary.
- Either the consultant or the client no longer sees progress being made.
- The project experiences barriers such as lack of a client's time or reduced availability of organizational members to participate.
- Organizational circumstances imply modifications of the original agreement (changing goals or budget).
- Personnel changes result in a new client.
- The consultant finds obstacles to completing the original agreement.

Recontracting follows a process similar to the original contracting session. The consultant and client should schedule a formal meeting to discuss the engagement, review the original agreement, discuss the new situation, and agree on how the new situation presents any changes to the contract.

## Ethics in Contracting

There are at least three ethical dilemmas that a consultant must navigate during the entry and contracting stages (White & Wooten, 1983, 1985):

1. *Misrepresentation and collusion.* We have already discussed the potential for a consultant to purposefully or inadvertently (by omission) overstate one's qualifications for an engagement. Consultants may lead the client to believe that they have experience with similar problems, industries, or organizations, and they may also overstate their certifications or other specialized skills. They may also misrepresent the potential for change or success by promising results. Collusion can occur when the consultant and client agree to "exclude outside parties for personal gain or protection" (White & Wooten, 1985, p. 149). This can occur when the consultant agrees to omit focusing on a difficult problem, agrees to a short-term change that may have long-term negative consequences, or agrees to serve a narrow interest benefiting a particular group to the detriment of other groups or the organization as a whole. Collusion can also occur when the consultant implicitly or explicitly agrees to accept the client's framing of the issues without additional confirmation, agreeing to implement a solution solely because the client wants it. Because consultants generally want to help the client and are eager to accept an engagement, the potential for an ethical conflict that misrepresents the consultant or colludes with the client is very high during the entry and contracting stages. Misrepresentation and collusion have such potential for negative consequences for the consultant and the OD consulting profession that skipping or minimizing contracting discussions can be seen as not only a poor process but also a violation of professional ethics.
2. *Value and goal conflict.* Value and goal conflict can occur when the objective for the consulting engagement violates one or more value principles of OD consulting, such as when clients seek to use the consultant as a "spy" or hidden observer, or when clients want to hide the purpose of the engagement. Value conflict can also occur when a consultant agrees to conduct an engagement with an unwilling client or one who has been coerced into participation. Other ethical problems can occur when consultants who work for multiple clients fail to be explicit about any potential conflicts of interest that may result from serving multiple clients who may have conflicting goals.
3. *Technical ineptness.* Technical ineptness refers not to information technology, but to the technical ability of a consultant to appropriately follow the OD consulting process. In the entry and contracting stages, consultants may not know how to articulate their needs or may omit a discussion of their needs, or they may seek harmony with clients by agreeing to take engagements that do not contain the seeds for success.



## Contracting as Data Gathering

When both parties agree on a contract, the next step of the consulting process begins: data gathering. While the consultant may be thinking of formally proposing interviews or surveys or some other data gathering method, he or she already has a lot of data, in fact. The problem has been described from one perspective (the client's), and the client may even have formally presented some data to the consultant, perhaps in the form of numbers or written feedback from surveys. In addition, the contracting process itself can be seen as data gathering. Did the client appear nervous, brusque, excitable, anxious, distant, or aloof? Was the problem described as annoying, impossible to solve, typical, or devastating? Did the client feel like a willing partner in trying to solve the problem, or did the consultant have to "sell" the client on equal participation in the engagement? Such responses, as well as the consultant's gut feelings about the project, can be illustrative or symbolic of how others in the organization may be feeling and can be instructive as the consultant approaches the data gathering process.

In addition, the consultant has learned a great deal about the organization's culture from the contracting process. Gallant and Rios (2006) explain: "Attention to words, tone, metaphors, and other linguistic differences that are peculiar to the client and the industry is essential" (p. 190). The consultant can become aware of communication patterns during these initial meetings that give insight into the organization's norms and values. The consultant likely has observed the physical environment and met some organizational members. In short, these first meetings with a client are the first steps in gathering data about the organization, and the consultant's own experiences with the client are an important source of information not to be discounted.

## Summary

The foundation of a successful engagement is laid when the consulting relationship begins in the entry and contracting stages of the organization development process. The entry process begins with the initial contact between consultant and potential client. Clients can be of different types, from the initial contact client to other clients who may be marginally affected by the project, to the whole organization.

Contracting is a critical skill for a consultant to learn. Many problems that consultants experience later in the engagement, such as a lack of commitment to taking action, disagreements about the consultant's role, lack of contact with a client, or confusion about the objectives of the engagement, can be attributed to ineffective contracting. Contracting has formal components, such as the fees to be paid, the amount of time to dedicate, and the actions the consultant will commit to taking. It also has psychological components, such as when the consultant and client must contract with one another about how they will interact together, and the sharing of mutual needs. While the contracting stage may appear to conclude when the project is agreed upon or the documents are signed, it never really does. Consultants return to contracting discussions each time they meet: to validate progress so far, correct any misunderstandings or missteps to that point, and agree on what to do next. In that sense, each engagement is a never-ending process of contracting.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Read the opening vignette to the chapter again. Why did the client respond that “this is the strangest sales pitch I’ve ever heard”? What do you think the client was expecting?
2. In initial meetings during the entry stage, clients often want reassurance that the practitioner can address the problem, but as we discussed in the section on ethics in contracting, the practitioner must try not to overpromise results. What are some ways that the practitioner can walk this line in the first meeting?
3. Think about the statement, “A practitioner is never finished contracting.” What do you think are some of the special challenges with recontracting when situations change? How might you respond to those challenges?

## For Further Reading

Block, P. (2011). *Flawless consulting: A guide to getting your expertise used* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Boss, R. W. (2000). The psychological contract. In R. T. Golembiewski (Ed.), *Handbook of organizational consultation* (2nd ed., pp. 119–128). New York, NY: Marcel Dekker.

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## Exercise: Contracting

Ann Marie Lewis is the vice president of product development, and Eduardo Silva is the vice president of product service and support. Imagine that you are an internal organization development practitioner supporting these two leaders, and today you received the following e-mail from Ann Marie:

I wanted to contact you because Eduardo and I have recently been talking about a problem that we are having with our two teams. My team, product development, is in charge of all of the functions and capabilities of our products. We develop new products and work on the upgrades of existing products. Eduardo's team is in charge of product support, so they go to the customer's location and provide installation or maintenance support for customers who order new units or who have problems with their existing products. If something breaks, the customer calls the 1-800 number and we send one of Eduardo's technicians to the site.

The problem is that our two teams are currently at odds. Eduardo's team is constantly sending us product upgrade requests or suggestions to reduce the maintenance needs they see. After all, they see the trends and common points of failure on the products. My team gets defensive when they get these upgrade requests. They want to decide what gets upgraded and what doesn't, and truthfully we have a limited number of product development personnel to work on these upgrades, so we have to prioritize, and sometimes it takes a while for us to get to the request.

Eduardo and I would like to meet with you to determine how we can get our teams to work together more effectively. Can you let me know when you might be available to meet?

Consider the following questions as you prepare for your meeting:

1. Who is the client in this case? Identify the different client types from [Chapter 6](#) that will be relevant to this engagement.
2. What questions will you want to ask Ann Marie and Eduardo in your initial meeting?
3. What would be the "red flags" that might cause you to reconsider whether this engagement is a good idea? What will you be listening for as you hold your initial meeting?
4. What would you propose as next steps?

## Chapter 7 Data Gathering

Promotion, Inc., is a privately held company in the Midwest that serves the direct mail industry with printing and mailing services. A junior organization development consultant agreed to conduct an employee survey, specifically with the Mail Division, to determine why turnover rates were much higher than in other divisions within the company. An internal committee developed 16 possible causes of the turnover based on interviews with 20 employees. The 102-item questionnaire (which included a separate page of demographic data as well) was organized into 11 categories, and the survey was pilot tested with a small group of employees and revised based on their feedback. In the end, all 480 employees in the division were sent a survey in order to ensure that no employee was omitted and that employees could remain anonymous. The results of the survey held negative feedback for management about roles between departments, work policies, and employee compensation. Results of the survey were presented to management in five separate sessions, beginning with top management and continuing with the internal committee and Mail Division managers. Results took many by surprise, and some managers walked out of the feedback sessions. Managers were unwilling to take action based on the feedback and decided to shelve the reports. In the end, employees were provided with only a brief and highly edited version of the feedback report almost 2 months after the survey was administered (Swanson & Zuber, 1996).

- What do you think was done well in the administration of the survey in this case? What do you think should have been done differently?
- Was a survey a good choice for a data gathering method in this case? Why or why not?

With a formal and psychological contract successfully established, a data gathering strategy is developed to further explore the causes and consequences of the problem described by the client. Using methods such as interviews, focus groups, surveys, observations, and unobtrusive measures, the consultant can develop a nuanced and detailed understanding of the situation so that interventions developed can be both applicable and more effective. In this chapter we discuss the methods of data gathering used by organization development (OD) consultants and describe how consultants choose among them to formulate a data gathering strategy.

To consultants and clients alike, spending time gathering additional data can seem like a trivial and costly exercise. After all, the client has at this point already seen many instances of the problem being discussed and likely has been able to describe it in detail. This can be a troublesome view to maintain, however. Clients see one angle of a problem from one perspective, and additional perspectives can add useful insights that cannot be seen without additional data. Gathering data and presenting the information back to the client can present a more complete picture of the organization and expand both the client's and practitioner's knowledge. It is an intervention in itself, and in many cases it is the most powerful intervention that a consultant can execute.

## The Importance of Data Gathering

Comprehensive data gathering takes time, however, and “many managers and consultants show a bias for quick intervention and shortchange diagnosis” (M. I. Harrison & Shirom, 1999, p. 8). In an attempt to quickly solve the problem that may have existed for quite some time, both managers and consultants are tempted to take a shortcut through the data gathering process, assuming that the information available is sufficient. However, “managers and other decision makers run serious risks if they eschew diagnostic inquiry and systematic decision making altogether when uncertainty and pressure for quick action intensify” (p. 9). Despite these warnings, speed frequently trumps accurate data and careful diagnosis.

Nadler (1977) writes that there are three reasons why consultants should take data gathering seriously. First, good data collection generates “information about organizational functioning, effectiveness, and health” (p. 105). Argyris (1970) explains: “Without valid information it would be difficult for the client to learn and for the interventionist to help. . . . Valid information is that which describes the factors, plus their interrelationships, that create the problem for the client system” (p. 17). Good data collection should expand the practitioner’s and client’s knowledge of the problem.

Second, data collection can be a force that can spark interest in change. It can bring organizational members together on a common definition of the situation that they can then agree to change. Nadler (1977) writes that in this respect, “Collection can be used for consciousness raising—getting people thinking about issues concerning them and the organization” (p. 105).

Finally, practitioners who do data collection well can “continue the process of relationship-building between the change agent, his or her internal partners, and the organization” (Nadler, 1977, p. 106). The change agent has the opportunity to meet organizational members, demonstrate empathy and credibility by focusing on individuals and their perspectives, and develop cooperative and trusting relationships so that the practitioner can help the organization to change.

## Presenting Problems and Underlying Problems

In initial meetings with practitioners, clients describe *presenting problems*. Presenting problems are those initial explanations of the situation that highlight symptoms of which the client is most painfully aware. Beneath presenting problems lie *underlying problems*. Underlying problems can be described as the root cause or core, fundamental issues that are producing the symptoms. Interventions designed to address presenting problems but that do not address underlying problems are likely to produce only a short-term, negligible impact. These interventions are commonly the “simple fix” that clients may actually prefer. After all, they usually match the client’s framing of the issues, they are frequently easier to address, and they often involve process issues or other task-oriented changes that avoid personal change or interpersonal conflict. Unfortunately, they rarely solve the underlying problem contributing to the surface-level symptoms that are easier to see.

For example, Block (2001) describes several common presenting problems framed by clients that consultants may erroneously try to fix. If a client wants more cooperation from a team, the change agent may try to get all relevant parties in a room, discuss their objectives, discuss working relationships, and agree on communication patterns. Reframing the problem as one of territory between groups changes the problem from the lack of cooperation to a negotiation of boundaries and group identity, where each individual or group may need to give up something for the good of the larger organization. Another common example concerns training: A client sees poor results and wants more training or education for organizational members. The client may not see that there are process and motivational barriers inhibiting organizational members from acting. If a consultant acts on a request for training without understanding why organizational members act in the way they do, the consultant will take up time and resources developing a training program that may have very little to do with why results are not being achieved.

The point is that without greater detail as to the nature and extent of the problem from different perspectives, the chosen interventions may target the wrong areas, and they may even deepen conflict and frustrate organizational members. Presenting problems are an initial place to start, but the practitioner’s real concern must be with the underlying problems. These can best be explored through data gathering.



## Data Gathering Process

Noolan (2006) recommends a five-step process for data gathering:

1. *Determine approach to be used.* Each method of data gathering has advantages and disadvantages. Based on the client's description of the problem, the consultant should determine what data should be collected and why.
2. *Announce project.* The client or another representative should explain to organizational members what data are being gathered, by whom, using what methods, and for what purposes.
3. *Prepare for data collection.* Surveys or interview guides should be prepared, along with a list of potential interviewees. Interviewees should be contacted and a time and place scheduled.
4. *Collect data.* Use appropriate protocols, depending on the data gathering approach selected.
5. *Do data analysis and presentation.* Practitioners may choose to use one or more diagnostic models to analyze the data and give feedback to the client. (This part of the process is discussed in the next chapter.)

This approach can vary somewhat, with different considerations for successful data gathering, depending on the data gathering method used. Each approach requires a different length of time for gathering information and analyzing it, a different level of expense, and a different investment on the part of organizational members, clients, and consultants. Some approaches, such as interviewing, can have a psychological effect on the organization, whereas unobtrusive measures generally occur behind the scenes without much fanfare or publicity. In this chapter we expand on the specific details for each step of the data gathering process for each method.

## Data Gathering Methods

Organization development practitioners use five common methods of data gathering to explore presenting problems. In the following sections, we explore these methods, including why practitioners use that approach, what advantages or disadvantages each approach presents, and what pitfalls or potential problems practitioners can experience in using each approach. We also explore tips for successful data gathering using each approach:

1. Interviews
2. Focus groups
3. Surveys/questionnaires
4. Observations
5. Unobtrusive measures

## Interviews

Interviews are generally one-on-one meetings during which practitioners speak directly with individual organizational members. The practitioner is interested in the individual stories and perspectives of organizational members and in a personal setting can explore their history, experiences, beliefs, and attitudes in depth. Seidman (2006) writes that “at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). The primary advantages of interviewing as a method for data gathering include the ability to understand a person’s experience and to follow up on areas of interest. Interviews can yield surprises that a practitioner may not know enough in advance to ask about. In many cases, interviews can be the only choice in getting at specific issues, such as employee experiences with a manager of a small group or a conflict between two managers. In these cases, employees may be unlikely to respond to a written questionnaire with adequate detail to truly understand the problem, and it may not be possible to witness the situation personally through observations. Even if a practitioner could see the situation personally, interviews can allow the practitioner to better understand how organizational members interpret a situation or what attitudes and beliefs they have about it.

Data gathering through interviews relies heavily on cooperation from organizational members who will only open up to discuss serious issues if they trust the interviewer (Seidman, 2006). Interviews can be threatening, as members may feel defensive if they are personally involved in a problem and they may be motivated to stretch the truth to present themselves in a positive light. Consequently, among the five data gathering methods, interviewing requires the greatest interpersonal skill of OD practitioners. Interviewers should be adept at placing people at ease in a one-on-one situation, excellent listeners, and skilled conversationalists. Interviews can generate a tremendous amount of data, with organizational members sharing stories, examples, and personal beliefs, including issues relevant to the issue the practitioner is investigating and those tangential to it. These data can be difficult and time-consuming for the practitioner to sort through after the interviews, and they may suffer from the practitioner’s or client’s biases or interest in seeing certain facts that may not be as apparent as the practitioner wants to believe.

To conduct data gathering successfully using interviews, an interviewer should follow these guidelines:

1. *Prepare an interview guide.* Interviews can be formal and structured, with each interviewee asked the exact same set of questions without straying from the list of questions, or they can be semistructured, with an interview guide containing a general list of open-ended questions addressing the major topics of the interview. Open-ended questions are those that typically require the participant to provide more detailed answers, whereas closed-ended questions can be answered with a word or short phrase. It is usually a better choice to ask a respondent “How would you describe your relationship with the members of this team?” than “Do you feel there is too much conflict on this team?” which tends to suggest an area of the interviewer’s interest rather than the interviewee’s. With semistructured interviews, the interviewer adds probes, or follow-up questions, where appropriate, and can explore other areas that were not predicted in the interview guide. Follow-up probes can include questions such as “Why do you think that is true?” or “Can you give an example?” Most OD interviews are

semistructured.

2. *Select participants.* When only a small team is involved, interviewing every team member is a reasonable approach. However, because interviewing can be time-intensive and resource-consuming for both the organization and the interviewer, it may not be possible to interview every relevant organizational member. For example, to gather data from employees on a manufacturing floor, the practitioner may have to sample a certain number of employees from the day shift and night shift, or to select employees from line A and line B. How many interviews to conduct likely will depend on the time available, the problem to be investigated, and the population from which participants are selected. A practitioner can be more confident that enough people have been chosen when interviews begin to get repetitive and substantiate the same common issues. The selection process can be random (using an established randomization protocol such as a random numbers table or computerized selection method) or stratified (taking every third person on an ordered list by employee number, for example). The selection of interviewees also can be intentionally based on the participants' knowledge or involvement in the topic being discussed. (With their greater knowledge of the organization, clients should help in selecting interviewees.) Still another approach is to conduct what social science researchers term "snowball" sampling, in which a researcher begins with one or more participants and concludes each interview by asking the interviewee who else he or she would recommend interviewing. Thus, the network is tapped for its own knowledge and access to another interviewee is potentially smoother. In any case, the practitioner should be prepared to justify these choices, since organizational members in sensitive situations may attribute meaning to interviewee selection, even if it was random.
3. *Contact participants and schedule interviews.* When contacting each potential interviewee, the interviewer should explain the purpose of the interview and how long it is expected to take. It can be helpful to have the client or sponsor contact interviewees first to invite their participation, promising contact from the OD practitioner to schedule the interview. This approach can have the advantage of easing access and encouraging responsiveness, particularly for an external consultant, but it can have the disadvantage of associating the consultant with a client's goals and objectives. The change agent can be more explicitly seen as an "agent" of management, and interviewees may be suspicious or withhold important information if they do not trust the sponsor. In any case, interview participation should be framed as a free choice with no consequences for refusing to participate, and potential interviewees should be given the option to participate free from any coercion. In sensitive situations, practitioners may advise that the client suggest a list of possible interviewees from which a certain number will be chosen.

Contact methods for scheduling interviews commonly include telephone calls and e-mails. The more sensitive the topic of the interview, the more the OD practitioner should consider the most personal method of contact. Simply scheduling interviews to get feedback on noncontroversial matters such as employee satisfaction with general working conditions or whether a new process is working correctly may easily be done by e-mail. Interviews discussing interpersonally sensitive topics such as conflict with a manager or coworker are best done in person or by telephone.

Descriptions of the purpose of the interview should be consistent between the client's description and

the practitioner's, as well as between interviews. Participants are likely to speak with other colleagues or their managers about the interviews, sharing the topics and questions among each other. If these descriptions are not consistent, participants may rightfully be apprehensive about the stated purpose or intent of the interviews.

Finally, a location for the interview should be selected that allows for the best interaction possible. This means a private location free from distractions such as phone calls and personal interruptions. The interview should be conducted in an environment in which conversation can take place without disturbing or being overheard by others.

4. *Begin the interview and establish rapport.* The interviewer should begin with a personal introduction, again explaining the purpose of both the engagement and the interview, including what topics will be discussed. The interviewer should also take the time to explain what he or she will do with the data from the interview and who will see it (if anyone). The interviewee may want to know how interviewees have been selected and who else is being interviewed, which the practitioner may be able to share in a broad categorical sense such as "all managers," "about half of the second engineering shift," or "five people at random from each of the company's four sites." The practitioner can also state what notes will be taken and what will be done with the notes, in order to explain why the interviewer may be writing during the interview. Waclawski and Rogelberg (2002) recommend that seating be arranged so that interviewees can read the interviewer's notes to further put the interviewee at ease regarding what is written, and that interviewers alter their notes if there is anything written that makes the interviewee uncomfortable.

To put the interviewee at ease, it is a good practice to begin the interview with a relatively safe set of questions about the interviewee's background, length of time with the company, and current and previous roles. It can also be useful for an interview to begin with a "grand tour" question (Spradley, 1979) in which the interviewer opens up the interview with a broad, general subject, such as "Tell me about a typical day for you at work" or "Tell me about your involvement with this group since you joined the company." While such questions tend to produce somewhat longer and wandering responses, they can be instructive as an overview without asking too many questions or introducing bias.

Many practitioners make a useful distinction between confidentiality and anonymity in interviews. Information is *confidential* if no one other than the consultant will know what was said in the interview—in other words, what is said stays with the consultant. Information is *anonymous* if it can be shared outside the interview but separated from the source (i.e., the interviewee's name). Generally interviewers can promise that information from interviews will remain anonymous but not confidential. That is, to be able to use the data and act on them, the practitioner must be able to share the data outside of the interview, but the practitioner should not share who said what without a participant's explicit permission (Freedman & Zackrison, 2001).

5. *Conduct the interview by following the interview guide, straying from it when appropriate.* Interviews are primarily a conversation, albeit one with a specific purpose. Interviewers need to listen carefully to the current response, think about any follow-up questions, remember the other areas that are listed in the

interview guide, and be conscious that time is limited. The best interviewers can maintain the character of the interview as a conversation without being distracted by other tasks.

6. *Close the interview.* Close the interview by inviting the participant to pose any questions that he or she may have. Conclude by thanking the interviewee and reiterating the timeline for what will happen next and when the participant will hear results, if at all. Most people are naturally curious about what will happen next, and it is important that the conclusion of the interview sets the appropriate expectation. The interviewer can also choose to provide a business card or other contact information in case additional questions arise or the interviewee wishes to clarify something after the interview.

## Tips for Successful Interviews

1. Listening is a critical skill in interviewing. It is important to avoid interrupting an interviewee with another question in earnestness to move on to another area. Listening for emotion as well as content can suggest areas for follow-up questions. Noticing hesitancy in the interviewee's voice, the practitioner can ask, "You seem reluctant to talk about the budgeting process. Can you say more about your thoughts?"
2. Avoid indicating agreement or disagreement with the interviewee, or suggesting that the interviewee's responses are similar to or different from other interviews. Even head nodding, nonverbal feedback such as "yes" or "uh huh," used to encourage the interviewee to continue, can be seen instead as a sign of agreement that may change the interview. Likewise, Seidman (2006) recommends only rarely sharing your own experiences that are similar to an interviewee's, since the interviewer can become the focus and can potentially alter the direction of the interview. The best advice is to emphasize interest in the interviewee's experience, not in one particular answer.
3. Take notes sparingly during the interview, and write more immediately after it ends. It is rarely possible to take verbatim notes and participate fully in the conversation. Taking very brief notes with key words, followed by a more complete record after the interview, can allow the consultant to pay closer attention to what is being said. When verbatim quotes are desired, the consultant can ask the interviewee to repeat what was just said, noting that "what you just said is so important I want to write it down word for word." To allow extra time to take notes after interviews, avoid scheduling them back-to-back. Some consultants choose to audiotape or videotape interviews, thinking that it will save time taking notes. This practice can actually take more time, however, since it requires spending time equal to the length of the interview listening to or watching a tape. Given concerns about where the tapes may end up, potential technical problems with equipment, and an interviewee's likely discomfort, this approach usually presents more disadvantages than advantages. If additional note-taking is desired to capture a great deal of data, and the consultant cannot do this alone, another consulting partner could attend the interview only for the purpose of taking notes. This can be very appropriate in some circumstances but may make some interviewees uncomfortable.

In summary, interviews are probably the most common method of data collection in OD. Good interviewing requires a consultant to have good interpersonal skills in establishing rapport, maintaining a conversation, steering the conversation to relevant areas of interest, and listening actively. While they can be time-intensive, they can be well worth the additional effort expended to gain knowledge and background detail into the

organization. Because gaining the time to conduct one-on-one interviews can be difficult, many consultants turn to the group interview, or focus group.

## Focus Groups

Focus groups are groups of usually a small number of organizational members facilitated by a consultant who poses questions and then allows for group discussion. Focus groups have been used by social scientists as a research tool for many years, and in recent years they have also been used frequently for public relations and market research activities (Smithson, 2000). Like interviews, focus groups allow the consultant to explore experiences and situations in depth and to follow up on specific areas of interest. They are not observations of group behavior in the group's ordinary work activities, but a special conversation instigated by a consultant's questions and facilitated and directed by the consultant. Unlike one-on-one interviews, focus groups are rarely appropriate for very sensitive issues (Waclawski & Rogelberg, 2002). Issues of a general nature, such as how employees feel about the company's benefit plan or what they feel should be done to improve executive communications, can be good candidates for focus groups. In focus groups, participants can build on one another's ideas. They can brainstorm, discuss, and debate. Because they can allow for a wide range of participation and orient members toward group or team involvement, two key values of OD, many practitioners like to use focus groups as a method of data gathering. As a disadvantage, focus groups can generate a tremendous amount of data that can be difficult and time-consuming to analyze.

To conduct a focus group, consultants should follow a process similar to interviewing. The considerations are somewhat different, however, since the subject matter and structure of a focus group are different from individual interviews:

1. *Prepare an interview guide.* Interview guides for focus groups are likely to be shorter than those used in one-on-one interviews, since the participation level will be much greater for a similar amount of time. Consequently, it is likely that fewer subjects will be covered. In addition to the interview guide, the consultant should prepare some opening and closing remarks that explain the purpose of the interview, what will be done with the data, and how the data will be recorded.
2. *Select participants.* Participants can be selected randomly, as in interviews, or they can be selected based on some other criteria. Groups can be homogeneous—that is, selected based on some criteria they share. Examples include intact teams, managers, all employees in the New York office, salespeople, college interns, employees with 10 or more years with the company, or customer service personnel. Groups can also be heterogeneous, or a mixed group, where the group's composition is more diverse. The advantage of homogeneous groups is that these employees may share a similar background because they have something in common, and they may be able to provide depth and detail into a problem from that perspective. Customer service personnel, for example, may be able to build on one another's contributions to create a more complete picture of quality problems with the company's products. By having different backgrounds or roles in the organization, mixed groups can offer the consultant the advantage of seeing patterns common to all organizational members regardless of role or demographic characteristic. The question of whether to use homogeneous or heterogeneous groups thus depends on the focus group's purpose. Waclawski and Rogelberg (2002) find an advantage in having each group be homogeneous, but recommend conducting enough focus groups so that a heterogeneous population



participates in the overall data collection.

As with interviews, a location should be selected that is free from distractions and interruptions for the length of the discussion. It is best for the location to contain a large oval table or for chairs to be arranged in such a way that all participants can see one another (Waclawski & Rogelberg, 2002). The number of participants per group depends on the subject's complexity but should be somewhere from 5 to 15 people. Successful focus groups can be conducted with more participants, but since time is likely limited, participants may struggle to contribute if the group numbers more than 20. Again, like with interviews, invitations to participants should explain the purpose and structure of the focus group, and participants should be reminded that attendance is voluntary and there should be no consequences for nonparticipation. There should be no peer pressure to participate (or not) and it is best that consultants minimize the potential for organizational members to know who did and who did not participate. For this reason, it is wise to issue invitations not to a large group at once but directly to each individual invited to participate. Thus, those who decline will remain known only to the consultant.

3. *Hold the focus group.* The consultant or focus group facilitator should begin by welcoming participants, and reiterating the purpose and explaining the structure of the focus group. Participants should introduce themselves if they do not know one another already, in order to understand one another's organizational roles and backgrounds. The facilitator should explain what and how notes will be taken, as well as what will happen with the results of the focus group(s). The facilitator should next propose several ground rules for participation, including the following:
  - What is said during the course of the meeting should remain known only to the participants and should not be repeated to others.
  - Roughly equal participation is the goal, so the facilitator is likely to intervene from time to time to ensure that all voices are heard.
  - The facilitator may intervene to keep the group on track or focus conversation back to the question under discussion.
  - The purpose is to explore issues; personal comments or attacks are not appropriate.
  - The group may wish to agree on other ground rules as well, and the distinction between confidentiality and anonymity should be made at this point.

The facilitator can begin with an open-ended, safe question to encourage participation if the group seems hesitant to begin. So that each person's voice can be heard and any initial hesitation to contribute can be lessened, the facilitator may wish to begin with a directive question such as "What one word comes to mind when you think of the physical environment of the building?" or "In one sentence, what's the best thing about your job?" It is not necessary to go around the circle in order (a conversation is the objective), but that is an option for groups that are especially quiet.

As the facilitator follows the interview guide, it may be necessary to quiet any monopolizing participants and to encourage those who are shy or have a difficult time jumping into the flow of conversation. Making eye contact with those who look as though they are waiting to participate is a very subtle way of

encouraging participation, but more directive comments may be necessary, such as “Ray has been trying to say something” or “Just a minute, Rick. I think Shanthi has something to add.” Frequent contributions from one member can bias the facilitator’s perception and give the impression that the entire group shares a single view. It may be important to test this with the group from time to time if the group does not comment. This can be done by saying simply, “Sheila has offered her suggestion for what should be done about the procurement process. Does everyone agree with that?” or “Who can offer another idea?”

Because the focus group often results in individuals sharing a group experience, some participants may be reluctant to offer a different view, especially if members have a close relationship outside of the focus group. Such *groupthink* should be tested by the facilitator as well. When participants know one another outside of the focus group, the facilitator should be reminded that the members have a previous history and other organizational roles that will change the course of the conversation. Members may work together frequently, they may have had a contentious relationship in the past, or they may have unequal status. Current or past conflicts, tight coworker relationships, or strong team identification likely will be manifested in the focus group setting. (Recall the OD value of the “whole person.” People are greater than their organizational roles in the focus group.) To the extent possible, the facilitator should try to be aware of these dynamics to better understand what is being said and why.

The facilitator must also balance the need to get through the interview guide and to explore topics of interest. Since the goal is an in-depth exploration of issues, the facilitator will need to listen carefully to the various contributions and offer additional probing questions, such as “I’ve heard a theme from many people saying that they don’t seem to trust the management team. Tell me what they could do to change that.”

Like interviews, focus groups are conversations among several participants. Careful listening and skilled conversational and facilitation practices are central to the success of the focus group.

4. *Conclude the meeting.* When time has ended or the conversational subjects have been exhausted, the participants should be invited to pose any questions they may have of the facilitator. The consultant should repeat the objective of the engagement and the focus groups and what will be done next with the data.

## **Tips for Successful Management of Focus Groups**

1. Listening is just as important with focus groups as it is with interviews. Focus groups can be somewhat more complex at times because the facilitator is listening to the speaker, thinking of the next question, and watching group dynamics.
2. Also as with interviewing, it is important to maintain objectivity to the extent possible and to avoid indicating agreement or disagreement with the group’s contributions. This can be especially important in group settings, when participants may convene alone later to discuss the group. Any impression of agreement that the facilitator gives can lead the group to think that the facilitator was taking sides (“She seemed to agree with us that the management around here is terrible”).

3. In some environments where organizational members may be particularly disgruntled about a situation, a mob mentality can develop in focus groups, where negative emotions can escalate and spread rapidly. This can promote a self-defeating tone to the group where participants may leave feeling more discouraged than when they arrived. The facilitator should be attuned to this possibility and may want to develop strategies to combat a downward negative spiral, perhaps by calling attention to it.
4. As in interviews, having two facilitators is an option where one can participate in the conversation and another can take notes. This can free the facilitator to listen and participate. When exact wording is necessary and budget is available, some consultants have hired court reporters to transcribe focus group dialogue, though this requires that participants only speak one at a time, which can occasionally stifle dialogue.

In summary, focus groups can be an excellent method for gathering data. They can elicit contributions from many people in a shorter time than can be done with one-on-one interviews. Group members can also build on one another's ideas, which can result in better solutions and explorations of a situation. If a facilitator is skilled at managing the conversation and addressing the challenges of a focus group, the data gathered from this approach can be very useful to diagnosis and planning interventions.

## Surveys/Questionnaires

In the history of organization development, the survey or questionnaire has been one of the most commonly used methods of data gathering. Since Mann's (1957) study of Detroit Edison, the survey has developed as a means by which consultants can solicit input from a large number of organizational members at once. Surveys or questionnaires are typically paper- or Internet-based methods to allow for a large number of participants. Today, a number of free or inexpensive online survey tools (such as SurveyMonkey) make it very easy to survey a large number of organizational members very quickly. Social media sites (though not always anonymous) can also allow a wide number of organizational members to be contacted and surveyed.

Generally, surveys address a broad number of subjects and explore a wide range of issues, as opposed to a deep investigation of one or two issues. Used alone, surveys are best used as exploratory mechanisms, and they are typically inappropriate for sensitive subjects. Some practitioners use surveys following interviews or focus groups to understand how prevalent the issues are that have been brought up in interviews. In combination with other methods, surveys can provide breadth where others provide depth.

Falletta and Combs (2002) write that surveys used in OD engagements are primarily action-driven. In this respect, "surveys are more than instruments for gathering information" (Kuhnert, 1993, p. 459); they are instruments for prompting change. The change agent does not conduct a survey solely to report the results to management and to conclude the project, but instead works closely with the client on interpreting the data and planning actions to address the results. Surveys can be quick and easy to administer. Each consumes time from organizational members, so it is important to be clear about the purpose of the survey and to gain at least some initial commitment for action. Without a commitment to take the results seriously and act on them, an organizational survey that appears to promise change will only deepen any existing cynicism among members when nothing is done with the results.

Having at least a moderate background in survey design and both qualitative and statistical analysis is necessary in most circumstances. Whether practitioners conduct the analysis themselves or get assistance with the statistical procedures, most will need at least to be able to read and interpret the results for their clients. A graduate-level course in qualitative and quantitative research methods can be extremely useful to the practitioner who plans to conduct surveys. In addition, there are a number of helpful guides to conducting organizational surveys (see, for example, Fink, 2002, 2005; Smith, 2003).

The following process can help a practitioner to successfully conduct an organizational survey:

1. *Determine the reason for the survey.* Surveys can be used to assess management interaction, organizational communication, work processes, training needs, and employee engagement. Each has a different implication for the structure of the survey. Annual satisfaction or engagement surveys are common in many large organizations, when every organizational member has the opportunity to participate. Such surveys have become "institutionalized," often separated from the daily functions of the organization (Smith, 2003). Because these surveys are often done out of habit rather than need, the reason for the

survey is often unclear and commitment to take action is unknown.

2. *Determine who will take the survey.* Organizationwide survey topics typically imply that all members will be given the opportunity to participate in the survey. In some situations, a smaller sample of members may be more appropriate, less expensive, and less time-consuming. Such samples, however, can increase the statistical error rate, depending on the population to whom the results are being generalized. If a census is chosen, then it is important that all necessary measures be taken for each member to receive a survey. Security employees who work the night shift, employees who travel from site to site, those who work from home, and manufacturing employees who may not have access to computers for Internet-based surveys can often be inadvertently left out of the survey process. If a sample is chosen, it may be a good idea to publicize the survey to the wider population to indicate that a random sampling technique is being used and that not all members will be receiving a survey invitation.
3. *Design the survey.* A practitioner may choose to use an existing survey instrument rather than design one. Many private companies have developed surveys that can be used to assess topics such as employee engagement, and academic researchers have developed highly tested surveys of organizational commitment, identification, and job satisfaction, among others. More frequently, practitioners use surveys to address specific issues, and in these situations, they often customize the questions to suit the organization. Falletta and Combs (2002) write that such surveys are frequently model-driven; that is, consultants sometimes use organizational models such as the Burke-Litwin model or Weisbord's Six-Box Model to develop questions. These models can be limiting, however, as they each frame the organization and its structure in its own way. This can lead to the model predetermining the outcome, and the consultant may feel that the model forces questions or issues into certain categories that may not match those being used by organizational members.

The length of the survey is a common concern. If the survey is too long, participants may become fatigued or busy with other work and may not complete it. If it is too short, it may not provide enough information or detail to act upon (Smith, 2003). Most surveys use a combination of fixed-response questions (for example, the Likert scale tends to use a 5-point scale with choices of *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neutral*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*) and open-ended or short-answer questions. Participants may not take the time to respond to a large number of open-ended questions, and analysis can be complex.

However, if used judiciously, such questions can be well worth the additional analysis time.

4. *Administer the survey.* Survey instructions should be clear about how long the survey is likely to take and how participants should return it (for paper-and-pencil surveys) or submit it (for electronic surveys). The deadline should be clearly communicated, and a reminder issued shortly before the survey will close.

## Tips for Successful Administration of Surveys

The most common errors in the use of surveys involve the questions or survey items themselves. The following list does not delve into all of the possible errors with question design, but these are a few important issues for OD practitioners to consider:

1. Avoid questions that indicate bias toward or against a particular group of people. Questions should use

language that is neutral toward any racial group, gender, religion, or any level, role, or category of organizational members.

2. Avoid questions that could be answered accurately in multiple ways. For example, a survey question that reads “I am satisfied with my pay and benefits” could be answered both “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree” if the respondent is very satisfied with the benefit plan but is dissatisfied with monetary compensation.
3. Keep in mind the need to translate or localize questions. In a global environment, many organizational surveys need to be accessible in various languages. Survey items will need to be translated as well as localized. That is, translation is a matter of linguistic change, whereas localization is a matter of cultural accuracy for the context. Items should avoid idioms or slang unique to American English as well as U.S. work practices that may not be applicable to employees in other countries.
4. Clarify important terms. Even phrases that might appear to be self-evident such as “senior management” or “your work team” may need to be defined at the beginning of the survey. Employees in a regional office, for example, may wonder whether “senior management” refers to the highest-ranking local management or whether it refers to the executive team at headquarters.
5. Survey items should be tested with a small sample of organizational members who can later be interviewed to determine whether questions were clear and whether the respondent understood the survey items in the manner in which they were intended.

Technological advancements have made issuing and responding to surveys easier than ever before. It is now possible for a consultant to develop and issue a survey to a targeted population and receive responses within a matter of days. Consequently, surveys remain one of the most popular ways that consultants gather data in OD engagements. The disadvantage of this ease of use is that some organizational members can become oversurveyed, but when used occasionally and conscientiously, surveys can be an excellent addition to the consultant’s data gathering approach.

## Observations

A fourth method of data gathering is direct observation. Compared to the first three methods we have discussed, observations allow the consultant to collect data on actual behavior rather than reports of people's behavior (Nadler, 1977). Self-report data can be erroneous because the information relies on the memory of the person being asked. For several reasons, people may report their behavior in error, may not be accurate in their perceptions of the behavior of others, or may represent behavior to give the interviewer a positive impression. Interviewees may not be conscious, for example, of whether telephone interruptions during a task cause them to make more errors, whether they handle customer complaints on a certain product differently from their coworkers, or whether they compliment certain employees more often than others. They may report only what they remember (perhaps only the last few days, or an event that was extraordinary and thus stands out) or they may report what they want to make known (avoiding a complaint about a coworker, but sharing frustrations about this year's salary increases). Questionnaires may also be unlikely to elicit accurate data on these points. Observations allow the practitioner to get closer to seeing how these issues play out during the course of an ordinary day and to avoid errors in self-reporting. Moreover, self-report data are always a reflection of past events, whereas observation collects data on what is happening in the present (Nadler, 1977).

The OD practitioner can use observations to gain a better understanding of the actual work that people are doing. Instead of only interviewing members to understand how patient registration or building inspections are handled, or reading the formally documented process, the practitioner can learn much more about the process by sitting with an intake nurse for a day or following a building inspector as she completes her rounds. By doing so, the practitioner will have a greater understanding of the process, will build credibility and relationships with organizational members, and will have a richer understanding of how any changes to the job will impact those who perform it.

Data gathered through observations, however, are prone to being filtered through the eyes of the observer. The observer who has heard complaints that employees in the billing department are unproductive because they socialize frequently may be more likely to observe that. Observing a staff meeting to watch for conflict may mean that the consultant interprets certain behavior as conflict that organizational members may not see in that light. Thus, bias is not omitted in this method of data gathering, but it is a different kind of bias than that which occurs during interviews, focus groups, or surveys.

In addition, observations are likely to alter the circumstances and potentially change the behavior of those being observed. This fact about observations has come to be known as the Hawthorne Effect, named after a now-famous experimental study of working conditions in a manufacturing plant described by Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939). Listening to a customer service agent handle customer complaints likely will expose the consultant to the kinds of calls that agents receive, but it may not be the best choice to learn how agents truly deal with complaints. Anyone being observed in that circumstance is likely to want to make a good impression and to complete the work in the most diligent way. Staff meetings conducted with an observer watching from a corner may be more cordial and agreeable than one without an observer. Unless the observer is trusted and

builds rapport, observation may not work well to see conflict, to learn how informal systems subvert the formal ones, or to understand how employees work around official processes.

While observations can give a general sense of how things happen, a consultant is not likely to see the entire range of situations. One or two team meetings' worth of observation, or a few hours watching patients in a hospital waiting room, can be very instructive but do not substitute for the knowledge and expertise of those who work there and have seen many more examples. The observer should not overgeneralize from only a small sample of observations and assume knowledge equal to that of organizational members.

Finally, observation would not be a good choice in situations where the phenomenon being observed is rare or infrequent. A practitioner may observe for many hours without witnessing what happens when a machine breaks down if it only happens every 3 months. Observations are less useful for studying unusual problems or infrequent interactions.

## **Tips for Successfully Conducting Observations for Data Gathering**

1. Observers should show an interest in learning what usually happens, demonstrating interest in the activity observed. Observers can be intimidating. Making it clear that the point of the observation is not to act as a police officer for an official process usually puts people at ease. In addition, no matter how quiet the observer is, observation is still usually an intrusive activity that interferes in some way with the ordinary course of organizational life.
2. Consider observing with explicit permission rather than hiding the purpose of the observation. It can be useful to observe interactions in the lunchroom or the lobby, and such observations rarely need widespread publicity or long explanations. When observing people doing their daily jobs, most consultants find it more ethical and comfortable to make their purpose known. However, the consideration to share one's purpose is situation-dependent. The more those observed know about the purpose of the observation, the more the behavior may change. Telling a team that the purpose of the observation is to see "whether staff meetings remain on topic or whether they wander off onto tangents" (or even a more general "to watch the flow of the meeting") probably will mean that team members pay much more attention to the content and process of the discussion, and the observation will be of an atypical meeting. This can be unavoidable, however, so the more general explanation probably would suffice.
3. Observations can be unstructured or formally structured. Unstructured observations can be as simple as moving from location to location, watching and listening to what people are doing. The observer can simply make notes about what is being seen. Formally structured observations can be used as well, sampling different times and locations to get representative observations. Other structured observations can be useful for group interaction, using forms that have been designed for that purpose (with check boxes that represent the number of questions asked, for example).
4. Note-taking can heighten participants' anxiety about being observed and can give away the purpose of the observation if it has not been disclosed in detail. It may be best for the observer to take short notes and frequent personal breaks where additional detailed notes can be taken.



5. Because observation can be prone to observer bias, it may be appropriate to use multiple observers, whether internal or external to the organization, to observe multiple times and locations. The observers can share their notes and interpretations with one another to test bias and determine whether they may share multiple interpretations of the same event.

Though they can be time-consuming, observations can be a good choice when the practitioner would like to witness a situation personally. They usually bring the practitioner closer to the situation or problem being experienced than do interviews or focus groups. It can be enlightening and humbling to witness the complexities and challenges of organizational life in action, and it can make a consultant more aware of the organizational culture so that interventions can be appropriately directed at the right sources of the problem.

## Unobtrusive Measures

A fifth type of data that can be gathered consists of unobtrusive measures (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966; Webb & Weick, 1979). As the name suggests, these data are generally readily available because they are produced during the ordinary course of organizational activity. They can usually be gathered in an inconspicuous manner without changing the data themselves. As discussed earlier, observations can be intrusive, and the very nature of observation can change what is being observed. With unobtrusive measures, the data usually already exist, and gathering the data does not usually change what is being studied. Like the Sherlock Holmes mystery in which the absence of a barking dog led Holmes to conclude that the dog knew the intruder, unobtrusive measures can be a source of data that can give the consultant insight into the organization without making a direct inquiry or conducting observations. Because these data exist separate from the consulting engagement itself, the data are likely to be less influenced by the presence of the observer or practitioner. As a result, unobtrusive measures can be highly valid sources of data. They can contradict or substantiate data gathered elsewhere (through interviews or observations, for example).

There are a variety of types of unobtrusive measures that can be useful to consultants:

1. *Historical data.* Historical data and archives consist of both public and nonpublic records. A consultant who wants to learn the history of a union strike or a company's bankruptcy can certainly rely on interviews with organizational members, but may also look up articles in a local newspaper to learn this history as well. These articles are less likely to be influenced by changing perceptions and interpretations of the event over time. The organization may maintain its own library of historical artifacts that can be examined as well, such as employee newsletters or correspondence with customers.
2. *Official documents.* These consist of a wide variety of documents that are often used for financial, legal, or human resources purposes, such as job descriptions, goals and objectives, personnel files, or meeting minutes. Obviously these data only represent the formal and official record, which may differ substantially from what organizational members experience. Meeting minutes, for example, may not document everything that was said during the meeting, but they do tend to define what organizational members considered to be worthy of documentation (Anderson, 2004). Presentations, e-mails, and other documents can also be helpful background information, as can internal websites.
3. *Databases.* Most organizations maintain databases of customer, financial, and employee records. These can be useful sources of data to determine, for example, how many people were hired last year compared to the year before or where most customers live.
4. *Online environment.* Social media websites, wikis, online bulletin boards, and review websites can illustrate past, current, and prospective employee and customer attitudes about the organization. Prospective employees might share their experiences about the interview process, and current employees might share what it is like to work at a certain site, for example. Current customers might share frustrations with aspects of customer service.
5. *Physical environment.* An organization's physical environment can say a great deal about its culture. In organizations where status and hierarchy are important elements of the culture, executives maintain

large offices with expansive windows on the surrounding landscape. Middle managers may have smaller offices and windows, and employees may sit in cubicles. In other organizations, all employees regardless of role may have an office or may have a cubicle. Other objects of the formal physical environment to observe include the following:

- Architecture and signage (e.g., layout, building construction materials, lobby furnishings)
- Design of work areas, formal gathering locations, and meeting rooms
- Lunchroom, break room, and cafeteria
- Posters, photographs, or art
- “Costumes, company uniforms, standard attire” (M. O. Jones, 1996, p. 6)

The personal physical environment, or how organizational members design their own work environments, can also be a source of data to illuminate the organizational culture. Examples include the following:

- Employee bulletin boards (newspaper articles, comic strips, papers posted by employees to be read by other employees)
- Desk or office decorations, such as personal photographs, diplomas, and certificates

Environments designed or customized by employees can give a consultant insight into employee satisfaction and morale. The number and content of currently popular *Dilbert* cartoon strips can provide a source of data about employee frustrations, for example.

6. *Language use, including stories and metaphors.* As Burke (1992) puts it, “Metaphors used by executives and other members of an organization are windows into the soul, if not collective unconscious, of the social system” (p. 255). Members describing the organization as “one big family” or “a sinking ship” (Brink, 1993, p. 369) give great insight into how they think about the culture. Common organizational metaphors concern sports (often used when people describe working in teams for a common goal) or the military (used to highlight urgent or competitive activities, such as beating the competition). They are more than shortcuts for longer explanations or mere poetic devices; they are ways of calling on and even creating a set of values that organizational members ought to share (C. D. Jacobs & Heracleous, 2006; Tietze, Cohen, & Musson, 2003).

Similarly, stories serve a teaching function. Values and lessons historically have been passed down from generation to generation through storytelling, and the same can be said for organizational stories. Members may recall “the lesson of the product failures of the 1980s” or tell a story about the vice president who was fired after making a major decision. These stories can be illuminating for a consultant who wants to understand the organizational culture and context.

Language such as stories and metaphors occurs naturally in organizational discourses but can be elicited during interviews or focus groups as well. An interviewee may be asked to tell a story that would give a newcomer an insight into the organization or to pick a physical object that describes how the office functions.

## Tips for Gathering and Using Data via Unobtrusive Measures

1. Despite the impression that may be given by the name, some unobtrusive measure data gathering is still resource-intensive. Unless the consultant has access to the database, for example, an organizational member who knows how to use it must do the work, so exploratory or “just to see” data gathering may not be appropriate.
2. Unobtrusive data gathering is not always hidden from organizational members. Nadler (1977) adds that searching through filing cabinets or employee records can cause a great deal of unease among organizational members, reminding us that such methods are not emotionally neutral. It may still be necessary to explain to organizational members what the goal of the data collection is.
3. Not all data may be unambiguously interpreted. For example, simply because all organizational members have the same office size does not mean that the organization is free from hierarchy or status. Nadler (1977) writes, “It’s not always clear, for example, what constitutes an incident of absenteeism or lateness. The data can be interpreted in several different ways” (p. 139). It may be helpful to check an interpretation with someone with experience in the organization’s culture to validate whether it is accurate.
4. Be careful not to overgeneralize from observations or examples that represent only one occurrence of a phenomenon. Online comments, for example, might represent only one particularly good or bad example, posted with the benefit of anonymity by a motivated writer, and not representative of the experiences of others.

Used in combination with another method, unobtrusive measures can be a useful source of additional data to help the consultant interpret the problem the client describes and the organizational culture. They can validate or contradict information gained from other sources. They can also be a rapid way of collecting data with less intrusion than other methods.

## Creating a Data Gathering Strategy and Proposing an Approach

Choosing a method of data gathering involves several considerations. Each of the methods described in this chapter presents various advantages and disadvantages, so the consultant and client must choose between them with the knowledge that none is perfect. As Schein (1969) puts it, “No data gathering method is right or wrong in the abstract” (p. 99). [Table 7.1](#) compares the pros and cons of the five approaches.

Consultants must balance several criteria when choosing a data gathering strategy:

1. *Investment required.* Each method has a cost to the organization and the consultant in terms of time and monetary expense for both data gathering and data analysis. Methods such as interviews take time to gather the data, whereas methods such as surveys can produce volumes of quantitative and qualitative data that can be time-consuming to analyze. While one-on-one interviews may be ideal to explore a certain problem, the client may not be willing to devote the time needed to execute such a strategy. In addition, the organization may not have the resources available to devote to substantial data mining from databases or files.

**Table 7.1** Advantages and Disadvantages of Five Data Gathering Methods

<i>Method</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
Interviews	<p>May prompt interviewees to be more forthright in a personal environment</p> <p>Interviewer can follow up on important issues and explore situations in depth</p> <p>More personal than surveys or focus groups</p> <p>Consultants can capture examples and quotes effectively</p> <p>Interviews may reveal new issues</p>	<p>Time- and data-intensive if many interviews are to be conducted</p> <p>Potentially expensive</p> <p>Rapport must be established; interviewees must trust interviewer</p> <p>Give only the interviewee's perspective</p> <p>Interviewers may unwittingly encourage certain response bias</p> <p>Analysis can be time-consuming</p>
Focus groups	<p>May save time compared to individual interviews</p> <p>Access to many people at once; thus can be more efficient at getting information than interviews</p> <p>Groups can build on one another's thoughts, stimulating thinking</p>	<p>Potential for groupthink or for people to "go along" with one point of view to avoid conflict</p> <p>Confidential issues may not be discussed with peers</p> <p>A few members may dominate the group</p>
Surveys/ questionnaires	<p>Data from many people can be gathered at once</p> <p>Can take a short amount of time</p> <p>Allow a broad range of topics to be addressed</p> <p>Data can be quantified and compared across groups</p> <p>Can repeat survey to show differences over time</p>	<p>Data analysis can be intensive</p> <p>May require statistical knowledge beyond the capabilities of the consultant</p> <p>Difficult to follow up in depth on a single issue</p> <p>Response rates may be low or may bias the results</p> <p>Respondents may give socially desirable answers</p>
Observations	<p>Allow data collection "in the moment" when an event occurs rather than after the event</p> <p>Allow behavior to be seen rather than self-reported</p> <p>Can be initiated with little preparation</p> <p>Can build relationships with organizational members</p>	<p>Can be time-intensive</p> <p>Can be expensive</p> <p>Observer may be biased to see an event based on how others have explained it</p> <p>May be difficult to observe multiple instances of a behavior that occurs sporadically</p> <p>Observer may intimidate or affect the group or individual being observed</p>
Unobtrusive measures	<p>Data exist separate from individual interpretation or motivation</p> <p>High validity</p> <p>Can substantiate or contradict data gathered elsewhere (triangulation)</p> <p>Can be less intrusive</p>	<p>Can be time-intensive</p> <p>Can be more subtle to interpret</p> <p>Can be more difficult to access</p> <p>Potentially poor quality</p>

2. *Access.* The client may not allow the consultant to have access to data or it may not be practical. It may

not be possible to interview each organizational member due to work schedules, travel, or vacation. The organization's policies may prohibit use of personnel files or may not allow external consultants to have access to financial or technical files.

3. *Relevance to the problem.* Some methods of data gathering are better suited to particular types of problems. Unobtrusive measures are less likely to yield useful data about how a team feels about a management change, and observations are unlikely to give significant insights into whether employees are satisfied with the training programs provided. Thus, each method of data gathering selected must be relevant to the problem described by the client. Each method selected should be chosen because it is likely to yield useful, valid information about the presenting problem and its underlying problems. If clients do not believe that a proposed data gathering strategy is relevant to the problem described, they will question the consultant's choices, since it may appear that the consultant is wasting time or following an unfruitful path.
4. *Accuracy.* Some methods are more prone to respondent and consultant bias than others. The consultant may be less likely to gain highly valid data from respondents in some situations, or the consultant's own biases may color what is seen in observations. Thus, the ability to obtain valid information from a certain approach will differ based on the situation and the consultant's relationship with the client and organizational members.
5. *Flexibility.* Some methods allow the consultant to have greater flexibility in terms of following up on particular questions of interest or items that come up during the course of data gathering. A survey can be inflexible, for example, because once it has been designed and administered, it is not possible to add subsequent follow-up questions. Interviews tend to be more flexible since consultants can alter the questions during the course of the conversation.

How should a consultant balance these criteria and choose among the five approaches? Each client situation presents a unique negotiation between the problem described and the factors listed above. In other words, consultants may have to settle for what is possible as opposed to what is ideal. To compensate for the disadvantages of one approach, it may be a good idea to balance it with another, combining different methods to yield the most detailed data. Surveys, for example, can be followed by interviews or focus groups where organizational members can help to interpret the results. Alternately, interviews done before surveys can give the consultant insight into what survey questions should be asked. The point is that

by using several methods to gather and analyze their data, practitioners can compensate for many of the drawbacks associated with relying on a single method. They will also need to choose methods that fit the diagnostic problems and contribute to cooperative, productive consulting relationships. (M. I. Harrison, 1987, p. 21)

Mixing methods and triangulating the same issue from different perspectives can solidify an interpretation as well and make it more persuasive in the client's eyes. As Swanson (2007) concludes, "In almost all instances, using more than one data collection method is necessary to ensure valid conclusions about the trends, factors, and causes of organizational, process, team, and individual performances" (p. 122).

To select an approach, it may be useful to create a chart such as the one shown in [Table 7.2](#). Based on the client's description of the presenting problem, the consultant can list other possible interpretations or underlying problems that might be contributing to the situation that the client is describing. Then a data gathering approach can be selected that would generate the greatest amount of useful information on that issue. Because this approach is likely to spawn an exhaustive list of possible data gathering methods, the consultant should choose only those that seem most relevant to the client's problem and that fit the five criteria described above. As shown in [Table 7.2](#), for example, a client may have shared a problem with the cycle time of insurance claims processing, perhaps even noting that new employees seem to take longer than tenured employees. There could be a number of reasons for this. One might be that they did not learn the process accurately when they joined the organization. Interviews would be well suited to determining how they learned the claims process. A chart such as this one can focus the data gathering effort by forcing the consultant to retain a disciplined concentration on the client's problem, as well as to be explicit about the rationale for the data gathering approach.

**Table 7.2** Selecting a Data Gathering Approach

<i>Facts From Client's Description of Problem</i>	<i>Possible Interpretation or Reason</i>	<i>Data Needed</i>	<i>Best-Suited Method</i>
New employees do not process insurance claims as quickly as experienced employees.	Employees do not learn the process accurately.	Ask new employees about their orientation experience and training.	Interviews
Sales figures in Midwest are significantly lower than East or West regions.	Salespeople in Midwest make fewer sales than in other regions.	Gather revenue-per-employee data in each region for past three quarters.	Unobtrusive measures



## Ethical Issues With Data Gathering

Data gathering is itself a response to ethical concerns. It is an ethical consulting practice in that its purpose is to avoid colluding with the client's initial statements of the problem, and in doing so, the consultant seeks to expand on the client's view in order to solve the right problem for the long term. By gathering data, the consultant can avoid some of the ethical issues described in the previous chapter.

However, data gathering also presents consultants with a number of opportunities to face further ethical challenges, some of which have already been hinted at earlier in this chapter. The primary opportunity for an ethical dilemma concerns "misuse of data" that "occurs when the voluntary consent or confidentiality of the client system is violated or abridged" (White & Wooten, 1985, p. 150). This ethical principle is violated most flagrantly when a practitioner discloses who made a particular comment during an interview or focus group session even after pledging to the respondent that comments would remain anonymous. For a change agent, quotes from interviews, paper-and-pencil surveys, and facts gathered through unobtrusive measures are a typical and sometimes mundane part of the job. What the practitioner considers sensitive or risky matters less than what organizational members consider sensitive. It is no stretch to say that inappropriately leaked data could have serious life consequences for organizational members, including career limitations or termination from a job.

In addition, before gathering data, practitioners owe organizational members an explanation about what will be done with data gathered from them, giving them an opportunity to participate with free and informed consent or to decline to participate without consequences. In academic research, researchers are usually required to present research subjects with an informed consent form that lists the researcher's purpose, contact information, and any benefits or risks to the subject for participating. OD practitioners should consider their own research practices no less seriously.

These ethical principles require that practitioners be vigilant in protecting data. Notes from interviews and handwritten surveys should be kept with the consultant or in a secure location under lock and key.

Practitioners should consider taking notes by using pseudonyms instead of actual names, or by using a personal shorthand method. Any audio or video must be heard or watched only by the consultant (or those with permission) and should be destroyed immediately after they have been transcribed. It is also easy to inadvertently "leak" information between interviews by stating "I heard the same thing from the last person I interviewed" (Farquhar, 2005, p. 227).

Finally, data gathering is conducted to benefit the client, not the practitioner. The practitioner should aim to gather data that is relevant to the problem described or that would illuminate related areas of the problem, all with the client's consent. The practitioner should avoid collecting data simply because it is interesting or useful for another engagement.



## Summary

The most effective way that a consultant can learn about the client's problem and propose an effective intervention is through data gathering. Consultants use data gathering methods to delve into a client's description of a presenting problem in order to determine what underlying problems may be contributing to what the client is seeing. By gathering valid information about the organization, the client and consultant have a better understanding of the problem. Five data gathering methods that consultants use most frequently are interviews, focus groups, surveys/questionnaires, observation, and unobtrusive measures. Each has its advantages and disadvantages, so a mixed method approach may be the ideal solution. Consultants must balance the pros and cons of each method with what clients may accept, based on the investment needed in the approach, access, relevance, accuracy, and flexibility. Thus, proposing a data gathering strategy to a client is to propose another kind of contract, one in which the consultant is pledging to help the client understand the underlying problem in exchange for the organization dedicating energy to analyzing it in order to work toward an appropriate solution.

In the case study that follows this chapter, you will have the ability to practice analyzing a client's initial presenting problem and to propose a data gathering strategy that will explore other elements of the situation and any underlying problems.

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## Questions for Discussion

1. Which of the five types of data gathering discussed in this chapter do you think is most effective? Which do you think is the most difficult to conduct? Why?
2. Have you ever been interviewed (for a job, school admission, scholarship)? How did it feel? Were you put at ease or did you feel uncomfortable? What are some lessons from your experience that might apply if you were to conduct an OD interview? How might an OD interview differ from the kind of interview you participated in?
3. Can you think of other methods of data gathering that are not discussed in this chapter that might be useful in an OD engagement?

## For Further Reading

Fink, A. (2002). *The survey kit* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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Webb, E. J., Campbell, D. T., Schwartz, R. D., & Sechrest, L. (1966). *Unobtrusive measures: Nonreactive research in the social sciences*. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.

## Exercise: Data Gathering

Read each of the five scenarios below. Then, decide what the best data gathering approach would be for each scenario based on the principles identified in [Chapter 7](#): interviews, focus groups, surveys, observations, or unobtrusive measures.

If you select interviews, focus groups, or surveys, identify who would participate and how, and write the questions you would ask.

If you select observations, describe whom you would observe, for what length of time, and in what setting.

If you select unobtrusive measures, describe what data you wish to collect and how you would do so.

*Scenario 1:* The client, a manager in the billing department, reports that her team “does not work well with the team from sales.” She tells us that she is always mediating disputes between what the sales team has promised to a customer and the processes that the billing department must follow. She complains that the sales team wants her to bend the rules to serve a customer. For his part, the manager of sales reports that his team is always complaining that the billing department is too rigid when it comes to its practices and that more flexibility is needed to serve customers.

*Scenario 2:* The client is the manager of a local retail chain that sells automobile parts and accessories. There are seven stores in the region, and each store has about 25 employees. The client is concerned that sales are consistently declining due in part to new competitors offering better prices. He feels that if employees were more engaged, they might be nicer to customers, be better at promoting sales, and distinguish his store from the competitors by offering a superior customer experience.

*Scenario 3:* Recently, a number of employees have begun to file complaints against the managers in the production department. Production has dropped 10 percent in the last several weeks and costly errors have increased by 15 percent. All of these employees are hourly employees who do not receive benefits. No salaried employees have filed complaints. The complaints occur consistently in the third month of each quarter.

*Scenario 4:* A government agency that conducts inspections for health and safety is currently experiencing a significant increase in work due to the number of facilities that need regular inspections. There are 1,500 employees in six geographic divisions. Despite a number of process improvement teams, the work still takes too long to complete, according to the client. The client would like to know how to increase productivity without hiring additional staff.

*Scenario 5:* Each month, the four regional sales managers in the United States must deliver a report showing their forecasted sales for the coming month to their local finance team. The finance team leaders state that they are consistently receiving these reports late. The reports are also often in the wrong format or contain errors. Last quarter, the chief financial officer had to admit to external financial analysts that he had given inaccurate information about the company’s financial situation due to mistakes in this process.

## Case Study 2: Proposing a Data Gathering Approach at TLG Solutions

Read the TLG Solutions case and consider the following questions:

1. What is the client requesting? What goal does the client have for this project?
2. What are the presenting problems? What do you think may be any underlying problems? Which of these underlying problems is most likely, in your view?
3. What data would illustrate whether these underlying problems are occurring? Which method of data gathering would you use and why? (Consider using the method of analysis shown in [Table 7.2](#).) Write a proposal that explains what data you will gather through what means (interview, surveys, focus groups, observations, and/or unobtrusive measures). Include any questions you might ask, observations you would undertake, and/or documents you would want to gather.
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of your data gathering choice(s)? Include a rationale and proposed timeline for your approach and any details about the data gathering method itself, including possible interview or survey questions, documents to gather, or observations you would conduct. Finally, ensure that your proposal addresses any additional contracting needs you may have in your relationship with Michelle.

"I'm glad you're here, and I have something important to discuss with you. Have a seat."

Seth Burke had been called to Michelle Greenfield's office. Just 18 months ago, Michelle had accepted the role of chief learning officer at TLG Solutions, a fast-growing provider of global human resources software for Fortune 1000 companies. Seth and Michelle had worked together in a previous company, and now that Seth was working as an independent external organization development consultant, Michelle was anxious to make use of his skills.

"Hey, I was really glad to get your call. It's been too long," Seth exclaimed as he took a seat at a round table in Michelle's office while Michelle closed the door. TLG Solutions headquarters was located in a six-story building just outside of downtown in a suburban area for expanding technology companies. Michelle's office had a panoramic view of the lake. "What great scenery," Seth added. "How long has the company been in this location?"

"Just 6 months," Michelle admitted. "We've been expanding so rapidly we outgrew the small office space that we had rented on the east side of town. Now that we are among the tech companies in this hub area on this side of town, we have a solid presence in the community and are showing that we are here to stay."

"And how have things been going in your new role?" Seth asked, transitioning to the reason for his visit.

"It's been crazy. The rapid growth means great things, but it's also stressful sometimes. It's really different from what we knew back with our old company. You and I were part of a very hierarchical, controlled, consistent, static company in a pretty stable industry. Everyone followed the process and the plan. A big change was when they replaced the carpet in the lobby. But here it feels like it's just the opposite. It's all about visionary innovation, constant change, reinvention. No 2 days are the same, and you get used to feeling like you're on a roller coaster. Just yesterday our CEO announced publicly that we would use our expertise in HR to create new products for marketers. And our product groups didn't even know that announcement was coming," Michelle pointed out.

"Yes, that does sound very different from the experience we shared a few years back," Seth laughed.

"The thing is, from my perspective we have changed things so fast, I don't think we have created the ideal organization to help launch us into the next phase. I've definitely learned a lot managing this department, and I think there may be some opportunities for improvement," Michelle said. "Basically, this training organization is a mess, and our chief HR officer, Vivienne, has told me that if I can't get it cleaned up soon she'll find someone who will. We are spending a ton of money on training and yet it's not getting us the improvement we need. But I should back up. I'm getting ahead of myself."

"Yes, maybe start at the beginning. Tell me a little more about TLG Solutions," Seth asked.

"Well, the company was essentially founded on our flagship product, NewHireScan, a software program that can scan thousands of résumés for key indicators and predict whether the new hire will be successful in the job. Our proprietary big data approach means that we

can save companies tons of money by hiring the best person for the job the first time, which we can tell by a number of data points. In the last few years, we have added or expanded products every few months so that we now have hundreds of products and variations on them for different industries. Since I've been here, revenue has almost doubled, if that tells you anything, and we are growing at a rate that is easily twice that of our nearest competitors. We just got a fantastic write-up in an industry-leading publication, and our CEO was just on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*," Michelle stated.

"I saw that article," Seth added. "That was really impressive and had a lot of people talking. I bet that did a lot for employee morale as well."

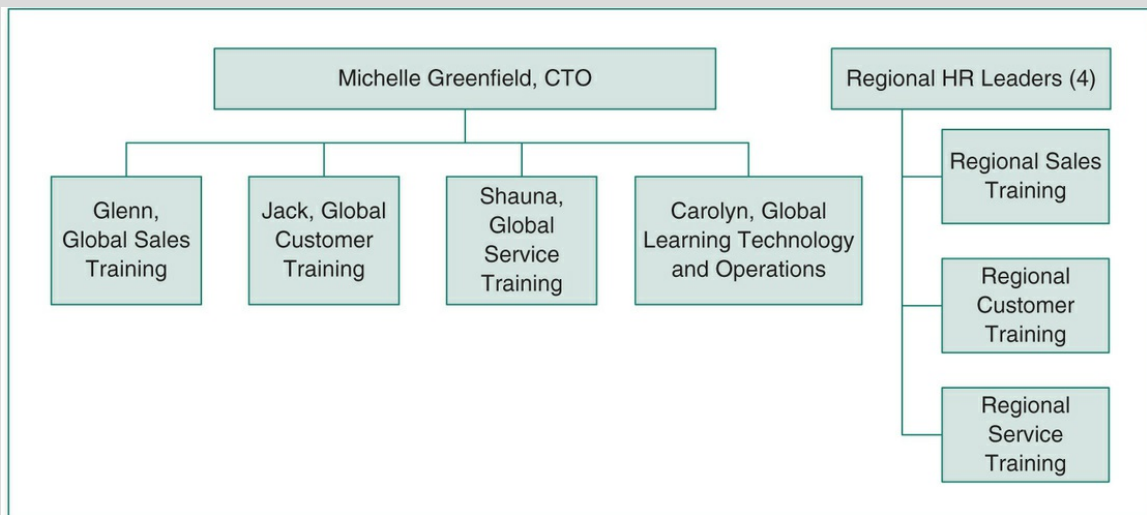
"It sure did. People around here are very motivated, driven, and work a ton of hours. It's a competitive environment, and they pour themselves into their work," Michelle said. "We are adding a lot of products to our portfolio over the next year since our goal is to expand into other areas of HR technology beyond hiring, and apparently we have this new marketing focus coming. Everyone seems to feel the urgency, and we all want to see it succeed. But the clouds are forming in our sunny skies. It's like the theme from *Jaws* is always playing in the background. We have competitors that are ready to take us out, and we can all see that our cost models are not sustainable. Investors are getting nervous. We are looking to the next year or two and we know that we must be successful getting our new products to market quickly. We probably need to reduce costs as well. It's not a crisis, but the leadership team is paying careful attention to the financials, as you would expect."

"Sure, that makes sense in your industry," Seth said. "Tell me more about where you think problems might exist on the horizon."

"I'll give you a list from my point of view, because there are a lot of them," Michelle said. "We have many loyal customers and excellent customer relationships. Some of them have been with us since the beginning. But lately we are starting to hear customer complaints, even from our loyal base. Products aren't working as promised. Salespeople are promising one thing and not delivering. I've even heard situations where salespeople have promised features outright that we never intended to put in the product just to make a sale. I've heard that sales reps can't even demo the products accurately. The service department is getting complaints because they can't accurately pinpoint the root cause of the problems the customer is experiencing. Those are common problems in many organizations, but we've done some investigating and it seems that time and time again the problem is training. Our salespeople and service reps don't know enough about the products. Customer service technicians lack some of the foundational problem-solving knowledge to help them troubleshoot. And training, as you know, is my responsibility, so I am under a lot of pressure to get this right."

"Tell me more about your department," Seth asked.

"Let me give you the training organization chart and I can walk through it," Michelle added, and handed Seth a piece of paper.



"This is the org chart for the training organization. I manage the global training teams that are responsible for needs assessment, training curriculum design, training technology design, rollout, and operations. Their focus is on the different populations they serve, so I have a group that designs training for our salespeople, a group that offers training to our external customers, and a group that focuses on developing training for service technicians. We serve a population numbering in the tens of thousands globally. To do this, I have about 65 people who work in these divisions, with the bulk of them in sales training and customer training, where there are 25 people equally divided in those two groups. Another 10 work in service training. The last group has about five employees in our learning technology and



operations division. This is the group that creates online learning, video-based learning, and virtual training programs to supplement any of the courses that get developed, including refresher courses. They also run the operations of the group, such as deciding on the training schedule, communicating to participants, and interfacing with the trainers.”

“It’s pretty impressive that you can train tens of thousands of employees around the world with just these 65 people,” Seth concluded.

“We can’t, and actually we don’t,” Michelle corrected. “I should be more specific. While we sometimes deliver training directly to our customers, where we charge a fee for those classes, all internal training delivery for sales and service happens in the regions, and that’s what the right-hand side of this chart represents. We have four regions: North America, Europe, Asia/Pacific, and Latin America. The regional HR leaders have their own training resources, in addition to their other work with human resources representatives, recruiting, employee relations, compensation and benefits, payroll, and some other areas. Compared to mine, some of these departments are huge, like in Europe where there are 85 trainers, and some are small, like in Japan where there are only two people who do training for all customers, sales, and service. So all of the regional training resources report up to my peers, who are the heads of HR in each region. And like I said, for them, training is just one part of their job, in addition to everything else that regional HR is supposed to do.”

“You told me that most of your people work in sales and customer training. Tell me more about what they do,” Seth asked quizzically.

“Our products are very complicated. We need to invest as a company in our salespeople so they know how our products work and how our customers use them. Our sales and customer training curriculum designers are really the subject matter experts on our products. Whenever I hire a curriculum designer, they need to not only know all of the best practices with respect to adult learning and training design, they need technical product knowledge so that they can include it in their courses. My sales group, for example, develops sales training in areas such as communicating with customers, influencing the sale, or understanding a value proposition, but they also need to incorporate the newest product release information into product update training for sales. Service training is about providing technicians with the knowledge to fix products when they break. It’s a little like my curriculum designers are the translators who understand how to explain the products to different audiences,” Michelle said.

“And training technology?” Seth asked.

“Similarly, our training technology group gets assigned to work on projects in the other groups on an as-needed basis, so if we want to create an online module for our customers, we will assign someone from that group to work with the customer training group,” Michelle summarized.

“So how does your group work with these other HR groups?” Seth asked.

“Do you want the ideal or the reality? The way the model is supposed to work is that we design the training and they deliver it. We produce everything from the training handbooks to the lecture notes and slides shown in class,” Michelle began. “It’s really designed to be an efficient model, so that we have one centralized global group doing all training design that can be used by the regions. That way we don’t duplicate resources developing the same thing in different regions. And it makes no sense for us to fly people around the world teaching classes when they could have someone do it locally.”

“From your perspective, how is this model working?” Seth asked.

“Well, the best way to put it is that we are all frustrated. My team spends months creating world-class training programs, using their expertise to design well-crafted courses that are intended to meet the needs of the various audiences that get training. I mean, I have seven PhDs in adult learning and instructional design in my department. We have designed pretests and posttests to confirm that students have learned the material, and then we have a manager observation program that occurs 3 months after the course to demonstrate that employees are using the knowledge on the job. We can also measure the return on investment of our training to demonstrate that the training pays for itself in sales many times over. These are some of the most sophisticated learning packages I have ever seen. And do you know what happens? They gather dust. The regions just do their own thing,” Michelle said, exasperated.

“Can you give me an example?” Seth asked.

“Yes. We found out recently that our Asia-Pacific region didn’t even use the most recent sales module we developed on how to conduct a customer demonstration of our new ZBS software product after we spent 6 months designing it. Instead, they developed their own and said that the program we developed ‘wouldn’t work’ for their employees, even though it has worked for everyone else in the world. And in Europe, they taught less than half of the service technician program and ran it as a half-day course, completely omitting a huge portion of the material that is absolutely critical for the technicians to learn. My team feels like their efforts are wasted, and they complain to me that the regions are developing shadow training organizations with their own resources. I think we have at least three different customer

programs that have never been offered in Latin America, but in North America they have been offered successfully on quite a few occasions. I've been unsuccessful in getting our team's solutions adopted with global consistency, and no one else so far has stopped the regions from doing things their way, even as inefficient as that is. The regions get high marks from customers, sales, and service about their programs," Michelle said.

"Why don't the regions want to use the programs that you have developed?" Seth asked.

"The politics here are unlike anything I've seen before. Seriously, that's a good question, and I don't have a consistent answer. I honestly think that several of the HR leaders are competing for a promotion to VP and they are trying to show that they could do this training job, too. In this company, the HR regions get a lot of power to do what they need to do locally, and they want to outdo each other. I sometimes hear complaints from them that the training programs didn't meet their needs, or they didn't have time, or some other generic reason. But I've seen their stuff. They have no proof that learning has occurred, and almost no metrics of success. The company gives a lot of control to the regions to manage as they see fit instead of directing everything from corporate," Michelle said. "And the regions love having their own local training resources."

"So in summary, it's less efficient and sometimes frustrating for your central team, but on the other hand, the regions have the opportunity to customize what they need. How much do the regions really think there is a problem that needs to be solved?" Seth inquired.

"I don't know if they do, but the other day Vivienne, our chief human resources officer, was looking at our budget and the number of people in HR globally who are involved in training in some way. She was astonished and demanded to know what all of these training people do. I tried along with my peers to explain how we divide up the various roles and responsibilities in training, but I don't know how successful we were. She was unconvinced that we have the right model here, and based on how it's working in practice, I think she may be right. Reading between the lines, I think a budget cut is coming. So far, no one has come up with any alternatives, and that's where I'm hoping to get your support. I personally think I should own the whole thing. We should have all of the regional training resources report into my team. But I haven't been able to convince Vivienne." Michelle looked expectantly at Seth. "So that's where we are. Any ideas about how we can move forward?"

Seth thought for a minute. "Tell me, Michelle. You have a robust and sophisticated HR organization here, from what you're telling me. It sounds like you have some ideas about what you want to do. Why not use one of your own internal OD consultants to manage this project?" Seth asked.

Michelle paused. "I'm afraid that all of our internal consultants are too loyal to the existing system, and they report to the leaders who are involved in this problem. I need an outside partner who has no special stake in the outcome to provide an objective voice."

"OK. I understand. You've given me some excellent background here. I have a good sense of your perspective about how the model ought to be working and how you see it working in reality. I also think I want to get more information and multiple perspectives on the situation. I'd like to come back to you with a proposal to gather additional data so I can learn more," Seth concluded.

Michelle was relieved. "I knew that you'd have an idea about what to do next. I will anxiously await your proposal."

## Questions for Discussion

1. How would you evaluate Seth's initial contracting meeting with Michelle? Is there anything you would have said or done differently?
2. What concerns do you have about this project? Is there anything that might cause you to decline this engagement? What additional questions would you have for Michelle at this stage?

## Chapter 8 Diagnosis and Feedback

The Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) in New York had hired a new school superintendent. Early in his new role, the superintendent decided that he needed to focus on several important constituencies, among them the BOCES administrative staff. To better understand and address the concerns of the internal group, he hired consultants to conduct interviews and observations of staff members. The staff concerns centered on issues of communicating common goals, understanding the vision and direction of the organization, participation in decision making, and teamwork. As a result of the diagnosis, the consultant, client, and staff all agreed that a series of workshops and action planning sessions would be useful to improve teamwork, clarify goals, and increase trust and engagement. The workshops were held as agreed and were rated as very effective by attendees. The group seemed to be making progress.

Just as the engagement was to conclude, a hidden conflict became apparent through a confrontation between the supervisor and the staff. Seven administrators sent a formal letter to the superintendent expressing significant concerns about many issues that had not yet been discussed or addressed, reporting barriers that inhibited them from being successful in their jobs. The initial diagnosis was now questionable, and additional data were gathered. A second round of staff member interviews now revealed deep conflicts about the superintendent's agenda, and the staff reported that they lacked confidence in the supervisor and his direction. The superintendent considered resigning. A second workshop was conducted to clarify roles, improve conflict resolution skills, and develop trust between team members and the superintendent so that open communication could occur. The consultants recognized in retrospect that while the data hinted at the hidden conflict, the initial diagnosis only showed part of the picture (Milstein & Smith, 1979).

- Why do you think the conflict was not discovered in the data gathering phase?
- What, if anything, could the consultants have done differently to make the conflict apparent earlier?

To many organization development (OD) practitioners, there is nothing quite as overwhelming as the volume of data that is generated from conducting interviews, focus groups, surveys, observations, and collecting unobtrusive measures. Depending on the length of the engagement, the size of the organization and data gathering effort, or the magnitude of the problem, such data can easily amount to hundreds or even thousands of pages of notes and reports. These notes may contain individual stories and interpretations, vivid observations, and statistical data from surveys, each of which may be consistent or contradictory with each other or the client's or practitioner's initial interpretations. At this point, the practitioner is faced with the challenge of sorting through it all to answer a deceptively simple question and discuss it with the client: "What is going on here?" This is the objective of the diagnostic and feedback phases of the OD process.

In this chapter, we explore the purposes of the diagnostic and feedback phases and we will discuss how consultants sort, analyze, and interpret data to arrive at conclusions that can be fed back to the client. We will address what kinds of conclusions consultants reach during the diagnostic phase, as well as how the feedback meeting should be conducted in order to present and discuss the data most effectively. We will address client reactions to feedback, including organizational member and client resistance and the consultant's response to resistance. Finally, we will address ethical issues in the phases of diagnosis and feedback.

As you may have already noticed, while data gathering, diagnosis, and feedback are separated here as distinct phases of the consulting process, they bleed and blend together in most consulting engagements. This can happen when, for example, during data gathering, preliminary conclusions (diagnoses) prompt the consultant to follow new data gathering paths. Also, client feedback can offer a new interpretation on the data, which can

add depth and nuance to the diagnosis. Taken together, these analytic stages represent the process of addressing a client's presenting problem with a complete picture of the underlying problem or situation so that the right intervention can be chosen and structured in the most effective way possible.

## Diagnosis: Discovery, Assessment, Analysis, and Interpretation

While *diagnosis* is a common term among practitioners, it is unfortunate that it holds the connotation of the doctor–patient consulting model described in [Chapter 5](#). Some argue that diagnosis presumes a sickness-based model where the organization is ill and it puts the consultant in the position of being the all-knowing expert who will present the cure, while others argue that a diagnostic stage fails to fully capture the common practitioner role of helping a client successfully identify ways to reach a preferred future (opportunities to improve even when there are no explicit problems to be identified or a diagnosis to be reached; Marshak, 2013a).

For this reason, some writers prefer terms such as *discovery*, *engagement*, and *dialogue* (Block, 2011, p. 163); *assessment* (Franklin, 1995; Lawler, Nadler, & Cammann, 1980; Noolan, 2006); or *analysis and interpretation*. Regardless of the label, practitioners agree that the purpose of diagnosis is to “help an organization understand its behavior and its present situation—what’s going on, how it’s going on—so that something can be done about it” (Manzini, 1988, p. 148). Diagnosis is not only an informational activity, it is aimed at generating action.

It is during the diagnosis and feedback phases that the consultant and the client explore a more thorough and nuanced view of the problem, a view that has been only partial to the client up to this point. This is because, as Argyris (1970) writes,

Organizations are composed of human beings whose behavior and attitudes are influenced by the positions they occupy, the roles they play, the groups and intergroups to which they belong, and their own personality factors. Thus, each individual may see a problem differently. (pp. 156–157)

Different interpretations of problems exist depending on job roles, organizational locations, individual experiences, and more. An executive will have one view of the problem and its causes, and there will be yet another view by a middle manager, and still another by a frontline employee. Showing the client how the problem can be viewed from these multiple angles can mean that “consultants and clients understand and attack causes of problems, rather than symptoms” (M. I. Harrison, 1994, p. 16). Indeed, Block (2011) reports that managers turn to consultants because they have typically tried unsuccessfully to solve a problem based on their own limited view of it, and that “the consultant’s primary task is to present a fresh picture of what has been discovered. This is 70 percent of the contribution you have to make. Trust it” (p. 217).

Done well, the diagnostic and feedback processes can act as interventions on their own and can motivate the client to take action to solve the underlying problem. Feyerherm and Worley (2008) agree when they note that

assessment and provocative questions are such powerful interventions that many OD processes are considered complete following an assessment because the client sees the organization clearly (often

for the first time) and can take the actions necessary to improve system effectiveness. (p. 4)

Practitioners often make two common mistakes in the diagnosis phase. First, they take diagnosis as an event rather than as a process. As the opening example illustrates, diagnosis is not a one-time occurrence—organizations, situations, groups, and people change. Additional data will surface and the picture will continue to build. Diagnosis is not a conclusion to come to in one day, but a set of preliminary beliefs about what is generally happening to be adapted as the organization changes. As the organization evolves, so must the diagnosis.

Second, practitioners often make the mistake of single-handedly shouldering the burden of diagnosis. Instead, diagnosis ideally would not be a process conducted by the change agent alone. In fact, many OD practitioners prefer to involve clients or even client teams in the diagnostic process. Bartee and Cheyunski (1977) state that diagnosis is most successful when the practitioner can create a process for the client to participate in developing an accurate set of conclusions. In this process, they write, “the client system becomes the authority in determining what information is important to share,” and “the clients immediately tend to own and take responsibility for the data generated” (p. 56). Some advocate conducting workshops in which data can be presented and interpreted by organizational members rather than by the practitioner alone (Bartee & Cheyunski, 1977; Moates, Armenakis, Gregory, Albritton, & Feild, 2005). Following a low response rate on an employee survey, for example, Moates and colleagues (2005) initiated a set of action groups that were presented the findings from the survey and interviews. The groups were asked to interpret the data, rate the importance of various themes, and develop ideas for addressing the problems described. In doing so, the diagnostic and feedback process was facilitated by the consultants, but the interpretation and choice of actions to take belonged to the client organization. This may not be appropriate for some organizational cultures or diagnostic subjects, but for many situations it is likely that such an approach would increase the client’s trust in the outcome (M. I. Harrison & Shirom, 1999).

The diagnostic phase consists of a number of interrelated activities, listed below. Each is described in greater detail in the following sections:

1. *Analyze the data, including sorting them into key themes.* Obviously, handing a stack of interview notes or completed survey forms to a client with no analysis is not useful. Instead, the consultant must summarize and abstract key points from the data. The consultant will look for common themes in the data and organize them in a way that helps the client understand the problem.
2. *Interpret the data.* Interpreting means drawing conclusions that are supported by the data. The consultant’s role is to present the facts as well as to facilitate understanding and implications of the interpretations, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and inferences offered by organizational members.
3. *Select and prioritize the right issues that will “energize” the client.* Almost all data gathering activities will produce a long list of issues, concerns, and contributing problems, and some will be only minimally related to the current problem. Selecting those that are most energizing will help the client to be motivated to focus on a narrow set of issues to be addressed, implying a shorter list of actions. The issues will not all have equal relevance or contribution to the problem, so the consultant can help the client to

see which issues may have higher impact or priority than others.



## Finding Patterns by Analyzing Data

The objective of the analytic exercise for the organization development practitioner is to reduce a large amount of data to a set of “manageable patterns which will help to organize the problem into a useful conceptual map” (Argyris, 1970, p. 157). Data analysis, as some social scientists have observed, can be a “mysterious” activity (Marshall & Rossman, 1989) and an “open-ended and creative” act (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). It can be perplexing to decide where to begin and how to tackle such an endeavor. Fortunately, social scientific researchers who have coped with this problem for many years have developed useful solutions, whether the data are quantitative (such as in surveys) or qualitative (such as in interview notes). Though academic research projects and OD data gathering programs have different objectives and audiences (Block, 2011), OD practitioners can learn from and apply a great deal of social science research practices in the data analysis stage.

Many practitioners struggle to get the data analysis “right,” as if there was (to use a metaphor) a needle of a true answer buried in the data haystack. This results from a misguided assumption that there is only one true interpretation. As some OD practitioners put somewhat philosophically, “The question of what is ‘truth’ remains tentative and subject to revision” (Massarik & Pei-Carpenter, 2002, p. 105). Data can be organized in any number of ways, and the interpretation and analysis of the data are often inseparable from the experience of the person doing the interpreting and sorting. This, in fact, is what distinguishes academic research from OD practice—the practitioner’s judgment and experience have a great deal to add to the creative and intuitive process of analyzing the data (Block, 2011). Levinson (1994) agrees, adding that the “practitioner is his or her most important instrument” (p. 27). In addition, despite the practitioner’s best efforts, it is probably a healthier attitude to take and less stressful process to follow when the OD practitioner admits to never being able to know as much about the organization as the clients themselves (Schein, 1999). A more realistic outcome would be for the practitioner to develop a set of data-based and data-supported preliminary conclusions that lead to a useful conversation with a client who can ideally learn from the practitioner’s conclusions and participate in developing appropriate actions.

Procedures for analyzing data are generally derived from two logical methods for reasoning from data (Babbie, 1992). The first is a *deductive process*, in which the analyst applies general principles or a theory to a particular circumstance or (set of) observation(s). The second is an *inductive process*, in which the analyst reasons from the observations or the data to elicit general principles or a theory. These methods can be applied to data analysis for OD practitioners as well. A deductive process of data analysis consists of using models or theories about organizations, organizational change, and human behavior to help sort and interpret the data. An inductive process consists of reading and sorting through the raw data to develop the key themes from them. Both are common approaches, as is statistical analysis of surveys and questionnaires.

## Deductive Analysis: Using Models for Diagnosis

One popular method of analyzing data is to use a diagnostic model. Particularly if a model has been used to develop the data gathering approach, such as a survey or interviews, using a model to analyze the data is a natural next step. Using a model has several benefits (Burke, 1994):

1. *It makes coding data easier.* Models present a finite number of categories into which data can be sorted. With preestablished categories, the practitioner can more easily sort interview comments into various groups.
2. *It can help with data interpretation.* The practitioner can notice which categories contain more or fewer comments, or can notice which aspects of the model are over- or underemphasized. Models also show relationships among categories that can be used for action planning.
3. *It can help to communicate with clients.* Unlike lengthy theories or complicated academic language, models are often graphic depictions that may be more easily understood and that can more clearly direct a client's attention to particular areas of interest.

We have already explored a number of popular diagnostic models in this book. Weisbord's Six-Box Model, the Nadler-Tushman congruence model, and the Burke-Litwin model of organizational performance and change (each of which is described in [Chapter 4](#)) have all been used successfully in numerous OD engagements to diagnose problems and suggest areas for attention. Each model differs in its choice of language and relationships, and thus each offers something a little different for the practitioner to consider (Nadler, 1980). One drawback is that these three are all models of whole organization functioning. Using one of these models to analyze data generated from interviews on a team's satisfaction with how projects are assigned would not be very useful. Specific models such as those developed for leadership or management (such as Likert's four systems or Blake and Mouton's managerial grid, discussed in [Chapter 2](#)), employee engagement, or team functioning might be more useful in some circumstances.

Burke (1994) gives an example of how this categorization process worked in one situation in which he used Weisbord's Six-Box Model to analyze data from interviews with eight managers in a financial services company. He sorted the interviewees' comments into strengths and weaknesses by each of Weisbord's six components, also labeling each comment as part of the "formal" or "informal" system. When the data were categorized in this way, he noticed that the informal system appeared to be stronger than the formal system, particularly in the area of leadership, and that the category of purposes was particularly weak compared to the others. An offsite meeting agenda was designed to focus on goals, objectives, and strategies, as well as to build the formal leadership team through relationships that had already been informally established.

In addition to these widely known models, many practitioners use their own models that they have developed from their own experience. Burke (1994) points out that most of these are not published, and that 100 different practitioners would produce "100 different diagnostic models" (pp. 53–54). Thus, there is not always agreement about which model is best for which situation, and the diversity of models can be both an asset and a drawback because of the assumptions contained in models. As we discussed in [Chapter 7](#) when we addressed

the use of models in survey design, models can be constraining. Systems theory is a popular diagnostic model, for example, yet it also focuses our attention on formally structured organizational processes and neglects interpretive acts of organizational members, which can be important in understanding many organizational problems. The very benefit of models in helping us narrow and focus the data can also be a drawback. Models can highlight attention to certain areas but allow us to overlook others, often oversimplifying complex processes (Golembiewski, 2000c).

Another danger is that we may become overly dependent on the model so that we cannot see connections or patterns ourselves without the model. A final note of caution about using the deductive approach with a model is that while it lends itself to categorizing and counting issues and comments, these do not necessarily represent the issues about which there is the most energy or emotion. In other words, a few participants may feel very strongly about one theme, which may also be very important to the current problem, and others may feel less strongly about a more frequently mentioned theme. Simply stating that five comments related to “leadership” may also not be instructive enough to take action.

## Inductive Analysis: Pulling Out Key Themes

Unlike deductive analysis, inductive analysis is done without a predetermined set of categories. That is, the data analyst determines what the categories will be. One benefit of an inductive approach is that the label for the categories can more closely align with the language of organizational members. The categories can also be customized to the project so that more or fewer categories can be used depending on how the consultant wants to present the data. This approach can even lend itself to creating a model specifically tailored to the client's situation, showing interrelationships between categories, topics, and organizational groups or members. Here is a short example of how this approach can be used.

Imagine that a client has engaged a consultant to determine why a team's past three major projects have missed their schedules, and that the following 10 comments are derived from individual interviews with team members:

- "Our project manager did not complete an accurate budget."
- "Management took too long to decide which proposal to accept."
- "We do not have the necessary systems in place for project managers to use."
- "Vacation schedules disrupted the work when team members were not available."
- "Management took members from the team for another critical project."
- "The schedule was inaccurate to begin with."
- "We do not pay enough to hire the most qualified people."
- "Project managers do not get paid for overtime."
- "Management changed the project scope halfway through the project."
- "We have no conference call capability to include remote team members."

These data could be categorized into four areas:

Project planning (budget, scheduling)

Compensation/rewards (overtime, salaries)

Management (scope, resources, decision making)

Tools (systems, conference calls)

A second categorization system could be based on the focal person identified in the comment (omitting two who do not fit this scheme):

Project managers (budgets, overtime, systems)

Managers (decision making, scope, moving resources)

Team members (vacation schedules, remote members)

Still a third method:

Financial systems (budgets, overtime, compensation)

Technology systems (conference calling, systems)

Human resource processes (vacation schedules)

Management processes (decision making, project scope, resource planning)

Any of these is an accurate categorization of the comments. In fact, a number of other categories could be used as well, so determining how these comments get sorted would depend on the consultant's experience, the client's preferences, and the organizational culture. Ask yourself what the client will learn when you present the data each way. What do you see in the three ways that this same list above is organized? Do you learn more through one presentation than another? Does it accurately reflect the data or does it make it look like one concern is more or less important than it deserves to be?

Note that each of the categorization schemes identified above reveals little about the content of the data. The client cannot immediately tell from the heading "Project planning" whether this is a strength or a weakness (or even a more subtle combination of the two) from the data. To address this fact, some practitioners advise following an additional step of formulating the labels or categories into sentences and theme headlines that explain the content of the data more explicitly. For example, using the "Tools" category above, the practitioner could write the following explanatory sentence and include quotes from the data as supporting examples to illustrate the point:

Current tools may be insufficient to support the project teams:

- "We do not have the necessary systems in place for project managers to use."
- "We have no conference call capability to include remote team members."

Learning data analysis of this type is best done through practice, and practitioners each have their own preferred methods of coding data. Generally, most practitioners perform inductive coding following these seven steps:

1. First, read through a good portion of the data again without taking notes. The purpose of this is to become very familiar with the general data rather than to take any action at this point.
2. Then, setting aside the data, write down several key ideas or themes that stand out in what you have just read. This can be a challenge, and you may draw a blank, but persevere. "Don't be surprised if, after doing this, you are no better off than before. You may have difficulty detecting particular trends. . . . Don't be alarmed" (Manzini, 1988, pp. 77–78).
3. Next, go back through the data again and ask yourself what this comment is trying to say or what idea or concept it is an instance of. Give the comment the appropriate label(s). In the example above, the comment "The schedule was inaccurate to begin with" could be labeled as "project planning."
4. Proceed through the list of comments, with each comment being placed into a category (or more than one) already in place or becoming an instance of a new category if it is unlike any that have been created so far.
5. When all comments are analyzed, sort them by category and validate that each comment has been accurately placed. Look for categories where there are very few comments and those where there is an

abundance.

6. Determine whether the “saturated” categories could or should be broken down further and whether the “single-instance” comments are truly unique or whether they could be combined with another category.
7. Write a description of what each category means and which categories may be related to others.

As you may conclude from the explanation and examples above, an inductive analytic approach can be time-consuming and even frustrating when data are plentiful. It requires reading through the data numerous times to become very familiar with the issues, and it demands flexibility and an open attitude from the practitioner. Because the categories do not exist until the practitioner creates them, the inductive approach may require more knowledge of the organization, the data, or organizational theory in general than the deductive approach.

Two final notes of caution should be mentioned. First, because the analyst is generating the categories, there is a danger of particular comments resonating with the practitioner’s own opinions or beliefs (this may be particularly true for internal consultants) so that certain comments or categories gain more weight than they should. A practitioner who has had a bad experience with senior management on another project may be inadvertently looking for comments about management to support his or her own view. On the other hand, the practitioner’s own intuition is a powerful source of data, and listening to this inner voice can be instructive in determining how to analyze the data. Second, careful attention must be paid to the practitioner’s language choices in the words and phrases used to summarize the categories. In the “tools” example above, the practitioner would need to reflect on whether a description of the tools as “insufficient” is a fair representation of what was heard in interviews. Would a stronger phrase than “may be” more accurately reflect what was said? We will discuss ways to address these dilemmas below.

## Statistical Analysis

For surveys (especially those with Likert-type items) or sophisticated analyses of themes generated through inductive or deductive categorization processes, statistical analysis can be a powerful tool for data analysis. Statistical analysis is very common with organizationwide employee satisfaction or engagement surveys, for example. Methods for conducting statistical tests are much too complex to present here, and compared to qualitative analysis, such quantitative procedures are probably necessary in fewer circumstances. Most OD practitioners should be familiar enough with basic statistical charts (e.g., frequency distribution tables, histograms, x- and y-axes, bar and line charts) and descriptive statistics (e.g., mean, median, mode) to interpret their meaning and to explain them to a client.

For the statistical research-oriented practitioner, powerful statistical tests can be very persuasive ways of diagnosing an organization. Often, however, clients without the research background of the analyst find these tests less persuasive. “Frequently, one sees consultants or researchers piling volume upon volume of computer output onto an overwhelmed, confused, but supposedly grateful client,” Nadler (1977, p. 149) writes. The time and effort the practitioner may need to invest to explain the conclusions drawn from an independent samples *t*-test or ANOVA may result in distracting the client from the genuine issue that ought to be addressed. Too much statistical detail can also lead the client to ask a number of purportedly “interesting questions” (“Are there statistically significant differences in mean responses on Question 15 between sales and marketing?”) that lead to additional statistical tests and thus permit the client to delay an action phase, a potential form of resistance that is described later. The best approach may be to be judicious with the use of statistics to include just enough to build a persuasive case without overwhelming the client with too much data. Nadler recommends including a small set of relevant data, simple enough for a nonexpert to interpret, with visual displays to help condense the important facts.

## Interpreting Data

When the data are sorted into categories and reduced from the volume of raw comments into the most prominent themes, the task remains to develop interpretations or inferences from the data to determine what conclusions can be drawn. The practitioner can now ask a number of questions about the data, such as those discussed when contracting with the client: What are the strengths and weaknesses being described? What is the nature of the problem according to the data? What are the contributing sources of the problem in the data, and how do these differ from the client's view? What is being done about the problem today? Are there differences in the data according to any demographic variables of interest?

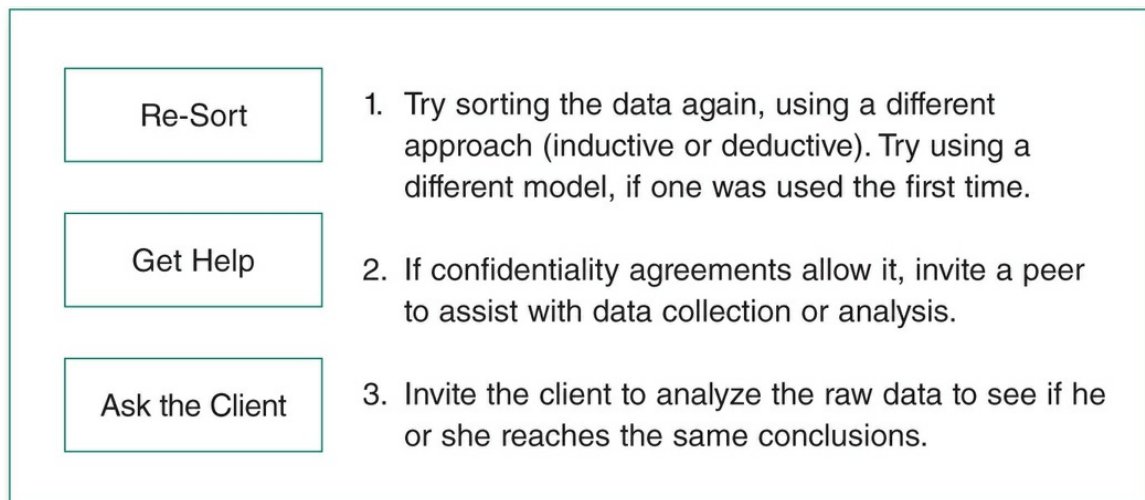
In this process, it is easy to subconsciously slip from facts and data to inferences, including some inferences that may not be supported by the data. Levinson (1994) offers an instructive recommendation: "The practitioner should be able to cite the facts from which the inferences were made, specify the alternative inferences that were possible, and explain the reason for choosing one over another" (pp. 43–44). A conclusion that "employees do not trust senior management" can be drawn from various facts reported in interviews: employees feel punished for taking risks, they choose not to report bad information, and they offer examples of managers' promises left unfulfilled. Having the facts available to support the inference helps to bolster the likelihood that it is a reasonable interpretation, and it gives both clients and change agents more confidence in the conclusion.

One reason why it is easy to make a dangerous slip to inferences not supported by the data is that practitioners may draw conclusions based on their own experience, potentially looking through data to back up a view they already hold. Kahn (2004), for example, describes a powerful consulting experience he had in a social services agency in which, because of his own personal family background, he began to side with organizational members as they blamed the agency director for the organization's problems. Assumptions about leadership, power dynamics, follower behavior and responsibility, and his personal sympathy with certain organizational roles all combined to push Kahn toward a particular interpretation about who held responsibility for problems and away from addressing sensitive issues including racial and gender dynamics.

There are many ways that practitioners can avoid this problem and develop more sound conclusions. One way is to conduct the analysis multiple times in different ways. Re-sorting the data into new categories or using multiple models can validate the analysis or offer alternative conclusions. Try both inductive and deductive analysis to see what results. A second method is to invite a colleague who is not familiar with the data (if confidentiality agreements with the client allow it) to either conduct a "second opinion" analysis of the data or listen while the analyst describes the conclusions that have been drawn. The second practitioner can test inferences to ensure that they are supported by the data. A third method, perhaps the most obvious, is to work through the interpretive process with the client. If multiple interpretations are possible, holding a dialogue with the client can clarify which of these is most reasonable. Again, the consultant's role is less about bringing the right, true answer to the client and more about facilitating a learning process that allows the client to explore an alternative picture and to have access to an angle that has been missing to this point. [Figure 8.1](#) summarizes these three options.



**Figure 8.1** Avoiding Bias in Interpreting Data



## Selecting and Prioritizing Themes

With themes developed and preliminary conclusions drawn, the practitioner must consider what issues should be brought up to the client. Not all of them will be germane to the current engagement and not all can be addressed. Thus, a careful prioritization process is necessary to “avoid presenting management with a huge laundry list of problems, which may appear overwhelming in its totality. Isolate the truly significant problems and issues, and prepare summaries that describe their nature and extent” (Manzini, 1988, p. 143). How does a consultant decide, however, that employee complaints about workload should be shared, but that complaints about the cafeteria food should be lower on the list? What about the complaints of a small but emotional minority who bring up a highly charged issue? Choosing what themes to select is a function of the problem, the data, the engagement, the contract, and the consultant’s own experience and intuition. Golembiewski (2000a) offers a useful set of “features of energizing data,” or those criteria that, when met, are likely to energize the client toward action rather than deepening cynicism or frustration that the issues seem unresolvable. Among them are the following:

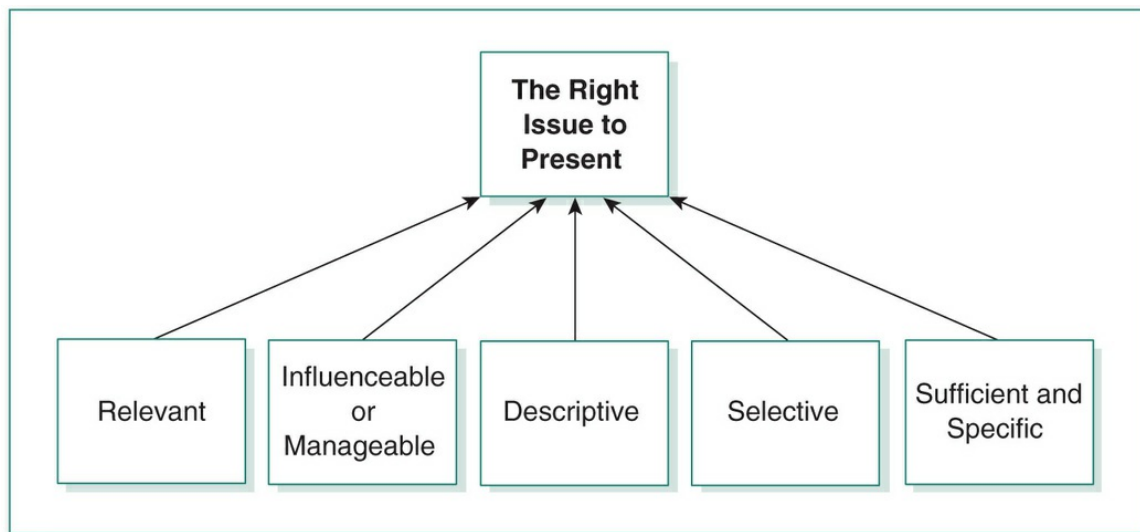
1. *Relevant.* Issues shared with the client should be relevant to the problem for which the consultant and client have contracted. The client is not likely to be interested in issues that are remote or not among the most influential causes of the problem. Cafeteria food may not be relevant to the team’s challenges in agreeing on a work schedule that meets each team member’s needs.
2. *Influenceable or manageable.* It will build energy when the consultant presents issues that the client can change. Sharing data about problems that the client cannot control (“Two of your problems are that the price of oil is too high for your budget, and you are in an industry that is declining at the rate of 11 percent per year”) pushes responsibility for the current problem further away and drains the client of energy to take action. Not only should the issue be manageable, but Block (2011) recommends choosing themes on which people *want* to work.
3. *Descriptive.* The most useful data will describe current facts, rather than using themes to judge, evaluate, pinpoint blame, or isolate individual contributions to problems. Data that are evaluative and that punish are likely to be resisted. This does not mean that emotion should be ignored. Feelings and opinions of organizational members fall into the category of facts that can be described. “I heard these three themes from my interviews” is an appropriate descriptive statement that outlines the issues with a minimum of evaluation.
4. *Selective.* Not all of the themes in the data can or should be discussed. It is tempting to present too much in order to expand the client’s picture of the situation, but such efforts are likely to overwhelm the client, who may then have trouble deciding what to do next. Choosing the top few issues to present will focus attention on those that are the most important, leaving out those issues mentioned less frequently.
5. *Sufficient and specific.* The tradeoff of selectivity, Golembiewski (2000a) writes, is that too little information may be presented, which may not be enough to fully understand the situation. Enough detail should be provided so that the client can consider specific actions to take. Using the example earlier, stating that “management issues” are a key reason why projects are behind schedule may be accurate, but without additional explanation, it is also too vague to decide what action would remedy the

problem. Also, issues selected should be described in relatively equal conceptual categories to avoid very specific feedback such as “Employees would prefer that you answer voice mail within 4 hours” mixing with more general descriptions such as “Employees feel that you do not manage change well.”

[Figure 8.2](#) summarizes these five guiding principles for selecting and prioritizing themes to share with a client.

## Feedback

Figure 8.2 Selecting and Prioritizing Themes



After the data are analyzed, sorted, and selected for the degree to which they will energize action, the practitioner shares these findings with the client. This can take the form of a written feedback report, a feedback meeting, or most likely both. How and when the feedback is presented is best discussed as a part of the contracting process (Noolan, 2006). As a practical matter, creating a report and sending it to a client is not a very difficult process. As Argyris (1970) writes,

If the basic objective of feedback is simply to offer a clear presentation of results, the interventionist need only develop a well-written, well-bound, easily understood report . . . and select a capable lecturer who will tend to prevent difficulties from developing. (p. 322)

The feedback meeting has a more important purpose, however, in engaging the client in doing something different, which is why Block (2011) prefers to call it a “Meeting for Action” (p. 229). During the transition from data to action, the change agent’s presentation of the data can put even the most willing client at a crossroads of what may be a difficult and even personally painful process.

Feedback to a client, even if the client has invited it, can be a sensitive process with high anxiety for both the consultant and the client. The client has exposed the organization to the consultant, and as a part of the system, the client is implicated in its problems. Even if the data are not about the client but about the organization in general, the client may see the feedback meeting as a personal and professional evaluation of competence. Because the objective of data gathering is often to develop a description of the problem that enhances what is understood by the client, the tacit implication in a feedback session may be that the client did not adequately understand the problem, and such a situation can produce a “sense of inadequacy [that] can arouse anxieties and guilt feelings” (Argyris, 1970, p. 323). The client may become defensive and resist the data in ways we will describe later. To maximize the likelihood that the client will receive and understand the

feedback and be motivated to take action, the feedback meeting must be set up for success by creating an environment in which exploration of issues, learning, and action planning are possible.

Feedback has both motivating and directing functions (Nadler, 1977). Feedback *motivates* action when it is inconsistent with what is already believed, so that it produces a level of discomfort and the recipient is prompted to take different actions to reach different results, a process Nadler calls disconfirmation. Feedback also *directs* attention to the *right set* of actions that will produce better results, a process Nadler calls cueing.

Nadler (1977) writes that for change to occur based on feedback, the feedback itself and the process must create energy. The client may have energy to fight the feedback, in which case the practitioner will notice resistance. If the client has energy to work on the feedback, there may still be no change if the client works on the wrong issues or if there are not supportive processes to help the change be successful. The practitioner's charge is to help create energy with the client and direct that energy to the most appropriate areas for change. As we have seen, not all feedback will motivate or direct change. The data will not produce energy if they violate the characteristics described earlier. If the information is not seen as relevant, specific, or sufficient, for example, the client will resist it.

The five principles above for selecting themes to present are also characteristics of effective feedback. In addition, feedback should be seen as verifiable. Nadler (1977) writes that "people will respond more to data that they feel are valid and accurate," meaning that clients will be more likely to have faith in the feedback if they also believe that "the data are truly representative of what goes on in the organization" (p. 147). The feedback should be framed as unfinalized. That is, this discussion of the data gathered is not a permanent state or condition, and the practitioner is not there to offer an expert judgment written in stone. Instead, as Nadler puts it,

successful use of feedback usually involves using the data as a starting point for further exploration rather than as an ending point. . . . In a meeting, for example, the best and most descriptive data are in the heads of the people around the table, not on the feedback sheet of the consultant. For feedback to be effective, the formal data should serve only as a starting point for more in-depth data collection, problem identification, and problem solving. (p. 148)

This idea is at the heart of a feedback meeting, where the client and consultant should jointly collaborate on a discussion of the data, using the data gathered as a foundation for dialogue.

## Structuring the Feedback Meeting

Organization development practitioners should consider how feedback meetings can be set up for success even before they begin. The practitioner should think carefully about the environment in which the meeting will be held and whether it is conducive to learning, exploration, and dialogue in a confidential setting. If the client's office is a desk in an open room in which other organizational members frequently walk in and out, the client will not be focused enough to hear the feedback and confidentiality may be violated. Other common interruptions in a client's office such as a ringing telephone, frequent visitors, and the immediacy of incoming e-mails all can be distracting. For this reason, it may be useful to choose a different locale. Also, enough time should be dedicated to the meeting so that the consultant can review the contract, the data, details behind the data, and discuss actions or interventions. Too little time will not allow the issues to be explored fully in a single meeting. Even seating matters as well. Sitting across from the client can create an adversarial environment where client and consultant seem to be working against one another. Sitting at a round table or side by side looking at notes or a presentation may create a more collaborative environment.

Experienced practitioners have developed their own preferences for how to structure the feedback process. Levinson (1994), for example, recommends that the consultant and client agree to set aside the last 2 hours of one workday and the first 2 hours of the next morning for review and discussion. In the first session, he reads the report to the client aloud, and only then gives the client a copy of the report for review in the evening. The following morning, the client, after having read the report alone and considered it, works with the practitioner to clarify the issues and to develop action plans. Block (2011) takes a different approach, quickly reviewing the original contract and presenting findings, with the bulk of the meeting dedicated to exploring client reactions, discussing recommendations, and deciding what actions to take next. He argues that most practitioners spend too much time on the data and themes so that little time remains to explore how the client feels about the data and what should be done with the feedback. To take yet a third approach, Argyris (1970) refuses to develop recommendations on the grounds that the clients must own the feedback as well as the recommendations. He argues that providing recommendations robs the client of the opportunity to explore and internalize the issues first.

Giving an early copy of the feedback to the client can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the client has the opportunity to review it before a personal meeting and may be better prepared to accept particularly difficult feedback after a few days of absorbing its meaning and implications. On the other hand, action-oriented clients may be tempted to act hastily on the feedback before discussing the data with the practitioner and may act on a misunderstanding or emotional reaction. The practitioner alone can make this determination based on personal preference, experience, and knowledge of the client.

## Presenting Data in the Feedback Meeting

The discussion in the feedback meeting presents several opportunities to increase or decrease client acceptance of the data. Here are a number of recommendations for managing the feedback session and presenting the data:

- Even though the client may see it as ritualistic, begin with positive data. Encourage the client to accept and appreciate the organization's strengths. This is a fine approach as long as the feedback is genuine and authentic. To some clients, this can feel like being set up before being hit with the bad news. Understanding strengths can be especially helpful when the client can use them to compensate for or to address weaknesses.
- Ensure that the themes described in the feedback report provide enough detail to be accurately defined and useful. Some consultants pick one or two representative quotes from interviews as an explanation of a particular theme. One caution in using this approach is that quotes can contain identifying information that may violate an interviewee's anonymity. Beyond the simple category label "improve team meetings," the practitioner should be able to define what interviewees wanted improved.
- Quantitative data can illustrate trends and how widespread agreement is across the organization, but they can also provide too much detail for clients. A healthy sprinkling of statistics may be all that is necessary to illuminate the trends.
- Language choices are important in presenting the data. Using nonevaluative descriptive language such as "employees mentioned that decision making on the executive team seemed slow" will be feedback that is more likely to be accepted and acted upon than "you are a slow decision maker." Also report "the specific impact on self or other's behavior, attitude, or value" (Golembiewski, 1979a, p. 65) so that it is not just the behavior that is understood, but the implications of it as well.
- A common problem is that the practitioner will project his or her own feelings on the client (Block, 2011; Scott, 2000). The practitioner may assume that the client will be angry, hurt, or embarrassed, because that is how the consultant might feel in the same situation. Consequently the practitioner makes assumptions about the client's feelings instead of focusing on the facts.
- "Be willing to confront the tough issues" (Scott, 2000, p. 149). However painful it may be for the consultant to say or for the client to hear, it is necessary to share. Avoid minimizing the feedback in order to create a harmonious relationship or to avoid upsetting the client (for example, by saying "I've seen many managers have this same problem" or "I do the same thing myself"). Such statements water down the significance of the message and encourage the client not to take it seriously.

## Resistance

Listen carefully to managers, change agents, and OD practitioners talk about reactions to change, and you will likely hear variations of the statements “no one likes change” and “people resist change.” Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) write that “organizational change efforts often run into some form of human resistance” (p. 131), and the causes they cite include parochial self-interest, misunderstanding and lack of trust, different assessments of the costs or benefits of the change, and low tolerance for change. O’Toole (1995) provides a list of 33 reasons that lie at the heart of resistance to change, including fear of the unknown, fatigue over too much change, cynicism that change is possible, and a desire to keep the status quo and one’s comfortable habits. Resistance is commonly seen as a major barrier between the change agent and successful implementation of the change, manifested in behaviors such as “push-back,’ ‘not buying in,’ ‘criticism,’ ‘foot dragging,’ ‘workarounds,’ . . . not responding to requests in a timely manner, making critical or negative comments” (J. D. Ford & Ford, 2010, p. 24), and other sabotaging actions. Scholarly attention to resistance has resulted in hundreds of research articles examining antecedent factors, contextual factors, personality traits, and more (see Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011, for a review) to recommend approaches to organizational change that will minimize resistance and enhance organizational members’ acceptance of change. In general, it seems, resistance is framed as a primary reason why change attempts fail (Erwin & Garman, 2010).

As a result, practitioners commonly work at “overcoming resistance,” a phrase that has a long history in organization development, perhaps first articulated in an article early in the history of the field (Coch & French, 1948). Managers and change agents strategize about the best ways to succeed in the face of opposition and search for the approaches, activities, and strategies that will get employees to drop their resistance and embrace the change. Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) advise managers to take a variety of actions on a continuum from educating members and inviting participation to manipulating and coercing them. However, the underlying view and mental model we have of resistance may not be the most helpful in our work with clients and their organizations. In this section we will look at how OD practitioners can benefit from rethinking the concept of resistance and how we can work skillfully with clients who express it in order to encourage more productive dialogues about our change projects.



## Thinking Differently About Resistance

When you hear the phrase *resistance to change*, what images come to mind? Some authors writing about this phrase point out that it may have outlived its usefulness. Dent and Goldberg (1999) reviewed the evolution of its meaning since its inception, noting that “the phrase *overcoming resistance to change* implicitly suggests that the source of the problem is solely within the subordinates and that the supervisor or more senior executive must overcome this unnatural reaction” (p. 37). The connotation we have of resistance to change is of a recalcitrant, disobedient, and irrational employee audience actively or passively working to oppose the justified, beneficial, and helpful actions of a rational change agent. Resistance is seen as existing only in “them,” not as a function of any actions of the change agent, and it is almost universally seen as negative. There are several reasons why a more nuanced view of the concept might be beneficial as we propose changes to our clients.

There is little agreement about a definition or set of behaviors that universally count as resistant. Jeffrey and Laurie Ford (2010) share an example of three project managers who delivered presentations to team members about a change. Two project managers received many questions about the change and the third received no questions at all. The latter reported being “stonewalled by silence” (p. 25). Among the two who had received many challenging questions about the change, one said that he had been “interrogated” by a resistant group, and the other called it an “energizing meeting” with an engaged group. “Two opposite behaviors, asking questions and not asking questions, were both perceived as resistance. When two groups did the same thing, ask questions, their behavior was perceived in opposite ways, as either resistance or engagement” (p. 25). It may be that resistance is not a universally interpreted phenomenon, but it may be that the actions and interpretations of the change agent have a part to play in what we call resistance.

Moreover, a more nuanced view of resistance suggests that reactions to change are not easily sorted into buckets of “for the change” and “against the change,” or categories of “supportive” and “resistant.” Our attitudes exist along a continuum and sometimes the same change can produce both positive and negative attitudes and behaviors. A member of the accounting team may be supportive of implementing a new software system that generates easy-to-read reports, but she may dislike the requirement that all data be submitted by noon on Friday. She may think that the new system will save time and enthusiastically discuss this point with others to persuade them of the benefits of the change, but she may also refuse to submit data on schedule. Such examples show how apparently inconsistent opinions about a single change are possible. Piderit (2000) advises us also to consider the idea that organizational members may be ambivalent to change, recognizing that in complex organizations, changes are complex as well and may have multiple components. These complex changes might produce multidimensional beliefs about the change (a cognitive dimension, or “what I think”), attitudes toward the change (an affective dimension, or “how I feel”), and actions toward the change (a behavioral dimension, or “how I act”). In this view, reactions to change are better seen as a mix of beliefs, emotions, and behaviors, each of which can vary on a scale.

Jeffrey Ford, Laurie Ford, and Angelo D’Amelio (2008) write that there are three ways that OD practitioners should rethink our model of resistance and take different actions as a result of this shift in our perspective:

1. We should remember that resistance is a label we apply based on our own interpretation. Rarely, if ever, do organizational members stand up to announce, “I am going to be resistant now.” Instead, they may seek out answers, ask questions, share opinions, and otherwise act in ways that may be interpreted by a change agent as resistance. When change agents enter a conversation assuming that there will be resistance, they may find what they expect to find, even labeling as resistance ordinary behaviors that in another context may not be considered resistant (e.g., responding late to an e-mail, sitting in the back of the audience). Change agents who are later asked to account for the failure of a change program will “take credit for successful changes and blame other factors, such as resistance, for problems and failures” (J. D. Ford et al., 2008, p. 364). This justification not only minimizes the change agent’s responsibility but serves to reinforce our commonly held notions that change failures are due to resistance. Consequently, it may be valuable to set aside the label and instead approach interactions with change recipients as a conversation opportunity that exists in a change agent–recipient relationship, allowing others the complexity of their own perspective and accepting our own role in the change process.
2. As change agents, we may be contributing to the very resistance we are trying to avoid, through misrepresentation, inauthentic behavior, or ambivalence of our own. We may ignore the dual advantages and disadvantages of a change and promote only the positives, offering an intentional or unintended misrepresentation of the change. Change agents must be authentic about the rationale for the change and accurate about assessments of it. When change agents hide or avoid discussing a change in order to avoid eliciting resistance from organizational members (or avoid discussing resistance itself), they may unwittingly encourage resistance from members who see through the inauthentic behavior. In addition, change agents may promote ambivalence of their own: In a study of management communication at an aerospace technology company, Larson and Tompkins (2005) noted that “what appears as employee resistance to management initiated change . . . might also reflect the subtle and not so subtle ambivalence of managers” (p. 17) who inconsistently promoted both a change and past practices. Employees may see little need to change when they hear multiple inconsistent or competing messages.
3. We should recognize that resistance can be a useful resource to us in our change projects. In fact, there are a number of benefits of resistance (J. D. Ford & Ford, 2010; J. D. Ford et al., 2008):
  - Resistance can clarify purpose. Resistance to the need for a change can prompt a change leader to more clearly articulate the rationale for the change in a way that resonates with recipients. Piderit (2000) notes that “divergent opinions about direction are necessary in order for groups to make wise decisions and for organizations to change effectively” (p. 790). Conversations about purpose can test that the right problem is being solved or ensure that there is agreement about the nature of the problem to be solved and the need for the change.
  - Resistance can keep the change active in the organization’s conversations. Among all of the other projects, programs, initiatives, problems, and challenges, a new change has a number of competitors to gain employees’ attention. Instead of letting the change conversation die from lack of interest, resistance offers at the very least the opportunity to keep the conversation going. Even “the honest expression of ambivalence seems more likely to generate dialogue than the expression of either determined opposition or firm support” (Piderit, 2000, p. 790), offering evidence that

ongoing debate and discussion are likely to be valuable as organizational members struggle with what the change means and how they feel about it.

- Resistance can enhance the quality of the change and its implementation. Resistance is often a reaction from those who genuinely care and may know a great deal about the change being attempted. By “listening keenly to comments, complaints, and criticisms for cues to adjust the pace, scope or sequencing of change and/or its implementation” (J. D. Ford et al., 2008, p. 369), recipients’ feedback, positive and negative, can be taken into account to create a better solution.
- Resistance can provide additional data about how employees feel about past change attempts and the organization itself. Change agents who hear “we’ve tried that and it failed” or “why should we trust you this time?” may overlook the organization’s past history of change attempts or underlying employee concerns about management’s past behavior. In fact, Bordia, Restubog, Jimmieson, and Irmer (2011) found that negative beliefs about past changes were significantly related to lowered trust in the organization and a higher level of cynicism about organizational change. Resistant messages like these can reveal a great deal more about the general state of the employee population.
- Resistance can reflect, and potentially build, involvement in and commitment to the organization. Organizational members who are protective of their organization and dedicated to its success may be correspondingly concerned with changes that they might see as threatening. In fact, this resistance can serve a useful function: “In a world with absolutely no resistance, no change would stick, and recipients would completely accept the advocacy of all messages received, including those detrimental to the organization” (J. D. Ford et al., 2008, p. 370). Thus, resistance can serve an organizationally protective purpose.

When we label change recipients as resistant and ignore or otherwise circumvent their criticisms and suggestions, we fail to see the value of their input and use it for the benefit of the change. Instead, when we see resistance as a natural part of an ongoing conversation with organizational members who we want to engage in our change proposals, we take seriously the multifaceted nature of beliefs about change, we increase involvement, and we realistically appraise our own role in the change process.

## Working With Client Resistance

With clients, the diagnostic process and the feedback meeting can surface negative feelings about change that the client may be unable or unwilling to address, including feelings of loss of control that are common when one's ideas and beliefs are confronted by new data. A client's resistance to the data and to taking action is a natural part of the process and is commonly expressed in feedback settings. Resistance can also be frustrating for the change agent, who may harbor a fantasy that "if our thinking is clear and logical, our wording eloquent, and our convictions solid, the strength of our arguments will carry the day" (Block, 2011, p. 21), but just as organizational problems are often both technical (e.g., the strategy is unclear, process delays cause quality problems) and personal (e.g., employees lack motivation), a client's reaction to feedback is often both rational and emotional. No matter how good the data collection and thematic analysis, an emotional response is likely. Resistance is a reaction to the emotions being brought up by uncertainty and fear. As we have seen, however, resistance is not always negative. It may also be a healthy coping and protective mechanism, as change can threaten the status quo and the ability for the organization to achieve its objectives (Gallagher, Joseph, & Park, 2002). Recognizing resistance is an important skill, and the ability to work with it is an even more advanced skill.

A comprehensive description of client resistance is presented by Block (2011), who describes the following 14 ways that it may be expressed by clients:

1. *Give me more detail.* The client continually asks for more data, more descriptions, and more information. Even when presented with the extra facts, it is not enough and even more is desired.
2. *Flood you with detail.* The client spends most of the meeting talking, providing history, background, and commentary on not only the immediate situation but tangential issues, too.
3. *Time.* Resistance is expressed as a complaint about not having enough time to complete the project, to gather data, to meet to discuss the diagnosis and feedback, or to plan the intervention.
4. *Impracticality.* The client complains that the solutions are not practical or feasible in this group, this division, this company, this industry, and so on. This may be expressed as a complaint about what works in "theory" versus what will work "here."
5. *I'm not surprised.* The client accepts the feedback and diagnosis with agreement, nodding that it makes perfect sense. "Of course that is what is happening; it is what I knew all along," the client seems to be saying, avoiding the discomfort that can arise by being confronted with new information.
6. *Attack.* Direct attack is a clear form of resistance, when the client expresses anger, frustration, and irritation through a raised voice and angry words. It is among the easiest to recognize because it is the most explicit.
7. *Confusion.* Much like a desire for more information, the client wants another explanation, expressed in a different way. Then this explanation seems unclear and another is requested.
8. *Silence.* The client remains silent during the entire presentation, and the consultant may be tempted to keep pressing forward until the client speaks up. If confronted, the client may say that the presentation is "fine" or "good," or that "nothing occurs to me to say at the moment, but keep going."

9. *Intellectualizing.* The client asks about underlying theory, perhaps desiring models or articles that apply to this situation. Instead of planning or discussing action, the client prefers to philosophize about the organization and its theoretical patterns.
10. *Moralizing.* The client wants to blame others, often as a group, stating what they should be doing or what they do not understand. Moralizing shifts the focus away from the client's own actions and sets up a hierarchical and noncooperative situation.
11. *Compliance.* Compliance with the consultant's proposal may be the most challenging for a consultant to see. After all, it is validating to work with a willing client who apparently sees the value in the change agent's proposed solutions. Underneath the agreement, however, lie doubts and reservations. When the time comes to take action, the client finds a reason to delay. If no doubts are expressed and everything seems perfect, the client may be compliant on the surface, but simmering underneath.
12. *Methodology.* As Block (2011) puts it, "questions about method represent legitimate needs for information for the first ten minutes" (p. 136). Beyond that, a barrage of methods questions may represent an attempt to invalidate the feedback and avoid taking action.
13. *Flight into health.* When the time comes to accept the feedback and take action as a result of it, the issue that the client noted in the first meeting has mysteriously vanished. It becomes easier to ignore the problem or change one's opinion of it than it is to take a risk in trying to address it.
14. *Pressing for solutions.* The client expresses frustration at any additional explanation about the problem, where it came from, who is involved, what problems underlie the presenting problem, and so on, pressing the practitioner to get to the point where solutions are described. As we have already learned, however, clients who do not understand the problem are less likely to solve it effectively.

Each of these expressions of resistance may at its heart be a desire to avoid, downplay, redirect, invalidate, or delay internalization of the feedback and taking action. If it were expressed directly, it could be understood and discussed, but when it is indirect and covert, it looks like a different conversation. The change agent who addresses the surface conversation (perhaps responding as requested with additional data or solutions) but who does not address the underlying concerns will be surprised later at the client's subtle delays to taking action.

Many change agents approach a feedback meeting bracing themselves for resistance but secretly hoping that it is never expressed, desiring to meet with a client who enthusiastically embraces the feedback and looks forward to the opportunity to take action. When that does not happen, they may leave despondent and look at their own presentation or action for clues about what they did wrong. They lose hope themselves that change is possible and begin to wonder whether this was a project they should have taken. Alternatively, they may decide that their own work was flawless, blame the client for not being more open to change, and begin to neglect the project.

A more effective route is to realize that resistance is a natural and expected part of the OD process and to learn how to find words that aid the client in describing what they are resisting. The best prepared consultants will learn how to recognize the forms of resistance that Block describes and to learn what questions or statements will best help the client to express the resistance more authentically. Asking the compliant client "What reservations or concerns do you have about these results?" can make it acceptable to express those

concerns if the client did not feel comfortable stating them earlier. To the client who expresses numerous concerns about methodology: “You seem to have a number of concerns about the methods by which I found these themes. Is there something in the data that is making you uncomfortable?” It can be challenging for many change agents to ask such a direct question, but it can also help to diffuse tension by allowing it to be expressed and addressed honestly. Consider looking back at each of Block’s 14 kinds of resistance and deciding what you would do if confronted with a client who demonstrated it.

The client may not be resisting when he or she refuses to continue with the project. A direct and honest statement of reluctance to continue with a project is an acceptable conclusion to a feedback meeting, however unfortunate it may feel for the change agent. The client may genuinely understand the data but choose to take no action. Perhaps the next step is not clear or the organization’s political environment makes it personally risky for the client to take action. That is not an indictment of the practitioner’s process, but it is a conscious choice on the client’s part, and it is not a form of resistance (Block, 2011). The practitioner can be confident that the right data were presented and fed back, and the client exercised the right to conclude the engagement.

## Ethical Issues With Diagnosis and Giving Feedback

The diagnosis and feedback phases of the organization development process provide a number of potential ethical dilemmas for the change agent. First among them is the possibility of using data in the feedback meeting in a manner that violates the anonymity of the participants. A client may desire to know which quote came from which interviewee, or more subtly, whether it was from the morning shift or the evening shift, or whether it was from a long-tenured employee or a new one. The client may want to read all comments verbatim rather than a subset or a summary of them. Each of these requests presents an ethical dilemma for the consultant who would like to make the data known in order for the client to appropriately interpret and act upon the information but who also owes anonymity to the participants.

In the data analysis phase, the practitioner faces the dilemma of interpreting data in a way that genuinely reflects the data, not the practitioner's own choices of issues or concerns. The consultant may be tempted to highlight, omit, or distort particular points in the data. This can be especially true for internal consultants who may have a personal stake in what data the client sees and chooses to address (White & Wooten, 1983).

In the feedback meeting, the greatest ethical dilemma occurs when the consultant chooses to collude with the client by avoiding or minimizing difficult feedback. This kind of dilemma means that "objectivity is lost. This can occur through assimilation of the change agent into the organizational culture of the client system" (White & Wooten, 1985, p. 149). Most consultants do not desire to intentionally cause personal hurt or to inflict emotional distress on their clients. When they discover through the data gathering process that organizational members find their manager incompetent or aloof, the consultant may be reluctant to address it for fear of the manager's emotional response. It is true that the change agent can face some challenging conversations, but as Block (2011) writes, "Clients have a right to all the information that you have collected" (p. 220).

## Summary

The diagnosis and feedback phases translate the volume of data gathered into meaningful insights that expand the client's understanding of the presenting problem and feed it back in ways that help the client to take action. In the diagnosis phase, the change agent uses deductive, inductive, and/or statistical techniques to sort and interpret data. Deductive techniques commonly involve models that help the consultant to organize the data using predetermined category labels. Inductive analysis techniques use the data to create categories not previously defined. Both are common techniques and have different advantages and disadvantages. Armed with a set of key themes from the data, the change agent selects among them which to share with the client. Some data will be more useful and energizing to the client than others. The most energizing data will be relevant, issues that the client can influence, descriptive, selective, sufficient, and specific. In a carefully thought-out feedback meeting, these themes are shared with the client. The feedback meeting is an opportunity to return to the client's initial presenting problem and to share what the data say about any underlying issues or problems that may expand the client's views. This can be a difficult conversation in which the client may express resistance to the data or to acting on the information, and the best response to an expression of resistance is for the change agent to understand what is being expressed at a deeper level and to learn how to bring out the client's genuine underlying concerns. Consultants act ethically in the diagnosis and feedback stages when they use the data ethically and bring up the issues from the data, distortion-free, avoiding collusion or omissions of difficult problems.

In the case study that follows, you will have the opportunity to analyze data, to choose key themes, and to structure a client feedback meeting in which you would present the feedback.

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## Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever received difficult or painful feedback? How was it presented? How did the presentation of the feedback affect your understanding and internalization of it?
2. Have you ever had to deliver difficult feedback to a friend, family member, or coworker? How did you do it? How was it received? What, if anything, would you do differently if you did it again? Based on your reflections about these two feedback situations, what lessons would you apply to an OD situation where you might have to give difficult feedback to a client?
3. Look back at the forms of resistance mentioned in this chapter. Can you think of any others that you have felt or experienced? Choose one of the forms of resistance and formulate a response that you could say if you encountered it.

## For Further Reading

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- Harrison, M. I., & Shirom, A. (1999). *Organizational diagnosis and assessment: Bridging theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
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## Exercise: Feedback and Resistance

The client is the CEO of a luxury hotel who is eager to earn a five-star rating for the hotel this year. She contacted you as the OD practitioner to better understand the day-to-day perspective of the staff in order to implement programs and practices to enhance the hotel's customer service and quality. Imagine that the following data come from the summary of seven focus groups conducted with the staff. A total of 72 employees participated in the groups, which were organized into homogeneous categories: (1) housekeeping; (2) front desk, reception, and concierge staff; (3) kitchen and restaurant staff; (4) conferences and events; (5) maintenance and facilities; (6) reservations; and (7) department management.

*Employees believe that greater coordination is needed between departments.*

- "In the kitchen we do not always have enough notice of last-minute requests coming from special events."
- "The front desk staff never keep up with special rates we offer in reservations. We get complaints that the guests are getting two different answers when they call about group rates."
- "Sometimes maintenance is not following up on the work orders we put in from housekeeping."

*Employees in several departments noted that they were short on staff, compromising their ability to spend necessary time doing a quality job.*

- "In maintenance we've lost three groundskeepers this year that haven't been replaced."
- "Housekeeping has had to cut back on cleaning common areas in favor of time spent in guest rooms."

*Training was mentioned as an issue in several departments.*

- "We need regular training or at least updates in our staff meetings. The reservation system has become very complicated and it doesn't seem like we ever find out about the changes before they are forced on us."
- "The maintenance people need more customer service training. At the front desk we are always getting complaints about rude maintenance staff."

## Part I: Feedback Meeting

1. Pair up with a classmate. One of you will play the role of the OD practitioner and the other will be the client. Present the data to the client in a feedback meeting. The client should ask questions, react, or resist as you wish.
2. Discuss the exercise. How did the client respond to the feedback? Did you each accomplish what you had hoped to accomplish? How did it feel to hear the feedback from the consultant? Knowing what you know about the data above, do you feel you heard what should have been presented?
3. How well did the feedback (a) describe rather than evaluate the behavior, (b) give specific instances rather than generalities where possible, (c) balance positive and negative feedback, (d) help rather than punish, (e) address behaviors the recipient can control, (f) stay true to the data and avoid collusion, and (g) motivate action?

## Part II: Client Reaction

Imagine that a week has passed, and the client sends the following e-mail to the OD practitioner:

I have been thinking about the data you presented to me last week, and I have come to several conclusions. Before I take any action I believe you need to clarify the data. First of all, the department managers have had the authority to hire the additional staff as they wish, and they have been dragging their heels on hiring. I am not the one who has kept facilities from hiring additional groundskeepers. Second, it has always been part of our process for the reservations staff to keep the front desk informed about rate changes, not the other way around, so the point about coordination between those two departments is frustrating because these mistakes are not the front desk's fault. Third, I have never heard that guests have complained about rude maintenance staff, so I do not understand where this point is coming from. We regularly ask guests to complete surveys and I have not heard this point before. I would like to meet with you again to discuss these points.

Discuss the following questions with a classmate:

1. What is your initial feeling about this e-mail? Why?
  2. Would you call this client resistant? Why or why not? Can you connect her response to any of the forms of resistance described in [Chapter 8](#)?
  3. How might you respond to the client when you have the opportunity to meet with her again?
-

## Case Study 3: Sorting Through the Data From Logan Elementary School

The following data are quotes taken from interviews of parents, faculty, and staff of an elementary school by request of the school's principal, Nancy:

1. Organize these data to present to Nancy. Notice demographic details such as grade level, interviewee role, and tenure.
2. Try organizing the data a different way. Did you notice anything different from the first time you analyzed the data? Which method do you think was more effective?
3. How would you structure the feedback meeting with Nancy? Which themes would you present and why?

Logan Elementary School is a suburban elementary school in a middle-class district in the southwestern United States with six grade levels. It is a large school campus with five wings, each with six to eight classrooms. Grades 1–3 (lower grades) are located in wings A and B, while Grades 4–6 (upper grades) are located in wings C, D, and E. The school was built in the late 1980s, though it was recently painted in bright colors, showcasing three elaborate murals, with funds raised from the Parents Association.

You have been called in as the organization development practitioner to help the principal better develop relationships among the school's faculty and staff. There are 38 faculty members, eight staff members, and a part-time librarian at the school. The principal, Nancy Mestas, 2 years into her role at this school, wants to improve relationships among faculty and staff, build consistency in approach among teachers at each grade level, and improve the relationship between the school and the community. She has made several dramatic changes over the past year.

You agreed to conduct interviews of staff members, faculty members, and parents over the course of 1 week to better understand the issues facing the school. With interviewees, you agreed that all interviews would be documented anonymously and data would be shared primarily in summary form, with quotes shared only when a single individual could not be identified. You are scheduled to meet with Nancy next week to present the data and to hold a feedback meeting.

## Monday

“Nancy’s been just great with the kids. A couple of times she’s joined our recess or physical education outdoor activities to cheer them on as they play kickball. They call her ‘Miss Nancy.’ I’ve never seen the kids act that way with a principal before.” (Teacher, Grade 5)

“I know Nancy wants us all to have a consistent set of books and materials, but that’s just not the way I’ve always worked at this school. I’ve been here for 9 years and I’ve always been able to choose my own books. Nancy needs to understand that that’s part of the freedom we have in the classroom.” (Teacher, Grade 3)

“Faculty meetings are generally productive. It is a good opportunity to meet with other teachers and release the stress of the day.” (Teacher, Grade 5)

“Nancy could do a better job of equalizing participation in the faculty meetings.” (Teacher, Grade 4)

“The first open house for parents last year was a nice idea. Same thing for the monthly bulletin.” (Parent, Grade-6 child)

“Nancy’s style has been very easy to work with. She’s very accommodating and approachable.” (Staff member, 3 years’ tenure)

“When she asked Jaime to pick the Grade 3 reading book, the rest of us weren’t consulted. I really felt that was unfair, and Nancy seemed to ignore our complaints. I know she wants consistency, but there’s a better way to handle that.” (Teacher, Grade 3)

“Nancy gives us a lot of support. She has been at every one of our grade-level meetings and has given us a lot of resources from her days as a fifth-grade teacher. I think she understands the challenges we’re faced with.” (Teacher, Grade 5)

“Nancy has been very supportive of the staff.” (Staff member, 2 years’ tenure)

## Tuesday

“The district’s new grade standards have been very frustrating. We were notified just a few weeks before the school year began—didn’t Nancy know about this?—and we had to scramble to meet the new expectations. I basically had 2 weeks to redo my entire plan for September and October. Nancy didn’t seem to have much sympathy. She just said, ‘We all have to be flexible.’” (Teacher, Grade 2)

“Faculty meetings never seem to get around to any of the topics that I’m concerned about. They’re run in a rigid and inflexible manner and we can never bring up any new topics unless we’ve reserved time on the agenda 2 days in advance. Sometimes things just come up and you need to have them addressed.” (Teacher, grade unknown)

“I’ve been impressed by some of the changes that I’ve seen over the past year. I really like the new monthly bulletin for parents. It helps me know what Sarah is doing at school.” (Parent, Grade-5 child)

“The addition of voice mail has been a helpful communication mechanism to be able to contact the teachers whenever I have a question about my son’s homework.” (Parent, Grade-2 child)

“I don’t feel that Nancy has been accessible to me. I have tried several times to reach her to share my concerns regarding our textbook selection and she has been too busy to meet with me.” (Teacher, Grade 3)

“Working with Nancy in the office has been excellent. It’s been a huge improvement over the previous principal.” (Staff member, 5 years’ tenure)

“The upper-grade teachers seem to get most of the attention. We hardly ever see Nancy in our wing of the school.” (Teacher, Grade 1)

“One thing is clear—Nancy has her favorites.” (Teacher, Grade 3)



## Wednesday

“It’s much easier to know what’s going on at the school than it used to be. Things like the parents bulletin each month have been a great resource.” (Parent, Grade-4 child)

“The kids love it when Nancy comes to read to them in my classroom. She has been very accessible to me and to our class.” (Teacher, Grade 5)

“My working relationship with Nancy is good. I have a lot of experience at this school and I think she respects that. My only concern is that sometimes she tends to forget to notify us of some changes (like the lunch schedule last week) and it causes some problems.” (Staff member, 8 years’ tenure)

“I think that Nancy should have been open with us regarding the reading textbook issue.” (Teacher, Grade 3)

“I’m not sure how frequently Nancy interacts with the superintendent or anyone at the district office, but I think it would help if she would build that relationship. We used to have a lot of credibility with the district because our students have been very successful and it would help us in the past when it came to budget time.” (Teacher, Grade 4)

“I wish the district had given us some additional funding to deal with the new math standards for our school.” (Teacher, Grade 2)

“There are times I think, ‘Nancy who?’ Except for faculty meetings and memos, I don’t think she knows that I even teach here.” (Teacher, Grade 2)

## Thursday

“As the librarian, I’m only here a few days per week, but I’ve really appreciated Nancy’s efforts to include me in the faculty meetings and treat me like a full-time member of the staff.” (Staff member, 4 years’ tenure)

“Our faculty meetings are tense and awkward. Only about half of the group participates. I don’t generally get a lot out of them.” (Teacher, Grade 3)

“I think Nancy is generally doing a good job, though I think she could have fought the district more on the new standards and getting us some additional funds.” (Teacher, grade unknown)

“Nancy redirected our arts funds to the Grade 6 teachers this year, so I’m not able to do my spring painting activity like I have done for the past 6 years. I don’t think that was right.” (Teacher, Grade 2)

“Nancy’s really approachable and sympathetic to our concerns. It’s nice to have her support.” (Teacher, Grade 6)

“I feel that the way that Nancy assigned teachers this year was unfair. I indicated my preference and that was not taken into account. I have never taught a combination class before and it has been a lot of additional work with very little support.” (Teacher, Grade 2/3 combination)

“I had the opportunity to meet with the principal and my son’s teacher during the first open house. I haven’t used the voice mail feature but I do tend to read the monthly bulletins.” (Parent, Grade-1 child)

## Friday

“Faculty meetings are well run and structured. I don’t think everyone participates equally, unfortunately. Nancy sends around an agenda a few days before the meeting, which works well, and I know what to expect and prepare for.” (Teacher, Grade 6)

“If there’s one complaint I have, it’s the budget. We can’t even afford construction paper! Everything we’re doing is to support the new curriculum standards, and it’s wiped out any additional funding for field trips or other projects.” (Teacher, Grade 5)

“I have to sympathize with Nancy. The budget was cut at the same time as we had entirely new requirements to meet from the district, and it’s been impossible. I wish she were more aggressive in pushing the district.” (Teacher, Grade 1)

“I have had a few opportunities to meet one-on-one with the principal because of my daughter and I have found her very approachable.” (Parent, Grade-2 child)

“I left a voice mail for Kelly’s teacher a few days ago, but I haven’t heard back. I’m not sure how useful that is.” (Parent, Grade-3 child)

“We have occasionally seen the quarterly parents bulletin that the teacher sends home. It could be more frequent.” (Parent, Grade-3 child)

“Nancy has high standards and is demanding, which makes the staff perform at a very high level. At times I think she could include us in some of the communications that are going to all of the teachers so we know what’s going on, too.” (Staff member, 3 years’ tenure)

## Chapter 9 An Introduction to Interventions

The UK-based client was one of three leading companies in a specialized global market. The past several years had seen a great deal of change in the company's structure and culture that had led to greater market share and faster cycle times to market. External organization development consultants were called in to help the senior management team through a strategic planning workshop, which had not been done for the past 2 years, and which was increasingly becoming necessary given the company's expectations about future growth. A workshop was planned to discuss the company strategy, to assess implications for internal corporate culture, and to develop the skills and capabilities of the senior team. The consultants first conducted individual interviews with the senior team and believed that the team was entirely committed to the workshop's goals and objectives. While they had discussed these objectives with each individual, however, they had never discussed them with the team together.

At the workshop, the consultants noticed a sudden, marked decline in the participants' levels of enthusiasm and energy for the organizational culture and team issues they had agreed to address. Two dominant members refused to address the previously agreed upon topics of team-building and culture issues. A coalition of the managing director and production director had become evident, and the consultants realized that team members were reluctant to engage in conflict or confront these two forceful teammates. Not only was the strategic planning work the only remaining acceptable topic to the participants, but the company's senior leader now monopolized the discussion, dictating the outcomes. A month after the workshop, the consultants again stressed the need to work on culture and team dynamics in addition to strategy, but the team resisted. The consultants, surprised by the political environment experienced during the intervention that presented a major obstacle to change, realized that the long-term objectives of the engagement had not been achieved (Beeby & Simpson, 1998).

- Was this team ready for change? Why or why not?
- Why did this intervention fail? What factors do you think lead to a successful intervention?

The impatient manager or change agent will have turned to this chapter after reading the table of contents and will want to quickly skim a list of diagnoses and intervention types and choose one to get on with implementing a solution. After all, the intervention stage is explicitly action and solution oriented.

Unfortunately, this quick-to-act mentality is too often the case and often results in unsuccessful change. Most organization development (OD) practitioners rightly consider the intervention to be the heart of the consulting engagement and the point at which change usually becomes the overt objective. At the same time, as we have discussed, it is only after the data are collected, discussed, interpreted, and internalized that the client and change agent can be confident that they are choosing the right intervention for the circumstances. It is only when the diagnosis is agreed upon that the natural next step is to answer the question "What should we do about it?" Deciding what to do can be enough of a challenge, but figuring out how to do it well can be even more difficult, as a number of environmental, organizational, and interpersonal factors can present obstacles to an effective intervention.

Yet as we have hinted, intervening has already occurred well before an intervention strategy has been discussed, planned, or implemented. That is, for the change agent, "Everything you do is an intervention" (Schein, 1999, p. 17). In fact, an intervention can be as little as a single question. One internal consultant tells a story of working with a project team that had the responsibility of redefining procurement processes. As the team presented its work to a larger group, the consultant asked a clarifying question. After the employee presenting the process answered the question, another employee spoke out to contradict the presenter, saying that the group had agreed on something different. A lively conversation ensued, and everyone realized that

clearly the group had not yet come to agreement.

The change agent can also intervene during the data gathering process by asking questions in an interview or focus group, encouraging people to talk explicitly about situations they may not have been consciously aware of. The feedback meeting intervenes by providing information that may be new or may confirm the client's current knowledge. Even the change agent's entry into the system communicates to organizational members that the problem is deserving of an intervention. But it is the intervention stage itself that is arguably the most formal and structured opportunity for organizational change.

In this chapter and the next four, we will discuss many of the most prevalent interventions in use by OD practitioners. In this chapter, we will address why interventions succeed and fail, and examine the consequences of managing an intervention that does not succeed. We will also discuss what factors practitioners consider as they select the right intervention strategy, matched to the data and diagnosis, and how they can structure the intervention activity to maximize the likelihood that it will be successful. Formal studies are not plentiful on the subject, but there are several lessons that practitioners have learned and shared from their experiences about how to select, plan, and structure interventions for success, regardless of the target of the intervention.

In the chapters following this introduction to interventions, we will discuss different kinds of interventions. Interventions can be focused on individuals, teams, multiple groups and teams, the whole organization, and multiple organizations, and they include a wide variety of activities that range from organization design to team building, mentoring, and coaching.

## Interventions Defined

Argyris (1970) writes that “to intervene is to enter into an ongoing system of relationships, to come between or among persons, groups, or objects for the purpose of helping them” (p. 15). There are three important points to stress about this definition.

First, the system is ongoing; that is, an intervention enters into the ordinary and continuous stream of organizational life, and as such, it is influenced by all of the complexities inherent in organizations, such as politics, organizational goals and workload, environmental constraints, interpersonal relationships, past history, and more. Because the intervention does not occur in a vacuum, the change agent must be conscious of the relationship between the intervention and the organizational context.

Second, interventions “come between” or deliberately interrupt existing processes, thinking, people, groups, and relationships. Because they often try to unsettle current practices, interventions can be uncomfortable enough that people may not be ready to change and will resist the intervention. Understanding readiness to change is an important part of intervention planning, which we will discuss later in this chapter.

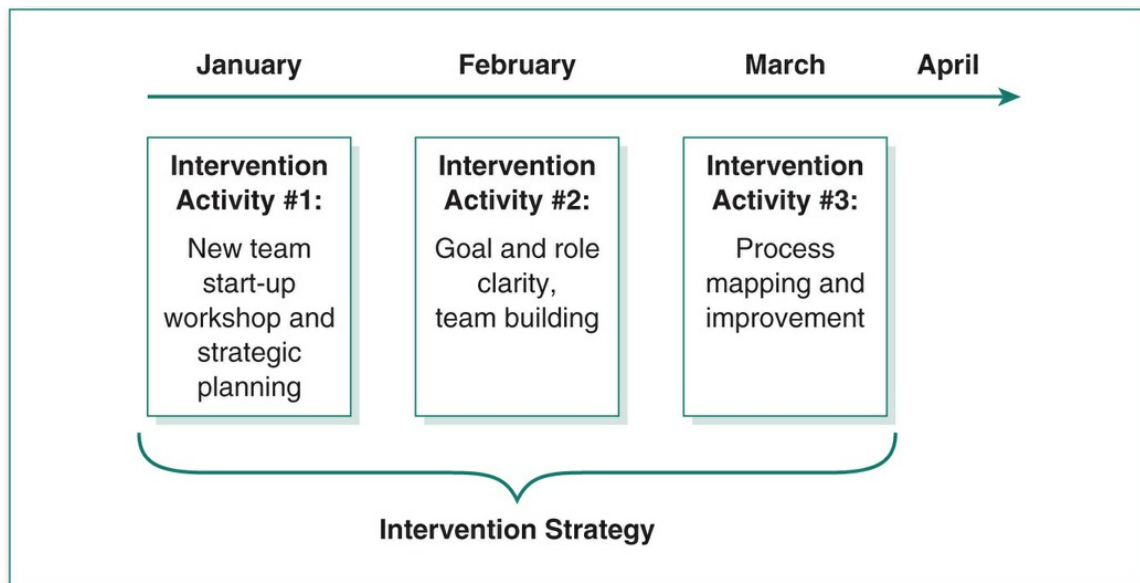
Third, the objective of interventions is to help or to improve the effectiveness of organizations, groups, teams, and individuals. Solving problems, improving relationships, clarifying roles or goals, and building skills are all worthy and common objectives of interventions. Improperly selected and poorly defined and managed interventions do not help, and they can actually hurt.

Interventions consist of two interrelated activities: first, action planning, or devising an appropriate intervention strategy to address the organization’s problem(s), and second, implementing the chosen intervention(s) by structuring them to be the most appropriate for the given individual, team, or organization. An intervention can be as small as a single meeting, event, or workshop, or it can be a series of events that help a group or organization change in progressive steps. We refer to the latter as an *intervention strategy* and the former as *intervention activities* or *events*.

An intervention strategy may consist of a number of different events, as may occur in the example that opened this chapter, where consultants proposed strategic planning, executive team building, and cultural change interventions. A process redesign intervention may also include individual skill building and management coaching. For example, [Figure 9.1](#) lists an intervention for a new finance team, with the overall objective being the rapid start-up of a healthy, well-functioning team. The intervention strategy consists of three activities to follow each other in sequence with a 3- to 4-week gap between them. The first activity would be to conduct a team start-up workshop and to discuss the group’s strategic plan. The second, to occur a few weeks later, would have the group discuss goals, clarify roles, and continue to build team relationships. In the third activity, again to occur a few weeks later, when the group has worked together for 2 months, the group would map its processes and discuss ways to improve them. While each of the individual events is an intervention (with goals for each individual workshop), they are combined and sequenced into a deliberate and coherent strategy with its own overall objective.

As clients and organizations are different, so too are the interventions that are applied in each case. While there are some standard approaches and ways of conducting interventions, no two applications of an intervention are exactly alike. Each may be adapted or changed somewhat, depending on the client or circumstances. Interventions may function differently in different organizations, so flexibility in the application of any intervention is a necessary skill for the change agent. Depending on the organizational structure, processes, age, technology, and cultural factors such as organizational members' tolerance for ambiguity or flexibility, what has worked for one group may not work for another (Meglino & Mobley, 1977).

**Figure 9.1** An Example of an Intervention Strategy With Three Intervention Activities



## Why Interventions Fail

Organizational change interventions of the type proposed by many organization development practitioners are implemented in a challenging environment today in which many members may be cynical about change. Many companies choose to implement “fad” programs they have read about in the popular press or heard about from colleagues in other organizations. They start up initiatives such as Total Quality Management, empowerment, or reengineering programs, only to see them result in little or no change, and then they give up on the program (Beer & Eisenstat, 1996; Hedge & Pulakos, 2002a). Such programs are begun and abandoned with relative frequency, so that most people likely have more practice and experience with unsuccessful interventions than successful ones.

This environment raises the bar for most OD interventions today and puts additional pressure on the practitioner to implement successful programs. Conrad Jackson and Michael Manning (1992) write,

No matter how well consultants sell their services, and no matter how pure their motives and insightful their diagnoses, unless interventions are well-conceived, skillfully facilitated, and carried out with client commitment, the intended changes in the client system will not be likely to occur.  
(p. 5)

Indeed, interventions fail to achieve their desired objectives and result in lasting organizational change for a number of reasons (see [Table 9.1](#)), including the following:

1. *The intervention tried to solve the wrong problem.* Stories abound of organizations that sent all managers to training only to realize too late that the real problem was an ineffective performance management process. Or change agents may be called in to conduct team-building interventions when the real problem was the manager’s ineffective leadership. Solving the wrong problem is often a result of a poor (or nonexistent) data gathering and diagnostic process. Consultants who consent to a client’s definition of the problem may conduct an intervention resulting in little or no change because the client had a limited view of the problem and the consultant failed to investigate further. As Weisbord (1976) puts it in relation to the Six-Box Model, interventions solve the wrong problem when “the intervention deals with the wrong (less salient) blip on the radar screen” (p. 445). Many managers choose to terminate an underperforming employee, thinking that the problem belongs to a single individual, only to find that the next person in the job is equally unsuccessful. They blame the person rather than examine the systemic problems that contribute to poor performance. Often when we leap to conclusions without proper data, we solve the wrong problem.
2. *The wrong intervention was selected.* In other words, multiple interventions were possible, and the problem was the right one to address, but the primary activity selected did not have the most relevance for the circumstances. Perhaps team building may have been an appropriate intervention, but a poorly designed process had more influence on customer satisfaction and should have been the initial target for



an intervention. Perhaps the intervention began at the senior management level, when training of the frontline salespeople would have had a greater impact. Often change agents and clients are concerned with implementing an intervention effectively and do not necessarily stop to examine whether the right intervention was chosen in the first place.

**Table 9.1** Why Interventions Fail

1. Wrong problem
2. Wrong intervention
3. Unclear or overambitious goals
4. Implementing an event rather than a program
5. Not enough time devoted
6. Poorly designed intervention
7. Unskilled change agent
8. Ownership not transferred to client
9. Resistance to change
10. Lack of readiness for change

3. *Goals were ambiguous, unclear, or too lofty.* The outcomes of the intervention were not clearly articulated or were not possible to achieve through a certain intervention event. The client may have unrealistic expectations that sales would double, customer complaints would be cut in half, or employee turnover would stop entirely.
4. *The intervention was undertaken as an event rather than as a program of activities with multiple targets for change.* Many organizational problems require working at multiple times and levels. For example, to increase the pace of a software development process, there may need to be discussions about providing new tools, software engineers may need to learn how to work differently to solve problems, and managers may need new ways of managing performance and measuring success. A single workshop on only one of these topics is unlikely to produce a long-term change. In addition, if the intervention is considered to be an event rather than a long-term effort, often little follow-up activity occurs and organizational members quickly return to former habits and practices. Finally, interventions undertaken as events may not take the larger organizational context into consideration, so that politics, other team members, the needs of other important and relevant stakeholders, and more will force people back into old routines (Massarik & Pei-Carpenter, 2002).
5. *Not enough time was devoted to change.* Closely related to the previous example, clients or change agents may not devote enough time to making the intervention successful. They may give up too quickly or expect too much too soon.
6. *The intervention was poorly designed to reach the specified goals.* There are a number of important design criteria for successful interventions, including everything from the invitation, the agenda, and the

participants to the room setup. Perhaps the attendees did not include the right participants who had the most knowledge or responsibility for making the change occur.

7. *The change agent was not skilled at implementing the intervention.* Perhaps the practitioner had never led a certain intervention before or was a poor facilitator. Dyer (1981) finds that “there seems to be good evidence that one factor in change failure is the effect of change agents trying actions they are not prepared to handle” (p. 65).
8. *Responsibility for change was not transferred to the client.* Organizational members may place responsibility for the change on the change agent and not own the change themselves. When the change agent fails to transfer ownership of the change to the participants, the change does not last beyond the current engagement. When the change agent leaves, organizational members return to their previous ways.
9. *Organizational members resisted or were not committed to the intervention.* There may not have been agreement about the nature of the problem, or organizational members perceive too much loss, risk, or personal consequences to the intervention. They may have been cynical about the likelihood for change or not motivated to participate.
10. *The organization was not ready for change.* Perhaps the organization faced a chaotic time in which organizational members could not focus on or devote attention to change. Organizational members may not be ready to engage in the emotional cost of confronting an authoritarian manager, or they may consider it too risky. In addition, Nadler and Pecorella (1975) write of organizations that are overloaded: “In its enthusiasm to bring to bear as many resources as possible, an organization may contribute to a lack of coordination and integration of change efforts by having a confusing number of activities going on at the same time” (p. 365).

Last, it is important to be reminded that what counts as a “failed” intervention is a matter of perspective. A client, such as the one in the example that opens this chapter, may be pleased with an intervention that allows a team to avoid uncomfortable conflict or surface past anger and consider it a success to have escaped without discomfort. The change agent may be disappointed that these issues were not addressed, realizing that the underlying problem may never be solved as long as members refuse to engage in these important discussions. The opposite can occur as well—a client may consider an intervention to be a failure because it was difficult to achieve or because it surfaced conflict and negativity, while the practitioner may consider it a success to have exposed underlying conflict that is vital to the team’s long-term welfare.

## Consequences of Failed Interventions

If the only cost of a failed intervention was the time wasted in implementing it, that might be frustrating enough, but the costs of a failed intervention can be much higher. The consequences to the change agent include not only losing the current client engagement but developing a poor professional reputation and losing other potential clients (since previous clients will share their experience with others). Argyris (1970) states that consultants who experience failed interventions will become less likely to trust their own instincts and interpretations, and suffer more self-doubt. Organizational members who experience a failed attempt at change, for any of the above reasons, can also face the same self-doubt (e.g., *Is it possible for us to change even if we want to?*) and be less likely to trust their own interpretations (e.g., *Do we really understand our problem?*). Consider some of Argyris's other effects of a failed intervention on the change agent and how organizational members may experience them as well:

- *Increase in defensive behavior.* Change attempts may be delayed until every possible factor is taken into consideration to defend against all possible points of failure.
- *Decrease in the use of appropriate coping mechanisms.* There may be an increase in unhealthy expressions of conflict or aggressiveness.
- *Increase in psychological tiredness.* Few members have the energy to devote to another change project.
- *Decrease in tolerance for stress and ambiguity.* Participants experience an increase in frustration and cynicism, or they may become rigid, controlling, or demanding.
- *Increase in unrealistic level of aspiration.* It may be that aspirations become too high for change, or they may be aiming at an inappropriately low standard to avoid risk of failure.

Some of these effects may be visible in an organization, even before a well-meaning change agent approaches organizational members for the first time, as residual effects of previous change attempts. For organizational members in this situation, failure becomes a cycle, a self-fulfilling prophecy that members can feel doomed to hopelessly repeat. Even when surrounded by it, the change agent cannot fall into this same thinking. Change agents need to maintain “confidence in [their] intervention philosophy, [an] accurate perception of stressful reality, [and] trust in [their] own experience of reality” (Argyris, 1970, p. 141). Recall the underlying values of OD—a foundational optimism that change is possible and that people, groups, and organizations are in process, not doomed in a failure cycle. A positive outcome is also an option and, fortunately, success can also become a cycle. As the pattern is broken, organizational members relearn what success feels and looks like, and they are increasingly able to make it happen again. The point is that the significance of selecting the right intervention strategy and managing it well cannot be understated.

## Considerations in Selecting the Right Intervention Strategy

How is a change agent to select the right intervention strategy and customize it to the current client when there are so many relevant factors to consider? Early in an engagement, many change agents fear that they will be unable to suggest an appropriate intervention. A more common problem is that the practitioner and client together can generate too many options and may be uncertain which of these to select. No matter how solid the diagnosis, it is not always evident which intervention is best (Dyer, 1981) as various situational elements come into consideration. In fact, selecting the right approach is more than a matter of finding the best OD technique to solve the client's problem. Gary Johns (1993) finds that the best choices of an intervention are not always the ones to be adopted, as political interests, alliances, and other contextual factors present obstacles to the selection of an intervention. A given intervention strategy will be more effective if it takes the following points into consideration:

1. *Matching the intervention to the data and diagnosis.* Perhaps the most important criterion in the selection of any intervention is what Bowers, Franklin, and Pecorella (1975) called the *principle of congruence*: "Change activities must be matched appropriately with the nature of the problems and their cases and with the nature of the organizational units under consideration" (p. 406). As discussed above, one of the biggest dangers to an effective intervention occurs when the intervention is not matched to the diagnosis and either the wrong problem is solved or the intervention is not designed to solve the agreed-upon problem. (Recall Argyris's point about the necessity of "valid information" in making a diagnosis.) This can sometimes occur when change agents determine what intervention should be implemented "without careful consideration as to whether that type of method is indeed suited for the organization's particular problems" (Kilmann & Mitroff, 1979, p. 26). This danger is echoed by Massarik and Pei-Carpenter (2002), who write that many OD practitioners "do a particular thing and that's that. They may try to apply an intervention simply because it is their specialty, without clear-cut focus in context of what is required, as long as the client buys it" (p. 109). The best lesson is that taught by Hanson and Lubin (1995), who remind us of the following:

Regardless of how attractive some of these techniques are, consultants must always ask themselves, "Is this exercise appropriate or relevant to the learning goals of this client or to the situation being addressed, or is it just one of my favorite interventions?" Remember, it is the client's needs that should be met, not the consultant's. (pp. 114–115)

Practitioners can also use one another's expertise and counsel by discussing the situation with colleagues or other outsiders to test whether a chosen intervention is indeed the most appropriate for the circumstances. One test is that a given intervention is likely to be well matched to the diagnosis if it results in a high "probability that the problem will be solved with the least probable recurrence" (Argyris, 1970, p. 170).

2. *Considering client readiness for change.* Readiness refers to the involvement, willingness, energy, time,

capability, and motivation of the organization to change (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; McLachlin, 1999). If the client is not ready or willing to change, then the consulting engagement's goals tend to belong to the change agent, not the client, and any intervention is unlikely to be successful. If a client is willing to change in a certain direction and not another, or has a preference of one intervention over another (both choices being equal otherwise), many consultants suggest starting where the client has energy (Block, 2011; Dyer, 1981; R. Harrison, 1970; Schein, 1999). Roger Harrison (1970) writes that many consultants overemphasize "the overcoming of resistance to change and have underemphasized the importance of enlisting in the service of change the energies and resources which the client can consciously direct and willingly devote to problem solving" (p. 199).

When readiness is a problem of motivation or willingness to change, Armenakis et al. (1993) write that change agents can increase the organization's readiness for change through three influence strategies:

- a. Persuasive communications, both orally and in writing, in which leaders can emphasize the urgency and need for change
- b. Participation in meetings or events related to the change, where organizational members can discover the reason for the change themselves, such as examining customer complaint reports or market share data
- c. Sharing external information to back up the internal communication with other credible sources, such as news media, reports from consulting firms, or academic research

Readiness can also concern the organization's capability and competence to change. For example, a team may not be capable of changing if a manager does not have the budget authority to purchase new tools for organizational members that are necessary. Organizational members may not have the necessary skills or competence to implement a change effectively. For example, before implementing a new supply chain design that requires employees to aggressively negotiate price breaks with suppliers, appropriate negotiation training may need to be provided.

Scholars have developed a number of instruments to help practitioners assess change readiness.

Beckhard and Harris (1987) offer a rough but instructive rating system in which various targets of interventions (e.g., individuals, teams) can be ranked as having high, medium, or low readiness and high, medium, or low capability for change. Before any intervention begins, low-readiness and low-capability-for-change situations can be addressed. More recently, Holt, Armenakis, Feild, and Harris (2007) have tested a "readiness for change" scale that assesses (1) whether organizational members see the organization as engaging in an appropriate change program, (2) whether they believe management support exists for the change, (3) whether they believe the organization is capable to be successful at the change, and (4) whether they believe the change would be advantageous to them personally.

In conclusion, the right intervention has been selected if the client, change agent, and organizational members are confident that the organization is ready and capable of implementing it to achieve change.

3. *Deciding where to intervene first.* Where to begin can be one of the most challenging questions to face:
  - Should the problem be addressed first at the frontline or with senior management?

- Should we tackle the task issues first, or should we begin with the relationship issues?
- Should we begin with a pilot project in one group or implement organizationwide from the start?
- Organizational structure or process?
- Easiest change to implement or most difficult?

Unfortunately, there is no step-by-step recipe that will address these questions, but experts advise that “if one asks questions systematically, one is likely to come up with better judgments and better choices than otherwise” (Beckhard & Harris, 1987, p. 73). Asking questions about the client’s goals, the organizational culture, motivation, and the other considerations identified in this chapter likely will help to narrow choices and select an appropriate starting point. In addition, Beckhard and Harris (1987) note that changing an established system using its established processes can be quite difficult since it can be challenging for organizational members to step outside of current practices in order to change them. They recommend the establishment of “temporary systems” such as pilot programs.

Many consultants recommend starting with task interventions over personal or relationship interventions. Roger Harrison (1970) notes that in his experience, intervening first at the level of the interpersonal relationship often makes organizational members uncomfortable, and he finds that they react with a high level of negativity. When he shifts his strategy to focus on the group’s tasks and processes, such as communication patterns, roles, decision making, meetings, and so on, the group rarely resists him and complaints about the intervention stop. “Members who exhibit hostility, passivity, and dependence when I initiate intervention at the interpersonal level may become dramatically more active, collaborative, and involved when I shift the focus to the instrumental level” (R. Harrison, 1970, p. 200). After working at the task level, the change agent may build enough trust and credibility with a client that deeper personal issues can be discussed. Schein (1999) agrees, writing that the primary task is the most direct contribution that the change agent has been asked to make. He argues that interpersonal issues should be observed and only targeted for intervention if the client specifically wants to do so. Beer (1980) argues that it is more efficient to begin with process interventions and to follow them with individual interventions, as individuals can be given an opportunity to experience a new process, which will then surface data about individual needs, such as training. Golembiewski (1979b) notes that some organizations such as the military may not be “culturally prepared” (p. 332) for the interpersonal depth of some interventions and might be better served by starting with structure, task, and policy activities. Finally, Hackman (2006) writes that “structure and context first, team dynamics later is the (approach) that I have come to favor, based on my own research and that of others showing that it can be virtually impossible to build a great team when serious structural and contextual flaws are in members’ way” (p. 124).

Beer and Eisenstat (1996) offer a somewhat different perspective. They agree that task-related interventions are more easily “sold” to organizations because they are seen as more germane by organizational members, yet they also note that “interventions that focus on harder elements of structure and systems typically do not develop the softer elements of skill, values, and leadership” (p. 599) and recommend an integrated approach. In some organizations, the task intervention may be able to

accomplish only so much without intervening in the accompanying interpersonal dynamics.

Finally, the complexity of many changes may dictate starting smaller at first. While a number of interventions may be appropriate, “there are limits, it seems, to the number of interventions that an organization can sustain and benefit from” (S. A. Mohrman, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1989, p. 150). It may be that either a smaller scope or a pilot team can build a client’s confidence that larger changes can be successful, and organizational learning from the initial activity can provide valuable insights that can help with later implementation.

4. *Considering depth of intervention.* Reddy (1994) argues that there are five levels of depth to groups:

- a. The work content
- b. Overt group issues such as communication and conflict
- c. Hidden group issues such as coalitions and power
- d. Values and beliefs
- e. The unconscious (p. 93)

The first two are at a surface level and are most easily observed, whereas the final three often lie beneath the surface. While interventions can be targeted at any of these levels, Roger Harrison (1970) argues that a change agent should intervene no deeper than necessary to achieve the client’s objective. For example, clarifying roles and building new skills are relatively surface-level interventions. An example of going deeper might be an intervention to address job satisfaction or discussions of communication patterns, expectations, or styles, or a manager’s ability to delegate. Still deeper might be interventions targeting a group’s level of openness and trust, or team members’ accountability or commitment to the success of the team. Harrison writes that the deeper the intervention,

- the less information is available, since individual emotions become involved;
- the individual as the target of the intervention becomes more likely, as compared with changes in organizational processes or structures;
- the more personal risk and uncertainty are involved;
- the more dependent individuals become on the skills of the change agent; and
- the less likely the results of the intervention are to become transferred to others.

The more the purpose of the intervention deals with surface issues (such as role clarity or process design), the less deep the intervention needs to go to address them. Deeper interventions may also be less appropriate for groups that are relatively new, meet infrequently, have a short life span, or work on technical rather than interactive tasks (Reddy, 1994).

5. *Considering sequence of activities.* When an intervention strategy consists of a number of separate activities, change agents should think about how those events are sequenced for maximum benefit. Beer (1980, p. 217) lists six considerations for how different activities should be sequenced in an overall intervention strategy:

- *Maximize diagnostic data.* Interventions that provide more data about the organization should be conducted first to allow better customization for those that follow.

- *Maximize effectiveness.* Initial interventions should build enthusiasm for a change or confidence in success so that later interventions can be more effective.
- *Maximize efficiency.* Interventions should conserve time, energy, and money to the extent possible.
- *Maximize speed.* Interventions should be structured so that they do not interrupt the client's desire for the pace of change.
- *Maximize relevance.* Interventions should be chosen so that the primary problem is addressed first.
- *Minimize psychological and organizational strain.* Early interventions should be safer and produce low anxiety.

[Table 9.2](#) summarizes these five considerations for choosing the right intervention strategy. They are guidelines; they may even contradict each other in certain situations. The best practice is to work closely with the client to determine what engagement is most appropriate for the problem and the client organization.

An additional approach to selecting the right intervention is to create a table such as [Table 9.3](#), listing the key theme from the data or the problem being experienced by the client, along with the consequences or effects of the problem, its possible cause, and a possible intervention to address that issue. Listing the possible interventions and analyzing them together with the considerations listed here may help the change agent and client logically sort through which are most or least appropriate for the situation and which may be appropriately combined into an overall intervention strategy. It may be helpful to construct a chart like [Table 9.3](#) to help a client see the possible interventions and to prioritize those that the client finds most relevant and useful for the circumstances.

**Table 9.2** Selecting the Right Intervention

1. Match the intervention to the data and diagnosis.
2. Consider client readiness for change.
3. Decide where to intervene first.
4. Consider depth of intervention.
5. Consider sequence of intervention activities.



**Table 9.3** Choosing an Intervention

<i>Problem, Issue, or Theme From Data</i>	<i>Consequences or Implication of Problem</i>	<i>Possible Cause</i>	<i>Possible Intervention</i>
Conflict between marketing and sales with regard to customer discount levels	Loss of revenue as sales gives significant discounts	Approval process for discounting is inconsistent and unclear	Intergroup intervention and process design
Sales is missing deadlines on proposals to customers	Low customer satisfaction with proposal content, missed revenue opportunities	Unclear who is responsible for getting proposal content completed	Role analysis

## Structuring and Planning Interventions for Success

Regardless of which intervention is chosen, it is important to be conscious of why and how the intervention strategy is intended to work, since “effective change is brought about by planned, integrated interventions which work consistently on a number of different behavioral and organizational targets” (Nadler & Pecorella, 1975, p. 363). Effective and long-term change is also most likely when the intervention is well structured for success. The structure of intervention activities, and how organization development practitioners plan and facilitate them, relies heavily on the foundational values on which OD is based.

Chin and Benne (1976) write of three approaches to change: The first is an *empirical-rational* approach, in which change is accomplished by persuading people that a change is necessary, providing data to support the argument, and justifying the need for change. A second approach they term *normative-reeducative*, which is based on the notion that change will occur when people change their attitudes, values, skills, and relationships, and when group norms encourage new behaviors rather than old ones. A third strategy they define as a *power-coercive* approach, based on policy, law, economic incentives or punishment, guilt, and embarrassment. OD interventions are primarily normative-reeducative approaches to change, and as such are constructed so that as participants accomplish the content work of the intervention, individuals and groups can also develop new attitudes, skills, beliefs, and values.

Three important principles on which OD interventions are structured include creating opportunities for learning, giving free choice to participate, and presenting clear and explicit outcomes.

### Creating Opportunities for Learning.

As we have said, the objective of OD is to improve organizational effectiveness, and learning and growth are central values. For interventions, this implies that they should be developed as opportunities for learning. Argyris (1970) writes that “one of the most important sets of criteria . . . is to generate choices that enhance system competence” (p. 170). In other words, the intervention not only solves the immediate problem, but it also provides organizational members with the opportunity to examine how the problem-solving process occurs so that the activity enhances their ability to solve problems like this in the future. This can occur through a number of means, such as experiential exercises and opportunities for reflective discussion on both the content and the process of the intervention. OD practitioners can also develop opportunities for low-risk experimentation and exploration so that organizational members can try out new ideas and analyze the outcomes. By participating in such experiential and reflective activities, organizational members become more conscious of their choices and patterns.

### Giving Free Choice.

Free choice implies both choice to participate in the activity and legitimate choices in directing its outcomes. “Intervention activity, no matter what its substantive interests and objectives, should be so designed and executed that the client system maintains its discreteness and autonomy” (Argyris, 1970, p. 17). The intervention should not be structured to accomplish what the change agent wants the group to do, but what

the client thinks should be accomplished in consultation with the change agent. To the extent possible, participants should be given the opportunity to attend or not to attend, free from shame or coercion. OD practitioners should avoid situations in which an unwilling client is being forced or coerced to participate in coaching sessions. Team members should not be pressured into revealing more of their personal background, history, values, or beliefs than they so desire. Leaders should not be “set up” so that they feel as though they have little choice but to accept a task force’s recommendations or risk further alienation from the team, or to be “ambushed” with a team confrontation.

Yet free choice does not necessarily mean that every part of the intervention is open for a collaborative decision. For example, organizational members participating in a process design may not have the ability to choose new technology or hire additional staff. They may need to be informed about what approvals may be necessary after they design the process. Free choice in this context implies that if the intervention is designed to develop a new process, and participants are told what the boundary conditions are for the process, the leader will not bring a predesigned process after a group has developed its own and dictate its implementation. Clients occasionally prefer to structure intervention activities so that their preferred outcome is the only seemingly reasonable solution, providing the illusion of choice. Such manipulation often results in little or no commitment to the final solution by organizational members.

### **Providing Clear and Explicit Outcomes.**

Change agents should be forthright about what the intervention activities are designed to accomplish. Effective client relationships are founded on authenticity and trust of both client and change agent. If the meeting is designed to help a manager to better understand how her leadership style affects the group, then the change agent must not trick or manipulate the manager into attending by hiding or glossing over the meeting’s purpose. If the meeting will be a confrontation between two groups that do not work well together, then attendees should be informed about that as the target of the intervention. The risks of participation should be known to participants and, to the extent they can be predicted, should be shared in advance of an intervention.

## Practicalities in Intervention Design

Everything about an intervention should be consistently directed toward its outcomes. Unfortunately, the objectives of the intervention and its design are often in conflict. The most flagrant violation of this practice occurs when, for example, a group wanting to engage in more effective collaboration is forced to sit through a 1-hour lecture from a leader on how to engage in collaboration (not modeling a very collaborative event). Instead, if collaboration is the goal, participants should be given the opportunity to practice it from the start. They can be given a small task to accomplish in groups of three, for example. This contrasts with a common start to many meetings in which the change agent and client define the agenda, give a motivational speech, and ask participants to introduce themselves by sharing their favorite vacation spots.

The room and room setup also matter to the achievement of a successful intervention. Putting people in close proximity in a circle with movable chairs is more likely to result in participation and an actively engaged group than holding a design session in an auditorium with fixed chairs (Block, 2011). Tueke (2005) observes that “most meeting rooms block participation rather than beckon it by the arrangement of the furnishings” (p. 75) by putting people in lecture-style or theater seating that does not allow participants to make eye contact easily with one another. Tueke has developed an instructive guide for facilitators that outlines how room size and layout, physical arrangement of chairs, and lighting and sound can be organized to encourage participation.

The point is that the design of the session should model what is expected out of it. If change is the goal, then each meeting has the opportunity to reinforce it through the structure of the meeting agenda and space.

## The Change Agent's Role in the Intervention

The intervention stage presents the change agent and client with another opportunity to negotiate roles. Will the change agent “be an active participant in the project or more of an outside expert/adviser?” (Stroh & Johnson, 2006, p. 139). Stroh and Johnson (2006) write that some consultants take on highly involving roles in which they essentially become “surrogate managers” (p. 139), whereas others may choose to substantially decrease involvement after their recommendations are made. While too much ownership of the change is probably inappropriate, so is too little involvement in the intervention phase, and the right level usually depends on the engagement. The client may prefer that the change agent facilitate a group strategic planning meeting so that the client can participate, or the client may prefer to take ownership of the issues and facilitate alone. In any case, being explicit about roles will help to “avoid duplication or gaps in the execution of the intervention” (Hanson & Lubin, 1995, p. 65). Among the roles that change agents take on in an intervention are the following (see Golembiewski, 1979b, 2000b), each of which can vary in the change agent's involvement:

1. *Facilitative*: Helping a client or group attain its desired outcomes by clarifying alternatives, processes, and decisions
2. *Gatekeeping*: Acting as a boundary-spanner between groups or between a supervisor and a team, negotiating between them and giving objective feedback
3. *Diagnostic*: Pointing out what has been seen, heard, or learned to enhance group or individual awareness
4. *Architectural*: Designing situations, events, and conversations so that awareness, learning, and change can occur
5. *Mobilizing*: Advocating for a particular approach or perspective

While the change agent is likely to be active during the intervention stage, eventually it may be most appropriate for the change agent's involvement to become more limited over time as the responsibility for sustaining the change will need to be transferred to the client.

## **Ethical Issues With Interventions**

The action planning and intervention stages of an organization development engagement represent arguably the highest susceptibility for ethical conflict (White & Wooten, 1983, 1985). “During this stage collusion of parties, technical ineptness, and value and goal conflict can create dilemmas resulting in inappropriate choice of change goals, targets, depth, and method due to a lack of skill, objectivity, or differing needs and orientations” (White & Wooten, 1985, p. 141). We have already discussed the importance of and considerations in selecting the right intervention. It is important to note that for many OD practitioners, selecting the right intervention rises to the status of an ethical issue. Other ethical challenges include the following possibilities:

### **Misrepresentation of the Intervention.**

Change agents may be tempted to misrepresent the time, cost, or difficulty of an intervention to please a client, or to overpromise that a given intervention will achieve certain outcomes. The change agent may also be challenged to limit the cost of an intervention to what the client can afford. The following is recommended in these situations:

The change agent would be well advised to tell the client honestly that it would be better not to start a program at all than to do something that would not be appropriate or would be too limited in scope or impact. (Dyer, 1981, p. 65)

### **Misrepresentation of the Consultant’s Skill Level.**

As we discussed earlier in this chapter, change agents may also be tempted, consciously or unconsciously, to propose and carry out interventions that are familiar and comfortable to them instead of proposing an intervention that is appropriately matched to the data. The opposite can also occur, when the most appropriate intervention is one with which the change agent has no experience. In these cases, rather than use the client as a test case, the change agent’s responsibility is to admit not having conducted such an intervention, perhaps recommending a colleague who can provide assistance.

### **Collusion With the Client.**

A common example of collusion occurs when a change agent agrees to implement an intervention even in the absence of data to support its use. Collusion can also occur when the consultant becomes a “native” part of the culture and desires to see it succeed, and this identification with the client affects the structure of a particular intervention so that it is misrepresented to organizational members or is structured to exclude certain organizational members.

### **Coercion and Manipulation of the Client or Organizational Members.**

Participants in an intervention may not be told about its purpose, or the intervention may not be structured for genuine choice to participate.



## Overview of Intervention Techniques

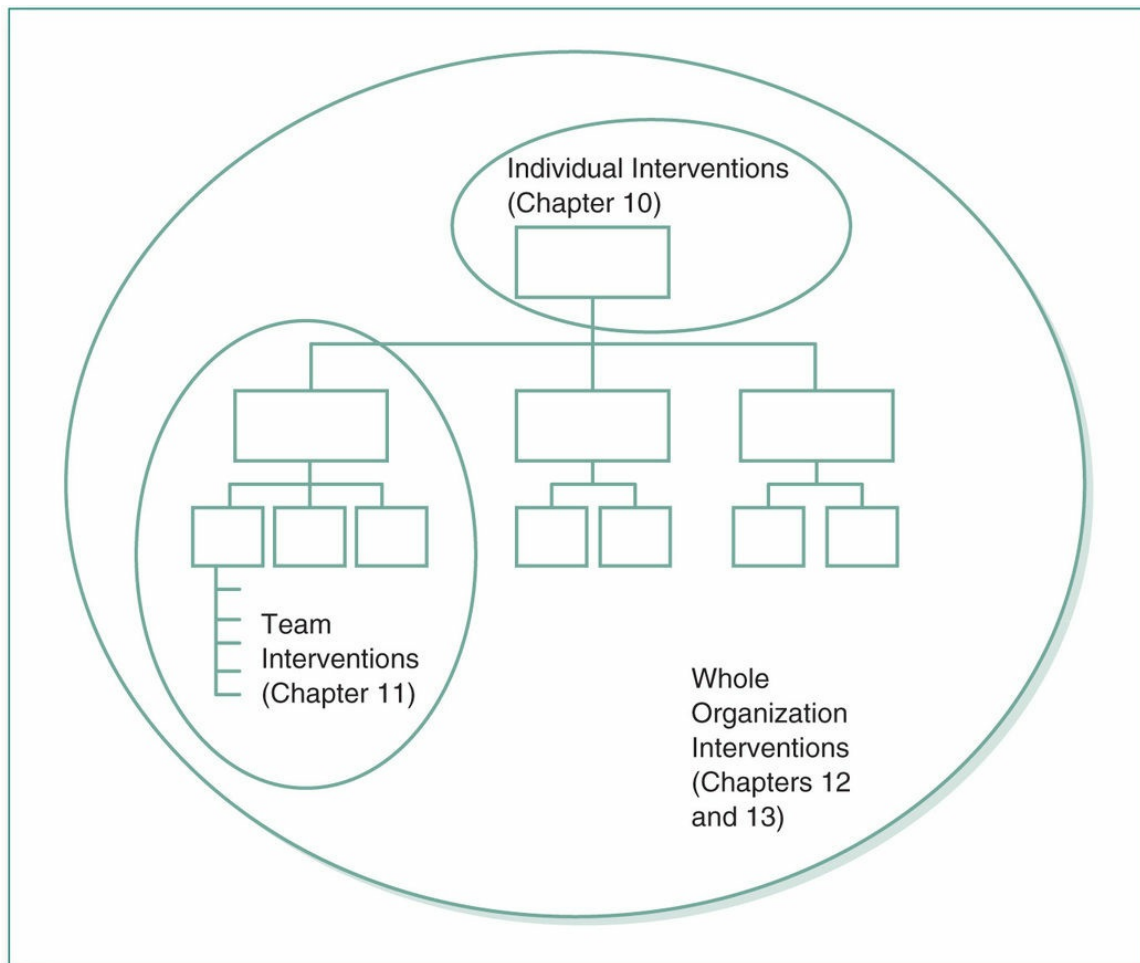
Intervention techniques differ along many dimensions. The following chapters differentiate interventions by their target audience and consider them to exist in three broad categories: those that apply to (1) individuals; (2) stand-alone groups and teams, or multiple groups and teams; and (3) whole organizations and multiple organizations.

[Figure 9.2](#) presents a generic organizational chart showing a leader, multiple managers, and individual team members and shows how the three intervention categories we discuss apply to that structure. Note that there are a number of ways that the intervention types could be applied to this chart. Individual interventions apply to any of the individuals on the chart, and the circle around the single team could also be drawn horizontally around the leadership team, for example. This point will become clearer as we explore these intervention types in subsequent chapters.

No book could possibly list or review the variety and possible adaptations of the universe of organization development interventions that have been created since the field's inception, so while we will not cover all known interventions, we will discuss those that are most commonly used today. [Table 9.4](#) summarizes those covered in the following four chapters. In addition, some of these interventions can be adapted to more than one target area (such as those used for both teams and organizations, for example), so where that occurs we will concentrate on the most common application of the intervention.

**Figure 9.2** Organization Development Intervention Types





**Table 9.4** Organization Development Interventions Described in This Book

<i>Individual Interventions</i>	<i>Team Interventions</i>	<i>Organizationwide Interventions</i>
Individual instruments and assessments	Team start-up and transition meetings	Organizational culture assessment and change
Coaching	Confrontation meetings	Organization design and structure
Mentoring	Role negotiation and role analysis	Directional interventions: strategic planning and real-time strategic change, scenario planning, and search conferences and future search
360 feedback	Work redesign	Quality interventions: reengineering, Total Quality Management, Six Sigma
Career planning and development	Workout	Interventions in mergers and acquisitions
	Appreciative inquiry	Dialogic OD interventions (including World Café and Open Space Technology)
	Intergroup/interteam interventions	Transorganization/interorganization development



## Summary

Interventions are explicitly designed to accomplish individual and organizational change. They often consist of an intervention strategy, or overall plan, which may be composed of individual intervention activities or events. Many organizational members today have become cynical about organizational change, in part due to the number of unsuccessful interventions they may have experienced. There are a number of common reasons for this, including using an intervention to solve the wrong problem, selecting an inappropriate intervention, having unclear goals and objectives, working with an unskilled change agent, and implementing change in an organization that was not ready for change. As a result, failed interventions have significant costs in time, money, and motivation of organizational members.

Choosing the right intervention involves several considerations. The intervention should be matched to the data and diagnosis. The change agent should consider the organization's readiness for change and where to intervene first. The intervention should also be at the appropriate depth, matched to the problem being solved, and the intervention strategy as a whole should consist of activities that are effectively sequenced for maximum benefit. No matter the intervention, it should be structured as an opportunity for learning, giving organizational members the opportunity to participate with choice and with clear and explicit outcomes. The intervention should be consistently structured so that everything from the invitation to the agenda to the client's initial presentation works steadily toward the established purpose of the intervention. The change agent and client should also discuss roles in advance so that the client's involvement and ownership in the intervention are established and that the change agent can take on an appropriate role in helping the client achieve the objectives of the intervention.

Finally, interventions present a new set of ethical challenges to the change agent, including the possibility of misrepresenting the intervention or one's skills, collusion with the client in choosing an inappropriate intervention, and potential misrepresentation of the intervention to organizational members.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Of the OD interventions you have participated in, which would you consider successful? What factors do you think contributed to the success of those interventions? Of those that were unsuccessful, why do you think they were unsuccessful? Can you add to this chapter's list of reasons for unsuccessful interventions based on your experiences?
2. This chapter lists a number of considerations in choosing the right intervention strategy. In your view, how might you prioritize these? What do you think are the most important considerations in choosing which interventions to implement first?
3. Look back at the potential ethical issues with interventions. Which of these do you think would be the most commonly faced, in your view? What could a practitioner do to avoid these ethical concerns?

## For Further Reading

Argyris, C. (1970). *Intervention theory and method: A behavioral science view*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

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## Chapter 10 Individual Interventions

Ann had been promoted to oversee the complex operations of a major publishing operation. In addition to a direct staff, she had managerial responsibilities for the management board of two journals and another set of staff members who worked at a different office location. After a year of working in this role, Ann's manager felt that she lacked certain management and interpersonal skills and thought that she would benefit from one-on-one sessions with a coach.

In the first session, the coach and Ann contracted for six coaching sessions, one per month. The coach and Ann determined that the objectives of the coaching engagement would be to increase Ann's skills in working with her team and to gain positive feedback about her performance from her team and her manager. In each 2- to 3-hour session, the coach used several methods to help Ann. Ann completed instruments to help her see her work preferences and how those preferences played themselves out in working with her team. Ann and her coach discussed how Ann related to and managed individual members of her team, how she made strategic decisions, and how she managed team meetings. In addition, they discussed interpersonal skills such as how Ann managed conflict, received and delivered feedback, and communicated with colleagues. The coach's role in these dialogues was to ask questions to help Ann clarify her thinking and see multiple options and possibilities, listening to and reflecting what Ann had said rather than instructing her how to act or giving directive advice.

After the six sessions were completed, Ann and her coach agreed to continue coaching as needed on a distance basis (telephone and e-mail) for another 6 months. When she looked back at her progress, Ann noticed how she had improved her working relationships with her manager, specifically with regard to how they could work more collaboratively and how Ann could provide more effective business updates. Ann's manager gave her positive feedback about improvements in Ann's management skills. Team members expressed support for Ann's management abilities, and she noticed that they now worked together in a more unified and consistent manner. Perhaps most important to Ann, the journals grew market share, turnover declined, productivity increased, and staff morale had improved (Wade, 2004).

- What is the purpose of a coach?
- What do you think makes an effective coach?

As you may recall from our discussion of the history of organization development (OD) in [Chapter 2](#), in the early years of OD the T-group and individual change were considered to be the foundation of organizational change—organizations would not change until the individuals who composed them changed. After all, organizations are not people but do comprise individuals, so at its heart, organizational change must arise first and foremost out of personal change. While that view has expanded somewhat to include team and organization-level interventions as specific areas for change, individual change through personal interventions remains an integral aspect of achieving organizational change. In this chapter, we will consider several of the ways that change agents and OD practitioners work with individuals to encourage their personal growth and development. These include administering individual assessments and instruments, coaching, mentoring, 360 feedback, and career planning and development.

Individual interventions can be extraordinarily influential to encourage personal growth, development, and change. Ultimately, however, two cautions should be noted about them.

First, as Peter Block (2008) puts it, “we have already learned that the transformation of large numbers of individuals does not result in the transformation of communities” (p. 5). Individual change can be an insufficient method for achieving organizational change because, as we have discussed, organizations comprise many processes and systems, as well as people with strong cultural values and beliefs. These systems,

processes, and beliefs can contradict and work against any individual's attempt to change. For example, an organization may administer a training program to teach employees how to be better at customer service, but such an effort will be wasted if employees lack management support or the appropriate tools to do the job. Put differently, organizations develop regular and usual practices that become institutionalized, and these can be potent forces to retain the status quo and resist any single individual's attempt to change (George & Jones, 2001). Changing individuals may be an important part of the change that an organization needs, but it is not likely to be the only change needed, since individuals work in interconnected systems. Individual interventions may need to be supplemented with team-based or organization-level interventions as part of a comprehensive intervention strategy (see [Chapter 9](#)). Individual interventions may also be needed to support a broader change effort. A leadership coaching program, for example, might be a supplement to a new organization design where leaders now manage global teams.

Second, as most of us have experienced personally, individual change is rarely successful or long-lasting if it is forced or mandated. Whether it is weight loss, quitting smoking, or changing one's communication style with coworkers, personal growth is most effective when the individual is motivated to change. In order to select interventions most appropriate for the given individual(s), an understanding of the psychology of the individual change process is useful to understand how people respond to and achieve personal change.

## Individual Change and Reactions to Change

An important part of how people think at work is through *schemas*. Schemas are the familiar cognitive concepts and beliefs that govern how we approach our lives and work environments (George & Jones, 2001). Schemas help us develop familiar patterns that aid us in interpreting what is happening to make sense of our work. We develop schemas so that that we know how to make sense of and act on a new product order received via the Internet, or how to interpret the role a new employee will take on the team. Schemas help organizational members organize not only the work itself but also how that work relates to other schemas they have developed about the organization, coworkers, the physical environment, and more. Change threatens these existing schemas and requires the development of new ones, forcing us to question what was once familiar, known, and comfortable. Whether it is a personal change that we seek (e.g., to become more effective at making and communicating difficult decisions) or change that happens to us (e.g., the company has been acquired and jobs are changing), change disrupts what is familiar. It is the discrepancy and inconsistency between existing, known schemas and new, unfamiliar ones that first prompts individual change (George & Jones, 2001). This is also the time when individuals may resist change as they first recognize the need to shed old schemas and adopt new ones.

It is a truism that people respond to change in different ways. Some are energized by learning new skills or experiencing a different environment, perhaps motivated by the possibilities of a brighter future. Others may be frustrated or anxious when faced with the unknown, perhaps uncertain how to adapt to change, or sad that an enjoyable current state is about to end. Many have mixed emotions. Whatever the emotions, personal change is very often an affective process as individuals go through stages of transitions that Bridges (1980) calls *endings*, *the neutral zone*, and *new beginnings*.

### Endings.

All transitions begin with endings, or the recognition and liberation of the past. Endings can prompt confusion and fear. Change can require letting go of past processes, beliefs, and ways of working, but change can also mean letting go of relationships and familiar places. It can also mean changes to one's personal identity, which may happen when career transitions prompt people to rethink who they have been and the meaning that their work has for them personally. The comfortable identity I have developed of myself as a good administrator, police officer, teacher, marketing representative, or book editor is now threatened, and an important piece of my identity may feel lost. Endings are experiences of loss, and people naturally "grieve" during this process, experiencing emotions of shock and denial when confronted with change.

### The Neutral Zone.

The neutral zone is a time when "neither the old nor the new ways work properly" (Holbeche, 2006, p. 74). It can be frustrating and confusing to recognize that a change is taking place, without the comfort of established routines and practices. People can feel bombarded and overwhelmed by new information and may not know how to evaluate or interpret all of it. It can feel uncomfortable and risky to try new things without the knowledge of what may happen next. It may feel as if the transition is taking forever without a clear sense of



when the confusion will end.

### **New Beginnings.**

Beginnings may occur with stops and starts as people transition to new ways, perhaps experiencing personal setbacks, frustration, or failure as they attempt to change but find it difficult. Disappointment may set in if the new beginning is not all that it was anticipated to be. “It is unrealistic,” Bridges (1980) writes, “to expect someone to make a beginning like a sprinter coming out of the starting blocks” (p. 148). Gradually, the new beginning may itself become as familiar and comfortable as the old way.

Individual interventions are designed to help organizational members through various stages of the change process, including recognizing the need to change, motivating acceptance of change, respecting the benefits and drawbacks of the past, learning new skills, and more. They work under the assumption that “if people are to positively embrace the change, it is important to create safe opportunities for people to come to terms with the change and adjust” (Holbeche, 2006, p. 71). Many managers or change agents trying to promote individual change in organizations, however, take the perspective that employees need to “get on with it,” “get over it,” or “just deal with it.” This belief overlooks the role of the manager in helping employees through the challenges of interpreting and adapting to a change (Isabella, 1992). As Bridges (1980) puts it, “Treating ourselves like appliances that can be unplugged and plugged in again” is an ineffective method for personal change, and we need methods for “making sense out of the lostness and the confusion that we encounter when we have gone through disengagement or disenchantment or disidentification” (p. 130). Individual interventions can be one step in that direction. They can prompt endings, encourage reflection during the neutral zone, and facilitate transitions to new beginnings.

## Individual Instruments and Assessments

Diagnostic instruments and assessments provide individual feedback to participants in any number of areas such as conflict style, leadership style, work preferences, learning style, work aptitudes, and more. Common individual instruments used in OD engagements are the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, FIRO-B, Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument, and DISC, to name just a few.

They are often referred to colloquially as “tests,” though this is usually a misnomer because diagnostic instruments of the type used in organization development interventions have no right or wrong answers. Individual instruments might ask participants to assess their level of agreement with statements such as “In a group setting, I like to take charge,” “I prefer to work alone most of the time,” or “Statistical data are necessary for me to make an informed decision.” Instruments are usually theory-based and are almost always rigorously tested for validity and reliability by psychologists or other research experts before being published. They are usually either pencil-and-paper or computer-based, completed individually, and can take anywhere from several minutes to several hours to complete, depending on the instrument. Once completed and scored, they can give valuable feedback to the participant to encourage self-awareness, recognition of personal strengths, and identification of any areas the individual may want to change. While they are usually focused on the individual, instruments can often be useful in team settings as well. In these cases, the instruments are completed individually and results are discussed among team members in a facilitated meeting (sharing one’s work style preferences, for example, can help team members know how each member approaches the team’s objectives).

Individual instruments have a number of advantages (Pfeiffer & Ballew, 1987). Because they are completed individually and feedback is given directly to the participant (usually in writing), instruments can be a relatively low-threat way for an individual to gain self-awareness and personal feedback. Often the process of completing the instrument can engage even a reticent participant and develop some curiosity about the results, which can encourage him or her to consider the feedback. The instrument itself gives participants a language and theoretical constructs to understand their behavior, style, and preferences, as well as those of people around them, and this can encourage them to become more aware of how their styles play out in daily interaction. Some instruments allow comparison to other people, which can be liberating when people feel alone or isolated. Instruments can also be administered on multiple occasions (e.g., each year) to identify changes that may occur over time.

Using instruments as interventions can have a number of disadvantages as well. Some people resent or fear being psychologically exposed, figured out, or otherwise discovered, seeing the instrument as pinning them down or labeling them. Despite a facilitator’s insistence to the contrary, participants may seek what they consider to be a socially desirable answer, thinking that there is a right and wrong answer. They may be disappointed to find that what they thought was the “best” leadership style does not match their own, according to the instrument, and this may induce feelings of denial or disappointment. The facilitator may try to respond to this by encouraging acknowledgment of the results, whatever they may be, and by stressing that there are no right answers. For some participants, because there are no correct answers, this can encourage

relativism and blind acceptance (“My style is fine, and so is yours”) instead of building awareness that one may have flaws or behaviors that may not be effective (e.g., strong, angry reactions that may inhibit employees from being honest with a leader). Some may have emotional reactions or become overwhelmed by the amount of feedback produced by some instruments, and some may become dependent on the facilitator for feedback, interpretation of results, or personal coaching. In group settings especially, instruments can encourage labeling or stereotyping of others (e.g., “He has no emotional reactions because he’s an ESTP,” “She’s a Stage 2 manager”) or participants can feel pressured to reveal results they were not prepared to share. [Table 10.1](#) summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of using instruments.

Pfeiffer and Ballew (1987) outline a process for using instruments effectively. First, they recommend establishing a safe and nonjudgmental atmosphere prior to administering the instrument. Participants should understand the reasons why they are completing the instrument, how it will be used, and who will see the instrument responses and overall results. The facilitator may want to stress that the instrument is only as accurate as the participants’ answers, so honest and forthright responses are important. Next, after participants have completed the instrument, it may be helpful for the facilitator to provide some background about the instrument itself, explaining its theoretical base and any theoretical concepts or ideas that may help participants to understand the instrument. Third, participants can try to predict their outcome on the test before the next step, receiving the results.

As participants receive results, the facilitator may wish to allow several uninterrupted quiet moments for participants to read through, absorb, and consider the feedback. They may wish to compare their predicted results with the results provided by the instrument and to read through any written comments or scoring guides. If the instrument is easy to interpret, the facilitator may wish simply to give scoring or interpretation handouts with the results. In some cases, however, instruments and scoring results can be complex to interpret, and a one-on-one session with someone trained to interpret the results will be necessary. In group settings, with the agreement of everyone present, group members may wish to share their results (anonymously, if desired) for the entire group to see.

**Table 10.1** Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Individual Instruments

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gives people language and constructs to understand themselves</li><li>• Relatively low threat; individualized</li><li>• Allows comparison to others</li><li>• Promotes involvement in self-discovery</li><li>• Can administer at multiple times to compare changes</li><li>• Can allow person to explore areas previously unknown to self</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People may seek the right answer or right style</li><li>• May encourage labeling or stereotyping</li><li>• May encourage relativism instead of confrontation</li><li>• Fear of exposure, being “discovered” psychologically or “figured out”</li><li>• Can foster dependency on the facilitator</li><li>• Can be too much information to confront at once; can be overwhelming</li></ul>

Interpretation and processing of results is the most important stage of the process. After all, the goal is self-awareness and knowledge, not clinical diagnoses. The instrument itself is simply a means by which participants can learn and grow. For individuals, facilitators can ask questions such as the following to encourage processing of the results:

- Did the results match or differ from your prediction? How so? Why do you think that is?
- What strengths do you see? What are you satisfied to see?
- What opportunities for change or growth do you see? Is there anything you are surprised or disappointed to see? Is there anything you find dissatisfying?
- How do these patterns play out for you in everyday life and work?
- Is there anything that you would like to do differently based on these results? What actions would you like to take next?

Throughout the process, the facilitator must remain nonjudgmental, open, and respectful, being sensitive to the fact that some individuals may have strong emotional reactions. Even examples that are used may give the impression of some results having a better or worse connotation, so facilitators must be highly attuned to how they are describing the theory and interpretation of results.

There are a number of ethical considerations in the use of instruments. Facilitators should be trained in the administration and interpretation of the instrument, and they should have completed the instrument themselves in order to understand possible participant reactions. Judgments or diagnoses should be carefully considered if they are made based solely on the results, and participants should not be pressured to reveal scores or adopt the facilitator’s interpretation of any individual result. Obviously, facilitators should obtain instruments through ethical means and use them as agreed (respecting intellectual property and copyright laws in the purchase and duplication of instruments).



## The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

Perhaps the most common instrument in use in organization development engagements is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). According to Edward Hoffman (2002), in fact, more than 2.5 million people annually complete the MBTI. The MBTI was developed in the 1920s based on the psychological theories of Carl Jung, who believed that “people are different in fundamental ways even though they all have the same multitude of instincts (archetypes) to drive them from within” (Keirsey & Bates, 1984, p. 3). The Myers-Briggs classifies personality into 16 types, based on four preference categories:

- *Extraversion (E) or Introversion (I)*. The E-I preference reflects how people gain energy. Extraverts are energized by time spent with other people, whereas introverts gain energy from time spent alone. At a large party or social gathering, the extravert will find more energy as the night goes on, and the introvert will generally feel less.
- *Sensing (S) or Intuition (N)*. The second preference pair refers to how people collect information. A person preferring sensation trusts facts, data, and personal experience, and values realistic and practical ideas. A preference for intuition indicates that the person trusts hunches, “gut feelings,” and speculative imagination, and values ideas that reflect possibilities and visions.
- *Thinking (T) or Feeling (F)*. The T-F preference reflects how individuals make decisions. Thinking types tend to make decisions based on logic, general principles or criteria, policy, and analysis, whereas feeling types tend to make decisions based on subjective and interpersonal considerations, values, harmony, and effects on people.
- *Judging (J) or Perceiving (P)*. The final pair indicates a preference for whether people like things closed, settled, and completed (J) or prefer to keep options open and flexible (P). J types plan ahead to get work done well in advance of deadlines, whereas P types prefer the flexibility of emergent ideas.

The MBTI results in a four-letter score, one from each category, so examples of MBTI types are ENFP, ISTJ, INTP, and so on. It scores each of these preference pairs on a scale, so that one might demonstrate a strong preference for introversion but have a weak preference for judging. The strength of these preferences might change over time, but several studies have shown that the four-letter preference tends to remain relatively stable. The test has been found to have good reliability in repeated administrations over time for the same individual (test-retest reliability), but some experts continue to question other aspects of the test’s validity due to a lack of evidence (Carlson, 1985, 1989; Pittenger, 2005).

Consultants have found the MBTI to be useful in a number of areas, including team building, training, career development coaching, and conflict resolution (Clinebell & Stecher, 2003; Coe, 1992; E. Hoffman, 2002; McCauley, 2000). The MBTI can provide an explanation and point of discussion for individuals who are experiencing a conflict, for example, by showing that two different attitudes toward deadlines are rooted in different preferences on the J-P dimension. In a team, a majority of thinkers may approach a decision logically, and thus be considered hard-hearted by the feelers in the group. A team made up entirely of strong N types may neglect hard facts and data that perhaps ought to be taken into account. In these cases, the MBTI can be especially helpful in reminding us that there are alternative ways to think and work, and that

these sources of difference can be beneficial. Individuals can learn to see that their preferences have strengths but also weaknesses, and moreover, these strengths and weaknesses exist in colleagues as well.

Like most instruments, perhaps, the disadvantages of the MBTI tend to lie in dysfunctional uses of the instrument rather than in the instrument itself. First, the MBTI is often used because it is interesting, fun, nonthreatening, well known, someone else did it, or the consultant is trained in it, rather than being used because the situation calls for it. The change agent should have a relevant reason for using the MBTI and a goal for the session. Second, despite the subtleties that exist in the MBTI rating scales, most uses of the MBTI tend to stress the four-letter preference category, which tends to typecast individuals and ignore the reality that most of us exhibit some aspect of both pairs at some points. Third, individuals may place too much emphasis on the MBTI and make assumptions or explanations for all behavior based on it (Pittenger, 2005). In some organizations, the MBTI has become so popular that individuals who simply experience the instrument themselves begin to train others in typewatching, with inaccurate explanations that neglect the subtleties and power of the instrument (McCaulley, 2000).

## Coaching

Shull, Church, and Burke (2013, 2014) note that coaching is now seen by practitioners as an integral part of the OD practitioner role. Coaching is a one-on-one intervention in which an individual works to improve a specific personal, interpersonal, or skill area, or to take actions to reach a desired future goal, working with a facilitator on the process of personal change. In the past, seeking out the assistance of a coach might have been seen as weak or a symptom of incompetence. That view has changed so that the vast majority of U.S. companies now offer some kind of coaching to top executives (Stone, 2007), and executive coaching is perhaps the most common type of coaching practiced today. As a result, the practice of coaching grew dramatically in the 1990s to the point that leadership coach, life coach, executive coach, and career coach are often seen as specialized career roles unique from that of the OD consultant (Schein, 2006a).

Bennett and Bush (2009) identify at least four different types of common coaching practices in organizations: (1) leadership development coaching, focused on “high potential or succession plan candidates”; (2) performance coaching, focusing on “individual employees who are underperforming”; (3) career coaching, helping “explore career or job options, change jobs, or retire”; and (4) executive coaching for the organization’s highest-level leaders (p. 3). Many observers now recommend coaching roles for managers as well, noting that there are significant benefits to employees and organizational performance when managers take an active role in helping employees to grow and develop (Hunt & Weintraub, 2002). Despite the growth of the manager-as-coach role, this section will primarily address the internal or external coach who does not have a management–employee relationship with the person being coached.

Coaching is done for different purposes, and coaches develop different roles and techniques depending on the client. In the example that opened this chapter, Ann worked with a coach in several areas to improve her effectiveness at work, a common goal of coaching. “Coaching is the process whereby one individual helps another: to unlock their natural ability; . . . to increase their sense of self-responsibility and ownership of their performance; to self-coach; to identify and remove internal barriers to achievement” (MacLennan, 1995, p. 4). In other words, a coach may be a sounding board, asking questions and directing conversations through a process whereby the individual can learn to self-assess and work through thought processes and obstacles. Goals of executive coaching include helping the client to improve “the client’s capacity to manage an organization—planning, organizing, staffing, leading”; “the client’s ability to manage self and others”; “the client’s ability to manage his or her career”; and the ability to “improve the effectiveness of the organization or team” (Kilburg, 1996, p. 140). The coach may help the client to develop a personal vision for the future, define gaps between where the client is today and where he or she would prefer to be, analyze internal and external obstacles and barriers to achieving that vision, and to set short- and long-term goals. Witherspoon and White (1996) write that there are a number of coaching roles depending on the goals of the client:

- Coaching for skills (learning focused on a specific task)
- Coaching for performance (to improve the job functions of the client more broadly)
- Coaching for development (to develop the client for a future role)
- Coaching for the executive’s agenda (the coach acts as a third-party observer to assist the executive with



business decisions)

Many wonder about the difference between coaching and therapy. After all, in relationships where one person is there as an outside party to help the other, a therapeutic or counseling relationship can easily evolve. Yet coaches and therapists differ significantly in the process they use to work with a client. “Coaches see themselves as partners, ready to work in tandem with a client to solve an interesting challenge. The issues that coach and client address are rarely life-and-death, so the coach uses a less diagnostic, analytical approach” (Grodzki & Allen, 2005, p. 28). Goals of coaching are also different from those of therapy. In general, coaching tends to focus more on clients’ skills and abilities at work and how they can reach their future goals more effectively (Stone, 2007), and much less on their psychological states or analyzing troubles of the past. As Gooding (2003) puts it, “A coach is hired to assist in designing a person’s future rather than reliving their past” (p. 36). The coach may help the client to recognize “untapped potential,” helping him or her to become more “self-generative and productive,” versus therapy, which focuses more on “retrospective” issues and “uncovering unconscious material” (Grodzki & Allen, 2005, pp. 28–29). Levinson (1996) writes that “executive coaching does not allow time for developing a therapeutic alliance” (p. 115) and that Levinson’s style is to concentrate on current circumstances while addressing patterns in the executive’s behavior that are contributing to present problems.

Executive coaching in particular offers unique challenges to the coach. The coaching relationship, while generally an interpersonal relationship, exists within the larger landscape of the organization, including its goals, strategies, culture, and politics. Thus, the coach must be adept at understanding and navigating political waters and cultural dynamics while helping the client achieve the desired outcome. Often the coach is not just a coach but also a consultant:

Today’s executive coach is a hybrid of these prototypes and whose playground is the management of an entire socio-technical business system. As such, he or she must be adept in engaging the mesh of political-behavioral and strategic-philosophical components of the organization. (Lyons, 2006, p. 15)

As in the field of OD generally, there are no special degree requirements or certifications needed to become a coach, though certification programs are increasingly available. Professional publications and associations include *Choice*, a magazine for professional coaches, which started in 2003; the International Coach Federation, which offers certification for coaches; and CoachVille, a global network of coaching professionals. Good coaching is a highly interpersonal activity. The best coaches

- have good communication skills,
- offer encouragement and support,
- take time to listen,
- build a positive environment,
- listen actively, and
- let people figure things out for themselves (Thorne, 2004, pp. 64–65)

Ennis and colleagues (2007) have developed a comprehensive list of competencies for executive coaches in particular, which includes such skills as the ability to ask good questions; knowledge of leadership styles, theories, and principles; assertiveness; self-confidence; and interpersonal sensitivity. For executive coaches, business acumen is an important skill because, as Orenstein (2002) puts it, executive coaching is not offered solely for the benefit of the individual, but “every individual intervention [is] a simultaneous organizational intervention” (p. 372).

The coaching process usually follows the OD process we have addressed in this book. First, coach and client meet to develop a contract to ensure that the relationship will meet the needs of both parties. The coaching intervention may not be appropriate, for example, if the client is unwilling to be coached or is being forced or pressured into coaching (Gauthier & Giber, 2006). The contract outlines the goals and timeframe for the coaching relationship and makes explicit other concerns such as the function of the coach’s role, whether and how the coach may challenge the client, confidentiality, and how the coach will evaluate progress (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2005). Coaches may use a number of the intervention techniques described in this and subsequent chapters, including conducting an assessment using individual instruments, gathering 360 feedback, facilitating the client through simulations and role playing, and more. No matter the intervention used, the coach will almost always begin with a coaching conversation to explore the client’s motivations to change and desired future. Hudson (1999) notes that coaches should ask questions that stimulate the client’s thinking, helping to facilitate the conversation and reflecting back what the client says, but that the coach should avoid taking over the conversation or imposing too much structure. During the coaching conversation, the coach can help to encourage goal setting and action planning. Some coaches offer “homework” for the clients to consider between sessions, and in each subsequent session the client may wish to report back on results from taking action or to reflect on any changes or new insights gained since the previous coaching session. When coaching engagements are concluded, many coaches conduct an evaluation session to improve their own coaching practice, inviting feedback about the coach’s style and process.

Bennett and Bush (2009, p. 4) describe five trends in the field of organizational coaching:

1. “Need/demand for coaching increasing and changing”: Coaching is increasing in popularity as a method for individual development and is increasingly available to a wider range of employees beyond the senior executive ranks.
2. “Coaching evolving as a discipline and profession”: Coaching continues to gain awareness as a development option and is an increasing area of specialization for human resources and OD professionals. More clients are starting to require that a coach hold a professional certification from one of the coaching organizations mentioned earlier.
3. “Demand for measurable impact and quality increasing”: As organizations invest more in coaching as a development option for executives, managers, and professionals, they increasingly require some evidence of success or results.
4. “Number and influence of professional organizations changing”: We have already referred to the International Coaching Federation, but in addition, many OD organizations are including coaching sessions as part of annual conferences, training sessions for practitioners, or articles in professional

journals about coaching.

5. "Coaching is becoming a commodity": Organizations are beginning to solicit regular coaching engagements, purchasing coaching services as they do other kinds of professional services.

They write that several trends will influence coaching practices in the future, such as the use of technology to coach virtually, coaching for groups and teams, and increasing cultural and global awareness and its relationship to the coaching process.

## Mentoring

Mentoring programs are growing in popularity in organizations (often where there are a significant number of older workers who are retiring and taking with them their institutional knowledge and experience). A mentor is a counselor, adviser, and teacher who usually works in a one-on-one relationship with a protégé.

MacLennan (1995) defines a mentor as “someone available for the performer to learn from” (p. 5) as a teacher, role model, or expert. In some apprentice-like models of mentoring, the mentor may demonstrate how a task is accomplished or provide an example, watch the performer complete the task (or assess completed work), and then provide feedback or an assessment on how it was done. In others, role modeling the skill may be less important. In both cases, mentoring usually involves an expert-protégé relationship with a skilled and knowledgeable teacher who can provide guidance, and is less often a relationship with a “hired” change agent or external consultant. Today, a protégé is likely to have a number of mentoring relationships with mentors inside and outside the organization as a network of advisers who can serve multiple roles and provide diverse perspectives (Whiting & de Janasz, 2004).

Mentoring programs “can shorten learning tracks, speed up managerial advancement, and build the next generation of leaders” (Stone, 2004, p. ix). Definitions differ among practitioners, and the roles can overlap considerably, but coaching and mentoring differ primarily in the degree of expertise on the facilitator’s part and content knowledge to be shared with the performer. Mentoring tends to involve a stronger focus on the skill development of the learner than does coaching. Unlike a coach, the mentor may provide explicit advice or direction rather than wait for the mentee to find the answer through self-discovery (Stone, 2004).

Some organizations have formal mentoring programs, whereas others may encourage mentoring but leave it to the individual mentor and mentee to develop their own relationship. Vogel and Finkelstein (2011) recommend seven strategies for mentees to use to cultivate mentoring relationships:

1. Develop your capacity for discernment, being curious about the paths that others have followed, what experiences led them to find success, and how they overcame challenges.
2. Develop your radar for a mentor, finding ways to establish relationships with others who have a diversity of experiences different from your own.
3. Be courageous and proactive, taking the initiative to seek out others and ask questions.
4. Cultivate social skills, building trust with the mentor but also respecting their time and investment in you.
5. Work hard and pursue excellence, having high standards for the quality of your own work.
6. Demonstrate a passion for learning, being open to the potentially uncomfortable position of not knowing and asking for help.
7. Foster collegial relationships, being open to the change over time in the mentor/mentee relationship, becoming one of colleagues who support one another, and giving back to one’s mentor.



## 360 Feedback

Multisource, or 360, feedback systems are methods by which individuals can receive feedback from a wide range of people with whom they work. This type of feedback can be a powerful source for personal reflection and change, and it became increasingly popular in the 1990s, prompted in part by trends toward gathering more customer feedback as well as a *Fortune* magazine article that proclaimed that “360 feedback can change your life” (O’Reilly & Furth, 1994). Feedback data are generally collected via written (computer or pencil-and-paper) questionnaires, though one-on-one interviews are also a common method for soliciting feedback. Most 360 feedback systems are anonymous. Generally 360 feedback is used for individual development, most often for managers and leaders of an organization, but some organizations use 360 feedback during the annual performance appraisal process or for team interventions (Lepsinger & Lucia, 1997).

The topic for the feedback itself can vary widely among different methods and can range from feedback solicited about personal attributes, interpersonal skills, and job performance. Many organizations customize feedback questionnaires to reflect the organization’s values or desired attributes of leaders. Regardless, what the approaches all have in common is the aggregation of multiple sources of data. This method, as opposed to a small set of feedback ratings or interviews with one or two people, offers several advantages. The idea of 360 feedback is that “observations obtained from multiple sources will yield more valid and reliable (and therefore more meaningful and useful) results for the individual” (Church & Bracken, 1997, p. 150). When peers, subordinates, supervisors, customers, and others all offer feedback on a single individual, the individual can observe common themes and consistent ratings that can transcend any individual situation or relationship. Moreover, it can be instructive to sort out ratings by respondent type to learn whether feedback from peers differs from that of supervisors or subordinates. In addition, some groups may have more opportunities to observe a given trait than others. For example, subordinates may have more data about a manager’s leadership abilities, and peers may have more opportunities to observe a manager’s ability to work across organizational boundaries collaboratively (Brutus, Fleenor, & London, 1998). Individuals can get a well-rounded assessment about their professional effectiveness from a wide variety of colleagues.

The assumption is that the 360 feedback process will augment the recipient’s self-awareness. The feedback provides insights into how others perceive one’s own behaviors and skills, and it allows them to compare their self-concepts with how others see them. This can give insight into areas in which recipients may wish to grow and develop. Thus, 360 feedback tends to work best when both raters and ratees see it as developmental. Individuals tend to vary with regard to how much developmental feedback they will accept. If individuals seek out the feedback, are willing to consider it, see it as important to their personal and professional success, and see it as important to understand how they are viewed by others, they are more likely to take the feedback seriously and take action based on it. Also, how the feedback is used and presented has a large impact on how much individuals will accept it. Using 360 feedback during the performance appraisal process, Silverman, Pogson, and Cober (2005) note, likely will encourage participants to reject, resist, or dispute any negative feedback because there may be more serious consequences to the performance appraisal. At the same time, if there are no consequences to the individual, it will be easy to ignore feedback and to avoid taking action

(London, Smither, & Adsit, 1997).

Antonioni (1996) writes that there can be five positive outcomes of a successful 360 feedback process:

1. *An increased awareness of appraisers' expectations.* The 360 feedback process can help to make explicit the unexplored or tacit assumptions and expectations that we have of one another.
2. *Improvements in work behaviors and performance.* Antonioni (1996) writes that research shows greater improvement when feedback data are reviewed with a trained coach who can help participants analyze the feedback and create action plans.
3. *Reduction of "undiscussables."* Since raters usually have an anonymous way to provide feedback about things they ordinarily may not have discussed openly, the 360 feedback process provides an avenue to open up these topics for discussion, which may be done in person following the feedback process. London et al. (1997) suggest that personal change and improvement will be greater when raters and ratees openly discuss the feedback.
4. *Increase in periodic informal 360-degree performance reviews.* The 360 feedback process has the potential to break down walls in organizations that prevent colleagues from honestly sharing feedback with one another. If done well, organizational members may learn how to give and receive feedback more frequently and informally.
5. *Increase in management learning.* Managers as a whole may see patterns in responses to see how the organization as a system may need to be changed in addition to personal change for any single individual.

As an individual intervention, a change agent or OD professional may be asked to participate in gathering the feedback data and presenting the information to the individual. Interview practices described in [Chapter 7](#) can be applicable in these circumstances, and in presenting the feedback to the individual, some of the recommendations from [Chapter 8](#) on gathering feedback and presenting it remain applicable as well. Setting up the feedback meeting, encouraging reflection on common themes, acknowledging strengths, recognizing resistance, and confronting tough issues are all relevant concerns for individual feedback meetings using a 360 process.

## Career Planning and Development

In the current environment of organizational restructuring, mergers and acquisitions, outsourcing, and downsizing, the concept of a career has changed. What were formerly clear and stable upward career paths have given way to a flattened organizational structure, changes in the scope of responsibility, increasing job mobility, lateral moves, team-based working, and more. The concept of a career identity has changed from what was once an expectation of moving up to a management level, to individuals wanting to balance work and family or resist frequent relocation for work (London & Stumpf, 1986). More midcareer and late-career employees who have had a lengthy career with the same organization now find themselves confronting new assumptions and expectations about work and careers, and as a result, the transition can be particularly stressful.

Many organizations have developed career development systems internally to retain and motivate employees, to develop employees internally and promote from within the organization, and to provide opportunities for upward mobility (Gutteridge, Leibowitz, & Shore, 1993). Some even hire career counselors (Niles, 2005). The concept of an organizational career development system originated from organizations' interests in balancing what employees want for career growth and personal development and what the organization needs given its strategic objectives. Yet most organizations still believe that the primary responsibility for career growth and development remains with the individual. Given the frequent downsizing and restructuring in the contemporary organizational environment, changes to the notion of careers, and changes in the employment "contract," it makes more sense than ever for individuals to be conscious of their own career plans and development. Career development programs and one-on-one career interventions can help employees through a forced transition such as a merger, restructuring, or downsizing. They can also help employees proactively choose to take action in anticipation of a transition in the future (seeking out new skills to plan for a new job).



## The Classic View: Stages of the Career

Early research and writing on career development emphasized a linear progression of career shifts throughout an employee's life, though recent research indicates that this concept has now been outgrown. Consider Schein's (1978) book *Career Dynamics*, in which he outlines nine stages of a career life cycle:

1. *Growth, fantasy, exploration.* During this stage, individuals explore career options and make educational choices based on careers they find desirable.
2. *Entry into world of work.* Individuals search out, interview for, and experience the first job. They experience the transition to becoming an employee, working for an employer, and navigating the challenges of completing initial job tasks.
3. *Basic training.* The individual begins to develop job skills, becoming an effective contributor. The individual is in a learning mode as a novice organizational member, learning not only job skills but also interpersonal skills in relating to and working with colleagues. He or she may be highly concerned with developing competence and meeting performance expectations of a supervisor or colleagues.
4. *Full membership in early career.* Individuals experience first major job assignments not in a training or apprentice role. They learn how to accept work assignments and the complexities of working with coworkers for extended periods. They evaluate whether this work represents what they would like to be doing in the future or whether a different job or organization would better suit them.
5. *Full membership, midcareer.* Individuals develop self-assurance and trust in decisions and job skills. They may have increasing responsibility and a professional reputation. They consider how to remain current in their areas of expertise and how to continue to grow and develop.
6. *Midcareer crisis.* Individuals begin to reassess their career choices and options. They may evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and think through their goals for their lives and how their careers fit or do not fit with that vision.
7. *Late career.* Individuals will customize a path based on the previous stage to determine the next steps. Those who take a leadership role will learn how to manage the work and performance of subordinates and make broad-ranging decisions, while those who do not choose a leadership path may develop breadth or depth in their areas of expertise.
8. *Decline and disengagement.* Individuals begin to change job roles and perhaps take less responsibility. They may develop increasing interests outside of work.
9. *Retirement.* Individuals transition from a day dominated by full-time work to nonwork concerns. They may reevaluate their personal identities in noncareer terms and may decide how to use work skills in a different capacity.

Schein (1978) writes, "People in different occupations move at different rates through the stages, and personal factors strongly influence the rate of movement as well" (p. 48). Some individuals may remain in one stage for an extended time, and some may find themselves rapidly progressing through stages.



## The Contemporary View: Boundaryless Careers

While this once may have been a relevant description of most employees' career development experiences, many observers now suggest that these stage theories no longer fit for the majority of employees. As organizations have evolved, so has the concept of the career. Indeed, in the 1950s, writes Cappelli (2008), the rapid growth of organizations and the continuing need for skilled managers demanded that organizations hone their ability to identify skilled talent and develop employees quickly. Cappelli notes that "careers advanced inside organizations because companies no longer brought in talent from the outside," citing a study showing that when executives retired "40 percent had been with their firms more than forty years" (p. 53). Predictable advancement was the rule, with many employees remaining in their jobs for less than 2 years before moving to another role, typically moving upward along a defined career path.

As time passed, both the demand and supply of managers became less predictable, and organizations reduced their investments in internal development and training. With changes in deregulation in the 1970s and greater global competition in the 1980s, it became increasingly difficult for businesses to predict both the life cycle and demand for products, and as a result, the skills that would be needed in the future. By the 1990s, outside hiring increased as organizations looked externally for skilled candidates, and the average job tenure (the number of years employees remained with one company) declined substantially. Few companies wanted to invest heavily in training employees who would be leaving for a competitor, and for their part, employees saw fewer career advancement opportunities. By the 2000s, many companies surrendered to the volatility of their talent needs and stopped both talent planning and internal training programs, and employees found the situation just as unpredictable. Organizations decided that "years-long programs for developing talent create a false sense of accuracy and no longer make sense" (Cappelli, 2008, p. 9). Cappelli (2008) notes that 30 percent of recent business school graduates could not identify their next logical career move at their current employer (p. 95).

Clearly, many organizations have arrived at the conclusion that "you can't have an agile company if you give employees lifetime contracts" (R. Hoffman, Casnocha, & Yeh, 2013, p. 50), leading some authors to advocate a "tour of duty" model. Reid Hoffman and colleagues (2013) argue that a new employment contract of short term, 2- to 4-year roles that take advantage of an employee's entrepreneurial spirit, helps to increase employee retention.

In the changing work environment in which individuals may change careers or jobs or choose to be away from the workforce for any period (e.g., to raise children, take a sabbatical, travel, obtain an advanced degree), some research suggests that people no longer progress through their career stages in the sequence presented earlier, but instead cycle through them quickly and return to previous stages (S. E. Sullivan, 1999). Rather than presuming that individuals follow a single, well-defined career path through stages, some have proposed the concept of the "boundaryless career" (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), which transcends any individual job, occupational function, profession, and organization. Career progression in a boundaryless career is defined more by learning milestones and skill capabilities rather than age and job titles. With the rise of flexible contract work, part-time, and temporary project work, employees may choose to work independently, taking

advantage of their multiple and diverse skills to work for several employers. Thus, in a boundaryless career, employment may be with many firms rather than a single company, and job security exists not because of tenure and long-term loyalty to the organization but because of the individual's ability to successfully perform the work and contribute to organizational goals (S. E. Sullivan, 1999).

Within a company, the concept of the boundaryless career implies that upward mobility may not be the only option for growth and development, but employees can develop their careers by gaining a diversity of experiences in a variety of areas. Junior accountants in product division A may not need to wait for a senior accounting position to open up, but may gain useful experience in product division B before moving to a senior role in product division C when there is a vacancy. There is also evidence that different generations experience career paths differently and hold different expectations for their careers. According to a study by Lancaster and Stillman (2010), the most recent generation entering the workforce (the Millennial generation) has a higher expectation for career development, with 82 percent of Millennial respondents noting that "career paths advance too slowly where they work" (p. 181). The authors recommend that employers offer rotation programs that can enhance skill development and provide a breadth of knowledge gained from a variety of positions.

Individuals experience different challenges and needs at different points in their careers, and many need support as they tackle these challenges on their own. As Arnold (2001) writes, "From an individual's point of view career management means deciding or finding out for oneself what it is best to do" (p. 120). The OD practitioner and career development practitioner can often provide support for individuals through individual career interventions. The next sections describe examples of career-related interventions that can be appropriate for individuals with different career needs, such as (1) choosing a career direction and identifying work interests, (2) setting career goals, and (3) developing career transitions and new employment relationships.

## Choosing a Career Direction and Identifying Work Interests

It may be even more important in the contemporary work environment for individuals to be conscious of their career interests and abilities. A number of individual assessments have been created and tested to help individuals with career choices, such as the Vocational Preference Inventory (VPI) and Self-Directed Search (see Holland, 1985, 1997), to name just two. The VPI is based on Holland's RIASEC typology, which argues that personality types correspond with vocational interests and satisfaction. The six RIASEC dimensions of vocational preference are as follows (Holland, 1996):

- *Realistic*: A preference for manipulating machines, tools, and things
- *Investigative*: A preference for exploring and understanding natural and social phenomena
- *Artistic*: A preference for music, artistic, and literary activities
- *Social*: A preference for helping, teaching, or counseling
- *Enterprising*: A preference for persuading and managing others
- *Conventional*: A preference for routinized tasks and orderly activities

Researchers who have examined career progression and the RIASEC typology have found that individuals may tend to change jobs or careers, but do so most frequently within the same career typology category. Early research also suggested that individuals were more satisfied with their careers when their careers were consistent with their personality type (Holland, 1996). Such occupational interest inventories, combined with individualized coaching, may help individuals anticipate which career choices may be most satisfying for them.

## Setting Career Goals

Some individuals may not yet have a fully developed sense of their own strengths, weaknesses, or even work preferences, so career options may be broad and overwhelming to contemplate. Without conscious attention to their career progression, many people in this stage end up wandering from job to job without goals that help them choose among diverse options. For these individuals, an exercise such as the 5-year résumé (Laker & Laker, 2007) may be a useful activity. In this exercise, the individual imagines that it is 5 years from today and writes a résumé that he or she would like to describe him or her. The résumé includes everything that would be included on a typical résumé, such as advanced degrees, educational credentials or certificates, and professional experiences. Participants complete short- and long-term action plans and identify the resources that are required for them to meet these objectives. The 5-year résumé activity encourages individuals to proactively manage their own career changes.

Other individuals may be concerned with whether they are successfully advancing in their career as much as they would like, either developing and using new skills in a different job or moving to increasing levels of responsibility. Different individuals judge success differently, so these will be unique concerns. They may notice others around them being promoted and wonder whether their career has stalled. There is often a need to develop a new routine, as the old ways may no longer work effectively. Hall (1986) writes, “The task in early career is to reduce exploratory behavior and establish a career routine, while in midcareer there is a need to disrupt habitual behavior and trigger exploration” (p. 133). At any point in a career, however, individuals can feel stuck. For these individuals, formal training (through university programs or professional seminars) or informal training (through job rotations or new assignments at work) may provide an occasion to reawaken interest in the job and to enhance one’s contributions at work.

## **Developing Career Transitions and New Employment Relationships**

Often later in their careers, individuals may benefit from the opportunity to share their career and life experiences with others. Mentoring or consulting may be appropriate and rewarding roles for these individuals, and many organizations have developed human resources systems for late-career employees to reduce their time at work (4-day work weeks, retirement but with extended consulting arrangements on an as-needed basis, etc.), which allow experienced employees to begin a phased retirement but allow the organization to continue to benefit from the employees' wealth of knowledge and experience.

## Summary

Individual interventions have historically been the foundation of organizational change, though this has broadened throughout the history of organization development to include team and organizationwide interventions. Individual interventions are intended to promote personal growth, development, and change. People's responses to change vary, however, and they often follow a pattern of working through the transition stages of endings, the neutral zone, and new beginnings. Individual interventions can help people manage through these transitions. Instruments, assessments, and 360 feedback can all provide information to an individual about his or her own style and behaviors, as well as others' perceptions about the individual. This can prompt reflection on one's strengths and effectiveness, and can encourage people to think through how they may wish to change. Coaching can be a resource to prompt creation of a new desired future and action plans to reach short- and long-term goals, encouraging clients to move out of the neutral zone stage and establish a new beginning. Similarly, mentoring can help individuals learn new skills and reflect on their actions with the help of a counselor and adviser. Career development interventions reflect the challenges that individuals face at various points in their career life cycle and can help individuals as they struggle through the unique concerns depending on their career stage and interests.

Individual interventions are often but one piece of a larger intervention strategy, particularly when larger organizational concerns are at stake, such as team effectiveness or organization design. In the next chapters we will consider these team and organizational interventions.



## Questions for Discussion

1. Think about the life transitions that you have experienced. What did the ending stage/neutral stage/new beginning stage feel like to you? What did you do to move between stages? How do you think your experience might relate to members of an organization who experience a major change (e.g., a merger or acquisition, changes in a job or role, change of a manager, loss of a team member due to a layoff)?
2. The chapter reviewed a previously popular model of career development that now seems to be inapplicable to the current environment. Do you agree? Does the stage model accurately reflect your career development? With what stage do you currently identify? How do you see your career developing in the future?
3. Have you ever had a mentor or been a mentor yourself? What was the purpose and duration of the relationship? How did the mentor help you, or how did you help your mentee? What agreements did you make about the mentoring relationship (how did you get started, how often did you meet, what role did the mentor take)? What did that experience mean to you? What do you think makes a good mentor?

## For Further Reading

Bridges, W. (1980). *Transitions*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Cappelli, P. (2008). *Talent on demand*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Goldsmith, M., & Lyons, L. (Eds.). (2006). *Coaching for leadership* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer.

Lepsinger, R., & Lucia, A. D. (1997). *The art and science of 360 feedback*. San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer.

## Exercise: Individual Intervention (Coaching)

You have agreed to coach Yelena, a hospital operations director, who would like to improve her leadership skills. She recently participated in a 360 feedback assessment where she received feedback from her manager, her peers, and the employees she supervises. She has contacted you to help her specifically in her relationships with her direct team. Some of the comments from her team include the following:

### *Delegation*

"I worry that Yelena takes on too much on her own. We are here to help her and support her, and sometimes she seems to take on a lot of the burdens of our department without our assistance. I think we have a lot to offer and I would like to take on more responsibility."

### *Communication*

"Yelena is great about communicating with us. We have a weekly staff meeting where she shares everything that's going on, we have a quick review of each of our projects, and she listens to our input. Even in the middle of the week if something comes up she will send us all an e-mail to keep us informed."

### *Business Knowledge*

"Yelena knows more about health care than anyone I know. She is up to date on all of the regulations, many of which are quite complex."

### *Performance Feedback and Giving Direction*

"The one opportunity for improvement I see is that I would like to get more direct feedback from her on how I'm doing. We have an annual performance evaluation process, but that seems to be the only feedback I get from her. I also think there is an opportunity for her to be more directive with us and state her expectations of us more clearly."

Create a plan to coach this client based on this feedback. Consider the following:

1. Reflect on an individual transition you made using the concepts of ending, neutral zone, and new beginning (some ideas: a job change, moving to a new city, changing schools, or a personal change like weight loss or quitting smoking). What did it feel like to end the old ways, experience the neutral zone, or start the new beginning? Did you experience some of the common feelings of personal transition reviewed in [Chapter 10](#)?
  2. Based on your own experience of change, how might your client be approaching her own change? What do you think might be difficult for her as she ends old preferred patterns and tries new ones?
  3. What questions might you use to help Yelena understand what to focus on next?
-

## Case Study 4: Individual Type Styles at the Parks Department

Read the parks department case study and consider the following questions:

1. What was the purpose of this individual assessment for this team? What should be the purpose of an individual instrument?
2. How did Lori explain the instrument and its meaning? What do you think she did well, and what could have been improved in her explanation of the instrument?
3. What activities did Lori do to use the results of the instrument? Do you think these were effective? Why or why not? What would you have done differently, if anything?
4. How would you respond to Tai's question at the end?
5. What were the results of this intervention for this team? What did the team learn from this activity? Were the client's goals met?

The Franklin Meadows City Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for more than 200 city-managed public parks, golf courses, and recreation facilities. It manages the city trail system, open space, summer camps for children and teenagers, and adult softball leagues. Ken is the city director of parks and recreation, and the staff consists of six managers of the major divisions of the department:

- Cindy, manager, public parks
- Tai, manager, golf courses
- Aron, manager, recreation centers
- Tasha, manager, trails and open space
- Felix, manager, leagues and activities
- Rachel, manager, parks rentals and special events

At the department's quarterly management retreat, Ken decided to conduct a team-building activity. He contacted Lori from the city's human resources department for ideas.

"I want to do something different from what we usually do, which is an operations and goal review, and then we can all go to dinner," Ken explained when he and Lori met. "While this team has worked together for about 18 months, and we know each other pretty well, I think it would be enjoyable to mix it up a bit."

"What's going on with this team that you think could be improved?" she asked.

"I think interpersonally the team is quite solid," he said. "I think there's an opportunity for members to open up to each other, however, which I think always helps to smooth the team interaction."

"I have just the instrument to help this team. I have recently become certified in the Team Type Alphabet assessment," Lori said. "It's a way for team members to learn more about one another's individual work styles. Once they take the instrument, I will score it and print reports for each of them."

"That sounds interesting," Ken said. "Why don't you send each member of the team an e-mail and let them know that we've spoken and you will be helping with the retreat."

"I look forward to helping out," she said.

The next day, Lori sent the following e-mail to the team:

Dear Parks Department Managers,

Ken has asked me to assist with next month's offsite meeting, during which we will spend some time on team building. The Team Type Alphabet assessment we're going to discuss will tell you what your individual preference is on a team. Please spend 15–20 minutes taking the test on the website listed below. I will provide you with your individual results at our offsite meeting.



## At the Retreat

Lori joined the team late in the afternoon of the third day of the offsite meeting to review the instrument with the team. She quickly noticed that the team was a little drained from such a long meeting, but hopefully they would enjoy the change of pace she could bring with the activity. The team was seated around several tables forming a U-shape pattern. Ken motioned for Lori to begin.

“You all remember a few weeks ago when you completed the Team Type Alphabet instrument? Today we’re going to go through the results of that instrument for each of you.

“The Team Type Alphabet tells you what your preferred style is on a team. This does not mean that you always display this type style in every interaction, but it does tell you what your preferred style is when you are part of a team, whether it’s a baseball team or a work team. According to the theory, there are six basic team type styles.” Lori wrote the following on the whiteboard in the conference room:

Type E: Energy. Desires harmony and cooperation on the team

Type C: Controlling. Likes to lead and be the focus of attention

Type Q: Quiet. Observant, sometimes hesitant to get involved in group discussion

Type A: Assertive. Forceful, ensures that his or her perspective is heard by members of the team

Type W: Wondering. Asks questions, enchanted by theory and new ideas

Type D: Detailed. Enjoys examining data and focusing on specific details

“I’d like to buy a vowel,” Aron joked.

“These are just basic descriptions,” Lori continued, “but there’s much more to each of them. There are longer descriptions of each style in your handout. Your report will contain your dominant style as well as your secondary style. I’ll hand these out and give you a moment to think about it.”

The group sat for a minute flipping pages in the lengthy report, quietly reflecting on their individual styles, until Cindy broke the silence.

“Controlling? Somehow that doesn’t seem right. I don’t feel like I always want to be the center of attention. And why is that called Controlling?” Cindy frowned and stared at the team.

“This is all backed up by years of theory showing that these are people’s style preferences,” Lori said. “The research shows that you tend not to change very much throughout your life, though your secondary preference might change slightly.”

“It’s just that Controlling sounds like a very negative description to me,” Cindy added, her voice cracking slightly. “I don’t think I always have a negative impact on this team. Look at item 35: ‘I will follow the team’s decision even if I don’t agree with it.’ I marked ‘strongly agree.’ That doesn’t fit someone who is controlling.”

“What’s important is not how you responded on any individual item, but how it fits within an entire pattern of responses on the instrument,” Lori said.

Cindy looked down at the table and closed her booklet. She looked out the window as a landscape worker shaped the hedges outside the conference room.

Lori continued. “Let’s get everyone with a Q style to stand up and go to the right side of the room.” Felix walked to the right side of the room and stood alone facing the team.

“Just one? Okay, now let’s get all of the A types to stand on the left side of the room.” Rachel and Aron went to the other side of the room and faced Felix.

“Okay. Now As, tell me what you think of the Q when you see him.”

“Well, I think Felix is a great manager,” Aron said. “His department has been very effective lately, with a nearly 20 percent increase in league signups this season. And—”

“I mean what do you think about his Q style on this team? Felix, why don’t you tell us how you feel about the As. Do they dominate the discussion?”

"Well, I guess sometimes that's true." He looked very uncomfortable.

"I always think this is so fascinating," Lori said. "The Team Type Alphabet describes exactly how these styles play out for us in everyday life. So as a team, what can you do about the fact that you have a quiet member and some dominating members?"

Tasha said, "This is so interesting, because I think this explains perfectly why we sometimes go around and around in our discussions. I mean the As tend always to speak first, and the discussion tends to steer in that direction, but it's an hour later when our Q gets to speak that we learn so much more and get to a better suggestion because of what his ideas bring."

"Spoken like an E," Aron said. The group laughed.

"I'm not an E; I'm a W," Tasha said, a little defensively.

"Is there anyone who would like to share his or her primary and secondary style type?" Lori asked, trying to refocus the discussion.

"I guess Felix probably won't go first, since he's a Q," Rachel said. "I'll go."

"But we shouldn't let her, as one of the As, dominate the discussion, right?" Tai asked Lori. "Should we make someone else go first?"

"So because I'm an A, I can never speak until others speak?" Rachel asked. "Is that really the point?" Another uncomfortable moment of silence passed.

"My secondary style is a D, which made a lot of sense to me," Aron said. "It's really accurate. I do tend to focus on the data, results, and numbers. I actually think that seems like more of my primary style. You guys know that I'm always the one trying to make charts and graphs." He smiled at the others. "Maybe I need to focus less on the number crunching."

"Well, everyone's style is different, and everyone's style should be appreciated for what it is," Lori said. "But you should be aware of what effect your different styles have on the productivity of the team."

"But you're the expert in this instrument. Based on what you know about our styles and this team, what do you think we should be paying attention to?" Tai asked.

The team looked up at Lori in unison, waiting for her response.

**Note:** The instrument described in this case study is fictional.

## Chapter 11 Team Interventions

The faculty of Highland Park Junior High School in Beaverton, Oregon, experienced the challenges that most other elementary and secondary schools experience today—to continually adapt to the needs of students, parents, and the community. To do so, they would have to learn flexible organizational problem solving to be aware of their current approaches and results, to understand the internal and external environment, to assess the gaps between their current and desired outcomes, and to cohesively develop action plans that they could agree to implement. The faculty and staff worked with organization development consultants over a series of workshops to improve communication and participation in faculty meetings, develop better problem-solving practices, take more initiative as a team to recognize and solve problems, and develop better interpersonal relationships with increased openness and skills in giving one another feedback. The consultants designed sessions to maximize face-to-face interaction, first through simulation activities and then facilitating sessions where the team solved real organizational problems. Team members identified and diagnosed their own problems, developed action plans, and tried out new ways of interacting as a team. As a result of the intervention events, cohesiveness and the quality of team relationships increased substantially. Turnover decreased to one fourth to one fifth of that of comparative local schools. Faculty began to take the initiative to call and run their own faculty meetings without the principal's involvement, and they designed and facilitated the next intervention workshop on their own, without the use of consultants. Soon, other schools in the district began to adopt the approaches of the faculty (Schmuck, Runkel, & Langmeyer, 1969).

- Do you think this team's problems are common to many teams? What other common problems do teams experience?
- How do you define a successful team?

Engagements where the target population is a team are among the most common applications of organization development (OD) interventions. The use of teams in organizations is not a new phenomenon, but use of and attention to work teams and their functioning has increased over the past several decades. Organizations have implemented new forms of teams, such as self-directed work teams, virtual teams, and cross-functional teams. These new types of teams, combined with the complexity of work today that frequently requires increased collaboration and problem solving in a global environment, mean that organizations rely heavily on teams for their success and must devote attention to the effectiveness of their teams (Buzaglo & Wheelan, 1999). Put another way, "The effective functioning of groups and teams is central to the effective functioning of organizations" (Woodman & Pasmore, 2002, p. 164). In addition, teams not only play a central role in an organization's effectiveness, but they also play a central role in the accomplishment and implementation of organizational change, such as shifts in strategy (Coghlan, 1994).

Unfortunately, leaders often fail to pay much attention to team effectiveness, not knowing how to develop the team or assuming that the team will work things out on its own (Dyer, Dyer, & Dyer, 2007). When they do tackle team effectiveness, many leaders and change agents fall into the traps discussed in [Chapter 9](#), directing interventions at the wrong issues, implementing interventions at the wrong time, or failing to address substantive issues of concern to the team.

In this chapter, we will define what we mean by a team, identify different kinds of teams used in contemporary organizations, and consider the elements of effective teams as well as common points where teams struggle. We will then examine some of the more commonly practiced team interventions directed at improving team effectiveness on work tasks and team relationships, such as role analysis, work redesign, and Workout. Teams also frequently come into contact (and conflict) with other teams, so this chapter also



describes intergroup interventions applicable when more than one team is involved.

## Defining Teams

Many practitioners and scholars find it instructive to distinguish between a group and a team. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) define a *team* as “a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable” (p. 45). Others stress the importance of member interdependence on a team, noting that team members must rely on each other and feel accountable to one another in the accomplishment of their goals to be considered a team (Dyer et al., 2007; Levi, 2001). To account for this fact, Carl Larson and Frank LaFasto (1989) believe that “a team has two or more people; it has a specific performance objective or recognizable goal to be attained; and coordination of activity among the members of the team is required for the attainment of the team goal or objective” (p. 19). In other words, a group might consist of a large number of individuals, all of whom perform the same general job task but do not count on other members in the accomplishment of individual tasks, so they are not a team by these definitions. Students in a class held in a large lecture hall are likely to be considered a group, but if they divide into smaller units to accomplish a task such as a class project (becoming interdependent and accountable to one another in the achievement of a common goal), they are forming teams.

Other commonly held characteristics of teams include the following:

- Members participate in decision making and setting goals.
- Members communicate frequently with one another in the accomplishment of team tasks.
- The team has a defined and recognized identity by others in the organization, outside the team.
- Members have defined roles and they recognize how these roles interrelate.

Barner (2006) writes that contemporary teams are very different from those of the past. Most people hold a model in their heads of a team as an intact collective of members who reported to a single manager, with egalitarian membership, located physically at a single work site, and made up of members from similar cultural backgrounds. Today, rather, teams are much more likely to be ad hoc, called together for a single purpose and a short period, perhaps self-directed without a single manager. Instead of being egalitarian, power relationships now intrude when members increasingly represent multiple functions and hierarchical levels. Teams may be geographically distributed, and thus may comprise members from different countries and diverse cultural backgrounds. Contemporary teams may demand that members perform multiple roles on multiple teams rather than specialized roles on a single team (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). All of these factors challenge our traditional assumptions about what constitutes a team, they introduce new complexities into the inner workings of a team, and they complicate our implementation of interventions to improve team effectiveness.

## What Makes a Successful Team?

Much work has been done by researchers to identify the characteristics that distinguish high-performing, effective teams. In an extensive survey of different types of teams in different types of organizational environments and circumstances, Carl Larson and Frank LaFasto (1989) conducted detailed interviews of members of high-performing executive teams, project teams, sports teams, government, and military teams. They concluded that eight characteristics set the successful teams apart:

1. *A clear, elevating goal.* That is, the goal is understood and seen as challenging to team members.
2. *A results-driven structure.* Team members must have clear roles, effective communication processes, and an ability to use available data to evaluate progress and take corrective action when necessary. Members must also understand how their roles interrelate.
3. *Competent members.* The team must comprise members with the right technical knowledge and interpersonal skills to contribute to the team's goal.
4. *Unified commitment.* Team members must be willing to dedicate effort and energy to the team.
5. *A collaborative climate.* Team members must develop a climate of trust in one another in order to collaborate.
6. *Standards of excellence.* High-performing teams have high standards for individual performance and members feel pressure to achieve.
7. *External support and recognition.* Teams need external rewards but also support in the form of resources necessary for the team to accomplish its work.
8. *Principled leadership.* Leaders provide the necessary motivation and alignment to complete the team's work.

All too often, teams fail in one of these categories. Low-performing teams consistently demonstrate some of the characteristics listed in [Table 11.1](#), missing one or more of these elements of high-performing teams. These can often be clues that a team would benefit from an intervention.

**Table 11.1** Common Problems in Teams

Many observers have seen that low-performing teams experience a common set of problems, including the following:

- Confusion about the team's objectives
- Ambiguity about team goals and how they will be achieved
- Missing handoffs or duplicating work between individuals who do not understand their unique roles or interdependencies
- Unclear expectations from the leader
- Lengthy decision-making cycles and an unclear authority for decisions
- Mismatched expectations for communication and information sharing
- Long and unproductive meetings
- An inability to successfully manage conflicts



## Special Types of Teams

In addition to a new model of team being used today, many organizations employ special kinds of teams to accomplish tasks. Three of these worth noting in detail are self-directed work teams, virtual teams, and cross-functional teams. Each of these teams solves a unique set of contemporary challenges in organizations, but also presents unique difficulties to overcome.

## Self-Directed Work Teams

Self-directed work teams are also frequently referred to as self-managed work teams. Self-directed teams have a long history, but their major rise to popularity came in the 1980s when economic cutbacks resulted in the loss of a middle management layer in many organizations, forcing companies to look to new ways of organizing work. The result was the pushing down of decision making into lower levels of the organization, often into teams (Orsburn & Moran, 2000). A self-directed work team is described as follows:

A group of interdependent, highly trained employees who are responsible for managing themselves and the work they do. They set their own goals, in cooperation with management, and the team plans how to achieve those goals and how their work is to be accomplished. . . . Employees on a self-directed team handle a wide array of functions and work with a minimum of supervision. (Ray & Bronstein, 1995, pp. 21–22)

A common myth is that a self-directed team can do whatever it wants, and many managers and leaders fear that if the team is given authority, productivity will suffer and laziness will become the norm (Hitchcock & Willard, 1995). In fact, self-directed teams have a wide variety of responsibilities, from goal setting, organizing work processes and schedules, and sorting out roles and responsibilities to monitoring results and taking action when results do not meet requirements. Some teams take on roles that were formerly the sole province of management, such as hiring team members and conducting performance evaluations.

Making the transition to self-directed teams usually challenges individual and cultural models of work, such as how decisions get made and who is ultimately responsible for productivity and performance. As a result, significant learning is required for managers and employees alike, which involves “learning how to behave under an empowered management philosophy including the roles and skills required, and the unlearning of old habits and behaviors (e.g., waiting for managers to solve problems)” (Druskat & Dahal, 2005, pp. 204–205). Employees must take ownership of team processes and be motivated to manage them as a group. Without significant learning, practice, and attention to team development, self-directed teams and leaders can quickly revert to “old” habits where leaders direct the team’s actions and make its decisions. Management behavior is an important factor in the transition to self-directed work teams, and their attitudes and actions have been called “the single largest threat” (Ray & Bronstein, 1995, p. 215) to successful implementation. Managers must shift from “paternalistic” behaviors of monitoring and supervision to acting as a coach or mentor to the team (Yeatts & Hyten, 1998).

Self-directed work teams require significant leadership commitment, mutual trust between management and employees, acceptance of new and sometimes ambiguous roles, and willingness to invest in time and money for training and development of teams. Self-directed teams are also prone to special challenges, such as resistance from leadership, the need to manage conflict within the team, power and control, team decision making, and giving and receiving feedback. The most successful self-directed work teams also have a support structure that encourages their ongoing development and growth beyond the initial implementation period.



## Virtual Teams

We have already noted how organizational teams are increasingly diverse and geographically distributed. These teams help organizations respond to the global customer environment and take advantage of expertise located throughout the world. Such teams are often referred to as virtual teams, defined as teams where members “work together through electronic means with minimal face-to-face interaction” (Malhotra, Majchrzak, & Rosen, 2007, p. 60). In a virtual team, team members from San Francisco, Denver, and London may all join a conference call and e-mail chat to solve a customer problem, perhaps pulling in an expert from Beijing when necessary. Virtual teams may hold few face-to-face meetings, conducting most team meetings through computer-mediated communications or other technologies. Thus, a distinguishing feature of a virtual team is the use of electronic tools to communicate and share information. This can involve very common and well-established technologies such as telephone conferences and e-mail, but many organizations also increasingly use Internet-based chat and instant messages, social networking technologies, handheld communications devices, and Internet-based collaboration tools to facilitate easy and quick interaction among team members.

When members are not collocated, coordination of work across physical and time-zone boundaries is the central challenge. It is also a challenge to build and develop a team, to create “avenues and opportunities for team members to have the level and depth of dialogue necessary to create a shared future” but where “issues of cultural diversity, geographic distance and member isolation can increase the challenges to effective collaboration” (Holton, 2001, p. 36). It can be challenging for members to build trust or to get to know one another on a personal level through electronic technology. Many feel that e-mail creates easy opportunities for miscommunication and misunderstanding, increasing the potential for conflict that is difficult to resolve through the same mechanism.

Dyer et al. (2007) identify four problems that seem to trouble virtual teams more frequently than face-to-face teams:

- *Lack of trust and mutual understanding.* Members may represent different cultures and develop conflicts, mistrust, or stereotypes when other members enact different cultural preferences.
- *Violated expectations.* Members may find differences in the use of different technologies, the expression of emotion through technology, or the time it takes one member to respond to another’s request.
- *Lack of training and effective use of communication technologies.* More effective virtual teams make use of available technologies and know how to apply them in the appropriate situation.
- *Lack of effective team leadership.* Dyer et al. (2007) note that leading a virtual team can require a significant investment of time. Malhotra et al. (2007) also identify special challenges of virtual team leaders, who must establish team trust, evaluate and measure progress, and ensure participation, all using distance technology.

To address these issues, some observers recommend several remedies (Connaughton & Daly, 2004), including creating opportunities to meet face-to-face to build relationships, creating opportunities for dialogue and



“small talk” for team members to get to know one another on a personal level, holding team sessions to agree on team norms about the frequency and type of communications (such as frequency of and process for conducting meetings), and scheduling discussions or training sessions on cultural differences.

## Cross-Functional Teams

Cross-functional teams are a response to the increasing complexity of operations in many organizations and the demand for rapid pace, focus, and problem solving (Parker, 1994). A cross-functional team is “a small collection of individuals from diverse functional specializations within the organization” (Webber, 2002, p. 201). Members are not usually part of the same department but represent varied departments, units, or geographies, and they are often brought together for a defined period to work on a specified project or problem. Team members usually report to a project team leader but also report to a functional unit “home” manager who directs their day-to-day work. An example of a cross-functional team would be a product development team where representatives from marketing, sales, customer service, finance, and product engineering all bring their unique experience to collaborate on a single team.

The same benefits of implementing cross-functional teams are also its major challenges. First, “functional diversity” of membership brings multiple perspectives together to enhance a team’s knowledge and problem-solving ability (Webber, 2002), yet it also means that teams can have trouble communicating and finding common ground as team meetings become organizationally “multicultural” experiences (Proehl, 1996). Members may use different points of reference or vocabularies and exhibit different values. Second, cross-functional teams can have the benefit of including members who can be brought together for a short amount of time to work on a project and then disband. Yet dedication of time can vary among organizational members, causing team conflicts and mismatched understandings of commitment to the team. This is “largely because the projects are not directly related to the members’ immediate work, and members have many competing responsibilities and varying degrees of immediate management support for participating in organizational initiatives” (Proehl, 1996, p. 7). Third, having a single team leader who brings the team together can provide a single point of leadership, yet it can create confusion and frustration for organizational members who now find themselves with two managers who may have conflicting demands. This can create ambiguity regarding decision making, such as which manager controls performance evaluations and rewards such as compensation or pay increases.

Studies of cross-functional team success point to the need to address some of these common challenges early on in the formation of a cross-functional team. Leaders can develop a common team mission and identity in the early stages so that team members who represent multiple functional areas can feel a common sense of belonging, commitment, and accountability to the success of the cross-functional team. Parker (1994) specifically recommends clear, overarching team goals to reduce ambiguity and confusion about the team’s authority and responsibility. Webber (2002) recommends both training for team leaders and that team leaders establish working relationships early with functional managers to explicitly negotiate time expectations for those members working on the team, and to agree on a performance appraisal and rewards process.

## Team Development

Whether we are discussing a more traditional, intact, and collocated team or one of the teams explored above, researchers have noted that most teams grow and develop in a common way.

One of the most well-known theories of group development comes from Tuckman (1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977), who proposed, based on an extensive review of published studies, that groups appear to experience a five-stage evolutionary process of development. Wheelan (2013) proposed a similar model with different labels. [Table 11.2](#) reviews these two models of group development. Not all teams will develop according to these stages, and not all will move sequentially from stage to stage. Some teams may find themselves “stuck” in one stage, or they may revert back to a previous state. For example, if a team cannot resolve a team conflict, team members may become guarded and may exhibit more of the characteristics of the first stage. While these models are overly simplistic, they may be instructive for practitioners. For the change agent, being aware of stages of team development can help to pinpoint common team problems and suggest interventions to enhance the team’s effectiveness and ability to develop to subsequent stages of productivity.

## Team-Building Interventions

Interventions to enhance team effectiveness can come from two general philosophies. Some researchers find it useful to distinguish between *team development programs* and *team interventions* (Barner, 2006).

Team development programs proactively encourage teams to develop as healthier groups. These programs “employ a training approach to team-building that relies heavily on the use of team exercises and simulations” (Barner, 2006, p. 48). A team development intervention might help a new team with start-up needs. For existing teams, it might help them to move from stage one to stage two of the models discussed in [Table 11.2](#) by encouraging forthright communication and the healthy expression and management of disagreement.

Team development programs often work with groups throughout the group process so that the team develops in a healthy way. In other words, a development intervention can be useful even when the team is not “at war, dysfunctional, incompetent, or distrustful” (Byrd, 2000, p. 157). They are often opportunities to allow healthy groups to develop even more effective patterns.

**Table 11.2** Stages of Team Development

<i>Tuckman (1965); Tuckman and Jensen (1977)</i>	<i>Wheelan (2013)</i>	<i>Stage Characteristics</i>
Forming	Dependency and inclusion	Team members explore initial interactions with one another in an “orientation” period as they begin to build relationships. There is generally a low level of trust and high anxiety and confusion about the group’s purpose and objectives. There are likely to be conversations about expectations, group rules, and structure. Communication may be guarded, exploratory, and cautious. Disagreement is rarely expressed. The group is generally highly dependent on the team leader, who is usually unchallenged, and members generally consent to what the leader says.
Storming	Counterdependency and fight	Members begin to express disagreements with one another and with the leader as members feel more comfortable and safe with the team. Emotions may run high as members have conflicts over goals, roles, or group values. Group cohesion may give way to subgroups or coalitions. Previously agreed-to group norms or rules may be broken. Members may try to negotiate the conflicts, work through them, and move on to the next stage, or they may become mired in unhealthy conflict.
Norming	Trust and structure	The group attempts to manage some of its conflicts by coming to agreement on group norms, roles, goals, and more. There is increased cohesion and a return to the harmonious climate of the first stage, but with increased trust, cooperation, and commitment. The team generally begins to focus again on task achievement, with less dependency on the leader. Conflict management techniques are now used effectively, and individuals feel free to express their opinions.
Performing	Work	Team members find synergy and begin to find repeated and successful ways of interacting to achieve group goals. Team members have clarity and agreement on goals, roles, and working processes. The team begins to see a period of high productivity and accomplishment of its objectives as energy is devoted to work tasks. The team monitors its own results and evaluates its own effectiveness, discussing problems and identifying opportunities for improvement. Team leaders more frequently delegate or leave routine decisions to the group.
Adjourning	N/A	As the team’s work is completed, the team may disband or members may leave.

By contrast, team interventions “employ a problem-solving approach to team-building that helps established work groups identify and address obstacles and constraints to high performance” (Barner, 2006, p. 48). These are likely to be more reactive than proactive, designed to address a problem that a team is experiencing. For example, members on a team may experience role conflict that impedes their performance, and they may need an intervention to sort through the confusion. “To use a seagoing analogy,” Barner (2006) writes, “team development programs take the form of redesigning boats when they are dry-docked, whereas team intervention engagements involve repairing leaky vessels while they are still at sea” (p. 49). These are likely to be situations in which a change agent is called in to correct an explicitly identified problem or barrier to the team’s effectiveness. The team is often stuck and needs the assistance of a change agent to get unstuck.



## What Is Team Building?

Whether they address development of a healthy team or team problems, most of these interventions go by the general label *team building*. As we will refer to it here, “teambuilding is the activity of attempting to improve a work group’s effectiveness at doing its work, maintaining the relationships of its members and the team’s contributions to the wider organizational system” (Coghlan, 1994, p. 21).

Team building, however, has different meanings for different people. In some lay circles, team building has come to refer to enjoyable and often relaxed activities in which team members may have fun and learn more about one another outside the work environment. To some, team building has come to mean any team-focused relationship-building event. Many consulting companies have been founded on this principle and now invite executives to learn scuba diving or sailing, or to work together to prepare a six-course meal with a top chef. Some clients request that OD practitioners build team-building activities into a meeting agenda, suggesting that the team meet for dinner, drinks, or an activity after the meeting. Such events are often enjoyable for the participants and usually build camaraderie. However, as Wheelan (2013) puts it, “Research does not suggest that rock climbing, whitewater rafting, blind trust walks, or playing basketball on donkeys increases productivity in any way” (pp. 119–120).

Others may hold an image of a team-building session as a time for members to “sit around and criticize one another, delve into personal matters, or just express their feelings about all kinds of issues, many not related to work” (Dyer, 1994, p. 15). Activities such as these are less effective at addressing some of the more challenging and pervasive problems that teams experience, such as resolving interpersonal and role conflicts, improving communication patterns, enhancing the team’s decision-making ability, or correcting process confusion. It is this latter set of challenges to team effectiveness that better encompasses the issues to be addressed in a team-building intervention.

Team building has a negative connotation for some clients because it cannot be denied that team-building activities often fail to achieve their objectives. In fact, some researchers have found that team-building interventions have no resulting effect on team performance (Salas, Rozell, Mullen, & Driskell, 1999). Others have found that the team building–performance link is a highly complex one, in which the effect on team performance depends on the amount of time the team has been together, the amount of time the team spends working together, the duration of each unique task, and the timing of the intervention (Bradley, White, & Mennecke, 2003; Woolley, 1998). It may also be that team-building interventions appear not to have met expectations when we implement them as one-time “fix-all” efforts and not as a part of a longer-term strategy (Boss, 1983). Building a high-performing team takes time. To think of a single team-building intervention as having “fixed” a team “conjures up pictures of OD consultants as magicians waving wands and curing all ills in the brief time that they have with the team—this is clearly naive” (Rushmer, 1997, p. 317).

Finally, Boss (1983) has observed a pattern of regression after team-building interventions, when team cohesion and unity, and energy for collaboration and trusting relationships, revert back to old traditions. This is especially true when there is little follow-up after the intervention, no support structure for continuing the

changes, no leadership support, and no associated changes in policies or processes. All of these postintervention factors should also be taken into account to ensure a successful team-building intervention.

## Data Gathering for Team Interventions

As you might expect, team-building interventions start with a data gathering methodology (using one or more of the methods described in [Chapter 7](#)) to determine the focus area for the intervention. Two widely used data gathering methods specific to teams are the *team diagnostic survey* and the *team diagnostic meeting*. Team diagnostic surveys vary significantly but usually ask team members to individually rate the team on such items as “Members are clear about group goals,” “Members are clear about their roles,” “The group uses effective decision-making strategies,” and “The group uses effective conflict management strategies” (Wheelan, 2013, pp. 55–57). Many practitioners design customized surveys of this sort, depending on the team’s current needs. A more formally tested empirical team diagnostic instrument has been designed by Wageman, Hackman, and Lehman (2005) and consists of a 15- to 20-minute survey designed to assess such areas as team structure, goals, leadership, and cohesiveness. Use of a designed and tested instrument such as this one can increase validity and allow comparisons to other high-performing teams. One popular team diagnostic instrument comes from the bestselling book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (Lencioni, 2002). Lencioni argues that teams frequently experience five common pitfalls that hinder them, including absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results (p. 188). A 15-question team assessment helps to diagnose which of these concerns is hindering the team, including items such as “team members are passionate and unguarded in their discussion of issues” and “team members are deeply concerned about the prospect of letting down their peers” (pp. 192–193). While the five dysfunctions model and assessment can generate useful dialogue, some have questioned its scientific validity (Hackman, 2006).

A second data gathering method, a team diagnostic meeting, allows the group itself to assess its own functioning, usually face-to-face. In an open environment of self-evaluation, with or without a facilitator, team members discuss the team’s strengths and weaknesses, and they design their own action plans to address them, which may involve one or more team-building interventions. (Some possible diagnostic discussion questions are listed in [Table 11.3](#).) In one variation of a diagnostic setting, team members write down the issues that inhibit the team’s effectiveness, small subgroups sort the issues by theme, and the team discusses and prioritizes the problem areas, which are then the focus for problem-solving meetings on another occasion.



**Table 11.3** Questions to Ask During a Team Diagnostic Meeting

- What are this team's strengths?
- How are we doing against our goals?
- What factors have contributed to our success?
- What is getting in the way of our goal achievement?
- How well do we solve problems?
- How well do we make decisions?
- How effective are our team meetings?
- How well do we understand our unique roles and responsibilities?
- How well do we collaborate in our work together?
- How well do we communicate with one another?
- How well do we work with other teams?
- How well do we handle disagreement or conflict?
- How well do we work with the team leader?
- What problems should we be working to address?

The chief advantage of this method is that the group itself owns and chooses its own categories of analysis without relying on the predefined categories of a survey. Use of data gathering or diagnostic methods such as these can help to narrow the team-building intervention to the highest priority areas of concern to the team. Once the data gathering or diagnostic activity is completed, a team-building intervention may be appropriate if the data show any of the signs listed in [Table 11.4](#).

**Table 11.4** Signs That a Team Intervention Is Necessary

Dyer (1994, p. 79) lists 12 signs that a team intervention is warranted:

- Loss of production or unit output (productivity)
- Increase of grievances or complaints from the staff
- Evidence of conflicts or hostility among staff members
- Confusion about assignments, missed signals, and unclear relationships
- Decisions misunderstood or not carried through properly
- Apathy and general lack of interest or involvement of staff members
- Lack of initiation, imagination, innovation—actions taken for solving complex problems
- Ineffective staff meetings, low participation, minimal effective decisions
- Slow start-up of a new group that needs to develop quickly into a working team
- High dependency on or negative reactions to the manager (or team leader)
- Complaints from users or customers about quality of service
- Continued unaccounted increase of costs

There are a wide variety of team-building interventions, and most change agents are prone to highly adapt them based on the needs of the team. The next sections describe six common team-building interventions that

relate to common needs of a high-performing team, such as team formation and change, job design and work process analysis, roles and responsibilities, and problem solving:

1. Team start-up and transition meetings
2. Confrontation meetings
3. Role negotiation and role analysis
4. Work redesign
5. Workout
6. Appreciative inquiry

Some of these interventions work well for new teams, while some work best for existing teams with work history. [Table 11.5](#) compares this aspect of these six team intervention approaches.

## Team Start-Up and Transition Meetings

In many organizations, teams are frequently formed, and then they work, evolve, and disband, with team members moving on to other projects. This, in fact, is one of the major advantages of teams, because members' skills and experiences can be combined to tackle a problem or situation and then move on to another team and another problem (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Teams can struggle through the start-up process, however, often failing to devote the time and energy to forming the team effectively, and instead the team will quickly jump in to performing work or solving problems. This is especially true for temporary or ad hoc teams that may see little need to invest time in the team's initial forming stages. Even when leaders transition or team members join (or leave) the team, there is a period of adjustment that will require attention to get the team back to its formerly productive ways. Team members may use the transition to stop and wonder whether the goals and processes that the team has depended on to date will remain in place. Roles may need to change as team membership changes. Without conscious attention to the initial stages of team formation, many teams will flounder for an extended period until they sort out the team's purpose, team member roles, and working relationships on their own through trial and error. During this time, without much attention to the team, team members can become disengaged and withdrawn, and productivity can suffer.

**Table 11.5** A Comparison of Team Intervention Approaches

<i>Intervention</i>	<i>New Teams</i>	<i>Existing Teams</i>
Team start-up and transition meetings	X	
Confrontation meetings		X
Role negotiation and role analysis	X	X
Work redesign		X
Workout		X
Appreciative inquiry	X	X

Team start-up (for new teams) or transition meeting interventions (in the case of a new leader) can both be effective interventions to start teams off quickly. West (2004) writes, "The beginning of a team's life has a significant influence on its later development and effectiveness, especially when crises occur. Start-up interventions can help create team ethos, determine clarity of direction, and shape team working practices" (p. 77). A well-structured team start-up and transition intervention can also do the following:

- Quickly establish agreements and norms so that the team can begin to function more quickly
- Provide opportunities to surface team member disagreements and misunderstandings earlier rather than later

- Clarify basic team functions such as goals and operating methods
- Allow team members to begin to develop interpersonal relationships
- Provide team members with clear and well-defined roles

Golembiewski (1979a) offers several instructive design guidelines for working with new groups or those in transition. Because the teams are new, start-up and transition intervention designs generally emphasize developing structure versus “unfreezing” groups out of any previous agreements. It may be necessary to design sessions that limit the amount of information that a new team tries to process at any one time, instead providing boundaries for discussions to avoid the team becoming overwhelmed. Frequent breaks away from team development or team building may be useful to allow the team to have a chance to work and experiment, and then return to the team development session with fresh knowledge.

A sample start-up or transition meeting outline is listed in [Table 11.6](#).

**Table 11.6** A Sample Start-Up or Transition Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions of each team member  
Career history and background, education, family, personal interests, or hobbies
2. Talk with the leader  
The leader's vision of and expectations for the team  
Leadership style, "hot buttons," work preferences, values  
Personal, "getting to know you" interview with the leader  
Team member expectations and needs of the leader
3. Exploration of team charter, mission, and purpose
4. Exploration of team goals and objectives  
Priorities  
Timelines and milestones  
Metrics (type, number, frequency of updates, targets, communication of results)
5. Exploration of team member roles and responsibilities  
Team member roles, titles, job functions, interdependencies among members
6. Agreement on team norms and guidelines for work  
How will we make decisions?  
What will be our basic method for work (individual tasks, subcommittees, the whole group considers all topics)?  
How do we make sure that everyone gets a chance to discuss issues or raise concerns?  
How will we communicate and resolve differences?  
How will we ensure the completion of work? How will we change things that are not producing results? (Dyer, 1994, pp. 132–135)
7. Agreement on team meetings  
Expected attendance  
Frequency  
Length  
Location  
Usual topics  
Agenda

## Confrontation Meetings

The confrontation meeting was first outlined by Beckhard (1967). It consists of a half-day to daylong session of any type of team (though it was first outlined as a session specifically for executive teams) and is in many respects a kind of team diagnostic meeting, as described earlier. It is more effective with intact teams that have worked together for some period versus new teams that do not have an extended history. The name of the intervention might suggest that it is intended to address or expose team conflict, but what is “confronted” are the team’s obstacles, broadly defined. In a confrontation meeting, the team examines its own effectiveness and health, and it develops action plans to address major areas of ineffectiveness and dissatisfaction. Beckhard writes that the confrontation meeting is appropriate for the following situations:

- There is a need for the total management group to examine its own workings.
- Very limited time is available for the activity.
- Top management wishes to improve the conditions quickly.
- There is enough cohesion in the top team to ensure follow-up.
- There is real commitment to resolving the issues on the part of top management.
- The organization is experiencing, or has recently experienced, some major change. (Beckhard, 1967, p. 150)

Beckhard (1967) writes that “in periods of stress following major organizational changes, there tends to be much confusion and energy expended that negatively affects productivity and organization health” (p. 153). The rapid nature of the confrontation meeting allows for an effective gathering and sharing of data without the extended time and expense of an organizationwide survey.

The confrontation meeting is structured in seven phases (Beckhard, 1967):

*Phase 1:* Climate setting (45 minutes to 1 hour). The session begins with the leader setting expectations to encourage an open and honest discussion.

*Phase 2:* Information collecting (1 hour). The group is divided into subgroups of seven to eight people, usually representing a broad cross-section of levels and functional specializations. Each subgroup lists obstacles to productive goal achievement and suggestions that would improve the organization.

*Phase 3:* Information sharing (1 hour). A representative from each subgroup reports back to the larger group. A facilitator begins to group the contributions into categories.

*Phase 4:* Priority setting and group action planning (75 minutes). Groups are re-formed into functional units, sitting with others in their normal work team. Each group prioritizes the problems that were shared in Phase 3 and identifies the issues it believes should be given the most attention.

*Phase 5:* Organization action planning (1 to 2 hours). Subgroups share their priorities with the larger group.

*Phase 6:* Immediate follow-up by top team (1 to 3 hours). The confrontation meeting ends and the top management group holds a private meeting to discuss the nominated priorities and to agree on what follow-up actions they will support. Within a few days they report back to the attendees on which

actions they have selected.

*Phase 7: Progress review (2 hours).* A follow-up meeting is held with all attendees to review progress 4 to 6 weeks after the confrontation meeting.

The confrontation meeting can have the advantage of encouraging participation and ownership by team members. Beckhard notes that this approach can fail if team leaders do not listen to or accept input from team members, if they do not follow up on the team's priorities, or if they set overly aggressive goals that do not get met.

## Role Negotiation and Role Analysis

Because team members are, by definition, interdependent with interrelating work activities, they can often find themselves in the frustrating position of not knowing how the various pieces of work fit together to achieve the overall team objectives. Whether team members have worked together at length or are just starting, member roles are a frequent area of confusion. Consider the following common situations:

- Members may not be clear about one another's assignments, so they do not know who to approach with a question or problem.
- There may be overlapping work, with multiple team members performing the same activities.
- There may be work necessary to accomplish that no team member is performing.
- There may be confusion about how the work contributes to the team's goals.
- The team may have evolved a new vision, purpose, or strategy, but old roles still remain.
- The team may have no process for assigning the work to a new team member.
- There may be frustrations about the equitable distribution of work (who gets the good assignments, who gets too many/too few assignments).
- The team leader may assign multiple people to similar activities, leading team members to wonder who is truly responsible for the task or whether the tasks relate at all.

The result can be team members who fight for the same work while other work gets lost, and inevitable last-minute crises that come about because of the confusion (Dyer, 1994). These role-related challenges can be categorized into several types of role problems that often occur in teams (Adair, 1986):

1. *Role conflict* (one team member) occurs when one team member holds two mutually incompatible roles. For example, a member leading a project team who is expected to discover the best possible solution but whose manager expects her to advocate a single solution at the same time.
2. *Role conflict* (multiple team members) occurs when team members hold the same role, and these are in conflict with one another. An example might be two salespeople who are given the same territory with the same customers.
3. *Role incompatibility* occurs when there are incompatible expectations about a given role. For example, some may expect the operations manager to facilitate the meeting while other members expect him quietly to take notes.
4. *Role overload* describes the situation when a person has too many roles to fulfill, such as sitting on multiple committees and being expected to act as the liaison between all of them, or to participate on the project team and all subteams.
5. *Role underload* occurs when a role is not fully developed with enough significant work or responsibilities.
6. *Role ambiguity* occurs when the role owner or team members are unclear about the responsibilities of a given role.

Having well-written job descriptions can address some of these challenges but still tends to leave some role issues unresolved. A role negotiation exercise and a second related intervention called "responsibility charting"



can help teams resolve the confusion, conflict, and frustration about roles.

## Role Negotiation Exercise

The role negotiation exercise (also called role analysis technique) puts team members in the position of negotiating responsibilities among themselves without needing a leader to make the decision for them. As a result, it is highly participative and can build team consensus about responsibilities. It results in each member having a documented and agreed-upon role description, with an understanding of the preferences and needs of other team members. As an intervention, it is relatively simple to implement, can be done in a short amount of time, and requires no special training of team members to carry out. The four steps of a role negotiation are as follows (Dayal & Thomas, 1968; Dyer, 1994; Golembiewski, 2000e; R. Harrison, 1972; West, 2004):

*Step 1:* Privately, each team member takes a piece of flip chart paper and writes down the activities and responsibilities of his or her role. “This means sharing all information about how the focal person understands the job—*what* is expected, *when* things are expected to be done, and *how* they are expected to be done” (Dyer, 1994, p. 120).

*Step 2:* Next, the completed flip charts are placed around a room, and every team member reads each flip chart. Clarifying questions may be asked of the author about how he or she has defined the role.

*Step 3:* Each team member writes a list on a separate piece of notebook paper with what he or she wants any other team member to (a) do more of, (b) do less of, or (c) keep doing the same. Every team member comments on every other team member’s role.

*Step 4:* The lists are sorted so that each team member has a list completed for his or her role (with each of the three categories listed in Step 3) by every other member. These may be written on flip charts and posted publicly for all to read or they may simply be handed out to each person. Team members can then meet in pairs or as a whole team to discuss their lists and negotiate what they would like each other to keep doing or to do differently. It is in this step where the value of the exercise becomes most meaningful, with members usually needing to compromise and be willing to change in at least some small degree. As Roger Harrison (1972) puts it, “Unless a *quid pro quo* can be offered in return for a desired behavior change, there is little point in having a discussion about it” (p. 90). Members will thus learn how to express their own needs from one another and negotiate how or whether those needs can be fulfilled. Harrison also suggests that, following a role negotiation exercise, team members try to keep to the negotiated agreements they have made for at least a short time, but that if they do not work, they should try to renegotiate them. Over time, he believes, the team will learn how to do this negotiation as part of its ongoing work activity.

Role negotiation requires an environment of openness and safety, comfort in expressing disagreement and getting beyond disagreement, the ability to express one’s wants and needs, and mutual commitment to each other and to the group. Lest it sound too simple: The analysis, charting, and negotiation of member roles on a team is not simply a matter of documenting who will do what, as this process intervention may appear. Complex identity matters and political struggles are at play when members negotiate responsibilities. If I used

to be responsible for reviewing all mechanical engineering designs for the company's products, and the team decides that everyone will share that action and I now will begin to work more closely with suppliers only on designs I reviewed, I may feel that I have lost a part of my professional identity. I may feel like I have been demoted or that I am no longer as significant a contributor as I once was. Consequently, change agents who implement role analysis and clarification interventions will be more successful if they are aware of and sensitive to the complexities of managing personal impacts and transitions.

## Responsibility Charting

The responsibility charting technique (Beckhard & Harris, 1977) can help a team with its decision-making processes so that members understand who is responsible and involved with what actions and decisions. It can reduce conflict by specifying up front, before the situation occurs, what involvement is necessary in what ways by which team members. Like role negotiation, role analysis is deceptively simple: It consists of the development of a chart or grid on which are written the team's major activities and that members are given the responsibility of completing. The simplicity of the design belies its power, since completing the chart can be a focal point to pull a group out of a conflict or confusion and surface unexamined difficulties. An example of a role analysis chart is provided in [Table 11.7](#).

Team member names are listed at the top of the grid, and down the left-hand column are listed the team's major activities. One of the following letters is placed under each team member name, in the row for each activity, representing that team member's responsibility for the activity (or it may be left blank if the member is not involved):

- *R: Responsible.* This person is responsible for ensuring that this action is carried out.
- *AV: Approval or veto.* This person has authority to approve or veto actions and decisions for this item.
- *S: Support.* This person supports the activity with time or other resources.
- *C: Consulted.* This person should be consulted or included in the action.
- *I: Informed.* This person should be communicated to or informed about the status of the activity.

Variations exist among practitioners in which letters should be included. Some, for example, call a role analysis chart a RACI chart and leave out the *S*. Golembiewski (2000d) advocates adding a *D* (for example, *R-D* and *A-D*) to signify responsibility or authority for a decision and *Imp* to signify responsibility for implementation.

Beckhard and Harris (1977) advocate a number of useful constraints or "rules" regarding the use of responsibility charts. First, they recommend that every activity line must have one and only one person responsible—only one *R*. If more than one person must be responsible, the activity should be segmented so that the boundary of each member's responsibility is documented clearly. Second, a large number of approvals—*As*—might be an indication that there are too many approvals, and team activity might be streamlined by reducing the number of necessary approvers. Similarly, having too many people consulted on an action may be unnecessarily involving team members and inviting input, which can lead to those consulted becoming surrogate or informal approvers, again slowing down team implementation.

**Table 11.7** A Role Analysis Chart

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Team Member 1</i>	<i>Team Member 2</i>	<i>Team Member 3</i>

## Work Redesign

Hackman and Oldham (1980) describe work redesign as the answer to the question “How can work be structured so that it is performed effectively and, at the same time, jobholders find the work personally rewarding and satisfying?” (p. 71). When jobs are designed well, people find them more motivating and contribute more effectively to the outcomes that the team seeks. Thus, work redesign can be both an individual intervention and an intervention into the effectiveness of a team.

Hackman and Oldham (1980) write that some tasks are best done by individuals, but that especially complex tasks are usually best performed by a team. This is true only if the team and task are well designed. Yet, the authors write, “it turns out that designing work for groups is *not* merely constructing a ‘team version’ of a good individual job design. . . . For groups, one must consider person-job, person-group, and group-job relationships, as well as how these components fit together” (p. 67).

The Hackman and Oldham model of work group effectiveness defines three criteria to look for in an effective work group. Team membership, goals, and individual jobs on a team can be assessed on these three dimensions.

1. *Level of effort brought to bear on the group task.* How well the group’s task is designed will affect how much effort team members can or will put toward the task. Well-designed tasks have the following:
  - a. *Skill variety.* Team members bring a number of their skills to bear on the task.
  - b. *Task identity.* The work is a “whole and meaningful piece of work” (Hackman & Oldham, 1980, p. 171).
  - c. *Task significance.* The work matters to others internal or external to the team.
  - d. *Autonomy.* Team members have some freedom in designing the work, such as the order and priority of subtasks to be accomplished.
  - e. *Feedback.* The team gets adequate and truthful information about its performance.

These five design criteria about the properties of the job itself can be diagnosed in a number of ways, including a Job Diagnostic Survey created by Hackman and Oldham (1975). If any of them is significantly missing, the team is likely to have motivational problems related to the task, as team members are likely to see the work as less meaningful and personally satisfying.

2. *Amount of knowledge and skill applied to task work.* The composition of the group is an important design feature that will contribute to or inhibit a group’s effectiveness. Team members must have appropriate competence to perform the skills and tasks needed by the team, and the team must have enough members to handle the amount of work needed but not so many that extra members actually contribute to a decline in the team’s productivity. Team members should have the interpersonal skills to manage conflict and work with a wide variety of work styles and personalities. If team members are not trained for the tasks they are asked to perform, they will be frustrated and productivity will decline, and if the team has too many members, each member likely will not have a significant enough task to perform to find the task motivating.

3. *Appropriateness of group norms about performance processes.* This category concerns such items as team agreements about the consistent use of team processes, how the team will measure its progress, and how changes will be made when processes and results do not meet expectations. Teams must have enough standardization that they do not waste time continually deciding how routine tasks are to be performed, yet they must have enough flexibility to recognize when alterations of standard processes are needed.

The challenge in designing a work group, then, is to help members develop norms that reinforce the use of strategies that are uniquely appropriate to the group task, and that are amenable to change when task requirements or constraints change. (Hackman & Oldham, 1980, p. 181)

Several principles can help change agents work with teams to design tasks more effectively (Hackman & Oldham, 1980):

1. *Combining tasks.* Skill variety can be increased by combining work tasks so that team members do not always perform the same routine tasks over and over, but have an array of activities to reduce monotony and make use of different skills.
2. *Forming natural work units.* Task identity and significance can be increased by forming work units so that the same person performs related activities. These might be organized any number of ways, for example, by geography, customer account, or industry.
3. *Establishing client relationships.* Work can be made more meaningful when team members have contact with their customers or clients. They begin to see the impact of their work on their customers, and they get direct feedback about how customers use their work and feel about it.
4. *Vertically loading the job.* Autonomy increases when jobs are vertically loaded—that is, when team members take a greater responsibility for both a larger number of process steps as well as the authority to decide when and how the work will be accomplished.
5. *Opening feedback channels.* Managers often have feedback or data about a team's performance that they do not share, for whatever reason. Making this information available to the team can increase motivation. For example, if a team has immediate access to a monthly customer survey, it can begin to see connections between that month's work and the customer satisfaction feedback.

Finally, Hackman and Oldham note that very little impact on individual jobs and group performance will be achieved if the group is not supported in the context of the whole organizational system. There should be an appropriate compensation and rewards system in place to recognize excellent performance, a training and education system that can help team members learn effective interpersonal and task skills, and clear communication from management about the constraints on the group (such as budget or timelines).

## Workout

Workout is a problem-solving methodology that was originally developed at General Electric but has now been adapted for use by teams in many organizations. General Motors has labeled the process a GoFast, Unilever has called it a Cleanout, and it goes by the name Trailblazing at Armstrong (Ulrich, Kerr, & Ashkenas, 2002, p. 286). The process is for use by single teams, cross-functional teams, or multiple functions. As originally designed, it can involve dozens or even hundreds of employees from across an entire company. For this reason, it can also be called a whole organization intervention, more examples of which are discussed in the next two chapters. As described here, it is also appropriate for teams in a mini-Workout scenario, where team members use it as a problem-solving methodology for their own internal processes. On a team, a Workout can be a powerful intervention to encourage participation and willingness to initiate an organizational change.

The purpose of a Workout is to identify and eliminate unnecessary work, work that might be taking up extensive time or resources but that is adding little value, work that is bureaucratic in nature, or work not meeting expectations because of process errors or other deficiencies. In the Workout process, it is not solely the leader's responsibility to identify these team problems. Team members who actually do the work are considered to understand it best, so their input is most important. For example, a team member might identify two meetings that have the same agenda and only a few different participants and propose that these meetings be combined to save time and reduce duplication of effort. Another member might note that she is required to produce weekly reports that are only read rarely and suggest a different frequency for producing them. Team members both propose improvement opportunities and take responsibility for designing solutions and proposing changes to senior management.

As designed, the process is relatively simple:

Small groups of managers and employees, cross-functional or cross-level or both, address critical business issues, develop recommendations, and present them to a senior leader at a Town Meeting. After open dialogue, the leader makes "on-the-spot," yes-or-no decisions on those recommendations, empowers people to carry out the ones that are approved, and afterwards reviews progress regularly to make sure that results are actually achieved. (Ulrich et al., 2002, p. 23)

Planning the Workout session begins with the selection of an appropriate business problem, usually involving a process where results are unsatisfactory. Team members are selected who have a stake in the outcome and energy to contribute, and a Workout is planned for 1 to 3 days, during which the process will be redesigned or other changes will be proposed. Senior management support before the Workout session is necessary to ensure that they are open to the change and ready to listen carefully to team recommendations. With halfhearted management support, the team will not have backing later, when there are inevitably obstacles to implementation.

The Workout session itself generally follows a five-step process (Ulrich et al., 2002):

1. *Introduction.* Participants learn about the purpose, goals, and structure of the Workout. All participants are encouraged to see the meeting as an opportunity to develop and implement a wide range of solutions, not as a chance to defend one's own function or territory.
2. *Brainstorming.* Small groups develop lists of ideas about what the Workout should accomplish.
3. *Gallery of ideas.* Groups identify their top 10 best ideas and post them for others to read. The larger group reviews the ideas and votes on three to four to work on for the remainder of the Workout session.
4. *Action planning.* Teams are formed to expand on the ideas that were described, identifying actions that should be taken and changes that should be made. They identify costs and benefits for making the change and create a project plan and timeline for implementation of the initiative. A project sponsor and team leader are also identified. During a longer Workout session, a process might be redesigned on the spot at this stage.
5. *Town meeting.* The town meeting is the opportunity for Workout participants to present their ideas to senior management. Participants describe the change desired and potential costs, risks, and benefits to the organization of making the change. Senior leaders ask questions to clarify, challenge, and test the team's thinking and are asked to make a yes-or-no decision immediately. They may decide to delegate the decision or poll other managers in attendance. Initiatives that are agreed to are immediately sponsored and expected to begin implementation. Some Workout sessions end with the symbolic physical action of the senior leader(s) signing the flip charts or project plans to publicly demonstrate their commitment to the effort.

Following the Workout session, senior leaders check on the initiative progress on a regular basis. In the first days and weeks following the Workout, the high level of enthusiasm for the project can be supplanted by negativity and discouragement as the difficult change work begins. Leaders can help to encourage the implementation team to maintain energy and focus on the project.

## Positive Organizational Scholarship and Appreciative Inquiry

Most discussions of organizational effectiveness, including written works such as this one, contain an implicit medical model of organizational health (notice that we still refer to a “diagnosis” stage, as described in [Chapter 8](#)). Problems are seen as deficiencies, illnesses, and cancers to be rooted out and eliminated. Our language is full of descriptions of issues, gaps, barriers, obstacles, snags, crises, errors, conflicts, and mistakes. Team meetings that direct attention to “what’s going wrong here” create negative environments where people focus on harmful and destructive actions and relationships, and these conversations often create a cycle of depression, pessimism, and low energy. Organizational members can come to see the problems as insurmountable and hopeless. As members of a team continually examine what is wrong, this habit even seems to carry over to the implementation of any possible solution, as team members may point out weaknesses and faults with even the most promising changes. Energy wanes and morale suffers. It is no wonder that there are few people to sign up for yet another problem-solving meeting.

Contrast this with a team meeting that directs our attention to what is working well, what strengths our team and organization hold, relationships that are flourishing, times when we have felt gratitude toward a teammate, times when we have been resilient or when we have achieved extraordinary performance. As the conversation develops and ideas are broadened and expanded, an “upward spiral” (Fredrickson, 2003) builds and positive emotions such as joy and pride are expressed. Which meeting would you rather attend?

The field of positive organizational scholarship (POS), a branch of the field of positive psychology founded by Martin Seligman, suggests new approaches to organization development by examining positive phenomena and their outcomes (Cameron, 2005). Instead of focusing on what is wrong with the system or its pathologies, the positive and affirmative health of the system is examined. Positive organizational scholarship “advocates the position that the desire to improve the human condition is universal and that the capacity to do so is latent in most systems” (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003, p. 10). POS investigates phenomena such as resilience, meaningfulness, gratitude, and positive relationships and the influences of those phenomena on organizational effectiveness. This is not to deny that negativity exists, but the field emphasizes the positive as an alternative to the more commonly investigated phenomena of errors, dissatisfaction, low morale, and so on.

Positive in this context has three components (Cameron, 2005, p. 317):

1. An affirmative bias (away from negative phenomena). We focus on “strengths, capabilities and possibilities rather than threats, problems and weaknesses” (Lewis, 2011, p. 17).
2. An emphasis on goodness, or the best of the human condition. We seek to elicit “virtuous actions” where organizational members may assist others without any expectation of self-benefit, setting aside blame, offering forgiveness for mistakes, and being open with information.
3. Positive deviance, or extraordinarily successful outcomes. By positive deviance, we mean examining conditions and moving to a state where the organization or team is not just satisfactory, effective, or efficient, but instead striving to flourish, find excellence, and create extraordinary results.



An organization that develops these three areas creates an “abundance culture” (Lewis, 2011, p. 24) that improves social capital, develops positive emotions, and builds strengths, all of which create high-quality relationships and a resilient culture that can improve organizational performance. Several studies attest to these outcomes.

Cameron, Mora, Leutscher, and Calarco (2011) report on two studies in a financial services company and a health care organization where they investigated the relationship between positive phenomena and organizational outcomes. The survey they administered assessed the degree to which participants felt dignity and respect, caring, support, inspiration, forgiveness, and meaning at work, with survey items such as “We show appreciation for one another,” “We genuinely care about each other,” “We honor one another’s talents,” “We inspire each other,” “We correct errors without placing blame,” and “We see the larger purpose in our work.” After analyzing the results of almost 2,000 surveys in the financial services company and comparing them to financial outcomes, the authors note that “positive practices appear to be important contributors to organizational effectiveness as measured by financial performance” (p. 277). In the health care environment, where some organizational departments implemented positive practices, “units that improved overall positive practices outperformed units that did not” (p. 282) on outcomes such as patient satisfaction and organizational climate. The authors conclude that positive practices at work improve organizational performance through three factors: (1) amplifying effects, whereby positive practices create positive emotions in an upward spiral, producing an environment where other organizational members also want to display positive practices; (2) buffering effects, whereby positive practices help organizational members remain resilient through difficult times, inoculating them against the negative effects of distress; and (3) heliotropic effects, whereby organizational members tend to be more attracted to positive social systems than negative ones.

Team and individual development has been the focus of a strengths-based approach investigated by the Gallup organization (Clifton & Harter, 2003). The StrengthsFinder approach (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Rath, 2007) advocates investigating attributes where an individual or team has a talent, in contrast to a weakness-based approach to development in which development programs generally push individuals and teams to shore up deficiencies. Development using a strengths-based approach recommends that the learner “focus maximum learning on talents, integrate activities of one’s life around talents and manage around weaknesses (finding complementary partners, etc.)” (Clifton & Harter, 2003, p. 120). Clifton and Harter (2003) report a study of teams in an automobile manufacturing organization and a health care organization that were given access to strengths-based development. In both cases, the groups that emphasized strengths improved scores in employee engagement. In the automobile organization, the high-performing strengths-oriented group improved productivity by 50 percent more than a control group.

A recently popularized method of intervening in teams and organizations called *appreciative inquiry* (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Srivastva, Cooperrider, & Associates, 1990) aims to do just that. Whereas ordinary problem-solving approaches follow a standard process of identifying problems, brainstorming possible causes and their negative effects, generating solutions, evaluating possible solutions, and implementing the ideal solution, the appreciative inquiry process begins with the team’s strengths. By appreciating what is working well and where the team has found success, positive energy is released, and the

team begins to gain a better understanding of its own valuable contributions. These conversations are naturally more enjoyable, encouraging, and upbeat. Cooperrider and Whitney (2001) write that “the seeds of change—that is, the things people think and talk about, the things people discover and learn, and the things that inform dialogue and inspire images of the future—are implicit in the very first questions we ask” (p. 20). Consider the different reactions a team might give to “What’s going wrong in this team?” and the following alternative set of appreciative inquiry questions:

- Describe a time in your organization that you consider a high-point experience, a time when you were most engaged and felt alive and vibrant.
- Without being modest, tell me what it is that you most value about yourself, your work, and your organization.
- What are the core factors that give life to your organization when it is at its best?
- Imagine your organization 10 years from now, when everything is just as you always wished it could be. What is different? How have you contributed to this dream organization? (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 14)

The conversation that results from these questions creates an environment of openness, hope, and participation in creating a better team or organization. These questions also tend to free creative thinking and avoid allowing a group to get bogged down in the problems of the present.

Its creators see appreciative inquiry as philosophically in contrast with the traditional action research paradigm, where problems of the past are examined through disciplined data gathering and examination, and solutions are implemented and measured. It is based in the “power of the positive question” and the notion that “human systems grow and construct their future realities in the direction of what they most persistently, actively and collectively ask questions about” (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2001, p. 191). It is thus highly consistent with the social construction model of organizational change discussed in [Chapter 4](#), harnessing the power of language and communication in creating organizations and teams as they unfold and are always in-process. For the change agent, appreciative inquiry requires a shift in mind-set to “view organizations as living spiritual-social systems—mysteries of creation to be nurtured and affirmed, not mechanistic or scientific operations with problems to be solved” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 46). We are well trained in rooting out problems and their solutions, but this new way of intervening also requires a new way of thinking, asking questions, and directing a team’s energy.

The appreciative inquiry process consists of four steps or phases, called a “4-D cycle” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005):

1. *Discovery*. The discovery process consists of engaging the team and relevant stakeholders in a dialogue about strengths, best practices, accomplishments, and rewarding experiences. Topics are turned around from what is absent or not working to what the team would like to see happen more often and what is working well.
2. *Dream*. Participants look to the future to imagine how things could be, articulating and sharing their visions for the future.

3. *Design*. The team collaboratively constructs a vision for a new future and actions that move the team or organization to a desirable new point.
4. *Destiny*. Last, the discussion focuses less on action plans and spreadsheets and more on creating grassroots networks (including those beyond the team) of interested and committed parties who are empowered and who freely choose to take action on their own.

Several studies have attested to the positive outcomes that resulted from using an appreciative inquiry approach. In one review of the literature, Bushe and Kassam (2005) found that appreciative inquiry was most successful and transformative when it generated new knowledge, new ways of thinking about the organization, or new approaches to taking action. Barrett and Cooperrider (1990) present a compelling case study of change in a hotel management team where conflict and defensiveness were high. Problem-solving and conflict resolution efforts had stalled, and conflicts had become aggressively hostile and confrontational. Instead of focusing on the negativity of the past, the authors encouraged the group to begin to share their images for what might be different. They began to imagine a new hotel environment and to discuss changes to both the hotel and the team that would fit with their shared vision. Over time, personal conflicts waned as the group learned to resolve its ideational disagreements in favor of a shared future.

Some may find the appreciative inquiry approach naïve, wondering how a team or organization could succeed if it failed to honestly admit to and examine its problems. Appreciative inquiry does not deny that problems exist, but it tries to reframe them into new subjects for dialogue. For example, one group of consultants worked closely with a customer service department at a major airline. Instead of focusing their attention on the problem of mishandled, lost, or late baggage (a problem they all agreed plagued the airline), the consultants helped them turn the discussion to developing an “exceptional arrival experience” for customers (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 134). The discussion then turned to exploring all of the multiple aspects of that experience instead of becoming mired in the baggage concerns, which were just a part of the larger topic. Interest and energy remained high, because the topic was attractive, it encouraged thought and participation, and it inspired dialogue about a new future.

## Intergroup Interventions

To this point, we have concentrated our attention on the development of a single team. As we know, however, teams do not exist in isolation. They usually interact with other teams inside and outside organizations. The East Coast production team works with the West Coast production team, the customer service team produces reports for the sales team, client management teams create contracts to hand off to internal project teams, and so on. During the course of their work, for various reasons teams can come into conflict with one another. They can develop rivalries and become competitive. Some interdepartmental competition may be beneficial; for example, when two sales teams each try to outperform the other, participants may be motivated to work harder and increase regional sales. When coordination is required and unhealthy conflict increases, however, performance can significantly decline. Organizations may consider these team conflicts unique, but in fact a long history of research in psychology and sociology demonstrates why and how social groups come into conflict and what can be done to resolve these disputes.

Why would teams experience conflict when they are ostensibly part of the same organization and dedicated to its larger purpose? There are so many reasons, in fact, that participants in one research study could identify as many as 250 unique types of intergroup conflict (Cargile, Bradac, & Cole, 2006) among collectives as large as nations and religious groups. Of the general categories that participants identified, several sources of intergroup conflict are especially germane to organizational environments:

- *Economic differences*: Competition over limited resources such as budgets and opportunities for promotion
- *Beliefs*: Different cultural beliefs about how things should be done
- *Past injustice*: A perception that one group has been mistreated by the other
- *Egocentrism*: One group holds a feeling of superiority over other groups and resists them to maintain its group identity
- *Communication*: Difficulties in exchanging information or holding dialogue with the other team

It may also be the case that simply dividing up into groups and functions, with unique identities and team or department names, actually creates the seeds of intergroup conflict. In a classic series of studies in the 1950s, Sherif and colleagues (see Sherif & Sherif, 1979, for a summary) found ingroup/outgroup conflict to rapidly develop in children's groups almost from the moment teams were created. In similar studies, team members tended to favor their own team and hold negative feelings about members of other teams, even when there was no significant incentive for them to hold those feelings (West & Markiewicz, 2004). Over time, members come to perceive other teams as threats, perceptions that feed anxiety and hostility toward other teams. They begin to develop more cooperative and cohesive relationships with their own team members. Thus, there is some evidence that organizational structures themselves can contribute to conflict.

An us-versus-them mentality prevails when different teams with distinct identities perceive their interests to be in conflict with those of another team. When the team feels a stronger team identity than a larger organizational identity, they can come to see other teams as competitors (van Knippenberg, 2003). Minor

conflicts can spiral, reducing trust and cooperation between teams, and encouraging stereotyping of other teams' members. These findings are especially notable not only for typical organizational teams but also for increasingly prevalent situations such as mergers and acquisitions (which are discussed in more detail in [Chapter 13](#)).

Some minor intergroup conflict is natural and likely, but when extreme symptoms are noticeable, an intervention may be recommended. When teams come into conflict and are unable, unwilling, or otherwise fail to resolve their conflicts, some of the following behavior patterns might become evident:

- Unit members avoid or withdraw from interactions with people from the other unit when they should be spending more working time together.
- The mutual product or end result desired by both units is delayed, diminished, blocked, or altered to the dissatisfaction of one or both parties.
- Needed services between units are not requested.
- Services between units are not performed to the satisfaction of those units.
- Feelings of resentment or antagonism occur as a result of unit interactions.
- People feel frustrated, rejected, or misunderstood by those in the other unit with whom they must work.
- More time is spent in either avoiding or circumventing interaction with the other unit or internally complaining about the other unit than in working through mutual problems. (Dyer, 1994, p. 144)

Such negative behavior patterns are far from inevitable, however, and research fortunately points to several interventions that can reduce it.

**Table 11.8** Ways to Reduce Intergroup Conflict

1. Increase intergroup contact
2. Implement a superordinate goal
3. Recategorize, develop a common ingroup identity
4. Find a common enemy
5. Exchange team members

The overarching objective of an OD intervention in these circumstances is to reduce the interteam conflict by breaking down barriers between teams, encouraging the development of a shared identity and purpose, and improving cooperative processes. Researchers have demonstrated a reduction in interteam conflict through several means (summarized in [Table 11.8](#)):

1. *Increase intergroup contact* (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003). More communication among group members alone is not sufficient to completely resolve intergroup disputes, especially those that are long-standing or particularly hostile. However, it is more likely when certain conditions are present, such as group members having equal status and a common goal. Particularly when team members establish

friendly personal relationships through increased contact, tension is reduced and team members begin to associate those positive feelings with other members of the team as well.

2. *Implement a superordinate goal* (D. W. Johnson & Lewicki, 1969; Sherif, 1979). A superordinate goal is one that is “*urgent, compelling, and highly appealing for all groups involved*” (Sherif, 1979, p. 261) and is “beyond the resources and efforts of one group alone” to accomplish (Johnson & Lewicki, 1969, p. 10). That is, it is not enough for the goal simply to be shared—it must be one that each group could not reach if it were to try to do so alone. Conflict is reduced when teams come together in a cooperative context to reach a goal that is important to them, and when team members witness members of the other team working hard on an interdependent task. Superordinate goals are most likely to be effective means for reducing interteam conflict when they are initiated by a third party, not by one of the conflicting teams. Higher-level managers and executives are often in a good position to do this.
3. *Recategorize*. This means developing a “common in-group identity” (West & Markiewicz, 2004, p. 62). This involves finding or highlighting the common identities that both teams share, for example, stressing how members are all part of the same organization.
4. *Find a common enemy, or an external threat to the well-being of both groups*. Some have argued that the common-enemy approach only reduces conflict momentarily, and when the enemy is defeated, the intergroup conflict returns because the groups never really resolved the underlying differences (Blake, Shepard, & Mouton, 1964). In organizational contexts, finding a common enemy is often a simple task. This might involve emphasizing how both teams are working for the same organization (the common identity approach suggested above) and against a common set of external competitors who are trying to lure business away from the organization.
5. *Exchange team members*. Teams may develop a rotation program or invite members of other teams to observe or attend team meetings. This can increase understanding and appreciation of how other teams work and can also provide opportunities for learning.

## An Intervention to Resolve Intergroup Conflict

One widely used method for reducing interteam conflict was first reported by Blake and his associates (Blake et al., 1964; Blake, Mouton, & Sloma, 1965) and was initially designed to reduce very hostile union-management conflicts. The intervention consists of eight activities over a 2-day meeting of the members of both groups:

1. With support of the leaders of both groups, an outside consultant explains the purpose of the session. The session will not attempt to resolve specific process issues or disputes between the groups. Instead, the objective is increased understanding of the other and dedication to improving the relationship. Not all conflicts are likely to be fully resolved by the end of the session, but the session should be a first step in the reduction of conflict and launch further work on the specific differences between the teams.  
Time: 30 minutes.
2. Next, each group meets separately to develop two lists. The first list is the team's description of how it sees itself, especially as the group relates to the other group. The second list is the team's description of the other group. The task, as Blake et al. (1964) put it, "is to describe the *character*, the quality, of the relationship; that is, typical behavior and attitudes" (p. 161). Most groups, the authors note, find it easier to create the latter list about the other group than the former list about themselves. Yet the development of the group's self-image is an important step in the group examining its own motivations and actions as well. Group members begin to jointly confront the idea that they are a contributor to the relationship with the other. In one variation of this activity, Beckhard (1969) presents different topics for the two lists. On the first list, each group writes what it thinks of the other group, and on its second list, it writes what it thinks the other group will say about them. Time: up to 5 hours.
3. The lists are exchanged. Now each group has the other group's lists. Group A sees how Group B sees Group A and how Group B sees itself. The two groups can now compare their self-images with how the other group sees them, and they can begin to point to areas of similarity and difference. Both groups may see Group A as comprising skilled and talented content experts. But Group A may see Group B as "slow to act and make decisions," whereas Group B may see itself as "deliberate, conscientious, and thoughtful in evaluating options prior to decisions." Time: up to 1 hour.
4. Each group has time to ask clarifying questions of the other group. The urge to deny the other group's interpretation will be strong, but members are all asked to seek understanding and elaboration of the images first. Time: up to 2 hours.
5. Groups return to their separate meeting rooms for a period of self-diagnosis and discovery. Each group is given two questions: "One, what is it we do . . . that has contributed to the image the other group has of us? Second, what is it in our *own* beliefs and actions that leads us to the conclusion we have reached about ourselves?" (Blake et al., 1965, p. 43). For example, Group B would try to examine why Group A sees it as slow to act. Now each group not only understands how each group sees the other, but has begun to analyze its own contributions to the relationship and the source of misunderstandings or different interpretations. Time: up to 4 hours.
6. Each group exchanges its diagnostic lists with the other. A joint dialogue is then held in which members

analyze diagnoses, share additional insights, and possibly reinterpret past actions. Team members may reach new points of understanding and agreement in order to resolve past differences, and they are also likely to discover deeply held differences that still remain. Time: up to 3 hours.

7. The groups develop a list of remaining key issues in the relationship to be resolved. These might involve changes to meeting structures to enhance communication, clarification of underlying value differences and a plan to find common ground, or a commitment to trust, respect, and openness in the relationship. Time: up to 2 hours.
8. The groups agree on a plan for next steps. This might involve the leaders or a task force comprising members of both groups holding a series of meetings to resolve the issues. Time: up to 1 hour.



## Variations on Intergroup Interventions

Dyer et al. (2007) present several variations of this intervention. In one variation, they invite Group A to hold its discussion of Group B in Group B's presence, though with the ground rule that Group B may only listen and observe the dialogue, followed by Group B holding the discussion with Group A listening. In this variation, both groups have the opportunity to hear the discussion firsthand rather than in list form, yet it can also be risky where the issues are especially contentious. In a second variation, the authors ask each group to meet separately, but to use an appreciative inquiry approach and to describe their ideal relationship with the other group. This design can have the advantage of encouraging members to consider a new vision and imagine an alternative to the current relationship. In a third approach to intergroup conflict, the authors use a task force comprising members both teams find agreeable. The task force is given the responsibility of resolving some of the obstacles to working together. Issues might be resolved quickly in this design, but because not all members are involved, acceptance of the task force recommendations might be minimal. In all cases, the authors recommend that a structure be designed to resolve future disputes, perhaps through the use of a task force or review board that meets regularly to assess the team relationship.

In addition, there are times when a team may have relationships or conflicts with more than one other team, or a team may desire feedback on how it is perceived. In these cases, an intervention called an "organization mirror" (French & Bell, 1999) can be effective in introducing the focal team to issues in its relationships with multiple other teams. In this intervention, representatives from other groups are invited to participate in a dialogue about the focal team. Focal team members sit on the outside of a large circle, and representatives from other teams sit inside the circle. Guests discuss their perceptions of the focal team, and the facilitator invites specific examples. Focal group members observe and take notes, and following the discussion subgroups are formed of team members and guests to work on the identified issues. This intervention can be an excellent way for a team to gain feedback on its performance and perceptions of its working relationships with other teams.

Finally, Alderfer (1977) has described an intervention called a "microcosm group—a structural innovation designed to increase information flow vertically and horizontally among differentiated units" (p. 194) of an organization. The group is a new group comprising a sample of individuals from the entire organizational population. They might represent each of the company's six sales divisions, or they may come from each of the major departments in the organization. Alderfer describes how one microcosm group helped to design and interpret an organizationwide employee survey and, in another essay, how a microcosm group was used to improve race relations in a large organization (see Alderfer & Smith, 1982). Such groups break down the boundaries often created by different organizational structures and can help to solve some of the information and process problems that occur in this environment. One advantage of the microcosm group is that it brings together representatives from many groups, whereas many of the intergroup interventions described earlier only address conflicts between two groups.



## Summary

Teams are the foundations of most organizations today, yet they can be plagued by a consistent set of problems. Among their other attributes, high-performing teams have clear goals, with knowledgeable members who are mutually committed to the team's success and have well-defined individual roles.

Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Teams can struggle with a number of common problems, including confusion about goals or roles, or conflict among members or between teams. Such problems are often symptoms that could be addressed with a team-building intervention to improve team effectiveness.

Understanding how teams are structured and how they grow and develop can help a change agent design an appropriate intervention to improve their effectiveness. In this chapter, we addressed six common team interventions: team start-up and transition meetings, confrontation meetings, role analysis, work redesign, Workout, and appreciative inquiry. We also discussed interventions that can improve the effectiveness of relationships between teams—in particular, to resolve interteam conflicts. These are just a few of the interventions and their variations that can help to develop effective teams. If teams are indeed the backbone of successful organizational change, then interventions such as these are likely to become important for any change agent to master.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Name a few teams to which you have belonged. Would you consider them good experiences? What made them good experiences (or poor ones)? How did team members recognize and act on their interdependence? What interventions might have been useful in those teams? Why?
2. What is most important to you when you join a new team? How would you structure a team start-up meeting to help a leader initiate a new team? How would you use the team start-up intervention for a new cross-functional team, a new self-managed team, or a new virtual team?
3. Have you ever experienced or witnessed intergroup conflict? How did it develop? What was done or could have been done about it? How might you have used one of the interventions described in this chapter to address it?

## For Further Reading

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West, M. A. (2004). *Effective teamwork: Practical lessons from organizational research* (2nd ed.). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

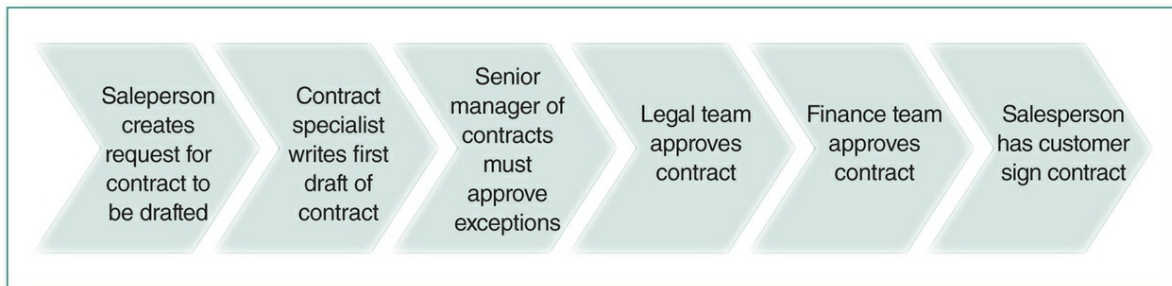
Wheelan, S. A. (2013). *Creating effective teams: A guide for members and their leaders* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## Exercise: Team Intervention (Facilitation and Team Development)

Jeb's Fleet Auto is a distributor of bulk customized automobiles and trucks for business and government customers. It buys cars and trucks in large volumes from major automobile manufacturers, customizes the vehicles according to the client's specifications, and delivers them to the customer site.

One important process for Jeb's Fleet Auto is the contracts process, since the contract must contain detailed descriptions of what Jeb's mechanics will do to customize the vehicles and a carefully worded financial statement of what the customer will pay to Jeb's for the vehicles.

The documented process for drafting a customer contract is presented below.



Two problems have recently come up in this process:

1. The contracts process is intended to take fewer than 5 days, but it currently takes more than 15. The approval stages are taking considerably longer than expected as the senior manager, legal, and finance all have new requirements of language to be inserted in contracts to reduce the company's liability.
2. Customers are noticing major errors in the drafting of the contracts. The most common errors are in the section on pricing, though there are also errors in the vehicle specifications the customer has requested. Recently the errors in vehicle specifications led to the return of a major customer order, costing Jeb's a significant amount of money.

As the OD consultant, it will be your role to help the team come to agreement about how to resolve these problems in the contracts process. Consider the following:

1. What concepts from [Chapter 11](#) will be important to consider or apply to this case?
2. What intervention(s) would you create to help the team? Would you create a workshop or event? How might that be structured? What would be your role?
3. What do you expect will be the challenges in working with this team? What questions will you ask to begin the discussion?
4. Role play a facilitated discussion between the salesperson, contract specialist, senior manager, legal, and finance about this process. After the discussion, reflect on what went well and what you would do differently.



## Case Study 5: Solving Team Challenges at DocSystems Billing, Inc.

Read the DocSystems Billing case, including the briefing document and four scenes, and consider the following questions:

1. What problems exist in this organization? How do these problems differ based on the employees' roles? Why do employees object to Jim's proposed solution?
2. Make a recommendation to the client about what could be done next based on the data included. Summarize your observations for Jim, offer possible interpretations, and suggest an approach for next steps.



**Briefing Document: DocSystems Billing, Inc.**

## About the Company

DocSystems Billing, Inc., processes insurance billing paperwork for a network of small health care clinics throughout the United States. Privately owned physician practices, as well as specialists such as cardiologists and physical therapists, contract with DocSystems to process the billing paperwork through the maze of health care insurance companies and networks. DocSystems charges either a flat fee for each bill it processes or a percentage of the total, depending on the contract with the provider.

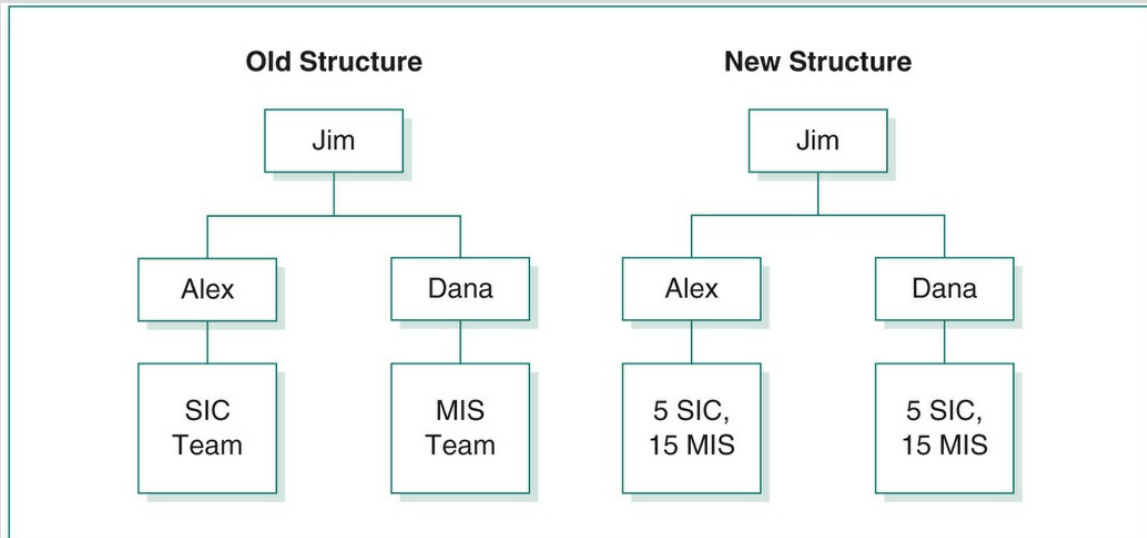
## About the Call Center

- Forty full-time employees work at the onsite call center: 30 Medical Insurance Specialists (who handle cases of moderate complexity) and 10 Senior Insurance Consultants (who handle very complex cases). The senior consultants have usually worked up through the ranks, often first working on basic billing, then as medical insurance specialists. Most of them have a long tenure with DocSystems, ranging from 17 to 23 years.
- An additional 100 employees (called Billing Specialists) work at an outsourced call center. DocSystems contracts out the initial processing of claims and basic computer input. The contract employees used to work at DocSystems until the outsourcing.
- The call center was outsourced a year ago to another organization. Almost all of the former DocSystems employees were offered jobs with the new company, but the pay and benefits were not comparable. Word has spread to the former colleagues who remain at DocSystems that the outsourcing company treats its employees poorly.

## Call Center Reorganization

The remaining group of 40 employees was reorganized into two new teams about 3 months ago. Initially, there had been two managers—Alex managed the senior insurance consultants, and Dana managed the medical insurance specialists. Both reported to Jim, the senior director. In the new structure, Alex and Dana both manage 20 employees, with each managing half of the specialists and half of the consultants.

That meant that some of each group remained with their former manager, while some moved to a new manager. Senior management hoped that the integrated teams would start to share knowledge between more senior and more junior practitioners.



## Roles and Work Process

### Billing Specialist

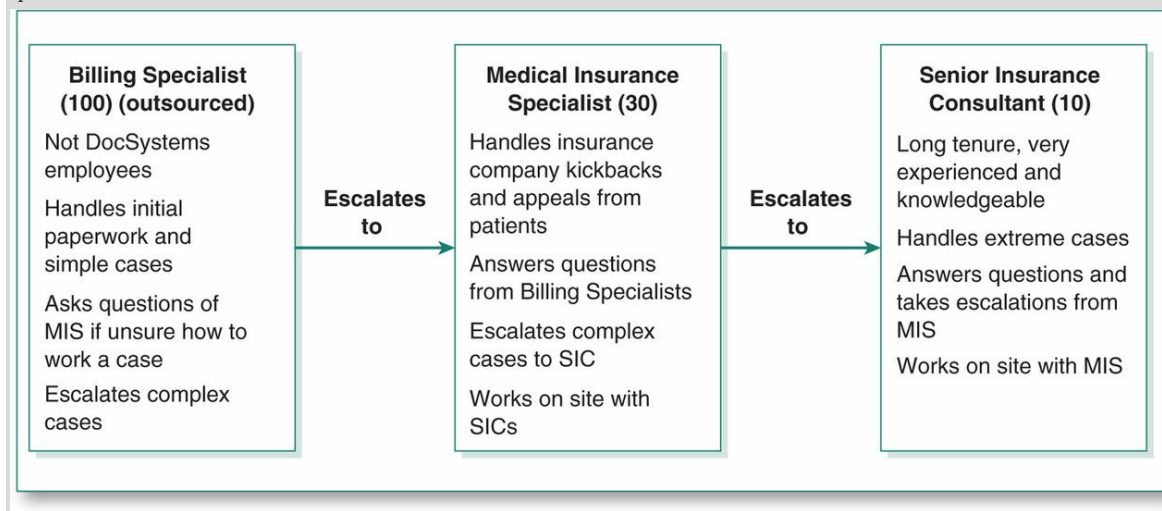
The billing specialists do the initial computer input and handle the majority of the cases. Normally this occurs without any need for DocSystems intervention or assistance, but occasionally there are difficult issues that arise. For example, a cardiologist may have conducted a certain procedure that fits more than one category in the DocSystems database, and the billing specialist may be unsure how to categorize it accurately. A phone tree system has been set up between the outsourced organization and DocSystems so that the billing specialist can call any of the medical insurance specialists, who are required to be on call at least 4 to 5 hours during a typical 8-hour shift. The partners can also formally escalate cases by handing them off through the system for a medical insurance specialist to work.

### Medical Insurance Specialists (MIS)

A similar process works for the medical insurance specialists. They are assigned insurance cases on a round-robin basis. They typically handle two types of cases: (1) any case that has been “kicked back” by the insurance companies for more information and (2) any case where the patient has filed a complaint, grievance, or appeal. Like the billing specialists, they work on the case to get it accurately processed and filed, and if they run into problems, they can call on their senior counterparts, the senior insurance consultants, to ask a question. They also have the opportunity to formally escalate cases to have one of the senior insurance consultants handle the case if it seems too complicated.

### Senior Insurance Consultants (SIC)

The senior insurance consultants handle anything and everything, but they usually work on only the most complex cases. They also answer questions from the medical insurance specialists. They usually get their work from formally escalated cases that the medical insurance specialists cannot handle on their own.



## The DocSystems Case in Four Scenes

## Central Characters

Jim: Senior Director, Customer Service, DocSystems

Dave: Organization Development Consultant, DocSystems

Rosie Jones: Medical Insurance Specialist, DocSystems

Carlos Chavez: Senior Insurance Consultant, DocSystems

Michelle: Senior Insurance Consultant and Carlos's colleague, DocSystems

## Scene 1: The First Client Meeting

Dave and Jim sit at a large oval table in Jim's office, discussing the OD engagement and plans for the upcoming team meeting.

*Jim:* Thanks for meeting with me. I really need your help facilitating this team meeting.

*Dave:* No problem, I'm glad to help. Maybe you can start by telling me what you're trying to accomplish.

*Jim:* Basically we're trying to redesign how the call center works. We have a few problems. The first problem relates to processing times. Our physician clients obviously want their payments as quickly as possible, so the billing specialists must work very rapidly to input the payment request to the insurance company. Also, our physicians want us to service their patient problems and appeals very quickly. Each role in the process is critical to getting the work done and processed as quickly as possible. Time is our number one success metric, and it's our number one failure right now.

*Dave:* What are the results today?

*Jim:* Right now we only have about 80 percent of our customers that say that they're satisfied with our services. From what I've read in our industry, that's at the very bottom. We're seriously in danger of losing customers if we can't speed up.

*Dave:* Have you done any analysis of where the bottlenecks might be occurring?

*Jim:* Yes. First, you should realize that the workload is tremendous. Each week, the billing specialists handle almost 2,000 claims in total. Our medical insurance specialists handle about 50 cases each per week, and the senior consultants about 10. It might not seem like a lot to handle only 10 or 50 cases per week, but some of the more complex cases can take 2 to 4 hours each to process. If we can't meet our time commitments, our clients and patients get frustrated. So we have metrics in place to monitor how well it's going. If a case takes more than 4 hours to process, it turns "red," which means that in our automated system, the case shows up on our urgent list. When a case turns red, we know from past data that it represents a customer who is dissatisfied, or it doesn't meet our service levels. The more red cases, the more likely we are to lose a customer or to lose money because we have to reimburse our clients when we don't meet our agreements with them.

*Dave:* What about the outsourcing? Do you have contractual agreements with them on their own processing timelines?

*Jim:* Yes, and actually they're doing pretty well. We don't usually have too many problems with them. The real problem comes when the cases get escalated to us. We have far fewer cases to handle, yet since they're complex they tend to take longer. Some of our physicians have special service contracts with us where their requests and their patients get top priority. They pay extra for the service, and they expect higher service from us as a result. For our Platinum Tier physicians, we have an agreement that we will get back to them with a resolution to their problem within 2 to 3 hours.

*Dave:* What is the cycle time today?

*Jim:* It's 15 hours at the moment. In other words, they expect a resolution in less than half a day, and we get them an answer in 2 days.

*Dave:* What do you think is causing the delay?

*Jim:* First, the cases are remaining with the medical insurance specialists for too long. Their cases turn red at a faster rate than anyone else's. It's the volume that's killing us. Each of them is forced to juggle 10 to 20 cases at a time. It's too much for them to take on, in addition to the calls that keep coming to them from the billing specialists.

*Dave:* Why don't they escalate to the senior insurance consultants?

*Jim:* They do, sometimes. But once they've started to work it, I guess they think they may as well finish it. We just need to hire more people, but we can't afford it right now.

*Dave:* Do you have any ideas about what could solve this problem?

*Jim:* Yes, and that's in part the reason I called to get your help. I want the 10 senior consultants, who are the most knowledgeable, to help the 30 medical insurance specialists with their caseloads. We want more collaboration on the teams. That's why I've scheduled the 2-day meeting that we talked about, and I'd like your help facilitating the team through a design session where we get their input and figure out how this new collaboration process will work.

*Dave:* I'm definitely willing to help facilitate the session, and I believe it's the right approach to involve them in the design. First, though, I think it would help me to understand their work better if I could see how they worked. Do you think that one of the medical specialists and one of the senior consultants would let me observe them for a few hours?

*Jim:* I'm sure they wouldn't mind at all. You should meet with Rosie and Carlos, who are our top performers. I'll send them an e-mail and ask if it would be okay if you contacted them and set up a time to talk. Rosie and Carlos will also be on our project design team, so it will be good for you to get to know them now.

## Scene 2: Observation With Rosie Jones

Rosie Jones, a medical insurance specialist, looks up as Dave approaches her desk.

*Dave:* Hi, Rosie. I'm Dave.

*Rosie:* Nice to meet you. Please have a seat. I hope I can help you with your questions.

*Dave:* I appreciate you letting me observe. As I said when we arranged this, I really don't want to take up too much of your time. I'm just interested in learning more about what you do so we can figure out this project together. What are these monitors for?

*[Dave points to the three computer monitors all located side by side on Rosie's desk.]*

*Rosie:* This one is for my e-mail, this one is for the case database, and this one shows the calls that are currently waiting on hold.

*Dave:* And the one with the case database—what are the numbers and colors?

*[Dave notices that the screen is full of line after line of case numbers, patient names, and insurance company names. About half are black and about half are red. More than 30 cases are listed on the screen.]*

*Rosie:* These are all of my open cases. The numbers represent the case numbers, and the red type means that the case is behind. This last column shows the status. So if you look, most of them either say "Waiting Patient" or "Waiting Physician." On those, I'm waiting for a return call. Some I could just close out now. So at the moment, there's not much I can do. Well, I guess on these last three I could get started on them. Let's see what they say.

*[Rosie clicks on the screen and opens up one of the red cases.]*

*Rosie:* This one says DED-1, which means "Denied for patient status." I'm not sure what happened, but it looks like we may have sent the case to the wrong insurance company, who denied the case and sent it back to us. This patient also has two health insurance companies to deal with. I'm going to have to call the physician.

*[Dave looks at the screens, mesmerized by the amount of detail there is to monitor. Rosie is typing and clicking so quickly, Dave can't follow. Rosie marks the current case "Waiting Physician."]*

*Dave:* It certainly seems that there's a lot going on at any one time. How often do you escalate cases?

*Rosie:* *[looks up quickly and stares at Dave]* I don't really need to. I know how to do my job. These are my cases, and I want to work them. Besides, we all know what happened to the billing specialists when they got outsourced. You think I want to give up my work and not be doing anything?

*Dave:* What do you think about the model that Jim is talking about, where the senior consultants would jump in and help out with your caseload when it's too much?



Rosie: *[forcefully]* You mean Big Brother watching over me?

### Scene 3: Observation With Carlos Chavez

Later that same day, Dave arrives at his appointment with Carlos Chavez, a senior insurance consultant.

Dave: Thanks for letting me sit with you for a bit. How long have you been with DocSystems?

Carlos: *[pouring a cup of coffee]* It will be 19 years next month. I've done it all, from billing, to insurance, to management. I remember when we used to have only three insurance companies to deal with, and I knew the physicians personally. Now there are so many clients, patients, and insurance companies, it's really amazing.

*[Carlos adds sugar and cream to his cup and they return to his desk, just a row of cubicles away from Rosie's. Like Rosie, Carlos has three monitors arranged in a semicircle on his desk, each showing the same information that Dave saw on Rosie's monitors.]*

Dave: What kinds of cases do you tend to work on?

Carlos: Well, here's my list right now.

*[Carlos points to the case monitor. There are just three cases showing, all listed in red.]*

Carlos: I have this one, which was escalated because the patient was so upset. She had three different physicians she was working with, and only two were part of our client list. The insurance company got confused and ended up paying too much, but we also ended up mistakenly billing the patient for the work of one of the physicians. You can see the case notes are three screens long.

*[Carlos scrolls through the case record showing the extensive list of comments.]*

Dave: Looks like there is indeed a lot to sort through. How many of these do you work at a time?

Carlos: *[putting his feet up on his desk]* Ah, it's not that bad. This is pretty typical, with about one new case per day. It will take a few hours to sort through, but mostly it's manageable, isn't it, Michelle?

*[Carlos yells over his cubicle wall to a neighbor. Michelle stands up and introduces herself to Dave as a senior insurance consultant.]*

Carlos: Michelle and I both left Alex's team to work for Dana. Well, I supposed we were technically forced to work for Dana. *[They laugh.]*

Michelle: Yeah, that's been a joy, hasn't it? If at first you don't succeed, reorganize to make sure you won't.

Carlos: *[turning to Dave, voice rising]* You know, we were put into our new team 3 months ago. Dana just had our first staff meeting on Thursday last week. She hadn't even called us to welcome us to her team.

*[Michelle pulls out a sheet of paper filled with tally marks. At the top it reads, "Where's Dana?" There is a cartoon drawing of a person on top of a mountain with "Dana" written above it, and 15 stick figures at the bottom of the mountain with question marks over their heads.]*

Dave: So until last week, you hadn't even spoken to your new manager?

Carlos: Whatever. It was much better on Alex's team, but hey, I figure the pay's the same whether I leave at 5:00 or 6:30, whether I have 3 cases or 30. We've had the standard 2 percent raise for the past 3 years, and it won't be any different this year.

Dave: What do you think about the model that Jim has proposed to the design team, where the senior consultants would help out on the medical insurance specialist caseload?

Carlos: I guess I understand where he's coming from. But I don't want to sit on the phone all day dealing with the same old patient status issues. Been there, done that. And I'm not about to take over the caseload for a lazy med specialist who just waits until the case gets old enough for me to work it for them.

### Scene 4: The Design Session

It's 8:30 on Wednesday morning. Jim begins the design session meeting with a kickoff presentation. In attendance are Dave, Rosie, Carlos, and Alex (the manager of one of the call center groups).

*Jim:* I really appreciate everyone taking time out of their schedules to work on this program. I'm confident that we can come up with a good solution. You're among our top performers in the division, and you know best what will work and what won't work in our company.

Jim spends the first few hours of the meeting reviewing the importance of the call cycle times, showing the group charts with the data he has collected: customer satisfaction numbers (last year, year to date, last month), call answering times (in minutes, listed by month for the past 12 months), case volumes (number of new cases opened, number of cases closed for the past 12 months), and number of red cases (by month).

Next, Dave facilitates the group through an approach that Jim has suggested all along, where the senior insurance consultants would collaborate on cases with medical insurance specialists. In the new process, senior consultants would have a new job task of monitoring the current list of red cases and pulling them from the medical insurance specialists if they felt that they could work the case faster based on their knowledge and experience. The new process would require that all senior consultants monitor the list regularly and read through any new red cases.

Dave notes to himself that neither Rosie nor Carlos raised the objections they had shared with him privately, but instead both seem very energetic and willing to experiment with some changes. With confidence high, the group takes a lunch break. After lunch, Dave checks the agreement the team appears to have reached.

*Dave:* So, Carlos, what do you think of the solution we're proposing?

*Carlos:* It will never work.

*Dave:* Why?

*Carlos:* I don't know. I can just tell you right now, this will never work.

*[The group looks silently at Dave.]*

*Dave:* You seemed more confident this morning. What changed your mind?

*Carlos:* I was out at lunch talking with Michelle and a couple of other people on Dana's team. They hate the idea and think it's just more work for us, and a way for the medical insurance specialists to pawn off their tough cases. I mean, no offense to Rosie, she handles her own cases well. But why should we jump in? We have our own work to do. People are basically lazy, and unless you force them to work on the new cases, they aren't going to volunteer.

After an hour of discussion, the group makes little progress. The morning's agreement has dissolved. With only a few hours to go in the meeting, the attendees begin to abandon hope that they could reach a solution, and Jim intervenes.

*Jim:* Look, here's what I propose. Let's call it a day for now, and we can reconvene next week to talk about it more. Thanks for your input, everyone, I know that we can handle this. It's a tough situation but I appreciate your participation on this project. Dave, can you hang around for a few minutes?

*[The group walks out quietly as Dave begins to stack up some of his papers.]*

*Jim:* *[shaking his head]* I really thought we were headed toward a solution. *[raising his voice]* Why can't people just say what they think if they have a problem? Why did we have to go through all of this?

*Dave:* I know that you're frustrated, and I'm getting a bit frustrated myself. Clearly the team is frustrated. But I also have to remember that it's better that we find out their objections now rather than a month from now when we're wondering why the new model isn't working.

*Jim:* I'm at a loss. What do we do now?

*Dave:* I've listened carefully to the team today, and I'm also thinking about my meetings with Rosie and Carlos. I'm also thinking about the structure of the work and of the two teams at this point. Let's plan to meet at 8 on Friday morning. I'll prepare my thoughts about what I've heard so far and what I think we should do next.

*Jim:* Friday at 8 works for me. I'm anxious to get your perspective.



## Chapter 12 Whole Organization and Multiple Organization Interventions (Part 1)

The organization design of the Valves and Controls business unit of Tyco Flow Control had outlived its time. The company decided to focus its attention on its core customer groups and to organize by the key industry segments that purchased its products, such as the oil and gas, mining, and water and chemical industries. The challenge was to develop an integrated global organization that could work together across significant geographic boundaries rather than relying on a distant headquarters organization to make all decisions. With 8,000 employees in more than 300 global locations, this was no small feat. A core team was identified (including HR, OD, strategy and line leadership) to manage the organization design process, and a broader expanded team was created to make design decisions. The expanded team's members represented a diverse group of skills and backgrounds as well as layers across the hierarchy. This decision to include broad involvement in the design was intended to role model what was expected out of the organization in the end, namely the ability to work in a collaborative and matrixed environment. The expanded team made several early foundational design decisions and decided to increase involvement even more.

In a 3-day organization design workshop, 75 employees debated design alternatives and models. They discussed sensitive subjects of authority, power, and control while avoiding moving forward with decisions that might be politically attractive but wrong for the company. New leaders were identified of the new units, and the units were staffed through an open process over the following months that matched employees to the skill needs of the roles rather than the leaders' personal preferences or friendships. Six months into the new design, leaders came together to share problems and challenges with the actual versus the imagined design. This allowed leaders to work out problems of power and governance between regional and global roles and to assess and adjust the design as appropriate.

Several significant results were achieved in the 3 years since the initial design discussions took place. An important customer who had wanted a global contract for 5 years (but had never been able to get Tyco to accommodate them) finally was able to negotiate a global agreement. A global product roadmap was created. The new global manufacturing operations saw increased efficiencies in facilities usage. Perhaps the most lasting impact was the development of the leaders who participated in the design work. Through a collaborative process, leaders were involved in changes that affected them as they learned how to engage in the process of strategic redesign (Rice & Nash, 2011).

- What are some of the special challenges in large-scale changes like this one?
- What practices made this organization design project a success?

In this chapter and the next, we will address some of the predominant organization development (OD) interventions that are designed to target changes in an entire organization or in more than one organization. Typically, such large organization interventions are designed to address issues that affect almost every member. Examples include such topics as the organization's strategy, structure, culture, organizational identity, future direction, interaction with its environment, relationship to other organizations such as suppliers and local or national governments, mergers and acquisitions, customer satisfaction, and product quality. These chapters describe commonly practiced large-scale interventions, those most frequently mentioned in surveys of OD practitioners (Covin, 1992; Massarik & Pei-Carpenter, 1992), overviews of the field (Bunker & Alban, 1997), and descriptions in the practitioner and academic literatures. In this chapter, we will focus on the following three intervention categories:

- Organizational culture assessment and change
- Organization design and structure
- Directional interventions: strategic planning and real-time strategic change, scenario planning, and

These “large-scale” interventions are done for a number of reasons. There are enormous pressures on organizations to reduce costs, increase productivity, speed up cycle time of product development, clarify direction, improve morale, and increase participation (Covin, 1992). Sometimes organizations approach large-scale interventions consciously and intentionally, such as when they develop a 3- to 5-year strategic plan, engage in a culture change initiative, or acquire/merge with another organization. Change may also be forced on the organization unintentionally due to economic, regulatory, or customer requirements; a competitor’s new product that requires a company to quickly keep up; or changes that occur inside the organization, such as an unexpected leadership departure (Cummings & Feyerherm, 1995). Organizations often choose a large-scale intervention when the task is complex or urgent, or when multiple people are required to accomplish it (Bunker & Alban, 1992).

Whatever the reason, “the purpose of an OD intervention in a large system is to make lasting change in the character and performance of an organization, a stand-alone business unit, or a large department” (Cummings & Feyerherm, 1995, p. 204). By “character,” we mean that large-scale organizational interventions significantly affect integral aspects of the organization’s functioning, structure, and processes (Ledford, Mohrman, Mohrman, & Lawler, 1989). Thus, large-scale interventions are visible, wide-ranging, and require significant commitment and attention of organizational leaders and members.

## Characteristics of Contemporary Large-Scale Interventions

Three characteristics of contemporary large-scale interventions are (1) the involvement of a wide variety of participants, (2) greater timeline of the intervention, and (3) a change in the consultant's role. While these may not apply to every kind of large intervention or every application of a large-scale intervention for any individual client, they do indicate trends that seem to be taking hold among OD practitioners.

### Participation.

Large-scale interventions, particularly the directional interventions that we will discuss, now tend to include a greater variety of stakeholders than may have been true for interventions like these in the past. The early 1990s saw a shift in the use of whole organization interventions, which invited increased participation in formerly leadership-only decisions such as strategic planning and organization design. The former top-down model of organizational change, where decisions were announced by top leaders who expected subordinates to accept them and carry them out, produced little buy-in from those lower in the hierarchy who were forced to adapt. To increase both the adoption rate and cycle time of change (and often to develop better decisions), many large-scale interventions began to involve multiple organizational levels (Bunker & Alban, 1992, 1997, 2006).

Large interventions now often involve sizable groups, with hundreds or even thousands of participants (for an example of a large-group intervention with as many as 4,000 to 13,000 participants, see Lukensmeyer & Brigham, 2005), or even more in multiple organizations or where entire societies and nations are affected. In fact, even in a single global organization, an intervention that engages many thousands of employees is now commonplace. Including multiple levels and roles in the intervention can lead to better knowledge since problems can be examined from multiple angles, but it also allows participants to learn about the problems, perspectives, and challenges of organizational members they may never have met. In addition, internal and external boundaries have become blurred, as participants from outside the organization, such as suppliers or customers, may be included as well. Even though the groups are large and may initially sound unwieldy, large interventions are often structured using smaller subgroups for purposes of idea generation and dialogue.

### Timeline.

Despite the need for rapid change, many interventions that target a whole organization rarely consist of a single intervention activity; rather, they often involve multiple activities over a longer period (Covin, 1992, found that the timeline is often longer than a year). Thus, a small list of objectives may be tackled with several individual intervention activities designed to address them. Notice how in the organization design example that opens this chapter, the 3-year design effort included multiple meetings and workshops throughout the intervention.

### Practitioner Role.

The practitioner's role has also changed, as many large-group interventions ask organizational members to take primary responsibility for generating and analyzing data, and the practitioner's role is "that of a

community organizer who structures, encourages, and helps focus the issues” (Bunker & Alban, 1992, p. 581). Rather than the practitioner having responsibility for gathering and interpreting data, organizational members can generate their own data and then can be taught and assigned how to analyze and interpret it.

Thus, whole organization interventions can be quite large and complex. We begin with one of the most pervasive whole organization interventions—that of organizational culture assessment and change.

## Organizational Culture Assessment and Change

As discussed in [Chapter 2](#), organizational or corporate culture began to take hold among executives and change practitioners beginning in about the 1980s. Since that time, interest in cultural assessment and change has blossomed. Further unpacking the meaning of culture can be illuminating because culture can refer to a wide variety of behaviors, actions, meanings, and symbols in organizations. Consider the following list of elements of organizational culture:

- *Language, metaphor, and jargon.* How organizational members speak to one another, using what terms. An example is whether organizational members are referred to as “associates” (some retail stores), “individual contributors” (some corporate environments), or “cast members” (such as at Disneyland). Organizational members develop specialized acronyms and terms that often only they understand.
- *Communication* (patterns and media). Who communicates to whom, on what topics, using what media. In some large organizations, the highest leaders send e-mail to all employees, while in others in-person communication is preferred. These choices can be situation- or topic-dependent as well.
- *Artifacts.* For example, pictures or posters on the wall, lobby decor, or dress style. Some organizations have explicit rules for who is permitted what size office, with what furniture style, or even what model of phone or cell phone calling plan is authorized.
- *Stories, myths, and legends.* What stories from the past resonate with organizational members to recall lessons and learnings from positive or negative events. An organization that has undergone an especially traumatic event, such as a bankruptcy, is likely to have a set of stories and assumptions that are repeated to guide new decisions in order to avoid repeating historical mistakes.
- *Ceremonies, rites, and rituals.* These are formal and informal gatherings or recurring events in which a standard “script” seems to be followed. Examples include a corporate picnic or holiday party, initiation rites such as those in a fraternity or sorority, or even repetitive events such as annual sales conferences, staff meetings, or performance appraisals.
- *Values, ethics, and moral codes.* Doing what is “right” may mean doing it quickly in one organization or doing an exhaustive study of all possible options in another organization. Organizations have espoused values, those that they explicitly articulate, and hidden underlying values, those that guide decision making but about which organizational members are usually less conscious.
- *Decision-making style.* Including what information is needed before a decision is made, who is consulted, whether opinions are freely offered, who makes the final decision, and how it is communicated.

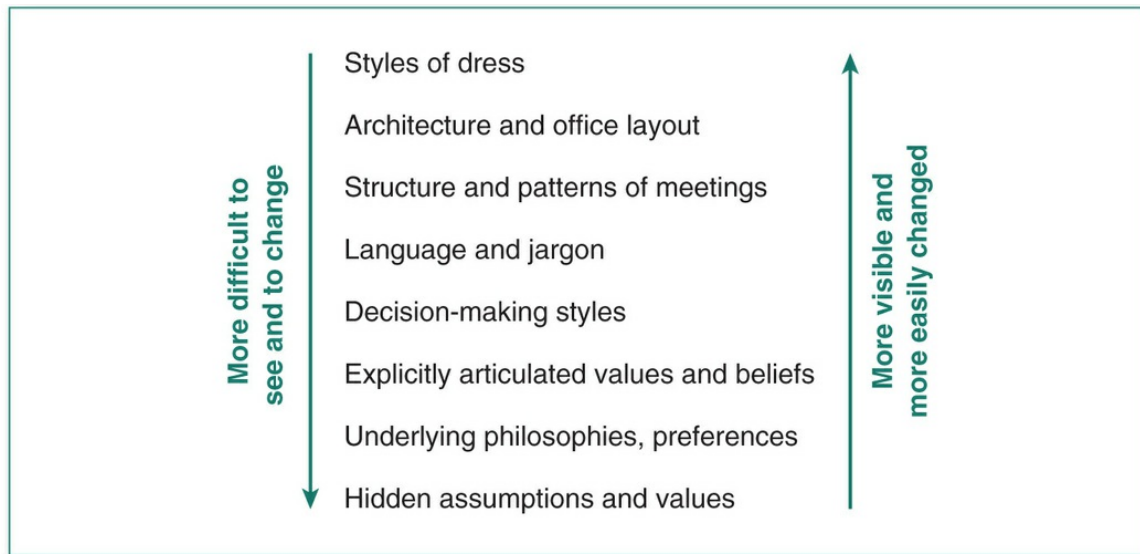
Elements of culture can be visible, such as styles of dress, office spaces, and language choices, and they can also be invisible or hidden, such as the organization’s values, ethical beliefs, and preferences. The more deeply held the belief and more tacit the assumption, often the more difficult it is to change. [Figure 12.1](#) illustrates these elements of culture.

Among experts on organizational culture, perspectives differ on how culture can or should be assessed. Edgar Schein (2006b), one of the most well-known authors on organizational culture, writes that “many organizations think that a general cultural assessment would be of value to them. Unless the culture



assessment is tied to a change initiative, however, it is fairly useless” (p. 457).

Figure 12.1 Organizational Culture



Schein's culture assessment involves focus groups (detailed below) because groups and teams create culture; so he argues that the data used to understand the culture should also come from groups, not individual surveys. Schein's assessment of culture is qualitative, which has been the dominant way of studying culture. However, another well-respected set of authors on culture has found success with an Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI; Cameron & Quinn, 2006), a quantitative methodology where organizational members complete individual surveys to give change agents insight into the culture. By comparing organizations on dimensions such as internal versus external focus and preferences for flexibility or control, the "competing values framework" (which is the basis for the OCAI; see Cameron & Freeman, 1991; Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Denison & Spreitzer, 1991) to organizational culture posits four idealized culture types:

- *Clan*. People strongly identify with the group, as in a family, placing a strong emphasis on the team and teamwork. Organizational members are loyal and friendly.
- *Adhocracy*. Innovation is prized, with organizational members having a large amount of independence and autonomy. The organization emphasizes developing cutting-edge products and services and leading the market.
- *Hierarchy*. Tradition and formality are dominant values. The emphasis is on stability, rules, and efficient processes.
- *Market*. Organizational members are competitive, hardworking, and demanding. Productivity and beating the competition are emphasized.

Organizations rarely fit one of these categories precisely; instead, they have elements of each cultural type to a greater or lesser degree. Culture may be a problem or need to be considered for change if elements of the culture or the environment are incongruent with one another (for example, if processes are formal as in a hierarchical culture but the external environment requires the innovation of an adhocracy culture). Thus, the OCAI can help change agents understand broad patterns of cultural values across the organization and open

up conversations with organizational members about how the culture can be changed.

Schein (2004, 2006b) has developed a culture change process involving focus groups that are asked to define the culture and to determine how it should be changed. His process involves soliciting commitment from top leadership for the effort and then beginning a series of focus groups that explore the elements of culture listed above (such as communication patterns, ceremonies, and artifacts). In Schein's process, subteams, often from different parts of the organization, are asked to do the following:

1. Describe the organization's existing culture, including specific examples of artifacts, rituals, and language.
2. Define the organization's explicitly articulated values.
3. Analyze whether the values fully explain the existence of the artifacts or whether there are underlying assumptions that amount to additional hidden cultural values.
4. Describe how the explicit or hidden values inhibit or strengthen how the organization achieves its goals.
5. Share any subcultural differences among the teams.
6. Discuss and come to agreement on action plans to change the negative cultural values.

Once changes to the culture have been identified, how are the new values actually introduced into the organization? Because cultures have tacit beliefs and values at their foundation, it is easy to fall into thinking that culture is inevitable, or that it is something that an organization "has" rather than something that people in the organization "do." In other words, each time we repeat a cultural value, we reinforce it even though we had a choice to do something different. A culture can be changed, Schein (1990b, 2004) states, through actions that explicitly reinforce new cultural values and those that dismiss the old, beginning primarily with the most visible actions of leadership. Examples include the following:

- Leaders can hire new managers and employees into the organization, as well as promote those who model the new cultural values, and visibly reward them.
- Those who do not model new cultural values and behaviors can be punished or removed.
- Old artifacts, rituals, and ceremonies can be removed or discontinued, and they can be replaced by new ones.
- Leaders can take the opportunity to discuss the new cultural values at every opportunity, such as in staff meetings, employee e-mails, and one-on-one meetings.
- Leaders can model the new culture through their actions, explaining to employees why an action is being done (Deetz, Tracy, & Simpson, 2000).
- Leaders can tell stories of success or failure that relate to the new values.

There are a number of excellent cultural assessment methodologies, both quantitative and qualitative, that have been developed by scholars and OD practitioners. Regardless of the methodology chosen, it is important to be conscious of the reasons and uses of the assessment. It is tempting to ascribe all organizational problems to problems of "culture," which can be esoteric to many leaders and unnecessarily broad for the change agent to diagnose when the problem can be defined more specifically. Cultural interventions often complement other types of interventions rather than being undertaken in isolation.



## Organization Design and Structure

Many organizations conduct a regular restructuring, giving employees new titles or job descriptions, or perhaps creating, combining, or dividing departments. These structural changes often fail to achieve their desired outcomes, which frequently occur when organizations approach design activity as a knee-jerk reaction to other problems or alter the organizational structure without considering larger implications.

However, there are many times when organization design genuinely needs to be addressed. The organization may be a new division or may have grown substantially. The organization may have outgrown its previous model due to size or complexity, or a change in strategy or major acquisition prompts the company to rethink an outdated model. Other signs for concern exist when departmental barriers inhibit process effectiveness and the organization is no longer serving its customers well, or employees may be frustrated at the internal obstacles to getting their work done (Ashkenas, Ulrich, Jick, & Kerr, 2002).

Such challenges can be addressed when a design perspective (as opposed to a restructuring) is taken. The purpose of a design effort, according to Jay Galbraith (1977), one of the leading experts on organization design, is to develop consistency between the organization's strategy, goals, and structure:

Organization design is conceived to be a decision process to bring about a coherence between the goals or purposes for which the organization exists, the patterns of division of labor and interunit coordination and the people who will do the work. (p. 5)

This implies that the organization must be clear about its strategy, customers, and the processes by which the organization delivers value to customers. It may be the case that a strategic intervention is necessary first if the strategy cannot be clearly articulated. Indeed, Galbraith, Downey, and Kates (2002) recommend that “the design process always begins with reviewing the strategy” (p. 12). Kesler and Kates (2011) refer to organization design as a leadership competency, but they note that while many leaders focus attention and receive development in the areas of strategy and talent management, organization design receives considerably less attention, though it has a significant impact on the achievement of the strategy.

The terms *structure* and *design* are often used synonymously, but they are not the same. An organization's structure tends to refer to the ways in which boxes are drawn on organizational charts, whereas design refers not only to the structure but also other elements that support the structure. Design has several components, all of which must be in alignment and must support one another to produce a capable, effective organization (Galbraith, 1995; Galbraith et al., 2002). These components have been described in two ways: in Galbraith's star model and in the McKinsey 7S framework.

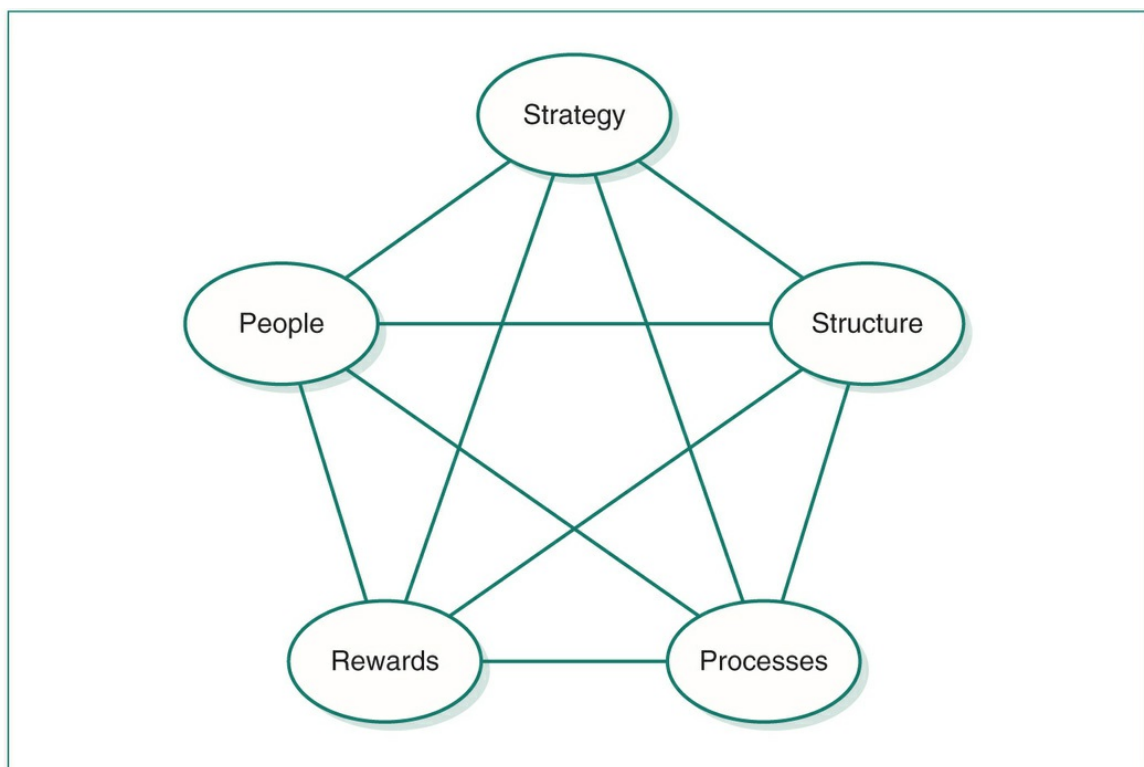
Galbraith describes five components of an organization's design that he terms the *star model*, depicted in [Figure 12.2](#):

- *Strategy*: The organization's direction and long-term vision

- *Structure*: Roles, responsibilities, and relationships among functions
- *Processes and lateral capability*: Decision-making processes, integrative roles, and cross-functional collaboration mechanisms
- *Reward systems*: Compensation and recognition, goals and measurement systems
- *People practices*: Hiring, performance reviews, and training and development

Each of these five components supports and must be in alignment with the other four. When any aspect of the star model is out of alignment with the rest of the model, the organization's performance suffers. If the strategy is not clear to employees, for example, individuals and teams will be confused about their purposes and overarching objectives. If reward systems do not explicitly articulate tangible and intangible recognition in support of the goals and objectives, the organization may be rewarding the wrong activities. The organization design can inhibit the effective accomplishment of work, and while "smart people figure out how to work around the barriers they encounter . . . they waste time and energy" (Kates & Galbraith, 2007, p. 2) in doing so.

**Figure 12.2** Star Model



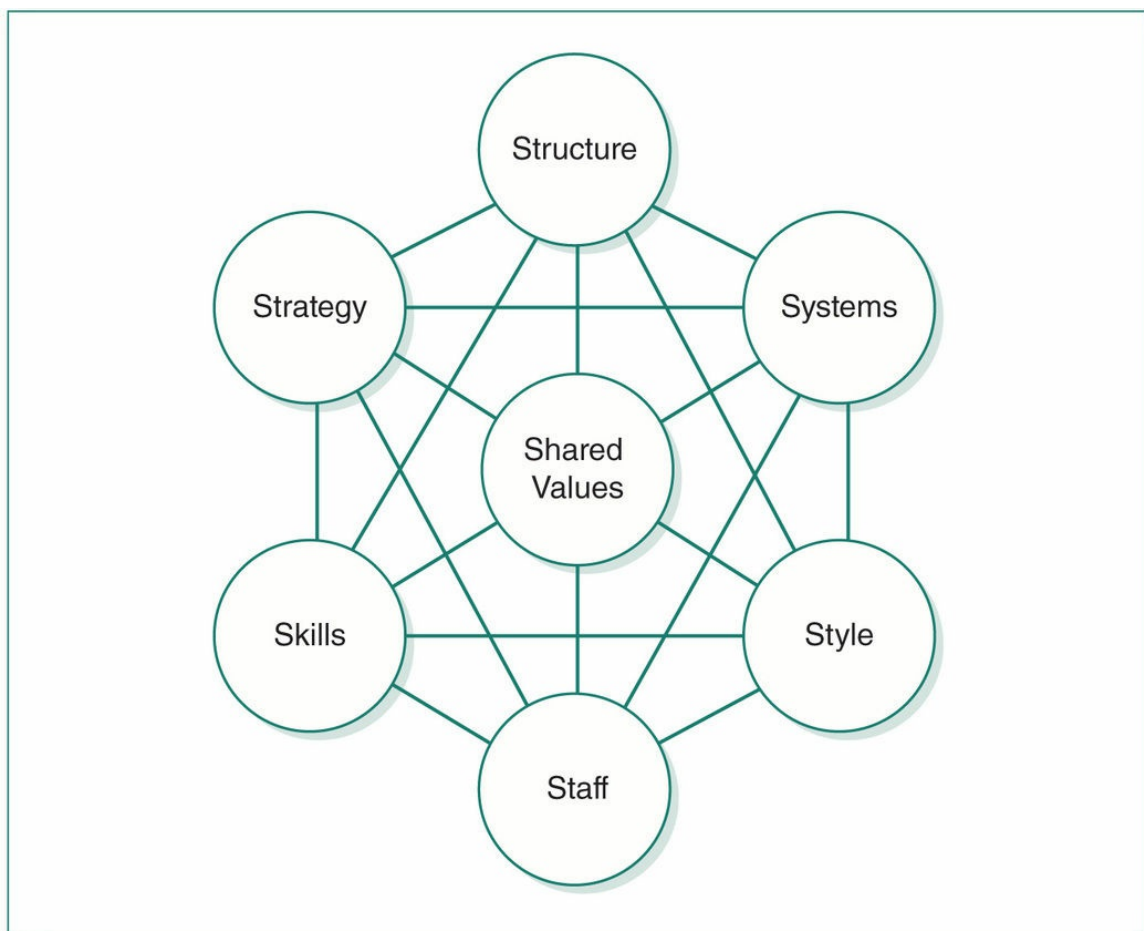
SOURCE: Galbraith, J. R. (2002). *Designing Organizations: An Executive Guide to Strategy, Structure, and Process*. New York, NY: Wiley. Reprinted with permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

A second model of organization design appeared in Peters and Waterman's (1982) book *In Search of Excellence*, in which they explain that organizations are more than their structures alone:

Our research told us that any intelligent approach to organizing had to encompass, and treat as interdependent, at least seven variables: structure, strategy, people, management style, systems and procedures, guiding concepts and shared values (i.e., culture), and the present and hoped-for corporate strengths or skills. (p. 9)

The framework became known as the McKinsey 7S framework ([Figure 12.3](#)) after the authors' consulting work at the well-known company. Similar to the star model above, the 7S framework acknowledges the interconnection of multiple issues in an organization's design beyond strategy and structure. Waterman (1982) explained that "when the needles are aligned, the company is organized; when they are not, the company has yet to be organized even if its structure looks right" (p. 70). In later years, Higgins (2005) revised the 7S framework into an 8S framework, changing "skills" to "reSources" and adding a "Strategic Performance" circle to serve as an outcome of the interrelationships among the seven components.

**Figure 12.3** McKinsey 7S Framework

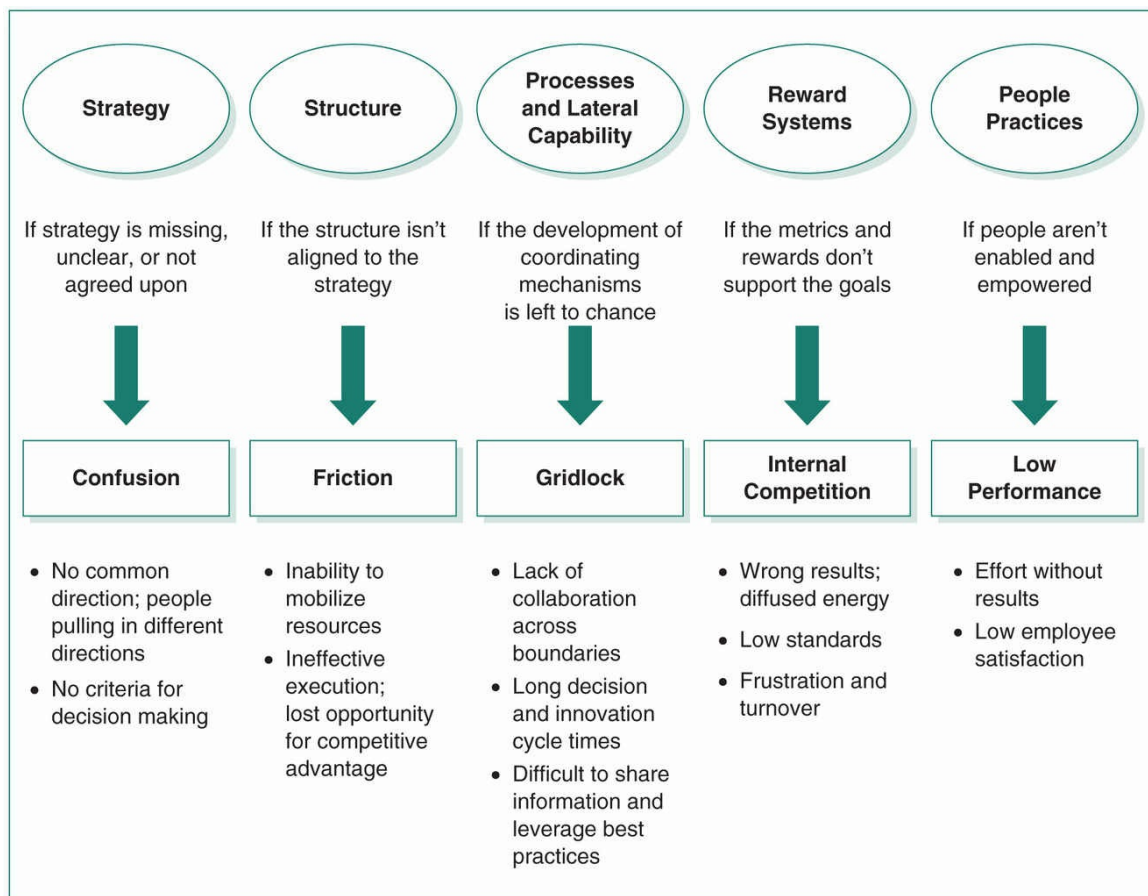


SOURCE: Waterman R. H., Jr., Peters, T. J., & Phillips, J. R. (1980). Structure is not organization. *Business Horizons*, 23(3), 14.

Galbraith et al. (2002, p. 5) offer an instructive diagnostic chart to help identify areas of misalignment in the

organization's design (see [Figure 12.4](#)).

**Figure 12.4** Unaligned Organization Design



SOURCE: Galbraith, J., Downey, D., & Kates, A. (2002). *Designing Dynamic Organizations: A Hands-On Guide for Leaders at All Levels*. New York, NY: AMACOM, p. 5. Published by AMACOM.

Stanford (2005) suggests a five-phase process for an organization design change:

1. *Preparing for change.* This includes assessing the current organizational structure, assessing the organization's strategy, and outlining objectives for a new design.
2. *Choosing to redesign.* An organization design change can be highly disruptive. Once word leaks that a new structure is imminent, employees may begin to feel anxiety over the transition to a new team, new manager, or new job. Gaining feedback from a large group of stakeholders on the criteria for a new design can help to assess the prospects for a successful transition (Galbraith et al., 2002).
3. *Creating the high-level design.* Developing alternative scenarios and evaluating them against tests such as those described below. This includes considering not only alternative structures, but how the structure will affect processes, rewards systems, metrics, people selection, and skill development.
4. *Handling the transition.* This involves communicating plans to employees and helping them through the transition.

5. *Reviewing the design.* Components of this review include evaluating the results of the new structure, measuring outcomes, and making adaptations or any new changes.



## Common Organizational Structures

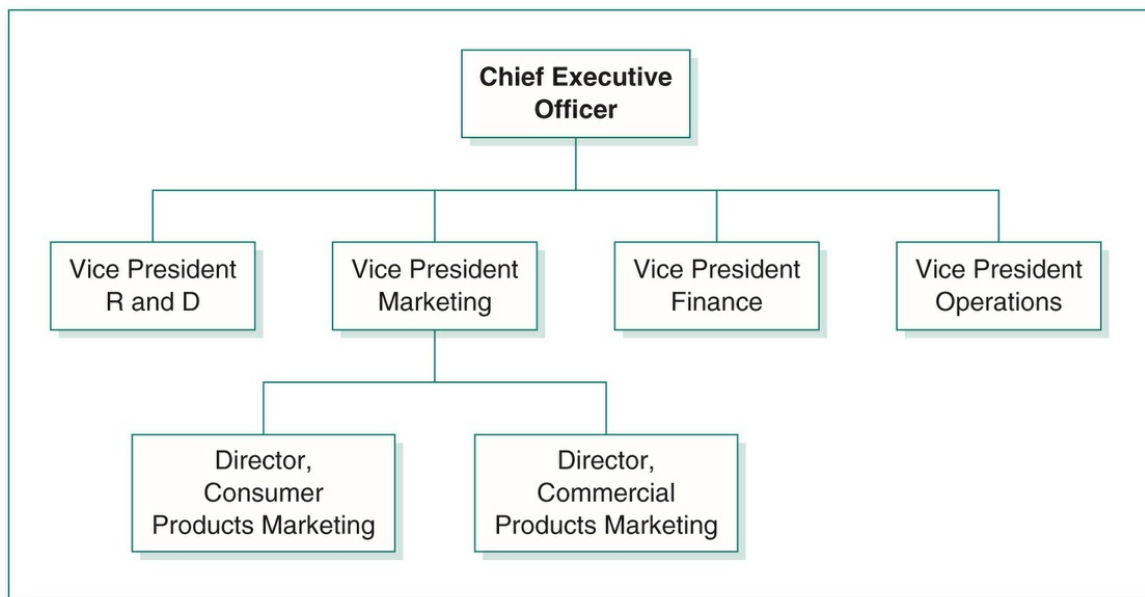
Five common organizational structures include the functional, unit, matrix, network, and boundaryless or process structures. Each of these is described below in its purest form, with its advantages and disadvantages, though there are many variations and combinations of structures (Galbraith, 1995).

### Functional Structure

The functional structure is arguably the most common and well-known hierarchical structure. In this design, divisions are organized by the type of work they do, so that divisions of marketing, finance, sales, manufacturing, product development, and so on are led by a single executive who reports to a chief executive officer, for example. Those who work in marketing work with other like-minded marketing professionals on marketing-related concerns, so its chief advantages lie in its ability to help divide labor and focus on narrow areas of specialty. It can also be a highly efficient structure. The marketing budget, when centralized in this manner, can be used for leverage to develop a contract with a single vendor for all printed brochures, for example. Standard practices can be developed for the department to reduce duplication of work (Galbraith, 1995). [Figure 12.5](#) shows an example of a functional structure.

Disadvantages of the functional structure include interdepartmental coordination and complexity. Coordination between functions generally is expected to happen at higher management levels, which can slow down interdepartmental information sharing unless other lateral or horizontal capabilities are developed. When the organization becomes more complex, with multiple products, services, and markets, the demands placed on the functional structure can exceed the capacity of the system to cope with the decisions and information needed. Thus, the functional structure is best for smaller companies with fewer product lines that have a long life cycle (Galbraith, 1995). Because of this, many observers believe that the once-dominant functional structure has been outgrown, since in many (perhaps most) organizations, speed and fast product turnover have become the norm.

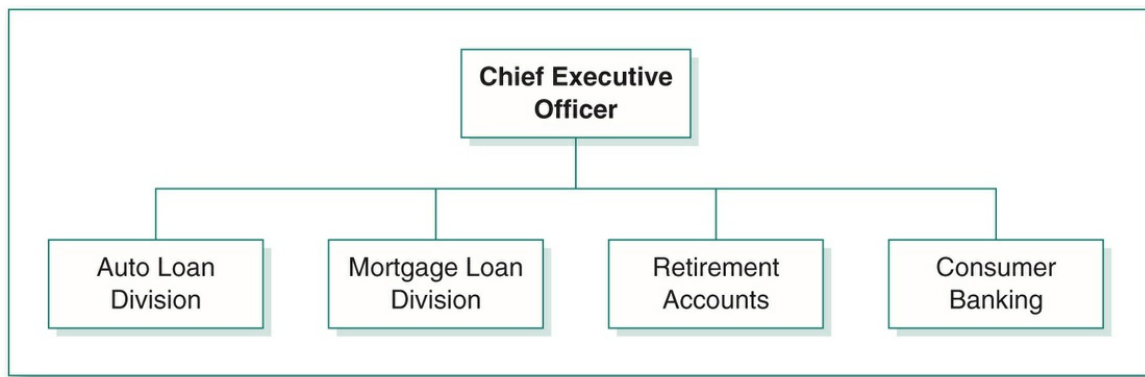
**Figure 12.5** Functional Structure



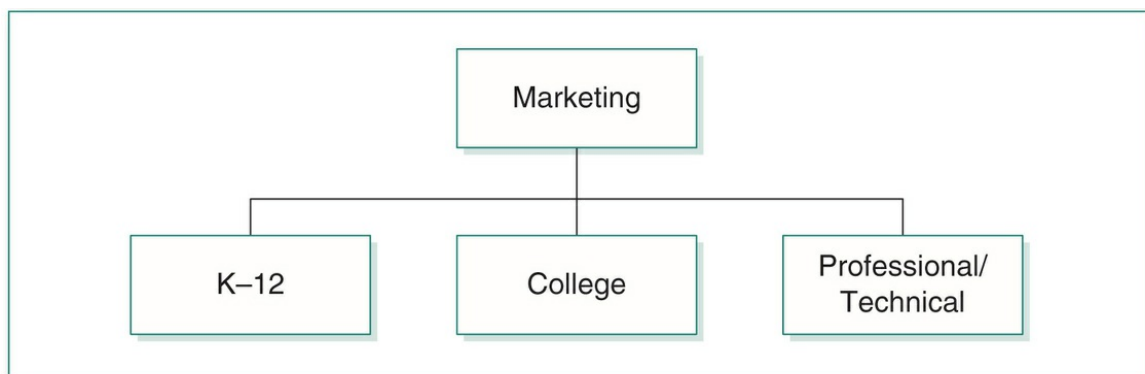
## Unit Structure

A unit structure is an alternative to a functional structure, and it divides responsibilities by the market, product, service, or geography that the unit serves. A financial services company might choose to organize by a unit structure, with divisions for auto loans, mortgage loans, retirement accounts, and banking, which are essentially the different products that the bank offers to customers. Instead of a single division to handle customer accounts, there might be separate loan officers, financial advisers, and processing and billing departments in each of those divisions. When implemented at its fullest, in a unit structure each unit has its own human resources, information technology, finance, sales, and marketing departments. [Figures 12.6a](#) through [12.6c](#) show three examples of unit structures, organized by product, customer segment, and geography. [Figure 12.6a](#) shows a unit structure organized by a product segment, the banking organization described above. With a product structure, coordination and focus within a single unit are clear, since in the auto loan department there are specialists who work solely on auto loans, and attention is not diverted to the special and distinct challenges of mortgage loans. Decisions can sometimes be made more rapidly because each department controls the resources needed for rapid implementation. [Figure 12.6b](#) shows a unit structure organized by customer segment, a marketing organization for a book publisher where the customer segments include books marketed to K–12 students, college students, and professional/technical readers. This structure has the advantage of focus, where divisions can dedicate their energies to the unique needs of a given market. Last, [Figure 12.6c](#) shows a geographic structure organized by continent. In a geographic version of a unit structure, resources can be placed physically closest to where the work happens, and the structure offers the advantage of local customization and knowledge of regional customer needs.

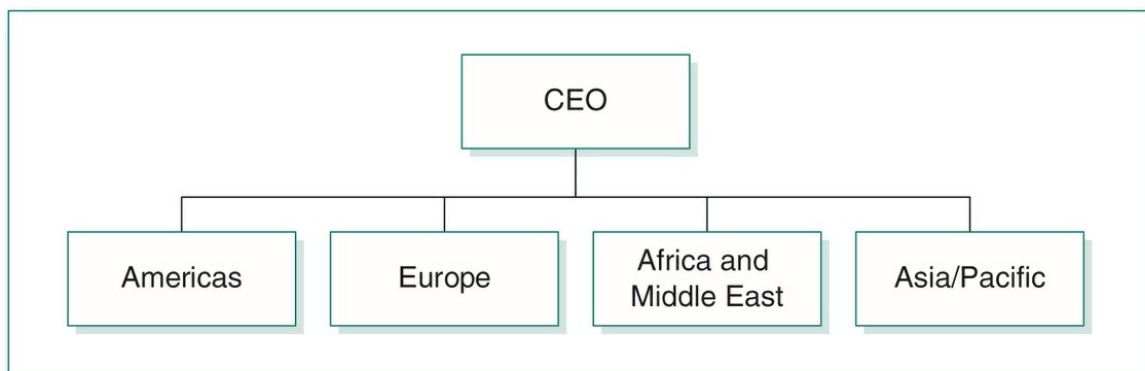
**Figure 12.6a** Unit Structure: Product



**Figure 12.6b** Unit Structure: Customer



**Figure 12.6c** Unit Structure: Geographic



However, the unit structure can also lead to duplication of work and inefficiencies, since multiple departments may not be sharing skills and resources most effectively. (They may unnecessarily duplicate purchases of information technology, for example.) Because different divisions may operate independently, they may not share information or knowledge effectively. When those who do business with the company have a relationship with more than one division, they can be frustrated when they experience different policies and processes, such as billing and invoicing, or the lack of information sharing between divisions (the mortgage division may not share information with the auto loan division to streamline a consumer's loan application information; global customers may need coordinated points of contact in each geographic division).

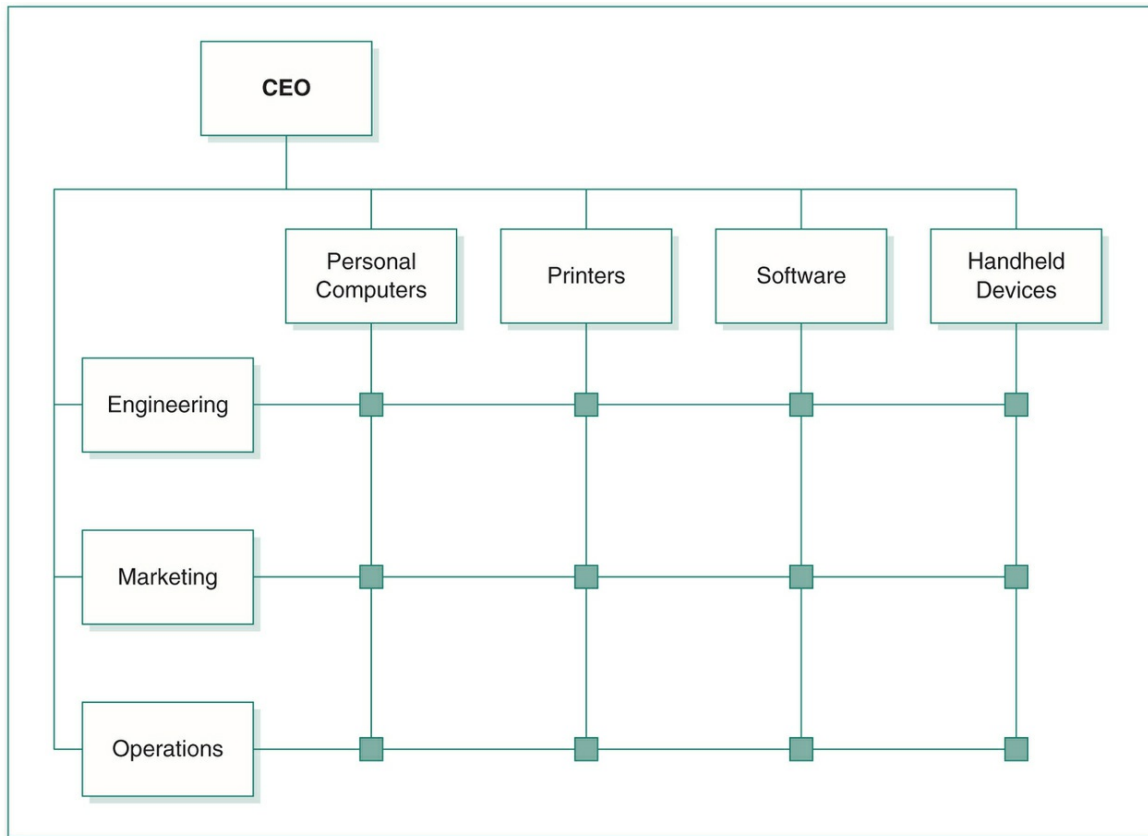
## Matrix Structure

Matrix organizational forms were first developed in the 1960s and 1970s as an attempt to address some of the disadvantages of the first two forms and to maximize their advantages. In a matrix form, the specialist functions and unit functions both exist, in some respects. Imagine a technology company that manufactures personal computers, printers, software, and handheld devices. If it operates in a matrix structure as depicted in [Figure 12.7](#), it might have teams in each division with responsibility for engineering, marketing, and operations. Each of those latter functional groups would have a leader to oversee the company's overall strategy for that division. For example, the leader of marketing would be responsible for ensuring a consistent marketing strategy across all divisions, while the leader of the printer division would be responsible for the success of the company's printing products. Note that a requirement for the matrix is that the organization maintains dual perspectives (function and geography, or product and customer segment, for example), with employees reporting directly to the two bosses who manage these dual perspectives (some argue that dotted line relationships are not matrix structures, strictly speaking).

While [Figure 12.7](#) depicts the most basic of matrix structures, organizations have evolved ever more complex versions in the decades since the matrix was originally popularized, particularly in organizations that do business globally and need a strong geographic dimension to their structure. Consider how [Figure 12.7](#) might look if we added three geographic regions reporting to the CEO. Each of those geographic divisions might also have connections to the other lines of the business, to create a department responsible for marketing printers in Europe, or engineering software in Japan. Galbraith (2009) even explores what a four-dimensional matrix structure looks like, including a discussion of the challenges of planning, leadership, and human resources policies that these structures present.

Matrix organizations work especially well under three conditions (Davis & Lawrence, 1977). First, they work well when there exist pressures for *multiple areas of focus*, such as when a group needs to focus on both technical expertise in a certain field and unique customer requirements of a given market. Second, matrix organizations work well when *the work is especially complex or interdependent* and additional coordination is required. When people are interdependent in multiple ways, a matrix may help to improve communication patterns. In the example above, information can be shared at both the product line and functional level. Finally, a matrix is appropriate when *resources need to be shared* for maximum efficiency. When skills are scarce and resources are at a premium, a matrix facilitates reassignment of the most scarce resources to the necessary areas. A marketing manager could move from personal computers to handheld devices, for example.

**Figure 12.7** Matrix Structure

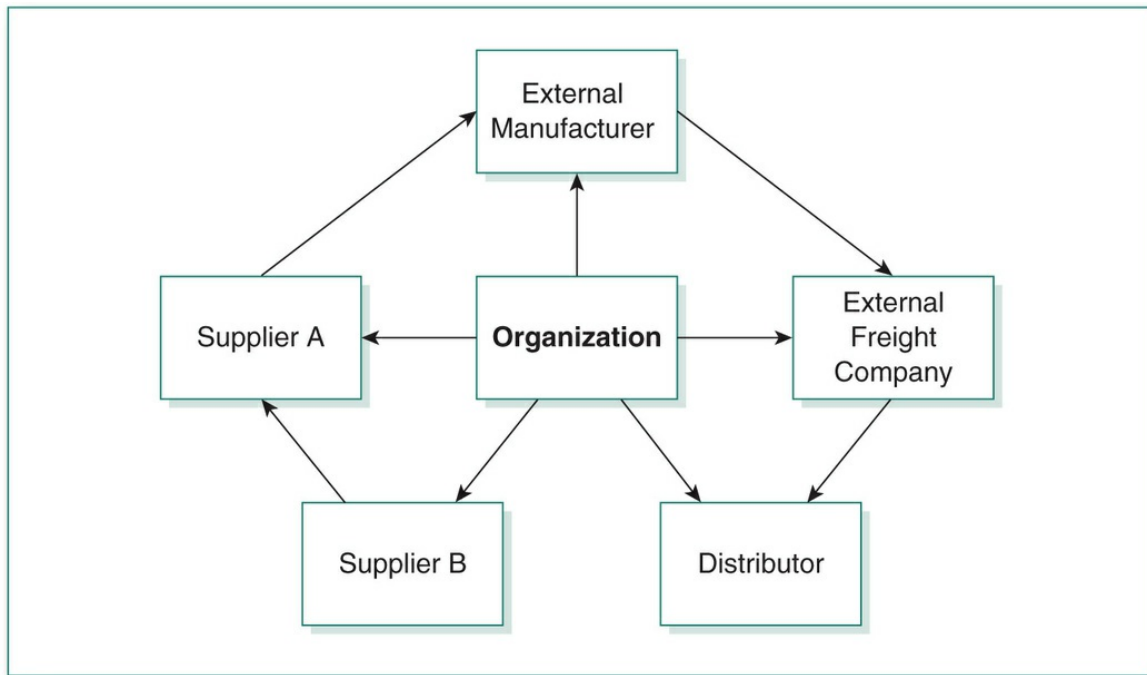


Matrix structures can be challenging to implement and can cause role conflict for the individual who can be caught between the demands of two managers. Decision processes can be complicated by seemingly needing the approval of managers at many levels in order to proceed. The matrix structure can thus lead to power struggles among managers.

## Network Structure

Like the matrix structure, the network structure dissolves the traditional hierarchical functional structure. Indeed, the network structure reduces the organization's functions down to its central competencies, and a network of suppliers and partners provides services that the organization does not consider central (or that are not cost-effective to perform internally; Miles & Snow, 1992). In one type of network, organizations may design their own products internally, but may contract with an outside manufacturer and shipping company to build and deliver products to customers. They may work with local distributors or third-party providers who may sell directly to customers on behalf of the company, but these distributors are independent entities, not in-house sales agents. In some networked organizations, the "external" suppliers may be so tightly integrated with the organization's people, processes, and technology that the line between being internal and external to the organization is blurred. The organization may even ask outside suppliers, manufacturers, and distributors to integrate their own processes and technology on behalf of the company. The organization therefore becomes a "broker" of services among the various players (Miles & Snow, 1986). An example of this type of network is presented in [Figure 12.8](#). Other types of networks exist as well (Miles & Snow, 1992).

**Figure 12.8** Network Structure

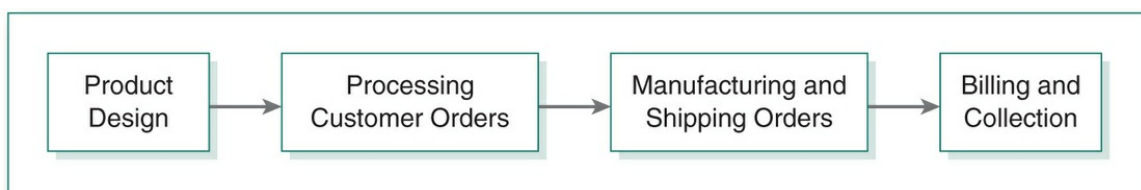


Network organizations can be cost-effective and flexible, and they can focus the organization on its central purpose. They can also cause problems when the organization must rely on the performance (and organizational health) of an external company over which it may have little control. The transition from internal ownership to external control can also be challenging if organizational knowledge or processes are not robust enough to share effectively.

## Boundaryless and Process Structure

Boundaryless and process designs became popularized in the 1990s as a way to structure an organization to achieve flexibility as a principal objective (Bahrami, 1992). This design emerged primarily in high-technology companies where creativity and innovation, along with rapid product development cycles and quick time to market, were necessary to remain competitive. The boundaryless design breaks down the traditional hierarchy and replaces it with cross-functional, often self-managed teams that form and restructure as the business changes. Roles, titles, jobs, and teams are no longer rigidly built into the structure of the organization but negotiated and flexible, depending on the needs of the organization. The ability to rapidly form teams, set objectives, adapt to change, and build relationships are all key skills in the boundaryless organization.

**Figure 12.9** Boundaryless or Process Structure



One slightly more structured version of a boundaryless organization is to design by process steps. There may be a division focused on the process of gathering customer requirements and developing new products.

Another division may be focused on creating customer demand and processing orders. A third may focus on manufacturing orders and delivering products to customers. A process leader may be in charge of each process step. Boundary-breaking designs like this one are good when rapid cycle time is necessary since there are fewer boundaries to interrupt process flow and decisions to revise the process can be made at the local level. The work flow and each department's connections to the customer are much clearer to all organizational members. Galbraith (2002) notes that the process structure was once a popular organizational structure, but that the structure is less useful in organizations that have automated or outsourced many processes and thus do not have jobs assigned to them as the structure intends. [Figure 12.9](#) shows an example of a boundaryless or process structure.

The task of leadership and management is particularly challenging in the boundaryless organization, as old ways of managing in the traditional hierarchy no longer apply. In an organization accustomed to traditional vertical decision-making authority, a boundaryless structure can be a foreign way of managing. Leadership now performs an integrative function (Shamir, 1999), managing tensions among authority, tasks, politics, and identities (Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1992). Leaders in the boundaryless organization must help to form teams, negotiate between teams, sort through role conflicts, balance competing interests between groups, and encourage employees to maintain an organizational connection even while teams are being disbanded and reformed.

## Lateral Capability

As you might have noticed, each structure has its advantages and disadvantages. What is appropriate for one organization, based on its strategy, may be inappropriate for another. In addition, every structure choice will solve some problems while it creates others. For example, the common functional structure, appropriate and effective for many organizations, can create challenges in sharing information across functions. In the geographic structure, a regional sales group can maintain a local focus on its customers, but it may have difficulty knowing how to solve a certain problem that, in fact, has already been solved in another region because of the challenge in sharing solutions across geographic boundaries.

To compensate for the flaws in a chosen structure, organization designers develop lateral capabilities, or horizontal mechanisms that enable the organization to enhance connections between groups or divisions created by the structure. Whereas the structure develops the vertical organization by creating departments and groups with common objectives, lateral practices help the organization share information across these boundaries.

Galbraith et al. (2002) describe five kinds of lateral capability. Some of these can occur naturally or informally, whereas others must be designed deliberately and typically more formally:

1. *Networks*. Networks can facilitate information sharing across department boundaries by exposing members of one group to those in another. Imagine making an acquaintance in another division at a training program or office party, then later needing a contact in that division to help solve a problem you are experiencing.
2. *Lateral processes*. A lateral process is a key organizational process that crosses major divisions. Consider a process such as new product design, which might involve employees from service, sales, marketing, operations, and research and development.
3. *Teams*. Cross-functional teams can be established in which members maintain relationships on the team as well as in their division. A product sales team, with representatives from each geography, can meet regularly to share best practices and solve problems they have in common related to selling a particular product.
4. *Integrative roles*. Integrative roles are formal positions with the responsibility to share information across the structure. A marketing liaison who works in customer support might gather all customer problems on a regular basis, meet with the marketing team, and then bring back information to customer support on upcoming product releases and marketing initiatives.
5. *Matrix structures*. We discussed the use of matrix structures above, but note that matrix structures are not only a structure but a lateral capability as well. By implementing structural relationships at multiple levels, the matrix structure attempts to compensate for maximizing one element of the structure (product) with another (geography). Thus, it formalizes information sharing across groups within the structure.

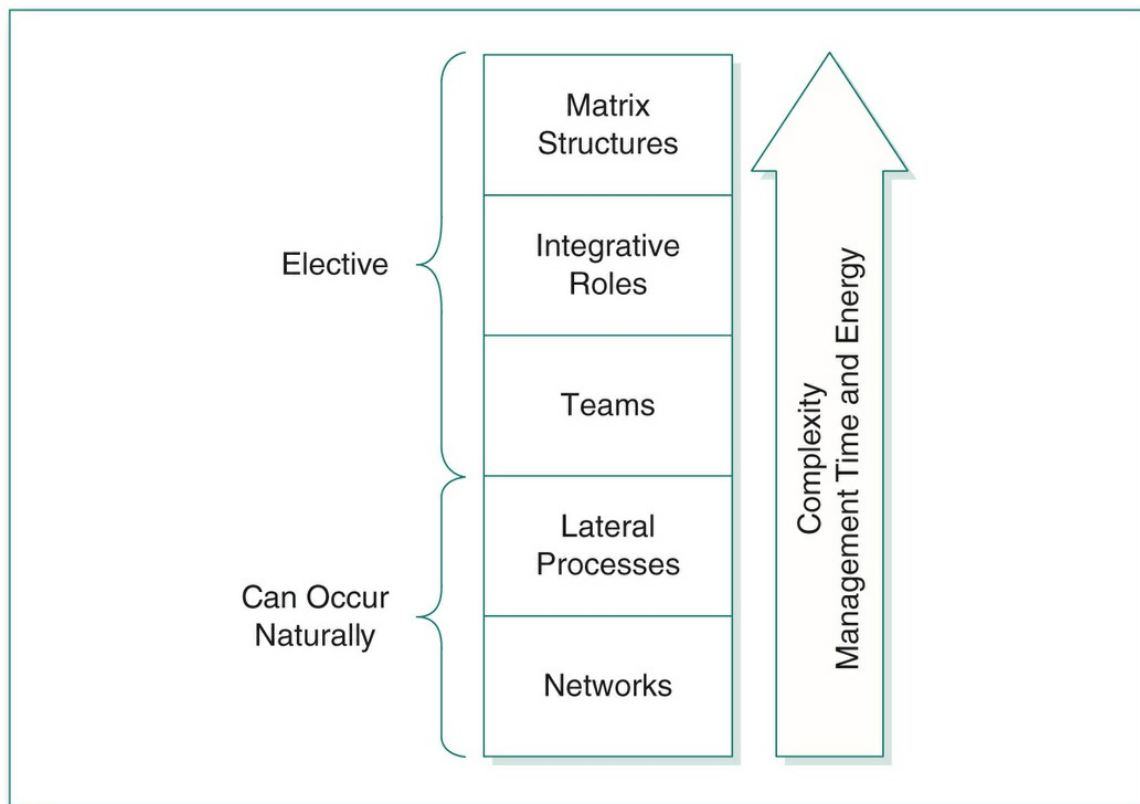
Notice that as more sophisticated types of lateral capability are chosen (moving down the list above), there is



an associated cost in time, energy, and complexity (see [Figure 12.10](#)). Which type of lateral capability to implement thus depends on the organization's needs.

## Tests of a Good Design

Figure 12.10 Continuum of Lateral Capability



SOURCE: Galbraith, J., Downey, D., & Kates, A. (2002). *Designing Dynamic Organizations: A Hands-On Guide for Leaders at All Levels*. New York, NY: AMACOM, p. 137. Published by AMACOM.

Given the complexities and tradeoffs involved in selecting any of these organizational structures, what should a change agent consider when evaluating a proposed new design? Nadler and Tushman (1992) suggest that change agents evaluate the design's ability to contribute to the strategy and task needs of the organization while appropriately fitting with its social and cultural environment. Strategic factors include a design that does the following:

- Supports the implementation of strategy
- Facilitates the flow of work
- Permits effective managerial control
- Creates doable, measurable jobs

Social and cultural factors include examining how

- Existing people will fit into the design,
- The design will affect power relationships among different groups,

- The design will fit with people's values and beliefs,
- The design will affect the tone and operating style of the organization.

Goold and Campbell (2002) list nine tests of whether an organization is well designed, propositions that can be used to appraise a design to see whether it is appropriate. They write that the first four of these tests of structure are for "fit" with organizational goals, strategies, skills, and plans. The final five are tests of good design, helping an organization achieve the right level of balance in processes, and may suggest modifications to the design to account for the particular challenges in any organization:

1. *The market advantage test.* Does the structure match how the organization intends to serve its markets? If the organization serves customer segments differently in different geographies, then having geographic divisions makes sense. No customer segment should be missed, and ideally no segment should be served by multiple divisions in order to provide maximum focus.
2. *The parenting advantage test.* Parent organizations should organize in ways that allow them to provide the most value to the rest of the organization. If innovation is a key value of the parent company, has it organized in ways that maximize innovation throughout the organization?
3. *The people test.* The design should support the skills and energy of the people in the organization. If the design requires that the head of engineering also manage finances, and finding a single replacement for those dual specialized skills is unlikely if the current leader were to leave, the design may be risky. In addition, the design may be risky if it will frustrate valuable employees who may lose status in the new structure.
4. *The feasibility test.* Will the design require a major cultural shift, such as a matrix design in a culture very comfortable with rules and hierarchy? Will information technology systems require drastic, expensive changes to report performance by customer industry versus geography?
5. *The specialist cultures test.* Some organizational units maintain different subcultures for good reasons. A group focused on the company's core products may think of innovation as a gradual series of incremental improvements to existing products, but a new products division may need rapid innovation for products that have a short life cycle. Combining R&D from both divisions may result in a dangerous culture clash.
6. *The difficult-links test.* How will divisions in the new structure develop links between them, and who will have authority when conflicts arise? If six divisions each have separate training functions, how will they coordinate the use of instructional resources such as classrooms and trainers?
7. *The redundant hierarchy test.* To what extent are layers of management necessary to provide focus, direction, or coordination for the units in their scope? If the purpose and value of a level of management is the same as the ones below it, it may be unnecessary.
8. *The accountability test.* Does the design streamline control for a single unit, or is authority—and accountability—diffused among different units? Will it encourage units that cannot collaborate to blame one another for poor performance?
9. *The flexibility test.* How will the new organization react when a new product is to be designed? Is it clear how the organization would work if the strategy were to change? Does the design actually obstruct and confuse rather than streamline and clarify?

Few designs will achieve all of these criteria. Goold and Campbell (2002) recommend that design planning be an iterative process, and that as a design fails one test, it should be revised and run through the list of tests once more. That said, “there is no one best way to organize” (Galbraith, 1973, p. 2), so some tradeoffs are inevitable. Ideally, “if management can identify the negatives of its preferred option, the other policies around the star model can be designed to counter the negatives while achieving the positives” (Galbraith, 2002, p. 15). Being conscious of how the design addresses the strategy and working with the other elements of the star model to address the flaws with the design is the best advice.

## Directional Interventions

In this section we will consider interventions that help organizational members understand and define what actions they should take to develop the organization for the future. They include (1) strategic planning and real-time strategic change, (2) scenario planning, and (3) search conferences and future search. Broadly speaking, while each has a similar general objective, in that they all help organizational members agree on and plan for the future, they differ in their outcomes and process.

## Strategic Planning and Real-Time Strategic Change

There are dozens of definitions of strategic planning and an equal number of writers who have recommendations about how to conduct it. Vaill (2000) defines strategic planning as follows:

Planning for the fulfillment of the organization's fundamental purposes. It includes the process of establishing and clarifying purposes, deciding on the objectives whose attainment will help fulfill purposes, and determining the major means and "pathway" (strategies) through which these objectives will be pursued. (p. 965)

Strategic planning involves making decisions about the organization's purpose, products, vision, direction, and action plans. It also involves tradeoffs and choices about customers and markets, as well as introspective analysis about the organization's competitive advantage and challenges in its current environment (Porter, 1996). Strategy also includes a discussion of mission (the purpose of the organization, including its products, markets, and customers) and goals and objectives (the targets, timelines, and methods by which the strategy will be translated into specific measurable activities). Strategies can be developed for almost any length of time—organizations often develop annual strategies as well as those for 3 to 5 years, or even 10 years or more, depending on the organization and its industry. Rapidly changing technology organizations may choose to develop a short-term plan of only a few years, whereas more established and less changing industries may choose longer time horizons.

Among management scholars, much has been written about the intricacies of strategy development. A perfect strategic plan, however, runs into challenges when the real work of implementation begins. Beer and Eisenstat (2000) write that there are six "silent killers" of strategy implementation, all of which relate centrally to the concerns of OD practitioners:

1. Top-down or laissez-faire senior management style
2. Unclear strategy and conflicting priorities
3. An ineffective senior management team
4. Poor vertical communication
5. Poor coordination across functions, businesses, or borders
6. Inadequate down-the-line leadership skills and development (p. 30)

Despite the potential for OD to address these implementation challenges, OD practitioners have historically not been deeply involved in the development of an organization's strategic plan, which has generally been a top management activity. This may be because of OD's intellectual history or reputation for a lack of business knowledge and the assumption by many executives that OD has little to offer the economic, financial, and marketing-oriented world of organizational strategy. However, the focus of the internal change agent on the effective implementation of strategy can be a defining characteristic of successful strategic planning. Internal OD practitioners can contribute to the process of developing the strategy itself but also can make leaders

aware of many additional concerns as they formulate the strategy, such as the following:

- How individuals and teams adapt to changes in strategic direction
- Implications of the strategy on the organization design
- How organizational processes support or hinder the strategy
- Elements of the organizational culture (language, rituals, etc.) that support or hinder the strategy
- How performance management and rewards systems relate to the strategy
- How strategic initiatives can be translated into goals
- Collaboration between departments to achieve strategic objectives

## A Strategic Planning Case Study

Consider this example of a strategic planning process published by Beer and Eisenstat (1996). Alpha Technologies is a \$1.7 billion technology company with offices throughout the world. It was composed of a number of different units, gathered together over time through acquisitions and mergers, so that a central problem for leaders was developing an integrated strategy. In response, company leaders developed a strategic planning process that required in-depth analysis of competitors, market conditions, customer needs, and product lines. Executives consulted one another to develop these departmental strategies, but the company became increasingly anxious that implementing these strategies would prove too difficult to carry out effectively because of internal barriers to change.

A strategic human resources management (SHRM) process was created so that the internal dynamics of strategy implementation could be understood. A small employee team, made up of individuals one or two levels below the senior team, was appointed to gather data from the organization about the factors that would support or inhibit the organization's implementation of its strategy. Areas for analysis included anything from organizational practices and resources to management capabilities. In a 3-day session, the employee data gathering team returned to share the data with top leaders, who listened to the presentation of data and jointly diagnosed the results and planned actions to take based on the feedback. The team analyzed the organizational culture, satisfaction levels of stakeholders such as customers and employees, leadership effectiveness, career development and training, the organization's ability to undertake interdepartmental coordination, and more.

In one division in particular, some difficult and honest feedback was shared. The employee task force reported that while the division was currently successful, future threats could undermine success due to a number of interpersonal and internal factors. These included low morale, a top-down management style in the division, low cross-functional interaction between departments, and poor upward and downward communication. As a result, the president of the division agreed to make certain changes to his own behavior, cross-functional management teams were created, and the senior team worked on its own team functioning. Other departments made staffing or role changes. In still other cases, disagreements about the overall division direction and strategy surfaced. Task force members reported being anxious about sharing the data, but that once the issues were raised, they did not experience any retribution for honest feedback.

The process resulted in organizational members being allowed to “discuss the undiscussable” (Beer & Eisenstat, 1996, p. 608), though this remains a challenge outside of the SHRM process. A higher level of involvement of employees and connections to senior management has opened up avenues for feedback and participation. Top executives say that the development of the company’s overall strategic agenda relies to a significant extent on the SHRM process. While the process continues to be refined and is far from perfect, “the strength of these interventions is that because they are highly structured and consultant led, they allow organizations composed of individuals who may not possess sophisticated inquiry skills to raise and address collectively difficult issues” (Beer & Eisenstat, 1996, p. 617).

## The Integrated Strategic Change Process

While strategic planning and OD may not have a lengthy history, it is clear that opportunities abound for integration and that OD brings “subject matter expertise, process expertise, and intervention expertise” (Worley, Hitchin, & Ross, 1996, p. 10) to the strategy effort.

Worley et al. (1996) have developed a four-step strategic planning and implementation process designed specifically for OD practitioners to add significant value to the planning effort. They call the process *integrated strategic change* (ISC) and write that their approach considers strategy development in combination with the often more challenging issues of strategy implementation, such as organization design, employee motivation and skills, and collaboration and teamwork across the organization. In this process, the strategy does not stand alone, but it aligns the organization around the necessary means to make it effective through a change plan. The ISC process consists of these steps, with the first two comprising strategy development activities and the next two comprising the change management activities to make the strategic plan effective:

1. *Strategic analysis.* The first step is to conduct a strategic analysis, which involves an assessment of the organization’s readiness for strategic change, an understanding of the organization’s values and priorities in creating a strategic plan, and a diagnosis of the organization’s current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It also includes a diagnosis of the organization’s strategic orientation, including mission, goals, and core processes.
2. *Strategy making.* The next step is to formulate the strategy. This involves the organization’s vision and strategic choices about the amount of change that will be proposed in the new strategy. Leaders analyze the organization’s environment, performance, and core competencies to determine whether minimal revision of the strategy is appropriate or whether it needs more radical change. Decisions are made about adapting or improving existing processes and about the future of the product portfolio, including areas in which to invest or reduce.
3. *Strategic change plan design.* The strategic change plan outlines not only the major activities that will be implemented or will change when the strategy is adopted but also the impact that the strategy will have on stakeholders inside and outside the organization.
4. *Strategic change plan implementation.* Leadership has a particularly important task in the implementation of the change plan. Leaders must communicate the vision and strategy, including the rationale for the change and how the leadership team arrived at major strategic decisions.



## Real-Time Strategic Change

Real-time strategic change (R. W. Jacobs, 1994) is a related intervention that OD practitioners have developed that can increase the pace of change. It can be applied to a number of topic areas that require commitment throughout the organization, including organizational members' ownership of and follow-through on implementing a strategic plan (Dannemiller & Jacobs, 1992). While it is not explicitly a strategy development process, it can help organizations implement the strategic plan by increasing awareness and commitment to the plan and its foundations. Philosophically, it has much in common with the search conference methodology that we will discuss later in this chapter, but the objectives are slightly different.

In real-time strategic change, participants work on present-day concerns, or "real business issues, such as cost containment, product quality, and increased responsiveness and sensitivity to the marketplace needs of customers" (Dannemiller & Jacobs, 1992, p. 484). It can involve hundreds of members from throughout the organization who work together to solve problems and discuss opportunities facing the entire organization, not just on those facing their own group or department. "Real time" in this process means "the simultaneous planning and implementation of individual, group, and organization-wide changes" (R. W. Jacobs, 1994, p. 21). "Strategic change" means that organizational members will work together on important issues in the organization's internal and external environment, including "customer and supplier needs, competitors' strategies, industry trends, market challenges and opportunities," and more (R. W. Jacobs, 1994, p. 22). Participants discuss changes to the entire organization, including the implications of those changes internally. By involving a large group of employees in such strategic decision making, both problems and additional strategic opportunities can be known earlier. It works especially well in strategic planning situations in which the following occurs (R. W. Jacobs, 1994):

1. A leadership team has decided that its organization needs a new strategic direction based on drivers for change either from inside or outside their own organization.
2. A draft strategy has been developed by a leadership team prior to the event.
3. The leadership group is open to feedback on the strategy by participants and to revising it based on this feedback.
4. The participants in this event make up the entire organization or a critical mass of people from a larger organization. (pp. 54–55)

Real-time strategic change events are generally structured over a 3-day period. The first day is focused on "building a common database of strategic information" (R. W. Jacobs, 1994, p. 56). Participants sit in "max-mix" groups (groups that represent a diverse set of functions, roles, and departments throughout the organization) and share an experience they have had in the organization over the past year that was exasperating or maddening, along with what the next year is expected to be like (both good and bad). Participants summarize the themes representing their current view of the organization and hear from leaders who talk honestly about their own views of the organization. With a commonly shared present state, organizational members learn more about the strategic plan from top leaders, asking questions to clarify their understanding. Next, customers or content experts may give presentations to expand the group's perspective.

Participants explicitly discuss changes that they need to make or that other functions need to make for the strategy to be successful. Through processes of individual group discussion, posting themes, and voting, organizational members are drawn back and forth between their own small-group contributions and the ideas and beliefs of the larger group. The conclusion of the event asks intact teams to work on action plans as a team to take feedback from other groups and to make decisions about how they can support the strategic plan, designing follow-up initiatives that they will commit to accomplishing. Jacobs (1994) states that the real-time strategic event combines dissatisfaction with a current state, a vision for the future, and action planning that can overcome resistance to change when a large group goes through the experience at the same time.

It is clear that as organizations follow the strategic planning process, OD practitioners can offer a significant contribution:

By infusing strategic planning processes with the OD perspective, organizations can understand better when and how to make substantive changes in their strategic orientations. Without this integration, we fear organizations will continue to generate elegant strategies that fail to get implemented or effectively implement organizational changes that have but a tenuous relationship to firm performance. (Worley et al., 1996, pp. 153–154)

More and more, OD practitioners are developing skills in strategic planning. They have value to add to the development of strategic content by becoming experts in strategic planning processes, especially in the areas of implementation and change. The integrated strategic change process and real-time strategic change are two methodologies by which OD practitioners can accomplish this.

## Scenario Planning

Scenario planning was developed as a management methodology in the late 1960s and 1970s at Royal Dutch/Shell to better plan for the possible economic and oil demand conditions of the mid-1970s. By using a process of defining and elaborating on various alternative scenarios, they could prepare for what they saw as (and what turned out to be) an eventual oil crisis (Wack, 1985a, 1985b). As we have discussed, the contemporary environment is characterized by a rapid pace of change and a great deal of uncertainty, which has made scenario planning increasingly popular in the past decade. Globalization, increased competition, and economic changes have made a single predictable forecast almost impossible to create or for organizations to respond to. Scenario planning thus encourages organizations to consider several likely possible future states, to consider which of those is most likely, and then to develop plans and actions that could account for a number of possible future situations. In a highly uncertain environment, scenario planning helps to “inform decision making, learn through challenging the currently held mental models, enable organizational learning, and enable organizational agility” (Chermack & Lynham, 2002, p. 373).

An organization can benefit from scenario planning in many circumstances (Schoemaker, 1995):

- Uncertainty is high relative to managers’ ability to predict or adjust.
- Too many costly surprises have occurred in the past.
- The company does not perceive or generate new opportunities.
- The quality of strategic thinking is low.
- The industry has experienced significant change or is about to.
- There are strong differences of opinion, with multiple opinions having merit. (p. 27)

Similar to other methods of forecasting, scenario planning involves gathering data to forecast possible future conditions. However, “scenario planning simplifies the avalanche of data into a limited number of possible states” (Schoemaker, 1995, p. 26) that allow organizational members to consider and to address them. Thus, it is in contrast with strategic planning, in which an organization develops its own plans for its future, and risk mitigation or contingency planning, in which an organization plans for a single future event that may or may not happen (for example, the computer backup system may crash). A scenario is also not a vision statement, which is an organization’s desired future state, is based on its values, and is intended to energize and motivate organizational members.

Instead, scenario planning “embraces uncertainty by identifying those unknowns that matter most in shaping the future of a focal issue” (Steil & Gibbons-Carr, 2005, p. 17). Scenario planning works best when there are a number of possible options and there is a high level of uncertainty about which options are likely to pan out. City planners may be able to develop contingency plans if this year’s rainfall amounts fail to fill the reservoir to capacity (rationing or price increases, for example). But will the city’s infrastructure be robust enough to support the city’s needs in 25 years? How will environmental conditions, upstream water usage, tax revenues, transportation, housing prices, interest rates, population increases or decreases, and water rights legislation all affect the future needs of the city? Moreover, which of those factors will be most important to take into

consideration? While some data are likely to be available on many of these topics, it may not be possible to predict with certainty how those factors will interact to produce a single likely future state.

In a scenario planning process, detailed stories or narratives (scenarios) are developed that describe plausible future circumstances. “A scenario is a well-worked answer to the question: ‘What can conceivably happen?’ Or: ‘What would happen if . . . ?’” (Lindgren & Bandhold, 2003, p. 21). Scenarios contain enough detail to be conceivable and credible, and they should be written in a persuasive enough narrative that they help decision makers visualize the future and its impacts on the organization. Scenarios contain both dramatic imagination but also thought-provoking analysis. In the city planning example above, planners might construct a scenario of what the city looks like 25 years from now, imagining a dramatic increase in the population due to the growth and expansion of three of the area’s major employers, all high-tech companies. Interest rates have remained steady, and the area’s moderate climate and attractive business environment have brought 25,000 new residents to the community, putting a great strain on the city’s infrastructure. A second scenario may predict the mergers of the area’s three employers, leading to job loss and residents moving away from the city to the south metro area where the employment climate is stable, implying that the city’s water needs will also remain stable, providing an opportunity to sell excess capacity to surrounding communities. The two scenarios describe very different future states but also the conditions to be monitored that will affect the need to take action.

While there are many variations, one recommended scenario planning methodology consists broadly of four major activities (Ralston & Wilson, 2006):

1. *Getting started.* Before any scenarios are written, a scenario planning team should be formed (usually somewhere around a dozen members who have executive support) and the group must determine the time horizon to be discussed and the focal topic of interest. The group should agree on the process and outcomes of the effort.
2. *Laying the environmental-analysis foundation.* Group members gather quantitative data about facts and trends as well as qualitative data about views of the future from organizational members. At this stage, the group explores external factors such as demographic trends, social and environmental patterns, and other economic, political, and technological concerns.
3. *Creating the scenarios.* The factors discussed earlier are now analyzed and compared for their predictability and influence on the organization. Three to five story lines or scenarios are written that capture the majority of the extreme future alternatives. A table compares the scenarios across several variables of concern.

Good scenarios, according to Lindgren and Bandhold (2003), have the following seven characteristics:

- *Decision-making power.* The scenario provides enough detail that decisions can be made based on the scenario coming true.
- *Plausibility.* The scenario must be realistic and believable.
- *Alternatives.* The scenario should imply options and choices, each of which could be a likely future state.

- *Consistency.* The scenario should be consistent in its own story. That is, to use the example above, proposing employment loss but income increases might need to have some explanation to make it consistent.
  - *Differentiation.* Scenarios must be different enough from one another that they describe genuinely alternative situations (ideally they would be diametrically opposed).
  - *Memorability.* Scenarios should be limited in number, and each should provide dramatic narrative for ease of recall.
  - *Challenge.* The scenario should confront what the organization currently believes about future events.
4. *Moving from scenarios to a decision.* The scenario planning group and the leadership team discuss implications of each scenario, including the opportunities and threats to the organization for each alternative. Current strategic decisions are tested and debated. The group makes decisions about what actions to take and agrees on metrics and processes for communicating and monitoring the actions.

While scenario planning is simple to explain in concept, it is very difficult to do and to facilitate (Ogilvy, 2002). Facilitating a team through a scenario planning exercise also requires a healthy team in which members have “patience, respect for others, a sense of humor, a reservoir of knowledge and experience, [and] the ability to listen closely to what others have to say” (Ogilvy, 2002, p. 180). A scenario planning intervention can not only involve creative thinking about uncertain and unknown events but also require the ability to thoughtfully consider ideas and future events that are opposed to one another. Organizational members can have difficulty rationally considering a future in which, for example, the organization’s products are obsolete or unnecessary. One purpose of scenario planning is to push these options as topics of discussion.

About scenario planning, Wack (1985a) concludes as follows:

By presenting other ways of seeing the world, decision scenarios allow managers to break out of a one-eyed view. Scenarios give managers something very precious: the ability to re-perceive reality. In a turbulent business environment, there is more to see than managers normally perceive. . . . It has been my repeated experience that the perceptions that emerge when the disciplined approach of scenario analysis is practiced are richer and often critically different from the previous implicit view. (p. 150)

## Search Conferences and Future Search

Search conferences and future search conferences are related interventions during which a broad cross-section of stakeholders meet over a short period to develop agreements and action plans to move the organization to a desired future. These techniques have been pioneered and explained in detail by Emery and Purser (1996) and Weisbord and Janoff (2000; Weisbord, 1992), with others proposing additional variations on or applications of the same concept (Axelrod, 1992; Cahoon, 2000). While there are some differences between the two formats (particularly in how the conference planners deal with conflict; see Emery & Purser, 1996, p. 215), both intervention methodologies seek to encourage commitment to a common vision of the future and to develop energy to work on the action plans that will bring about that future in a highly participative environment. We will concentrate below on how future search conferences work.

### Features of a Future Search Conference

#### **Size, Length, and Subject.**

A future search conference is a 2.5- to 3-day meeting (with a typical size of about 60 participants) to create action plans for an issue or concern that participants share. It is not a problem-solving conference, in the sense that it is not intended to get a group together to determine how to deal with the county's homeless population or how to reduce the cycle time for shipping of the company's most popular product (though those may be topics for action planning later). Instead, the topic is likely to be "a future search for ABC county" or "the future of ABC company," topics that tend to promote positive energy toward a desired future. It is also not a team-building meeting where members negotiate roles or work processes.

#### **Attendance.**

The objective in inviting participants is to "get the whole system in the room." A broad cross-section of stakeholders is invited to participate. A conference to determine the future of a school district may invite administrators, students, parents, teachers, staff, business leaders, and elected and government officials (see Bailey & Dupre, 1992; Schweitz & Martens, 2005). Involving multiple stakeholder groups is an important feature of a search conference, for two reasons. First, involvement leads to better input and better decisions. When participants share what they know, every participant learns something about another stakeholder group (their opinions, goals, and problems) that they may not have realized when they examined the situation from their perspective. New relationships are built. Second, involvement means that implementation is more likely because solutions already have built-in commitment from people who developed them. Extensive "selling" is less necessary. "The mayor opens one door, the grass-roots activist another, the ordinary citizen still a third. Together, they make possible a range of commitments none could make alone" (Weisbord & Janoff, 2000, p. 66). Weisbord and Janoff (2000) recommend that 25 percent to 40 percent of the participants be from outside the organization. Most important, participants must care about the topic and have a stake in its outcome.

#### **Data Gathering and Interpretation.**

The future search conference methodology approaches the task of data gathering and interpretation differently from the traditional role of the OD practitioner. Instead of the practitioner leading the data gathering and interpretation process, Weisbord remarks that “in search you have people interacting, collecting, and interpreting their own data” (quoted in Manning, 1994, p. 88). Participants may bring external data, but their own experiences tend to be the most powerful source of data. By conducting the data interpretation process themselves, participants take responsibility for managing their own content and group process, skills that will be important following the conference as groups take action without the aid of a consultant.

### **Exploring the Wider Context.**

The conference is designed for participants to hold a broad dialogue about their shared past and present before attempting to plan a future. In doing so, they learn how their past paths intertwine and interrelate and how they each have arrived at a particular interpretation of the present based on this foundation. With the wider context as a foundation, participants can have a dialogue about a future in which they also all will participate.

### **Structure.**

A future search conference involves few to no presentations, training, or speeches by top executives. Instead, it tends to follow this 3-day pattern (Weisbord & Janoff, 2000):

## **Day 1 (Afternoon)**

The first theme for the afternoon is a focus on the past. Participants sit in heterogeneous groups, often with people whom they have never met. On long sheets of paper posted on the wall, participants write their experiences along 5- to 10-year time frames under three categories: “Personal,” “Global,” and a third focusing on the company, community, or the issue on which the conference is focused. Immediately, all participants are up and writing a sentence or two explaining, for example, what was happening in the company in the 1990s, in their personal life in the 1980s, and so on. All participants share something from their own experience. Back in their mixed groups, participants analyze common themes in the data and present their findings to one another. Then the topic immediately shifts to present trends that are affecting them. The activity is a “mind map,” a large graphic display of trends and their relationships to one another. As the final activity of the day, participants vote on which of the top trends they believe are most influential. In a very short amount of time, participants have established a shared past and conducted an analysis of current influential trends. Importantly, by completing a small task together, they have also learned something about collaborating and appreciating one another’s perspectives.

## **Day 2 (Morning)**

The next morning, participants are reseated into stakeholder groups (e.g., customers work with customers, suppliers with other suppliers). Now working with others with whom they share a common role, they analyze the influential trends from the previous day, and they share with the larger group what their individual

stakeholder groups are currently doing with respect to the trends and what they would like to do in the future. Next, the same groups make two lists. The first list is their list of “prouds,” or those things they are currently doing with respect to the organization or focal issue that they are proud of or that are working well. The second is a list of “sorries,” those things they regret or that are not working well. By the end of the morning, the stakeholder groups have acknowledged their place in the system’s success. Because each group has admitted to its regrets as well as acknowledged its successes, groups end up on equal footing and they notice the ways in which they are interrelated.

## **Day 2 (Afternoon)**

In the afternoon, talk turns to the future, and participants are again reseated in diverse stakeholder groups. Each group has a single deliverable: a creative presentation of their desired state in 10 to 20 years, often putting themselves into the future and looking back on today with the hindsight of experience. The presentations take the form of “putting on a skit or a play or writing a poem or singing a song” (Manning, 1994, p. 89). Unleashing creative forces tends to free participants’ energy from the discouraging issues and problems of the present. Participants often report that this was the most energizing, entertaining, and powerful part of the conference. After hearing each presentation, the groups develop lists of the common themes they heard, possible projects that could result, and any areas of disagreement that they have with the desired futures.

## **Day 3**

The final day is devoted to developing agreements and action plans. The whole conference group reviews the lists of themes, projects, and disagreements from the previous day. Individuals and stakeholder groups face the reality of the choices they need to make about the future, and they may not be willing to support some of the identified alternatives. Such disagreements are not resolved during the conference but are placed on a list. The objective is to identify those actions, based on a common vision of the future, that groups can support. Once projects or themes are agreed to, stakeholder or ad hoc groups meet to develop short-term or long-term action plans. Participants develop postconference plans for communication and follow-up in meetings or through websites or newsletters.

Future search conferences following this structure have been sponsored in hundreds if not thousands of organizations around the world, in virtually every industry and organizational profile. In a short amount of time, it can be an excellent intervention to encourage groups from multiple perspectives to develop a common vision of the future. Like most other interventions, it does not work well when skeptical participants or sponsors are coerced into participation, when there are significant differences in underlying values, or when mixed stakeholder groups are intentionally not included because they are distrusted.



## Summary

In this chapter, we have discussed a number of organizationwide intervention techniques directed at changing the character and performance of whole systems. In this category of interventions, changes have been made in recent years to design interventions that involve a broad number and type of stakeholders, “getting the whole system in the room” to encourage increased participation and commitment to organizational change. This has been true whether the target is a single strategic planning session in one organization or a search conference involving thousands of citizens in multiple nations. Because of their subject matter and magnitude, large-scale interventions can be among the most difficult to execute effectively. However, if success in the contemporary organizational environment means being successful at large-scale change, such interventions are likely to be the hallmark of any successful organization. In the next chapter, we will continue our discussion of whole organization interventions.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Organizational culture can be an instructive but also an elusive concept. Think about an organization you know well: perhaps a university environment, or even this course as an organization. How would you describe its culture to an outsider? Compare that organization with another: How do the two differ on such dimensions as physical space, language use, and underlying assumptions and values? Which culture type best describes these organizations?
2. Do you think that organizational culture can be changed? Why or why not?
3. Reflect on the structure of an organization to which you belong. Which type of structure outlined in [Chapter 12](#) best describes that organization? In your experience, what are the advantages and disadvantages of that structure? Would another structure have fit the organization better? Why or why not?

## For Further Reading

## Large-Group Interventions

Bunker, B. B., & Alban, B. T. (1997). *Large group interventions: Engaging the whole system for rapid change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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## Strategic Planning and Real-Time Strategic Change

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Worley, C. G., Hitchin, D. E., & Ross, W. L. (1996). *Integrated strategic change: How OD builds competitive advantage*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

## Scenario Planning

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Schwartz, P. (1996). *The art of the long view*. New York, NY: Doubleday.



## Search Conferences and Future Search

Emery, M., & Purser, R. E. (1996). *The search conference: A powerful method for planning organizational change and community action*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Future Search: [www.futuresearch.net](http://www.futuresearch.net)

Weisbord, M. R., & Janoff, S. (2000). *Future search: An action guide to finding common ground in organizations and communities* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

## Exercise 6: Whole Organization Intervention (Organization Design)

In this chapter you learned about the star model of organization design. In this exercise you will practice applying those concepts to a fictional organization.

ProRunnerGear.com is an online and specialty retailer of high-end running shoes, apparel, and accessories for the professional runner, competitive runners (e.g., high school, college track), and advanced recreational runners. The company aims to be the first choice for the running athlete by offering a wide variety of innovative products to meet its customers' needs. It may not be the cheapest running store, but it offers exceptional customer service and stocks products that cannot be found elsewhere. It has a rapid product delivery timeframe and offers an easy and flexible return policy. Competitors include other online retailers, specialty running stores, and "big box" retailers for some products.

1. Create alternative organizational charts for ProRunnerGear.com based on one of the following structure types (note that you will need to make assumptions about the size or location of the organization as you do this):
    - a. Functional structure
    - b. Geographic structure
    - c. Customer structure
    - d. Matrix structure
  2. Identify the advantages and disadvantages of the structure you created.
  3. How might the different departments you created interact with one another? What lateral capabilities might be needed to help these groups connect and share information? Explain which of these lateral capabilities you would incorporate into your design and why:
    - a. Networks
    - b. Lateral processes
    - c. Teams
    - d. Integrative roles
  4. Imagine that ProRunnerGear.com decided to transition to a different structure type. What do you think would be the greatest challenge for it in doing so?
-

## Case Study 6: Reorganizing Human Resources at ASP Software

Read the ASP Software case (Anderson, 2005a) and consider the following questions:

1. How does the client feel about how the change has been managed at this point? How do you think the management team or employees feel?
2. What has Susan done well in managing the change to this point? What could she have done differently?
3. What intervention strategy and intervention activities would you recommend to Susan? How would you structure these activities? What roles would Susan, the management team, and the consultant play?

Nathan Miller's phone buzzed on his desk in his home office.

"Hi, Nathan? This is Susan McNulty, from ASP Software, I'm the vice president of human resources here. I got your name from Joan Orman at Kendall Consulting."

Nathan smiled. Joan had been a talented coworker during his time at Kendall several years ago. He had since received many referrals from her for his growing organization development practice. "Of course—what can I do for you?" Nathan inquired. ASP was a familiar company to Nathan. It was a large employer in the area, a high-tech organization in a community without many technology companies. ASP built software products for Fortune 500 companies, employing about 750 software engineers in product development and 500 sales executives. Including the other support functions needed to make the company run (marketing, HR, finance, and so on), it employed almost 1,500 people in the region.

"Well, we're reorganizing our human resources department here at ASP, and I was asking Joan whether she knew of anyone who might be able to help us with a team-building exercise, and your name came up. Do you think you might be able to do that for us?"

"Well," Nathan paused. "I might be able to help you with some ideas—team building could be a possibility, or there are other initiatives we could work on as well. Can you tell me a little about what you're trying to do there at ASP? Perhaps give me some of the context?"

"Sure," Susan said. "We're changing our model from a functional model to a full client management services model. Of course, that model requires a lot of teamwork, and we've also had a small reduction in staff, so. . . ." She paused for emphasis.

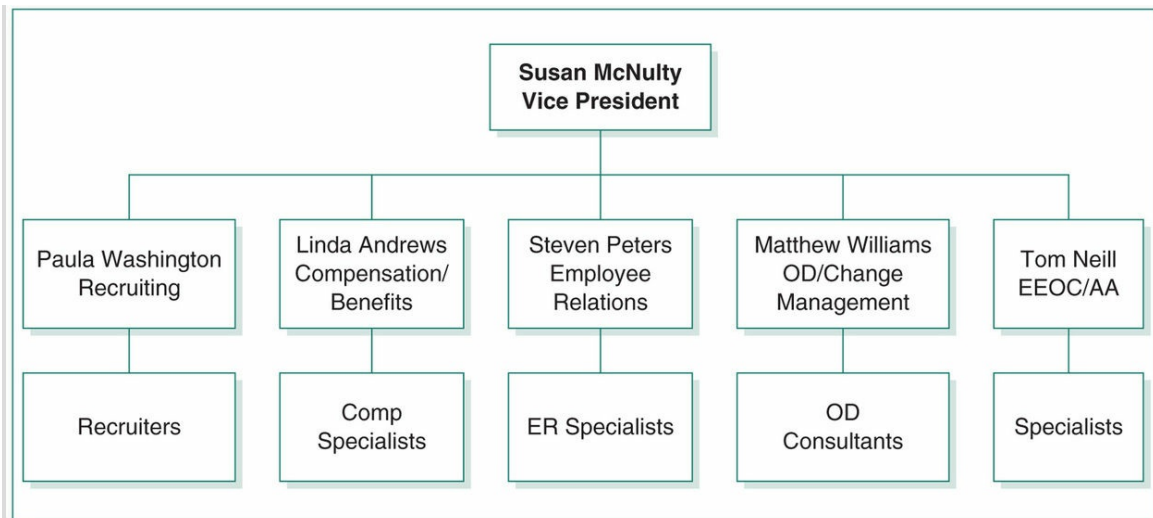
Nathan listened. He wasn't sure what a "full client management services model" meant, but it was clearly important to Susan.

Susan continued. "So, with this new focus on teams, it seemed important to our change team that we conduct a team-building activity. I was hoping that maybe we could meet in person and I could describe our model and we could talk about how you might be able to help us? Say, Tuesday at 2:30?"

"That sounds fine. I know right where your headquarters are located. Should I stop in the lobby and ask for you?" Nathan asked.

"That's fine. I'll see you then."

"I'm so glad you could make it. It's nice to meet you in person." Susan welcomed Nathan to ASP Software headquarters, a four-story building located just outside downtown. The building was a standard glass-and-steel box, with a shiny chrome ASP logo featured prominently in the marble-floored lobby. The lobby was a busy place as employees and visitors were constantly coming and going. Nathan wore a visitor's badge and had been waiting in the lobby until Susan came down to greet him.



On the fourth floor, Susan and Nathan sat down in a conference room at a large mahogany table surrounded by 12 leather chairs. On the wall he noticed a cherry wood–framed print of mountain climbers. At the bottom read “Teamwork: Giving a helping hand makes all the difference.” Another showed a kayaker paddling down a river, with the text “Goals: Effort is nothing without a vision.” Also in the room were a video-conferencing unit and a recessed screen that appeared via remote control. Track lighting provided spotlights on the framed prints.

“Thanks for inviting me. It sounds like you have an interesting and challenging change underway,” Nathan said.

“Oh, yes, I think so. I’m really pleased that the management team has adopted this new structure. I think it will improve our productivity and reputation as an HR team,” Susan said.

“So you said that you’re changing models? Can you tell me what that means?” Nathan inquired.

“Sure.” She handed Nathan an organizational chart.

“This chart shows how we are currently organized, by HR function. I have five managers on my team, and each has a separate function. Paula is in charge of our recruiting function, and she supervises all of our talent acquisition work. She has five recruiters working for her. Her recruiters work with managers to open jobs; they search for candidates, conduct preliminary interviews, and process job offers. Linda has compensation, benefits, and rewards. That includes stock grants, executive compensation, and job leveling, plus any other compensation studies that our executive team requests. Linda currently has two compensation specialists reporting to her. Steven has eight employee relations specialists—they do most of the day-to-day work with the management teams they support, to help them conduct performance reviews and to deal with employee complaints and problems. Matthew is our organization development and change management expert, and he has four OD consultants working for him. They work on various projects, but they generally advise the management teams they work with, facilitate meetings, and develop and conduct training. Finally, Tom has our EEOC responsibilities, including legal reporting and compliance, but also investigations of complaints such as harassment or mistreatment of employees. He has three investigation specialists who do data analysis and reporting.”

“That sounds like a common organizational structure for a human resources department, in my experience,” Nathan said. “What prompted a change?”

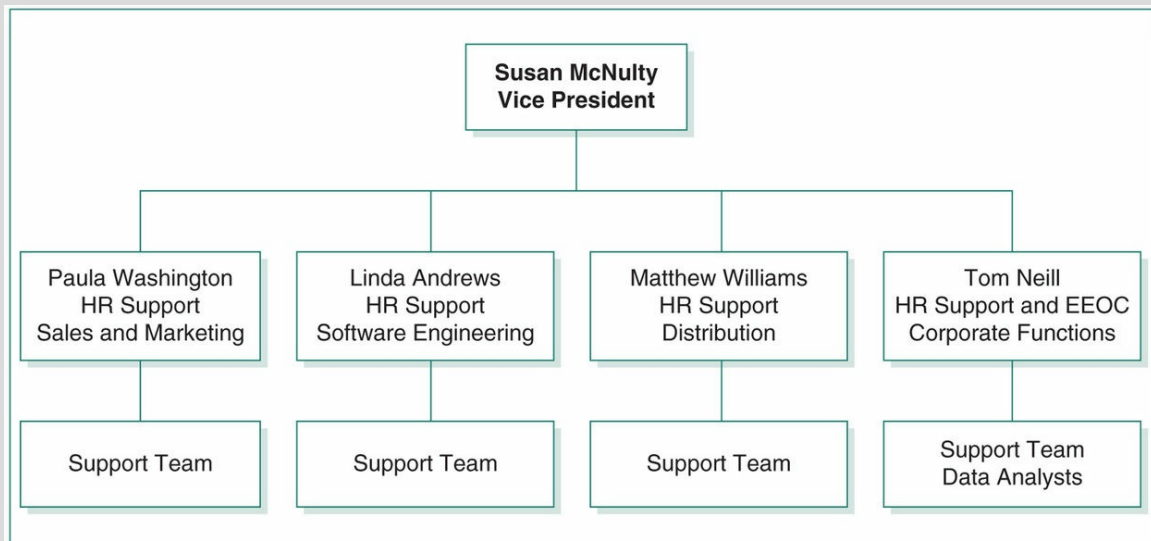
“Well,” Susan started, “our internal client managers—the internal ‘customers’ of our department—haven’t been very happy with the service they’ve been receiving from the HR department. One of the company’s biggest challenges is recruiting—we have about 200 new positions a year to recruit. Combining those jobs with positions that we need to fill as a result of turnover means that each of our recruiters is handling two dozen positions at any given time. That has led to some frustration from the ASP management team. A manager will need to hire someone, and he’ll have to call one person in Paula’s organization to get the position opened, then deal with a person on Linda’s team to figure out what the compensation level should be, and neither of those people is the person that the manager typically works with on employee relations issues from Steven’s team. That can cause some problems on its own, but what really has frustrated them is that the next time he has to hire someone, he’ll have to call Paula again, and might be assigned a different recruiter. It’s a trend that we see in many companies today—our managers are looking for one person to call to handle all of their HR services. And we really need to open positions, interview candidates, and get job offers out much more quickly than we are today. It’s a tight market out

there for the best people.”

Susan continued. “At the same time, most of the management team really isn’t involved with the strategic aspects of the business, designing HR programs that make the most sense with where the business is going. In the software industry, we must move very quickly, and we’re constantly looking for new talent and examining different ways to compensate them to maximize loyalty, retention, and productivity. I’ve been involved with our corporate strategic direction, but the rest of the HR team has been oriented toward the day-to-day activities instead of the bigger picture, so they’re not adding as much value as they could.”

“That sounds like a common complaint,” Nathan said. “What kinds of changes are you going to make?”

“Here’s the new organizational chart,” Susan handed Nathan another sheet. “In this new model, we’ve organized teams to serve the various internal departments that run the ASP software business—we call them our internal ‘customers.’ So, for example, Paula will now support only the sales and marketing team, and she will be supported by a team that will consist of four team members, called ‘generalists,’ who will all support various assigned members of the management team in sales and marketing. The advantage is that Paula will now be the central point of contact for our VP of sales and marketing, and she will be much more involved in developing and understanding sales and marketing strategy, so that our human resources strategies—compensation, hiring, change management—will all be aligned with the sales strategy. Linda will do the same thing with software engineering. Matthew will support our distribution function. In this way, we’ll be much more client-focused, and we will be much more strategic and responsive to the business. Once a new employee is hired, that person will work with one HR generalist throughout his or her career at ASP, in career planning, compensation, etc. I also asked Tom to keep the EEOC function with two data analysts since that was his expertise and it didn’t make sense to combine with the other functions, but he’ll also take on a support role for all corporate functions, like finance and legal.”



“Has this been announced formally?” Nathan asked.

“Mostly. We had our first meeting last week. We told them that some changes were coming, and most people were aware of it generally but not the specifics. Today we had the second meeting where I published the chart with the names in the positions,” Susan answered.

Nathan noticed that the new organizational chart contained fewer boxes. “You had mentioned a staffing reduction?” he asked.

“You’re paying attention,” Susan said. “At the same time as we discussed this model, we determined that our expenses were about 10 percent more than we could afford, so we had to reduce our total headcount by four positions. Those will come from several areas, including two employee relations specialists, one EEOC data analyst, and one recruiter.”

Nathan did the math quickly in his head. There was one position unaccounted for. “I only get 22 people when you used to have 27. Am I missing one position?” Nathan asked.

“Good observation,” Susan smiled. “I haven’t published it yet or announced it because I still need to formalize it, but I’ve asked Steven to take on the role of director of HR operations. The four members of the management team will all report directly to Steven, and he will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the HR organization. My role will change slightly, since I’ve been asked by our CEO, David Kaufman, to take on several additional responsibilities and to assist him with special customer calls. While I will have the same title, I

won't have time to sort out the daily problems, so I've invited Steven to take on this new responsibility. It's a good development opportunity for him, and it saves me time. We have another meeting with the whole organization on Monday, and I'll share Steven's new role with them at that time."

"Do you have a sense for how people feel about this change generally? Both on the management team and among the support teams?" Nathan asked.

"On the management team I think there's a bit of relief, since they knew I was going to reduce it by one position and the four that are left are settling into their new roles. They know that they have jobs, although they don't know yet about Steven's promotion. Among the generalists I think there's a range of opinions. There is a lot of anxiety about the staffing reduction, and I'm not sure that people have gotten over that yet. The old teams were pretty tight, and I think that some people are looking forward to their new roles while others are wondering about their new team members or their new manager. Some of them, particularly the ones that used to be recruiters, are looking forward to expanded roles that will give them more access to their client managers. Others, such as the employee relations specialists, are not looking forward to the recruiting responsibility."

"Have the employee relations specialists ever done recruiting before?" Nathan inquired.

"One or two used to do that in a previous company. But most of them haven't, so they will probably need some training initially. I'm willing to let them have that time to adjust and learn," Susan said.

"Anything else? Who else might be especially happy or unhappy with this change?" Nathan probed.

"Among the employee relations specialists, Steven was a very popular manager. Matthew has had a couple of run-ins with one of the ER specialists we have assigned to his group—that relationship has been contentious in the past, but it was the only spot to put that one individual, so we had to deal with it. I think Matthew will be very professional about it," Susan added.

"Tell me about the relationship that Steven has had with his peers," Nathan inquired.

"Steven has been very popular as a team member and as a leader in his own group, there's no question. I don't think there are any issues there." Susan shook her head. "But it will be a slight change to those who don't know him well, like the recruiters or the compensation specialists. It might be hard for his former team members to relate to him in a different way. But Steven is popular and he projects a very pleasant charisma, so I know he'll quickly take over the leadership position."

"What measures of success are you looking for?" Nathan asked.

"We've always measured the effectiveness of our recruiters in a couple of ways: number of qualified candidates presented to management and cycle time of open position to acceptance of offer. We'll continue to measure our generalists in that way, which I think makes some of them a bit anxious since they're not used to recruiting. Right now it takes us about 77 days to open a position, find candidates, interview them, and get a job offer out. I'm looking for our generalists to move twice as quickly as that. That means each generalist will have a quota of jobs to fill and will be measured on time to fill those positions. But generally I'm looking for more satisfied internal clients and fewer complaints. We should also be able to do more with less since each person will have direct responsibility for their internal clients—they won't need to go from team to team to get the job done."

"How about for my work—are there any specific outcomes you're looking for?" Nathan wondered.

"Not exactly. I'm looking for your guidance about how to proceed. What we need to do is to get beyond this change as quickly as possible so that we're starting to show real results to our internal client managers. I think people are still pretty upset about losing some of their coworkers, and the rumors have been running rampant for the past several weeks. We stopped some of that with the meetings last week and this week, by sharing our plans and showing them the organizational chart. But we've lost a lot of time in getting to this point and now we need to move quickly to get people into their new teams and to start recruiting immediately," Susan stressed.

"You had mentioned initially that you were looking for a team-building activity?" Nathan asked, remembering their phone conversation.

"Yes. With these new teams, only a few of them have worked together closely before. This will require a new kind of coordination among the team members—instead of doing their own thing and managing their own projects, they'll be part of a team to support each business function. They'll still have their own responsibilities, but they will need to share information, determine a strategy and direction, and take on new and unfamiliar responsibilities. I'm thinking that some kind of team-building activity would be really helpful to them—they could get to know each other better, perhaps in a social setting. The other thing I was thinking since we talked on the phone is doing a

personality test like the Myers-Briggs or another assessment so that people could examine each other's working style? I just don't know where to start."

The conversation began to die down, and Susan posed the final question.

"So after all of that, do you think you can help us?" Susan inquired.

"I think there are a couple of things that come to mind that could help make this transition smoother," Nathan said. "Why don't I put together a proposal for how I think things could proceed, and we can take it from there?"

"I would really appreciate that. You come highly recommended and I appreciate your insights and guidance," Susan said. "I look forward to reading your proposal."

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## Chapter 13 Whole Organization and Multiple Organization Interventions (Part 2)

The acquisition of MPC, a small chemical manufacturing company, by ComChem, a well-established, older company in the same industry, presented many challenges to both organizational cultures. MPC had been a family-run business with just 25 employees, each of whom had developed strong ties to the husband-and-wife team founders. The company was well integrated into the small local community, sponsoring little league teams and contributing financially to area charitable organizations. Employees were involved in most significant decisions, companywide formal and informal communication was frequent, and employees were highly valued and recognized for their contributions through an annual employee appreciation dinner. The environment was casual yet professional, and customers were loyal to the company, as it had served a specific niche in the market serving small local businesses. ComChem also began as a family-owned business, but in a large community serving a customer base of large corporations. Customer service was an important value held by ComChem employees. ComChem employees were treated well, with many perks and benefits available to them, such as a game room that employees were welcome to use at any time and free lunch catering.

After the acquisition deal was signed, executives of ComChem traveled to the MPC site frequently to help employees through the merger, though no one permanently relocated to work there. Some aspects of the transition were frustrating to MPC employees, such as the lack of information about goals, objectives, and the future direction of the organization; vague information about new product pricing; and confusion in job roles. Yet the frustration was short-lived because employees were told honestly that goals had not been determined, for example, and senior managers from both companies openly admitted that the work of integrating the two companies was tough. To thank employees for their patience during the difficult transition, they gave each employee a cash bonus, and they added a basketball court and other perks to the MPC site as a way of making employees feel welcome, valued, and equal to the “old” employees from ComChem. MPC employees saw proof that the values in the new organization were similar to what they were used to, as both customers and employees were treated well at ComChem. (Shearer, Hames, & Runge, 2001)

- What factors do you think make a merger succeed or fail?

This chapter picks up on additional common large-scale, whole organization interventions. Specifically, this chapter will discuss:

- Quality and productivity interventions: Reengineering, Total Quality Management, and Six Sigma
- Interventions in mergers and acquisitions
- Transorganization or interorganization development
- Dialogic OD interventions

In the first two of these, we will discuss subjects that might be seen as less germane or central to the role of the OD practitioner, but which are opportunities for OD practitioners to contribute. Next, we will examine a special kind of whole organization intervention where multiple organizations are involved. Finally, we will expand on our discussion of dialogic OD that we first introduced in [Chapter 5](#). Here we will examine what a dialogic OD intervention looks like, the conditions necessary for a dialogic OD program to be successful, and how the role of the practitioner is shifted in these types of engagements. While dialogic OD interventions are not exclusively whole organization interventions, we will review them here now that you are familiar with the dialogic OD mind-set and approach as well as interventions at the individual, team, and whole organization levels.





## Quality and Productivity Interventions

The three interventions in this section that address organizational quality and employee productivity arguably suffer more from a fad mentality than do most of the other interventions discussed in this book. Total Quality Management, reengineering, and Six Sigma have all had moments of popularity as well as moments where their techniques have been assailed in both the popular and academic press. None was, strictly speaking, developed as an organization development intervention in the same traditions as we have discussed, but because change agents are frequently involved in their application, it is important for most OD practitioners to be at least somewhat familiar with them.

# Total Quality Management

Total Quality Management (TQM) developed as the earliest of these three approaches, gaining widespread attention in the 1980s as a response to the quality challenges to American manufacturing coming from Japan. TQM uses quality principles and tools to manage and improve processes through employee involvement in teams. Quality, in this respect, is not just the responsibility of manufacturing products that are error-free. Instead, quality is everywhere. “Total quality management can be defined as creating and implementing organizational architectures that motivate, support, and enable quality management in all the activities of the enterprise” (Heilpern & Nadler, 1992, p. 138). However, there is much variation in what TQM means and a number of highly specialized tools and techniques that many consider to be part of a TQM effort, including the following:

Practices such as benchmarking, continuous improvement, *Kaizen*, concurrent engineering, just-in-time, empowerment, *Poka-Yoke*, micro process control, cycle time, flexible manufacturing, lean production, customer focus, value added, suppliers as partners, cross-function networking, statistical process control, and total system control. Since TQM means so many different practices, TQM means different things to different consultants. (Boje, 1993, pp. 4–5)

TQM involves systems thinking (as we discussed in [Chapter 4](#)), where customers receive the output of the organization’s inputs and process steps. In TQM, processes are systematically measured using statistical techniques, called *statistical process control* (SPC), to chart the accuracy and productivity of each process. Problems are examined and solved using specific analysis techniques. Not only does TQM require significant training for employees to learn these techniques, but it requires a cultural shift in many organizations to consider the impact of every process on customer quality, with every employee taking ownership and responsibility for quality. In addition, management processes, including measurement tools, rewards, and communications, are all impacted by the adoption of a TQM mentality. Effectively implementing a TQM program can take 5 to 7 years (Heilpern & Nadler, 1992).

TQM comprises five basic activities (M. Adams, 1992):

1. *Identify customers and what they value at all levels.* The top management team must support the quality effort in the organization and should meet regularly with top and potential customers to assess the organization’s products and services. Moreover, TQM also emphasizes meeting the needs of internal customers, for those departments that serve others internal to the organization, such as finance or human resources.
2. *Identify products and services provided.* Customers should be asked which products or services they value, how they use those products or services, and what improvements would make the product or service even more valuable.
3. *Define processes.* Flowchart techniques are used to document the actual process in use today, with all its flaws, including rework, testing, and quality checks. Employee teams can document processes and point

to common problems or errors in the process.

4. *Simplify the process.* Like quality circles, ad hoc cross-functional employee teams can take ownership for process improvement activities as those closest to the action. Unnecessary process activities can be combined with others or eliminated to streamline the number of steps required.
5. *Continuously improve.* Incremental process changes can be made regularly when data from SPC charts and root cause analysis tools prove that there is a fault in the process. SPC charts show the standard variations in the process so that when a process exceeds these levels, action can be taken to understand and correct where errors are occurring. Management must rely on data (such as quantitative charts) to make decisions rather than making decisions on a hunch or best guess.

Critics of TQM point to its high failure rate (about three quarters of implementations fail to live up to their expectations, according to Spector & Beer, 1994), the wide gap between its “rhetoric and reality” (Zbaracki, 1998), and presumptive packaging as an employee involvement strategy masking a mechanism for management control (in the footsteps of Taylorism) through statistics (Boje & Winsor, 1993). Supporters, however, point to significant improvements in organizations that have used the TQM approach, documented in the annual Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award competition.

## Reengineering

Hammer and Champy's (1993) book *Reengineering the Corporation* argued that management fads and quality efforts had done little to improve productivity and profitability in corporations. They pointed out that in most organizations, there exist tremendous inefficiencies caused by organizational structures that segment research and development, engineering, manufacturing, shipping, customer service, and more into distinct divisions that may each be successful but at the expense of another department. Rather than make small incremental changes to existing processes (such as small technology improvements that could save a few hours or dollars in manufacturing or shipping), companies could save more time and money by rethinking and restructuring entire operations. As an example, they pointed to a company that reengineered its credit processes so that instead of separate departments handling applications, credit checks, writing loans, and so on, one person would follow the request through the entire process. By involving fewer departments and giving one person the responsibility to manage the process, cycle time was reduced considerably. Hammer and Champy write that reengineering is not the same as automation, downsizing, or reorganizing; rather, it is a rebuilding process where entire organizational operations are created anew. The reengineering movement touched off by Hammer and Champy's book continues today, sometimes under the moniker of *business process reengineering* (or *redesign*), though today it does often involve new technology and downsizing.

Reengineering efforts comprise a leader, a process owner, a reengineering team, and an overall reengineering steering committee and "czar" (who oversee all of the organization's reengineering efforts). The organization's major processes are defined and mapped to understand the work currently being done. Three criteria help the team determine which processes are ripe for reengineering: processes that are not working as they should, processes that affect the organization's customers, and processes that would have a high impact if redesigned. Once the organization has chosen a process to be reengineered, it is the responsibility of a reengineering team to remove barriers, create new process steps, develop new job roles, shift responsibilities, or consider any of a number of other possible changes. They consider how to implement core reengineering principles such as "as few people as possible should be involved in the performance of a process" (Hammer & Champy, 1993, p. 144).

The reengineering movement is related to and consistent with the widespread belief in OD to think both structurally and systemically about larger organizational processes and practices rather than improvements in a single department or system. However, there are also important value conflicts with OD. The primary values of reengineering tend to be about organizational profitability and process control rather than participation (Moosbrucker & Loftin, 1998). Hammer and Champy (1993) note that two major flaws with most reengineering programs are that they let the corporate culture stall the effort and they fail to run the program from the top down, with the result that "frontline employees and middle managers are unable to initiate and implement a successful reengineering effort" (p. 207). Consequently, when pushed through without involvement from those affected, many reengineering efforts have failed to manage major transitions. As an outcome, OD practitioners have found that reengineering efforts that have in the past resulted in downsizing, rightsizing, or other euphemistic terms for layoffs often color how organizational members approach

reengineering interventions (Church, Burke, & Van Eynde, 1994), which has led to significant employee dissatisfaction. This has prompted many observers to call for integrating OD values and processes (such as participation, open communication, employee involvement, and shared leadership) with the potentially significant improvements gained through reengineering programs (Cheyunki & Millard, 1998; Moosbrucker & Loftin, 1998).

## Six Sigma

Six Sigma grew out of quality improvement initiatives at Motorola in the late 1980s, and it gained popular attention when Harry and Schroeder (2000) published a book by the same name. Motorola executives were convinced that they could develop higher-quality products at a lower cost, a proposition that has been proven over and over through many Six Sigma projects. Within 4 years of implementing the Six Sigma program, the company calculated that it had saved \$2.2 *billion* in productivity increases and cost reductions. It has been used by companies such as GE, AlliedSignal, Ford, Sony, and many more.

The term *six sigma* has two meanings. The first is as a statistical measure; the second is as a business process improvement initiative that uses statistical methods or strives for Six Sigma-level performance. As a statistical measure, six sigma ( $6\sigma$ ) refers to the existence of fewer than 3.4 “defects” for every 1 million opportunities. Most processes operate at about a 3 or 4 sigma level, or approximately 10,000 to 60,000 errors for every 1 million opportunities. For example, at  $4\sigma$  (99 percent accuracy), the post office would misplace about 20,000 pieces of mail per hour. At  $6\sigma$ , it would misplace *seven*.

Six Sigma also refers to projects that are undertaken to measure and improve an organization’s processes. Six Sigma is also built into the infrastructure of the organization through the establishment of several important roles, called *champions*, *master black belts*, *black belts*, and *green belts*. Black belts and green belts lead improvement projects, whereas champions and master black belts remove obstacles and provide support and mentoring. Black belts work with green belt team members to apply quality tools to specific problems to drive financial savings and productivity improvements directly to the organization’s bottom line. The quality tools used in Six Sigma look much like those that have been around in other quality programs for years. The difference, according to Harry and Schroeder, is that Six Sigma stresses the application of these tools and diligently questions existing work processes to result in a dramatic, measurable impact to the bottom line.

To implement and sustain a Six Sigma program, Harry and Schroeder (2000) write that it takes three steps:

1. *An honest assessment of the organization’s readiness to implement Six Sigma.* This includes an assessment of strategic direction, the chances of meeting financial and growth goals, and the organization’s ability to adapt effectively and efficiently to new circumstances. Will the company culture (including executives, managers, and employees) expend the necessary energy and provide commitment?
2. *Willingness to expend the needed resources.* There are direct and indirect financial impacts to launching a Six Sigma program. Direct and indirect payroll costs include the number of people dedicated to the effort full-time and the time devoted by executives, team members, and process owners to measuring and improving processes. There are significant training costs as well.
3. *Reflection on the objectives, scope, and timeframe for the program.* This includes an assessment of what the organization wants to accomplish in which areas in what time period, and whether it is appropriate to implement a pilot program in one area, or in the entire organization at once.

Total Quality Management, reengineering, and Six Sigma all aim to improve customer satisfaction and

productivity through process improvement efforts. With each program, critics have pointed out that its popularity has waned as improvements either failed to materialize or were short-lived. Yet most agree that this failure is not due to the programs themselves. Their failure, in many cases, has been due to practitioners' neglecting to think of the program as an organizational change intervention, with all of the associated cultural and stakeholder challenges we have discussed in this book. In this respect, many observers believe that OD principles have much to offer the quality movement.



## Interventions in Mergers and Acquisitions

It has been estimated that anywhere from 50 percent to 75 percent of all mergers and acquisitions fail to achieve their financial or strategic objectives (Marks, 2002; Marks & Mirvis, 2001; Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1993). Despite the negative press of a low success rate, merger and acquisition activity increased substantially in the 1990s and 2000s (Daly, Pouders, & Kabanoff, 2004; Tetenbaum, 1999). The mergers of HP and Compaq, Daimler and Chrysler, and Exxon and Mobil all grabbed headlines, and each has faced its challenges.

Simulated experiments (see Weber & Camerer, 2003), empirical studies (see Daly et al., 2004), and case studies of mergers (see Horowitz et al., 2002) all attest to neglected cultural factors and incompatible cultures as primary reasons why mergers do not live up to their expectations. More than 40 years ago, Blumberg and Wiener (1971) noticed that “the financial and economic components of mergers are part of a total mix of problems that includes such things as expectations about norm development, role changes, leadership style, decision-making processes, and goal orientation” (p. 87), but the latter categories rarely get the majority of the attention. It seems that not much has changed in this respect over time. Organizations tend to invest time, money, and energy in initial due diligence activities, such as assessing strategic fit, evaluating financial models, considering possible market and customer reactions, and contemplating product roadmaps, but tend to invest relatively little in understanding the merger’s possible impact on people (Tetenbaum, 1999), unlike the rare example that opens this chapter. This has been true despite the fact that many executives increasingly recognize that successful merger and acquisition integration depends fundamentally on people (Cartwright & Cooper, 1993). Executives may examine the financial and strategic aspects of an acquisition because they may be less amenable to change, while culture and people issues are assumed to somehow fall into place.

In many mergers in today’s knowledge and service economy, effectively integrating the acquiree’s employees is as important as acquiring customers and intellectual property. Failing to appropriately integrate them often means that the most talented never identify with the target company and eventually leave—in fact, up to 75 percent of senior managers tend to leave within 3 years unless specific efforts are made to integrate them effectively (Tetenbaum, 1999). Despite the popular “120-day plans” or “business as usual” mantras, mergers cause significant disruption. The political reality can quickly become apparent—even the dominant focus of attention—as employees and managers in both organizations begin to jockey for new roles and opportunities in the new structure. As employees worry about their job security, whether they will have the skills to be successful in the new company, whether compensation and benefits will be comparable, and whether they will feel comfortable with the new corporate identity, productivity and morale often suffer serious declines (Holbeche, 2006).

When two organizations come together, culture clashes can occur on a variety of dimensions, such as whether the two companies match or differ with respect to the following:

- Consensus decision making or autonomous decision making
- Risk taking or risk averse

- Formal or informal
- Emphasis on rapid agreement or on thorough analysis
- Emphasis on standard rules or on flexibility
- Emphasis on centralized corporate control or on regional control
- Hierarchical or egalitarian structures
- Long-term orientation or short-term orientation
- Preference for face-to-face or e-mail communication

Successfully integrating two cultures requires significant work even before merger and acquisition agreements are signed. In each phase of the merger and acquisition process, leaders should devote some attention to cultural issues.

1. *Precontract stage.* In the precontract stage, “human due diligence” (Harding & Rouse, 2007) requires cultural assessments of both the acquiring company and the company being acquired. As Deetz, Tracy, and Simpson (2000) write, “Before an organization should even consider merging with another, it should take stock of its own corporate philosophies, goals, and visions” (p. 175). Knowing one’s own culture will help to identify blind spots or potential problem areas in an acquisition. Likewise, the acquiring company should know what strengths and weaknesses exist in the target company’s culture. For example, an organization with a strong culture for innovation and problem solving, where organizational members distrust solutions not invented by members of the organization, may have trouble merging with another like-minded culture if organizational members distrust the newcomers. Harding and Rouse (2007) also recommend evaluating the top management’s structure and function, and management and decision-making processes, and to examine the skills and capabilities of the target organization’s top teams and individuals. These facts can aid in determining whether the acquisition is a good idea at all. Some organizations that take cultural due diligence seriously actually walk away from acquisition deals when their assessment indicates that the integration would be so difficult and argumentative due to cultural factors it would not be worth it (Tetenbaum, 1999). This level of assessment can be difficult, especially for confidentiality reasons, because the OD practitioners or human resources department are often left out of the early stages of negotiation and due diligence.

Transition to the new culture begins the moment the deal is announced. Executives, managers, and the integration team should be prepared for and plan for employee responses to the shock of the acquisition announcement. Communication plans should include the delivery of messages in person (Deetz et al., 2000), frank discussion of the challenges of integration (Marks & Mirvis, 2001), two-way dialogue to allow employees to express their own concerns and ideas, and education about the acquiring company to ease the transition to a new cultural and organizational identity.

2. *Postcontract, “combination phase.”* Once the merger or acquisition is announced and employees of both organizations can begin discussing it in the open, they can further explore cultural attributes of both organizations and develop what Trompenaars and Prud’homme (2004) call a “cultural gap analysis.” An integration team can be the focal point for such an effort.

Many authors recommend that effective merger integration should be handled by an integration team formed by executives, managers, and employees of both companies. The job of the integration team will be to handle the daily decisions and actions needed to effectively bring both organizations together, and it should be managed by a respected leader who can resolve conflicts among integration subteams. Tetenbaum (1999) also recommends that the integration team have a cultural leader who has strong skills and a high level of knowledge of organizational culture.

The level or type of acculturation should be an explicit topic of dialogue, however difficult it may be for the team to discuss. Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1993) write of four acculturation scenarios:

- *Assimilation.* This occurs when the acquired company relinquishes its cultural practices and adopts those of the acquiring company.
- *Integration.* The acquired company and acquiring company both retain and also both relinquish aspects of their cultural identities, perhaps sharing cultural elements between them.
- *Separation.* The acquired company retains most of its original cultural attributes, frequently remaining as a division or stand-alone part of the acquiring company.
- *Deculturation.* The acquired company gives up its cultural attributes but is unwilling to adopt those of the acquiring company, usually leading to dissolution of the old organization.

Nahavandi and Malekzadeh write that in acquisitions of stronger cultures, integration and separation are more effective strategies, but assimilation or deculturation are likely to be more successful when acquiring a weak culture. Often, integration teams claim to be doing a cultural integration out of respect for the target company, when their actions point to a cultural assimilation strategy. In addition, employees of the target company may be unwilling to abandon their previous culture, no matter how much the integration team would like them to do so. Cartwright and Cooper (1993) write that “many mergers and acquisitions fail, or develop often avoidable problems from the outset, because one of the parties does not recognize, share, or accept the other’s perception of the marriage terms” (p. 65). Honest conclusions and communications about the acculturation scenario will help the integration team make appropriate integration decisions and will help the team maintain credibility with employees of both organizations.

3. *Postcombination.* Once the two organizations are legally combined, it is common for the integration team to quietly disband, declare the organizations integrated, and ask members to return to their former jobs. As Buono (2003) notes, “Pre-combination transition planning teams continue to be disbanded too early” and “far too many organizations continue to treat the merger and acquisition process as an engineering exercise . . . rather than a far more chaotic set of events that readily affect people’s lives and future prospects” (p. 91). This may be because many observers note that a long, drawn-out integration is likely to result in long-term ambiguity and confusion. This is unfortunate, however, because this is where the cultural integration work truly begins, as new teams need guidance and support in team formation activities and learning to cope with the cultural challenges ahead. Such integration work can take up to 2 years or longer, depending on the size and difficulty of the acquisition, and without an integration team to provide resources and attention to integration activities and challenges, managers have few avenues for support. Research suggests that leadership turnover will increase threefold after an

acquisition, complicating the continuity often needed in a turbulent circumstance (Krug, 2009).

Several activities can help to make transitions easier. For example, communications should continue following the effective acquisition date to support employees in their adoption of the new culture, continuing to provide education on the organizational vision, strategies, and goals.

Successfully integrating two cultures requires significant attention and dedicated resources. Cultural analysis of both the acquired and acquiring companies in the early stages of the combination can provide valuable information about the subjects in the integration that are likely to be contentious and most challenging. It is likely that regardless of the acculturation strategy, because there are so many cultural attributes of any organization (as well as its myriad subcultures) cultural conflict is probably unavoidable. It is possible, however, to be attuned to the dimensions and degrees of cultural difference so that potential conflicts can be better understood, and managers and employees can be prepared for what to do when it happens.

In the postcombination phase, attention must be given to how the merger evolves at the team and department level for the organization to achieve the value desired from the combination. Galpin and Herndon (2008) report the results of a study of executives from 21 different industries who had experienced a merger or acquisition. Almost half of respondents (49 percent) reported that their organization was in need of “merger repair—that is, my company has several operational, productivity, service, and/or performance issues resulting from poorly conducted M&A integration efforts” (p. 7). As Marks and Mirvis (1992) rightly and candidly assert, “Post-merger malaise begins the day top executives declare that the merger is done” (p. 19). Far from being an ending, the day one legal formalities are really the beginning of the challenges to come in integrating individuals, teams, departments, and organizations. [Table 13.1](#) lists a number of the common problems that occur during the postcombination, or integration, phase. In the next section, we will explore the diversity of OD interventions that can help at these four levels of integration.

**Table 13.1** Common Problems in Integration at Four Levels

<i>Individual Integration</i>	<i>Team Integration</i>	<i>Cross-Team/ Department Integration</i>	<i>Organizationwide Integration</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees spend too much time finding information and getting set up.</li> <li>• Employees lack motivation and engagement, translating to increased turnover, absenteeism, and low productivity.</li> <li>• Employees desire to return to “old” ways or fail to adapt to new processes, tools, and systems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquired employees lack understanding of team goals, purpose, and processes.</li> <li>• Employees do not understand or accept new roles.</li> <li>• The team charter is unclear.</li> <li>• There are long decision-making cycles as well as unproductive meetings and communication patterns.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newly formed teams work at cross purposes, missing handoffs or duplicating work.</li> <li>• There is confusion about which team handles which tasks.</li> <li>• Employees are unclear about the strategy, and there is little buy-in to the strategy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is gridlock, failure to make changes over time, and an inability to realize competitive opportunities.</li> <li>• Two companies still remain.</li> </ul>



## Organization Development in M&A Integration<sup>1</sup>

The quantity, diversity, and complexity of challenges in an acquisition demand that the OD practitioner identify an equally diverse set of practices to match. Some practitioners prefer to focus on the areas of incompatibility in organizational cultures, whereas others immediately focus on the challenges of individual transitions. The OD practitioner who insists on a single approach—either an individual, team, or whole organization intervention—will fail to appreciate the importance of integrating employees at multiple levels and targets. What is unique to OD interventions in acquisitions is the need for a combination of approaches to target the diversity of challenges that exist at these multiple levels.

In early stages of the integration, OD practitioners should consider conducting organization assessments and sensing surveys as data gathering mechanisms to help identify sources of conflict and prioritize these interventions. Questions should address potential trouble signs at each of the following target levels to enable the practitioner and client to select and customize appropriate interventions that match the organization's particular needs. Beard and Zuniga (2006), for example, explain the development of a culture assessment that provided an integration team with guidance on the most appropriate interventions.

## Target 1: Individual Integration

Repeatedly over the past 20 years of research, M&A activity has been noted for the significant psychological stress it places on employees, described variously as a sense of loss, anger, anxiety, uncertainty, and grief. Individuals experiencing these emotions are likely to exhibit increased conflict, low motivation, and greater mental and physical illness, while for the organization this translates to absenteeism, turnover, and low productivity, among other outcomes (Cartwright & Cooper, 1993; Seo & Hill, 2005).

Early on in the acquisition process, concerns are naturally very personal. “People’s first reaction to a merger is to think of their own interests: They become preoccupied with what the deal means for their jobs, livelihood, and careers” (Marks & Mirvis, 1992, p. 20). Once the “survivors” are confirmed, at a similarly very basic level the logistics of the job become important. Technology, facilities, telephones, badges, signage, and business cards have the potential to easily disrupt productivity if not handled accurately and swiftly. Policy and procedure questions that were once routine and mundane to answer are now time-consuming and disruptive to address. Employees’ time and attention are thus directed away from everyday work activities to solving basic problems of getting set up with basic needs and finding answers to their procedural questions. More dangerous to the integration process, however, is the natural tendency for employees to respond to the vacuum of information by returning to familiar ways, old processes, tools, and systems. In this respect, one very obvious barrier to individual integration is poor handling of onboarding and orientation activities.

## Interventions for Individual Integration

“Focusing on the individual earlier in the due diligence process can yield significant long-term benefits,” writes Tim Merrifield (2006, p. 11), reflecting on his experience with research and development talent integration at Cisco. Seo and Hill (2005) identify a number of prescriptions to help individuals cope with the stress of individual transitions, including counseling and social support, disengagement efforts, or grieving meetings in which individuals can share feelings of uncertainty and anxiety with others experiencing similar emotions, and two-way communication with leaders. Not all communication is useful, however. In particular, in one study of information adequacy during a merger, researchers found that communication sessions promoted job satisfaction only when the communication sessions were carefully designed and concerned matters employees were truly anxious about (such as how decisions are made and what aspects of their jobs will be changing; Zhu, May, & Rosenfeld, 2004).

Collective socialization tactics (such as those that occur in onboarding sessions, new employee orientations, and new manager orientations), in which employees and managers participate in group learning, provide opportunities to socialize with peers. Such activities have been shown to increase embeddedness (i.e., increased connections to the job and organization) and reduce turnover among newcomers in at least one study (Allen, 2006), though this study did not focus on acquisition onboarding specifically.





## Target 2: Team Integration

As new teams form following an acquisition, managers and team members “have to face the consequences of high-level decisions about work-unit charters, structures, and systems” (Marks & Mirvis, 1992, p. 21). Newly acquired employees may not understand the purpose, goals, or direction of the new team or their role in it. The team’s charter or mission may have changed due to the acquisition as well, and even existing (pre-acquisition) team members are likely to have questions about their responsibilities and how the new team members will fit with existing roles and processes. The result can be long and unproductive cycles of trial and error, where team members struggle to determine who makes what decisions, miss important handoffs, duplicate work unnecessarily among team members who do not understand or respect one another’s roles or responsibilities, or engage in ineffective communication patterns.

However, managers often fail to recognize that even comparatively small transitions in team membership (just one or a few members joining or leaving) will change team dynamics, as members question what will happen to the work that a departing member used to do, or what role the new member(s) will play. Managers, perhaps pressured to get on with the team’s tasks, tend to throw new members into the team and expect them to pick things up as time goes on. Since both new and tenured team members are working through Bridges’s (1980) classic stages of endings and new beginnings (as we discussed in [Chapter 10](#)), failing to pay conscious attention to the transition will slow down the team integration process.

## Interventions for Team Integration

We already discussed a number of team interventions in [Chapter 11](#), so there is no need to duplicate them all here. In an acquisition, it may be even more important to conduct team interventions early on in the life of the team in order to clarify changes in team membership, goals, purpose, roles, and expectations about team norms such as meetings, decision making, leadership, and communication. One intervention in particular—team start-up or transition meetings—can be effective in an acquisition to start teams off quickly and can increase acquired employees’ identification with their new teams.

### **Target 3: Cross-Team/Department Integration**

Recent research confirms that the longer a group has been together, the greater the feeling of loss of the historical identity, the greater the resistance to a merger or acquisition, and the more actively members will work to protect and maintain the former identity (Jetten & Hutchison, 2011). Interestingly, participants in that study felt less resistance when they were allowed to retain their pre-merger group names. Similarly, Colman and Lunnan (2011) found that strong identification with a former company increases employees' resistance to new processes and approaches they are now more likely to see as substandard. These findings underscore social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), which proposes that a significant part of our identity is developed and shaped by the social groups to which we belong.

The pragmatic advantages of this identification, of course, are that team members who hold a strong sense of team identity are more likely to engage with fellow team members in team goals to achieve shared outcomes. In a merger or acquisition, however, this same sense of ingroup identity can have "tribal" consequences as fighting between internal teams overtakes cooperation. McGee-Cooper (2005) notes that in an acquisition, "new hires and old hands face off. The company treats new people as foreign and 'dangerous' . . . as the tribe closes ranks to defend against new ideas and cultural differences" (p. 14). Much research attributes inter- and intrateam conflicts to cultural differences, which "tend to grow into aversive feelings in situations of direct confrontation, sometimes triggering a vicious cycle" (Bijlsma-Frankema, 2001, p. 194). Rather than working cooperatively in the new organization, teams or functions now see themselves as pitted against one another in competition, a phenomenon that may become even more prevalent when organizations structure the acquired company as a stand-alone entity or choose to maintain the acquired company's old department structures in the new company. The addition of new functions, bolted onto the pre-acquisition structure (for example, a new product engineering group) may now create confusion about which department handles which tasks, how charters overlap, where tasks intersect and handoffs must occur, where power lies in decision making, or how information is to be shared between divisions.

In addition, leaders of the new organization must reflect a common understanding and shared commitment to the strategies, plans, and goals of the combined organization. This highlights the importance of relationships among the leadership and management community where these issues can be openly shared, discussed, and decided. For the acquired manager, challenges exist in communicating to the division when employees require information about transitions from old to new. One study noted that acquired managers face a contradictory role in which they have to maintain old processes, networks, and relationships but simultaneously adapt and negotiate these in a new context (Chreim & Tafaghod, 2012). Chreim and Tafaghod (2012) found that a critical factor in acquisition integration success for these managers was the quality of the relationships among acquired and acquiring managers. In successful integrations, managers had positive, constructive, and frequent interaction, whereas those integrations that were unsuccessful were marked by new-old manager relationships that displayed either apathy or counterproductive interaction.

### **Interventions for Cross-Team/Department Integration**

First, OD practitioners can aid leaders in managing intergroup conflict between intact teams that existed prior to the acquisition and newly acquired teams. Organization mirror activities (where perceptions of similarities and differences between groups are thoughtfully exchanged in a facilitated session), joint problem-solving workshops, and microcosm groups (where a subset of members of each group negotiate solutions to process problems) can all be effective in increasing intergroup contact and reducing stereotypes of other teams. To help organizational members learn to work more effectively together, Tetenbaum (1999) recommends that a superordinate goal be established that requires employees from both organizations to collaborate (as we discussed in [Chapter 11](#)). As you know, intergroup contact alone is not likely to reduce conflicts, but it can do so when the teams develop a shared ownership of a goal to which they are both committed. Leaders of both groups can agree on a combined strategy, facilitated by OD practitioners skilled in strategic planning and goal setting.

Leadership development activities can provide leaders and managers with increased skills in managing cross-functional challenges. Following Adobe's acquisition of Macromedia in 2005, cross-team collaboration became critical as the integrated company sought to increase its leadership skills to compete in new markets. Morris (2009) outlines the development of the Adobe Leadership Experience that set expectations for both pre- and postacquisition leaders with a common set of leadership attributes and values. Leadership development sessions, including the assignment of a "buddy" system for acquired and acquiring managers, can also provide opportunities for increasing networking and management contact.

## Target 4: Organizationwide Integration

In large acquisitions, before the legal combination takes place, it is common for leaders and the transition team to determine how the organizations will be operationally combined. This includes an initial set of decisions about how processes will be integrated, which employees will be retained and which will not, how reporting relationships will be structured, and much more. Barkema and Schijven (2008) note that this stage typically demands more decisions to be made than the organization can optimally handle. As a result, some decisions are quickly made on a pragmatic basis (e.g., “We’ll just leave the two different product maintenance organizations intact”).

In the integration stage, as the organization’s capacity to address these issues increases, new information usually comes to light that provides more data for effective decision making. (Overlap between the two product maintenance organizations now becomes increasingly apparent.) This research suggests that continual monitoring and adjustment following the close of the combination is a key competency in achieving a successful merger or acquisition. Indeed, Barkema and Schijven (2008) note that “acquirers are typically unable to optimally integrate acquisitions the first time around” (p. 702) and that “restructuring plays an important role in more fully realizing the potential of the firm’s acquisitions” (p. 715). Importantly, they note that postacquisition decisions about organization design are not a “one-shot game, but a process that extends far beyond” initial integration efforts (p. 715). During the integration process, new capabilities or opportunities may be realized that require leaders to rethink previous decisions about the organization’s design to truly realize the benefits of the acquisition.

## Interventions for Organizationwide Integration

Organization design work early in the process and in the years following the acquisition is important. Jasinski (2010), writing about MetLife’s organization design and acquisition process, argues that “sound organization design, applied from early in the acquisition process through implementation, can be an effective catalyst for ensuring that the structure, process, governance, metrics, and people are optimally configured and aligned to fulfill the strategy of the newly integrated organizations” (p. 6). Supporting the research findings above, in the MetLife process “organization design activity peaks during M&A integration planning, subsides after integration, and then spikes later as the longitudinal effects of the design are observed and adjustments are indicated” (p. 9).

As day-to-day integration challenges fade in the months following the acquisition, leaders are likely to ask, for example: “Where are we failing to see value from this acquisition?” “What untapped potential remains?” “What might the next step be in our evolution?” These broad questions are likely to force them to rethink strategies, reporting structures, processes, and more. Skilled OD practitioners can work with leaders to help them through organization design questions in a structured process. Questions about the future and the organization’s vision of it can imply the benefits of participative, large-group interventions that can engage employees from both the acquiring and acquired organizations.

[Table 13.2](#) summarizes just a few of the interventions mentioned in this section. This is by no means an exhaustive list of the kinds of problems that can occur at these levels, nor is it a comprehensive list of OD interventions that practitioners might use to address them. Because of the complexity of mergers and acquisitions, organization development practitioners can add maximum value to the integration stage of mergers and acquisitions through a diversity of approaches that address multiple targets—maintaining attention simultaneously on the development of individuals, teams, departments, and the organization as a whole in what clearly involves a high-touch, resource-intensive effort. One possible approach would involve forming a combined OD team, composed of practitioners in both the acquired and acquiring organizations, to collaborate. Practitioners with expertise in each organization and target area can join forces to develop a comprehensive postintegration organization development strategy. This approach has the benefit of putting the practitioner team in the shoes of the clients they are working to support (forming a team, negotiating roles and processes, observing cultural differences, and collaborating across organizations), allowing the practitioners to experience similar challenges to those of their clients.

## Transorganization or Interorganization Development

A special circumstance in organization development describes the application of OD concepts to situations in which multiple organizations join together in networks or collaborative relationships with a shared purpose (Cummings, 1984). They are referred to as transorganizational systems, or “meta-organizations” (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). Many observers have noted that these kinds of relationships are increasing in frequency, but that the field of organization development has been slow to understand the unique challenges involved in these relationships (Clarke, 2005; Cummings, 1984). Ahrne and Brunsson (2008) estimate that there are upwards of 200,000 meta-organizations in Europe alone.

**Table 13.2** OD Interventions That Address Common Integration Problems

	<i>Individual Integration</i>	<i>Team Integration</i>	<i>Cross-Team/ Department Integration</i>	<i>Organization Integration</i>
Goal	Support employees through acquisition stress and foundational needs, and develop employee engagement	Form productive teams	Develop cooperative interactions between leaders and teams	Remove gridlock and promote future potential
Interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Onboarding sessions</li> <li>• New employee orientation</li> <li>• New manager orientation</li> <li>• Two-way communication sessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team start-up meetings</li> <li>• Manager development to foster team transitions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intergroup/interteam interventions</li> <li>• Strategic planning and goal setting to jointly develop superordinate goals</li> <li>• Leadership development to promote cross-functional networks and shared values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization design</li> <li>• Large-group interventions</li> </ul>

Multiple organizations may enter together into interorganizational relationships (also called transorganizational systems and collaborative networks) “to exchange or pool their resources, or they may decide to work together toward some common and mutually agreed upon end, or they may collaboratively produce a new product or service” (Alter & Hage, 1993, p. 2). Sometimes these multiple organization systems arise to address problems and challenges that none could solve independently, perhaps because each did not have the resources to solve the problem or because the organizations are interdependent and must cooperate to solve it (Chisholm, 2000). Examples of these multiple organization relationships include the following:

- Joint ventures for new products or services
- Consortia to develop industry standards
- Production networks
- Public-private partnerships, such as those in education or health care

- Co-ops or purchasing networks
- Trade agreements, associations, or unions
- Joint research and development consortia
- Lobbying associations of for-profit and not-for-profit organizations

Each of these types of transorganizational system (TS) differs in how it is organized. For example, in the development of a joint venture, two or three organizations may meet periodically to determine who will handle which responsibility and how they will work together to meet each organization's objective. Perhaps one may do research and development while the other does manufacturing. In other situations, such as in a trade association or industry standards consortia, there may be yet another new organization formed with representatives from each of the participating organizations. (The United Nations would be such an example.) In still other situations, organizations may participate in name alone, or they may have only an economic relationship such as in a purchasing network.

For example, Chisholm (2008) describes a system that developed in Romania in the 1990s called the Collaborative Alliance for Romanian Orphans. Hundreds of organizations from around the world joined in a consortium to provide relief to an estimated 140,000 orphans left in state institutions. They shared the goals of providing emergency relief and improving the health care system, and in a short time trained hundreds of medical professionals and cared for tens of thousands of children. Shuman and Twombly (2010) suggest that these collaborative networks have the advantage of agility as each organization participating in the network brings capabilities that no single organization possesses.

Transorganizational systems develop in a three-step process of identification, convention, and organization (Cummings, 1984). Each of these stages presents distinct topics of concern:

1. *Identification.* The focus is on the reason for forming the TS as well as finding and inviting members who have a stake in the issue or concern to participate. Because different groups will see the problem differently, they may have different ideas about the problem's scope and boundaries, so identifying relevant members and establishing the scope of the relationship can be difficult.
2. *Convention.* This second stage consists of soliciting input on each member's perception of the problem, members' objectives and motivations to join, and developing a commitment to taking action to address the issue.
3. *Organization.* Members explore and agree on the desired future they would like to see, including actions each would agree to take to reach that future. Some have used the search conference methodology described earlier to do so (Clarke, 2005; Trist, 1985). Participants develop working arrangements on topics such as communication preferences, norms of participation, decision making, leadership, and structure. For example, what decisions and actions can the TS take on behalf of its members without explicit permission?

From one perspective, problems in these relationships can be addressed with a number of the strategies described in [Chapter 11](#) on single-group interventions, such as new team formation activities and team-building interventions. However, transorganizational systems also have special characteristics that make the

application of traditional OD interventions particularly challenging and in many cases demand a different approach, For example:

1. *Hierarchy and structure* are different in transorganizational systems from those in typical organizations. In many cases, group members participate on equal footing with no hierarchical relationship between them, and no higher-level “manager” to resolve disputes. Members must conduct their own activities in a self-regulating fashion (Chisholm, 2000). Some have suggested that transorganizational systems are “underorganized” (L. D. Brown, 1980; Cummings, 1984), meaning that participants are only loosely tied to one another, with vaguely defined purposes and few or no policies or formal procedures. In these situations, change strategies should “increase organization of the system” (L. D. Brown, 1980, p. 190) such as “increasing shared norms and values, and designing structures, roles, and technologies to create predictability and regularity” (Cummings, 1984, p. 399).
2. *Membership relationships* are unique compared with most organizations in which employees all have the same relationship (or similar relationships) to the organization. Membership in a transorganizational system can be voluntary, as in the case of a cooperative production network or international political body, in which case participation and engagement of all members is a primary concern. In these cases, it helps to know members’ motivations for participating and individual members’ goals and objectives. Different members may have different objectives and desires for the system, some of which may conflict. Participation can also be involuntary or mandated by regulation or law, where conflict may be more apparent (Cummings, 1984). In both cases, members of the transorganizational system also are members of their “home” organization, and often must report back to it or get official permission from it to act on the home organization’s behalf. Consequently, negotiations and agreements often involve several rounds of discussion. Change agents working with these systems can help to define decision processes so that members are clear about what levels of agreement are required.
3. *Trust and collaboration* are special concerns in transorganizational systems (Vangen & Huxham, 2003), and political issues are likely and can be highly charged. For example, competitors may decide cooperatively to join together and come to agreement on joint industry standards because the market demands it, but each has a separate interest in its own success. Members may suspect other members’ motives and hidden agendas for their choices, contributions, or opinions. Lobbying, vote-trading, power struggles, and coalitions are likely results. Vangen and Huxham (2003) write that trust and collaboration can be developed in these systems through a gradual cyclical process of trust building, taking risks, managing power imbalances and dynamics, and achieving modest incremental successes as a foundation for further trust. They also note that it may not be possible to build a highly trusting relationship in these systems and that the system must learn how to manage with this situation.

Shuman and Twombly (2010) note that these network relationships are maintained through a leadership role they call the “network choreographer,” who organizes participants and develops and maintains network relationships. In a strategic alliance, for example, members who represent the various partnership organizations can be considered to hold the choreographer roles. The choreographer role acts as an entrepreneur and liaison between the parties to ensure that the members of the network continue to receive value from the relationship. Choreographers must also be (1) entrepreneurs, “to hold the vision and be



comfortable with the ambiguity inherent in creating and growing something new” (pp. 7–8); (2) passionate advocates, who can persuade others of the vision of the collaboration; (3) coaches and mentors, “working with senior leadership to guide them in understanding the implications of some of their actions and decisions” (p. 8); and (4) indefatigable communicators, who can “bridge silos that exist in traditional organizations and create links between organizations” (p. 8).

The growing presence of interorganizational designs (whether we call them transorganizational systems, networks, or some other term) will continue to offer an opportunity and a challenge for organization development practitioners to help choreographers and network members engage in productive and collaborative relationships.

## Dialogic OD Consultation and Interventions

Recall that in [Chapter 5](#) we reviewed an approach to OD that carries with it different underlying and foundational philosophical assumptions from traditional OD. In many ways, a dialogic OD process suggests different ways of engaging with clients throughout the OD engagement, including contracting. As you might expect, dialogic OD interventions look different from and are facilitated differently from traditional OD interventions.

In dialogic OD, interaction and conversation are the priority, and participants are given ownership and responsibility to bring up the issues and topics that matter most to them. In most dialogic OD interventions, the facilitator and client may not even know what topics will come up during the intervention, making them feel somewhat less structured or planned than other interventions. As Bushe (2013) puts it, in dialogic OD

the design of the change process has to ensure that two key things happen: 1. The people who will ultimately embody and carry out the change are engaged, along with leaders and other stakeholders, in discussing what changes ought to occur, [and] 2. Members self identify, individually and in groups, the changes they want to take responsibility for. (p. 14)

The format of a dialogic OD intervention is designed to create these conditions.

Here we will address the practitioner role in dialogic OD, share examples of dialogic OD interventions, and discuss how practitioners successfully introduce dialogic OD practices.

## Role of the OD Practitioner in Dialogic OD Interventions

One important difference in dialogic OD and diagnostic OD is the role of the practitioner. As you know, in diagnostic OD the practitioner plays a principal role in gathering information about the system, feeding it back, and facilitating interventions designed to change the system. In dialogic OD this role takes a different perspective as the consultant role is more about acting as “a facilitator of events and constructor of a container within which client systems engage themselves rather than being a central actor in diagnosis, intervention, and/or facilitation of interpersonal and group interaction” (Bushe & Marshak, 2009, p. 358). Some have described this role as a “planner and designer” of events whose responsibility approaches that of “convening or hosting” (Bushe, 2013, pp. 15–16), creating the right conditions for a community of engaged participants to arrive at their own interpretations and organize their own outcomes. Marshak and Heracleous (2005) also observe that in a dialogic approach to OD, the facilitator must take “a discursive orientation to organizational phenomena” to make “real-time process observations, interpretations and interventions” (p. 75). Sometimes this means that the agenda, discussion topics, and consulting process emerge as “in the moment” consulting opportunities (Marshak, 2013b) where the practitioner can articulate observed patterns of discourse as they occur. (Recall that in [Chapter 5](#) we termed this approach “dialogic process consultation.”)

Where traditional facilitation techniques might encourage participants to deal with problematic conflicts and come to a set of final conclusions about what actions to take, dialogic OD facilitation might encourage participants to hold off on final conclusions but instead experiment with questions that encourage thinking about future-oriented possibility. Imagine the difference between asking the questions “What actions will reduce absenteeism?” and “What is the practice of people feeling well at work?” or “What kind of leadership creates, sustains, and develops healthy habits?” (Storch & Zietzen, 2013, p. 26). The right question is important in setting the stage for the right conversation.

Dialogic OD practitioners create “containers” where this kind of thinking and dialogue can take place. In the events that are convened in dialogic OD practice, practitioners create “a time and space where normal, business as usual ways of interacting are suspended so that different, generative conversations can take place” (Bushe, 2013, p. 15). More than just the physical room where the meeting takes place, the container in a dialogic OD intervention must be designed to encourage creative thinking and engaged participation. These events may involve dozens or hundreds of people, so the job of the facilitator is to create the conditions for the community to freely converse about issues and perspectives in a way that generates energy for action. Facilitators help to involve and invite the right people to attend, frame the questions that will guide the conversations in a helpful way, and seek the balance between a loose enough structure that invites multiple interpretations and one that guides the group to action.

## Examples of Dialogic OD Practices

We have already reviewed examples of dialogic OD interventions in this book: appreciative inquiry, described in [Chapter 11](#), and future search, search conferences, real-time strategic change, and Workout, described in the previous chapter. In addition, World Café and Open Space Technology are two frequently cited examples of dialogic OD practices. Here is a brief description of how each works:

### World Café

World Café is an intervention designed to bring large groups together in the discussion of issues important to them, based “on the assumption that people already have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges” (J. Brown, 2005, p. 4). World Café makes use of the principle that in everyday organizations, we self-organize as we bring new colleagues into conversations, debating ideas, sharing knowledge, challenging thinking, asking questions, and persuading others. World Café takes seriously the idea that an organization is an “evolving web of conversations” (J. Brown, 2005, p. 11) and it encourages groups to foster these networks as they explore a common issue of concern.

In groups composed of as few as 12 to hundreds, participants sit at small tables of just 4–5, perhaps adorned with a tablecloth, flowers (as in a café), and paper to draw on, to discuss a focal question that guides the group’s conversation. Examples of focal questions include: “What opportunities can we see in this situation?” “What assumptions do we need to test or challenge in our thinking?” “What would it take to create change on this issue?” and “If our success was completely guaranteed, what bold steps might we choose?” (J. Brown, 2005, p. 173). After a 20- to 30-minute conversation, most of the participants rotate to new tables to begin new conversations with new table members, though one table member will remain behind as host to explain the previous conversation to the new participants. After a few rounds, patterns begin to emerge in the conversations and the larger group is reconvened to share these discoveries.

World Café is based on seven integrated design principles (J. Brown, 2005, p. 174):

- Set the context
- Create hospitable spaces
- Explore questions that matter
- Encourage everyone’s contribution
- Cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives
- Listen together for patterns, insights, and deeper questions
- Harvest and share collective discoveries

By engaging participants in conversations on significant issues and multiplying these conversational insights through rotations, participants build on one another’s ideas, which sets the stage for collective insights to emerge and actions to take place. There are many methods for the individual tables to present and acknowledge their insights about the collective contributions, but the important point is that as they do so, a greater awareness of the whole group emerges.

## Open Space Technology

If you have ever been to a large conference where you enjoyed networking with many attendees, or participated in a workshop where the issues to be discussed were heated, you might have noticed the common feeling that the coffee breaks are the most enjoyable, productive, and useful part of large-scale gatherings. This observation was the genesis of Open Space Technology, a meeting design that is often used when

a diverse group of people must deal with complex and potentially conflicting material in innovative and productive ways. It is particularly powerful when nobody knows the answer and the ongoing participation of a number of people is required to deal with the questions. (Owen, 2008, p. 15)

On the contrary, Open Space is inappropriate for situations where a decision has already been made.

Seated in a circle, participants generate ideas to address a focal question or topic of the gathering, such as “What opportunities do we have to improve our customer service?” or “What can we do to create a more vibrant downtown environment in our city?” These ideas are written on sheets of paper and posted on a wall for everyone to see, and a volunteer agrees to take a topic and convene a group of attendees who are also passionate about it and willing to take some responsibility to work on it. A time and location for the topic is announced, and anyone interested will be present during that point in the meeting to discuss it, debate solutions, and generate actions. They may combine the topic with another, divide the subject into subtopics, agree to meet again, or dissolve the group and do nothing. The attendees have ownership of what happens at this point.

You might be thinking that this sounds like a very fluid and flexible design, and indeed this is the case, as participant empowerment and opportunities for participation are more important than the facilitator or client retaining control over interaction. Open Space operates with a set of values called Four Principles and One Law. These principles remind both participants and facilitators that voluntary participation increases the quality of the discussion and that progress depends on whatever willing participants show up, no matter when the meeting starts or how long it lasts. The Law of Two Feet is intended to give everyone the freedom to move to another discussion where they find they may have more interest, passion, or commitment.

## Four Principles of Open Space

1. Whoever comes is the right people.
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.
3. Whenever it starts is the right time.
4. When it's over, it's over.

## One Law

The Law of Two Feet

Owen (1997) writes that Open Space is a “bare bones” method of facilitation that takes seriously the desire for individuals to organize themselves, and that the facilitator, client, and participants must have faith in the process to reach the outcomes desired. When the conditions are right, Owen (2008) writes, “the people involved find themselves excited, energized, and ready to move forward” (p. 161).

## Introducing Dialogic OD Successfully

To introduce dialogic OD successfully means reexamining many of the traditional OD “truths” we have covered in this book. In addition to new methods of conducting interventions, dialogic OD prompts practitioners to rethink traditional practices of entry and contracting. They will need to consider whether and how to blend diagnostic OD practices with dialogic OD practices, and to be mindful of the conditions that will make such an engagement a success. Practitioners also require different skills than we have reviewed in traditional OD practices.

## Entry and Contracting: Clarifying The Sponsor Role and Dialogic Mind-Set

Recall that in [Chapter 5](#) we described the expert, doctor–patient, and mechanic models of consulting, which we contrasted with the OD model of consulting where practitioners and clients jointly engage in a process of diagnosis, problem solving, interventions, and sustaining change. These alternative preconceived notions about OD often exist because clients, under pressure to implement rapid changes and solve problems that have never been seen before, turn to an outside source with an expectation that they can delegate the problem or be told by an expert what to do. As Averbuch (2015) argues, this is exactly when a dialogic OD engagement would be appropriate—when multiple people can be engaged in finding innovative solutions and help to implement those solutions in a collaborative way. Yet it may also be a time when leaders feel added pressure and are reluctant to cede control to a large group of diverse stakeholders and an unpredictable outcome.

Leaders or sponsors of a dialogic engagement must be willing to share some leadership with a broader community, to see what emerges, and to do so in an authentic and transparent way. The leader’s ideas may be questioned, or participants may not find the sponsor’s ideas compelling. During the contracting process, practitioners must be clear with sponsors about what the sponsor role entails, as it may feel risky or put the sponsor in a vulnerable position. Thus, as Averbuch (2015) describes, the contract in a dialogic OD engagement must be clear about the intentions and shared goals of the effort. Sponsor and practitioner must be willing to buy into (1) “a basic attitude of not knowing”; (2) “engaging diverse players in dialogic, nonhierarchical conversations, not top-down communication and one line of command”; (3) “ensuring that both the results and the process are emergent and cocreated”; and (4) “focusing on the future” (p. 237). Specifying these values explicitly clarifies the underlying mind-set of dialogic OD for the sponsor. Failing to do so might mean that

we run the risk that when the process reaches a point of collective empowerment that the sponsor cannot tolerate any more, the sponsor takes back control and starts giving orders. People will feel deceived and betrayed and the process may make things worse than if no OD project had been started. (Averbuch, 2015, p. 229)

Clear contracting for the dialogic OD approach and mind-set can help to prevent that from happening.



## Blending Traditional and Dialogic OD

Given their philosophical differences and differences in how they are managed, you might wonder if it is possible to blend more traditional forms of OD practice with a dialogic approach. Some authors believe it is.

Oswick (2009) proposes that perhaps dialogic and diagnostic OD might be combined in a single consulting engagement where “the outcomes offer a more provisional and plurivocal, rather than a finite and prescriptive, understanding of the processes being explored” (p. 372) in a joint and open diagnostic process. In addition, he writes, “it might also be possible to utilize them as discrete but consecutive phases within more ambitious, larger-scale OD programs” (p. 373). This might be done by initially widening the scope of possible actions a group could take through an open dialogic format, but then acknowledging differences and using more traditional diagnostic or problem-solving approaches to narrow down to a limited set of actions.

Gilpin-Jackson (2013) writes of diagnostic and dialogic OD as being on a continuum rather than a choice of two practices. She describes a blended diagnostic/dialogic OD engagement where the organization’s readiness for change was low but the complexity of the project was high. In this situation, diagnostic data were gathered through a more traditional process to develop an initial set of tentative and temporary conclusions, but then the data were discussed in open facilitated sessions where multiple perspectives surfaced and multiple events were held for the group to decide collectively how to take action. Gilpin-Jackson writes that “the art of mastering the grey zone in between Diagnostic and Dialogic OD becomes how well a practitioner can move along the continuum as appropriate to the circumstance” (p. 62), using diagnostic OD where the reality was complex and not known by all parties, but a dialogic approach to enhance commitment to action. Part of this circumstance involves the willingness of organizational leaders to give up some direct control over the unpredictable outcomes of a dialogic effort, and that perhaps these approaches can be introduced gradually or in limited ways.

## Conditions for Successful Dialogic OD Interventions

In addition, Bushe (2013) has articulated the conditions necessary for a successful dialogic OD intervention, which are listed in [Table 13.3](#). These conditions stress the importance of the relationship between the change agent and sponsor who can develop the appropriate events and containers where conversations can take place.

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**Table 13.3** Key Conditions for Successful Dialogic OD Interventions

- A sponsor with the authority to commandeer necessary resources and support emergent change
- An effective sponsor–change agent working relationship
- Reframed problem/challenge into possibility centric, future-focused issue that is personally meaningful to community members
- Identification of the appropriate community for addressing the issue and a way to get them to come to the event(s)
- Convening events that build the relationships among community members so that readiness to engage in the change issue is heightened
- Convening events that create and/or utilize generative images to provoke new thinking and catalyze self-generated change proposals from the community
- Slack resources are available to support emergent changes
- Processes for sponsors to “track and fan” emergent changes

**SOURCE:** Bushe, G. R. (2013). Dialogic OD: A Theory of Practice. *OD Practitioner*, 45(1), 11–17. Reprinted with permission.

## Skills Needed for the Dialogic Practitioner

As we reviewed in [Chapter 5](#), traditional skills required of OD practitioners include knowledge of different types of interventions, consulting skills, data collection and analysis, and organizational behavior. These skills are necessary if one thinks of change as in systems theory, from one relatively stable state to another. In that case, the job of the practitioner is to help guide the organization through that transition through interventions. In dialogic OD, with the change in mind-set to ongoing, continuous, adaptive change fueled by new ways of interacting, not only are the underlying mind-set and practices different, but the skills required to help are different as well. Storch (2015) explains that

possessing skills for dialogue, such as creating rapport, asking open-ended questions, hypothesizing, listening, and imagining how the world might look from within others’ lived circumstances, and therefore being able to engage with people in ways that produce the kind of conversations that elicit change, are important. (p. 201)

Following Pearce and Pearce (2000), Storch argues that dialogic OD practitioners also need to be comfortable with the following:

**Strategic Process Design.** Designing one or a sequence of change processes to occur that form at least a coherent structure or narrative at the outset. Storch (2015) writes that the design of the change process often comes as a result of thinking through “what kind of conversations are needed in order to achieve the desired outcome and how these conversations might take place” (p. 202). As dialogic OD engagements often involve a design team and encourage broad-based participation from many people in the design stages, practitioners must be comfortable and skilled in working with diverse stakeholder

groups during the design phase.

**Event Design.** Being able to create events that strike a balance between a structured approach and one that is emergent, flexible, and adapts to what happens during the event. “The skills to stay in the moment with others, to engage their concerns and meaning making without providing answers or false certainty to assuage their anxiety about change, and to facilitate conversations that generate new possibilities are vital” (Storch, 2015, p. 204). Knowing the basic approach of a World Café or future search is important, but practitioners must be skilled to know when to deviate from the typical approach to make it fit the present needs of the event.

**Dialogic Facilitation Skills.** Intervening in the ongoing sequence of events, as in dialogic process consultation, with outward and inward skills. Examples of outward skills are the ability to reframe statements back to participants so that the conversation continues in a productive fashion, or to ask questions that prompt a new way of thinking about the situation or topic under discussion. Inward skills refer to the ability of the practitioner to be conscious of his or her own feelings, thoughts, reactions, and desires. Some suggest that dialogic OD practitioners can benefit from professional theater training to hone skills in listening, improvisation, and nonlinear thinking that can result in enhanced creativity and being fully present in the moment (Stager Jacques, 2012).

These skills are particularly important when we believe that organizational change must be co-constructed in an environment where multiple meanings exist. Dialogic OD practitioners must be able to listen intently (to organizational members as well as one’s own inner voice), respond authentically, and react to what emerges in a process that Storch (2015) calls “spontaneous responsive engagement” (p. 207).

To this list of skills, Bushe and Marshak (2015a) add that practitioners must be knowledgeable about social construction theory and other interpretivist social science theories such as complexity theory. They note that dialogic OD practitioners face ethical considerations of being aware of their own contributions to the dialogue happening in the client organization, that they are a part of the system and not separate from it, and that there is an ethical imperative on practitioners to develop their own self-awareness to be able to engage authentically.

## Further Areas for Development of Dialogic OD

While a great deal of research and writing has developed the ideas of dialogic OD in the past decade, this is an area that is likely to grow in both theory and practice. There are a variety of dialogic OD approaches now in use, but we do not yet know when each approach is most useful for what kinds of situations. Theorists have explored an initial set of practitioner skills required to perform dialogic OD as described above, but it is not yet clear what additional skills may be required to successfully conduct dialogic OD engagements or how practitioners might gain those skills. We are only beginning to understand when and how dialogic OD practices and other traditional forms of OD might be combined or adapted together. There is also an opportunity to continue to explore the conditions necessary to make dialogic OD successful, and when it might be ill advised.

## Summary

This chapter has reviewed a number of intervention types where the OD practitioner has an opportunity to engage in large-scale change, whether it is a traditional quality program, a growing area such as OD in mergers and acquisitions, or the complex concerns of transorganization development. With a knowledge of the foundations and practices of organizational change, organization development has much to offer the quality movement. OD practitioners who understand the challenges of postacquisition integration can intervene successfully at the individual, team, cross-team, and whole organization levels. The shift in perspective prompted by adopting a dialogic OD mind-set encourages practitioners to engage in different practices of consulting and change broadly speaking, whether the changes are with individuals, teams, or whole organizations. This is an area that is likely to grow in both theory and practice.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Think back to the stages of transitions we learned about in [Chapter 10](#). How do you think that model of transitions might apply in a merger or acquisition? What ideas might you have about how to help employees manage the transition to a new company successfully?
2. Think of an example of transorganization development with organizations familiar to you. How do you think some of the practices covered in this book (including contracting, data gathering, feedback, and the intervention types we have covered) might apply or need to be modified in your example?
3. What would you add to the conditions for success in the use of dialogic OD practices? Are there some organizations, problems, or situations where you think these practices would be more successful? Less successful? Thinking about an organization you are familiar with, how receptive do you think it would be to dialogic OD practices? As a dialogic OD practitioner, what do you think would be the most challenging aspect of this kind of engagement?

## For Further Reading

## Quality and Productivity Interventions

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## Mergers and Acquisitions

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## Case Study 7: The Future of the Crossroads Center

Read the Crossroads Center case and answer the following questions:

- How would you summarize the current situation at the Crossroads Center?
- What is the client looking to accomplish? What challenges exist for the client in accomplishing his objectives?
- How would you design an engagement that uses dialogic OD practices to assist this client?

The Crossroads Center was founded 16 years ago as a nonprofit drug and alcohol treatment center for adults and adolescents. The center is located in a quiet, rural area about an hour from a major urban center. It consists of six separate cream-colored buildings that encircle a large park, walking paths, and a duck pond. Except for a small, almost hidden sign on the main building, most community members cannot distinguish the center from any other set of office buildings or detached apartment units located in the sleepy town.

The center has two segments that operate differently depending on the patient's age. The first is an adult treatment facility, where treatment primarily consists of support provided by psychologists and licensed therapists. Adults who enroll at the center usually find out about it through their health insurance provider, which pays 100 percent of the center's fees for up to 30 days of inpatient treatment and 30 outpatient visits. The center's staff can support up to 120 adults at any given time.

The second part of the center is an adolescent residential treatment facility, where patients live together in the facility and are supported by a network of clinical psychologists, physicians, nurses, addiction counselors, and therapists. The center also provides staff teachers who give educational assistance while the patients live at the center, which can last for up to 8 weeks depending on a patient's needs. The residential center is much more expensive to operate, given the additional staff and housing needs, so there are typically just 30 to 40 patients living at the center at any point in time. The funding sources for the adolescent treatment facility include insurance as well, but also grants and foundations as well as federal and state programs.

Darrin Spoldi was appointed director of the center almost 3 years ago. During his short tenure, the center received three new grants from national foundations and increased by one third the number of patients that the center has reached. Darrin called Lisa Rodriguez last week with an urgent request. The center was at risk due to a new law, and he needed some advice to avoid the worst-case scenario.

"I'm really glad that you're here," Darrin said, as he and Lisa walked along the sidewalk path outside the center. "We're in a desperate situation, and if we don't do something soon, we may not be able to keep the center open."

"You sounded very concerned when we spoke last week," Lisa admitted. "But I had thought when we spoke a few months ago that things were going so well."

"Exactly," Darrin said quietly, looking down at the weeds on the edge of the sidewalk. "I had just gotten a major grant and our funding seemed more solid than at any point during my time here. Ironical, as it turns out. Things were sailing smoothly until just recently. In fact, just a few weeks ago we concluded our yearlong study on adolescent recidivism since we hired the additional therapist staff."

"Recidivism? What's that?" Lisa asked.

"It's our return rate. We follow up with our patients after they leave the center to see how they are doing and whether they are able to maintain the skills they learn during their time here or whether they need to return to a center for additional treatment. We found out that our patients have the lowest rates of return to drug and alcohol abuse among centers like ours in this region. In fact, the rate has improved by about 15 percent over a few years ago."

"To what do you attribute this result?" Lisa wondered.

"There's no question. It's both our teachers and our therapists," Darrin said confidently. "Patient after patient in the study we did reported that they had incredible support from the therapists, and having the teachers here on staff kept them focused on their studies, so that when they returned to school they had little difficulty assimilating. About a year and a half ago we added three new therapists to the staff, and the change was incredible. I know how good our work is here. I've worked in treatment facilities like this throughout my career, and this is the most successful model I've seen."

"Tell me about what's causing your concern for the center," Lisa asked.

"Don't misunderstand. I might sound calm now, but I suppose I'm just numb from thinking about this. It's not just a 'concern.' This is the biggest crisis I've faced in my career," Darrin said. "You might have heard about the changes that the state legislature just made to the social services budget for this fiscal year. Well, the budget for social services includes a set of regulations requiring that treatment facilities that receive state funding have a certain percentage of their staff hold medical degrees from an accredited medical school. I guess the regulations were intended to address the large number of facilities that are run primarily by lower-skilled technicians, with few medical professionals actually administering services. Last year's controversy regarding abuse in nursing home facilities prompted a number of community groups to call for additional regulations. The result, though, is that even facilities like ours face the same criteria. In any case, the law was just recently signed by the governor, and facilities have just 6 months to comply with the law or forfeit all state funding, retroactive to the signing date of the legislation."

"What does that mean for Crossroads?" Lisa asked.

"In other words, the center will continue to receive state funding for the next 6 months, but if we cannot comply with the law in that time period, we need to return 6 months' worth of funding to the state," Darrin said.

"What would it take to comply?"

"Currently, the center's staff of teachers and therapists put the staff below the required threshold to receive funding. Most of them have advanced academic degrees, but they are not medical practitioners according to the legal definition. We would have no problem if we just let our teachers and therapists go," Darrin said. "But they are critical members of our staff, and as I said, our patients give them a great deal of credit for their treatment. I just don't think that is an acceptable solution. Another possibility would be to refuse the state funding, but then trying to operate with our remaining funds would be impossible. With money coming just from the federal government and from our grants, we would not only have to have a layoff of staff, we'd have to reduce the number of patients we serve by about two thirds, and we would turn away a lot of people who need our help. I've done a lot of thinking about this in the last several weeks, and I haven't been able to come up with a solution that is acceptable to anyone."

"Does the community understand what's happening to the center and what might happen if it closed?"

"We have purposely maintained a low profile in the community for the last several years. Before I arrived, it's my understanding that there was a call among the county supervisors for the center to close or move, and we did not have a lot of support. I don't know what all of the issues are, but there is some animosity among the board of directors toward the county board of supervisors. Nothing came of it, obviously, and the board of directors recommended that I not spend a lot of time in the community for a while until things settled down. I'm not sure how many community leaders even know how we've contributed to the community by treating our own local adults and adolescents," Darrin concluded.

"What have you done so far?" Lisa asked.

"A few weeks ago we had a small meeting of the top administrators, about eight of us. We just talked in circles, bouncing back and forth between trying to figure out how to continue to operate without state funding or trying to meet the state's requirements and maintain our current funding. We didn't come to any conclusions, but we agreed to meet again this week. I do have to say, though, that the staff has been great about this. Morale is high, and our administrators are highly involved and motivated to find a solution. I've worked with other groups that would have given up or quit, but this group is participative, engaged, and smart. They're keeping each other going," Darrin said.

"Let me summarize. A highly successful local center is going to close because of a state law that holds unintended consequences, and the closure will affect a large number of patients, staff, and community members. It seems to me that there are a lot of groups that have a stake in this center being successful and continuing to operate. There are the patients and staff, obviously, but also the patients' families, the grants and foundations that contribute to your success, the community, even the state legislature," Lisa concluded.

"You've got it," Darrin said quietly.

Lisa continued, "You have a lot on your shoulders here. I can see that it's affecting you a great deal personally. What do you think of bringing together a larger group to help you decide what to do? We could keep it to your staff, or we could invite members of these other groups."

"It sounds like a good idea," Darrin agreed. "And at this point I'm at a loss about what to do next, so I'll take any suggestions. Tell me more. Who would we invite? How long would it take, and how would it be structured?"

“Let me think more about that. I can get you a proposal quickly and we can get started as soon as possible,” Lisa said.

“For the first time in a few weeks, I’m starting to feel hope,” Darrin smiled. “I’m looking forward to your proposal.”

<sup>1</sup> An extended version of this section originally appeared in Anderson, D. L. (2012). Organization development interventions and four targets of post-acquisition integration. *OD Practitioner*, 44(3), 19–24.

## Chapter 14 Sustaining Change, Evaluating, and Ending an Engagement

Consultants conducted a comprehensive organization development intervention with the employees and management team of the Communications and Electrical division of the city of San Diego, California, in order to improve productivity and employee satisfaction. Each of the city's work groups attended team-building sessions in which they participated in problem-solving exercises and clarified team members' roles. Top managers received one-on-one coaching on problem solving, and managers attended training courses to learn how to be more effective in managing meetings, evaluating employee performance, and more. The consultants offered observations to teams on team decision making, problem solving, group dynamics, and communication. When the interventions were concluded, the consultants evaluated the results, comparing this division to similar divisions within and outside the city. They gathered quantitative measures of employee productivity, they conducted an employee survey, they gathered employee data on absences and turnover, and they solicited citizen feedback on satisfaction with the department. Compared to the situation before the interventions, costs were lower, employee efficiency significantly increased, and job satisfaction increased. "Those who invest time, energy, and money to accomplish certain goals via an OD project can never know whether those goals have been reached unless they make some effort to evaluate the project" (Paul & Gross, 1981, p. 77).

- When concluding an organization development engagement, what factors do you think it would be important to evaluate to assess the success of the effort?

In the previous chapters, we discussed a number of individual-, team-, and organization-level interventions that can be used to implement change. In this chapter, we will discuss what happens after those changes are made. What other supporting systems, processes, or changes can be put into place so that the change persists and is long-lasting and effective? Moreover, how do clients and change agents know whether the interventions to implement change made a difference at all? To answer these questions, we will address what experts recommend about effective ways to sustain and evaluate change.

The final stage in our model of the organization development (OD) process is concerned with ending engagements, or the process of separating from and exiting the client's environment. Even internal consultants who continue to work for the organization after the engagement is done need to concern themselves with successfully transitioning ownership of the process back to the client and explicitly calling the engagement to a close.

## Sustaining Change After the Intervention

Interventions such as those described in the previous chapters all describe methods to achieve personal change (such as learning how to become a more effective manager), team change (new roles on a team), and organizational change (a new structure for a division). Lest anyone get too confident in the achievements that have been made to this point, many observers warn of the difficulties to come. “Now your troubles begin,” write Senge et al. (1999):

As your original “seedlings” begin taking root, they come into contact with new features of their environment, such as predators, rivals, and other life-forms that will resist the presence of a new entity. Your task is now to sustain life, not just over a few months, but over a period of years. (p. 240)

Indeed, once people try out changes like these, they may find them exceedingly difficult to maintain. For example, the new team roles may not feel as comfortable as the old roles, and members may long for the past despite the fact that the old roles did not work well. The new structure for the division might cause confusion and mistakes as people wonder who is responsible for which decisions. It might feel awkward initially to communicate differently with a coworker. In such cases, there is the likelihood of a relapse to how things used to be done before the intervention. Relapse is a possibility for several reasons.

First, we are often motivated to maintain a change when a change agent, manager, or external consultant is watching. When observers leave, we often slip back into the comfort of the old way. Leaders may support the change because they feel compelled to follow the recommendations of the change agent, but then they fail to continue to work on the change when the engagement concludes.

Second, the change is often a more difficult state, requiring more conscious energy, emotion, or attention, and we may have dedicated our attention to it when we were asked to, but cannot keep up that level of energy:

Work group members have to change individual behaviors and habits and stick with those changes. This requires ongoing focus, attention, and discipline on their part because of the challenge of maintaining new behaviors in the face of ongoing work challenges. (Longenecker & Rieman, 2007, p. 7)

Daily struggles with workload and the psychological demands of maintaining conscious attention to the change can require enough dedication that the demands of personal, team, and organizational changes can be too much to maintain.

Third, organizational members may naturally be unskilled initially as they adapt to the new way. Education may be required, and it can take weeks or months to achieve results as people continue to learn. Without the patience to push through the natural and awkward phases of trial and error and the inevitable initial mistakes,



many organizational members claim that the change has failed, and return to the old way.

Fourth, systemic organizational forces such as rewards or cultural values, expectations, and beliefs may be too powerful to overcome, and they may inhibit members from fully adopting the change. A manager who receives coaching to become more assertive in selling his ideas may become pushed back into old habits when his next performance review calls him “confrontational.” A leader who chooses to involve others in the department in high-level decisions may reverse that approach when she is passed over for a promotion and labeled a weak decision maker. Mounting internal complaints may force the finance department to continue producing customized reports that it had eliminated in a process improvement effort. Other organizational members or other systems, structures, and processes may provide intractable barriers to change.

What is required are methods for sustaining and stabilizing the gains that have been achieved, for working through the barriers to maintaining change, and for pushing through the difficult initial stages of change so that it lasts. The challenge is to develop techniques for making the “new way” stick. To sustain change, most experts recommend that the change become “institutionalized.” Change has been institutionalized when organizational members no longer think of the change program as a special initiative or project. “In the final analysis,” Kotter (1996) writes, “change sticks only when it becomes ‘the way we do things around here,’ when it seeps into the very bloodstream of the work unit or corporate body” (p. 14). You may recall the phrase “the way we do things around here” as one definition of organizational culture. In other words, the change program is most effectively institutionalized when it becomes part of the culture, or an integral part of the ordinary practices, programs, values, and beliefs of organizational members. Depending on the number of organizational members involved and the magnitude of the change, this can be a substantial endeavor, one that can take years to fully mature. Many writers emphasize “anchoring” the change, forcing it to become irreversibly “hardwired” into the organization. This approach helps to sustain change, but it may have its disadvantages.

## The Dangers of Sustaining Change

Work too hard at stability, and complacency and stubborn adherence to the new status quo may become the rule, which can inhibit future change attempts. (The same change agents who are frustrated with organizational members' earlier resistance to change are often those same change agents that later want organizational members to stick unyieldingly with the new way.) Too much stability can be harmful, as can too much change. In other words, "the routinization of current practices may block other potentially more significant developments. A desire to sustain current methods may prevent staff from acquiring new skills and experience, thus reducing morale and damaging performance" (Buchanan et al., 2005, p. 191). There is a constant tension between stability and change in organizations, with both offering opportunities for and threats to the organization's long-term survival. Too much routine—sticking with values, ideas, methods, or practices that no longer work—is dangerous to adaptation, but too much change can mean low productivity, frustration, and confusion.

Lawler and Worley (2006) write that the hallmark of successful contemporary organizations is no longer their ability to make changes stick:

Creating a stable organization to perform in a complex and rapidly changing environment is following a recipe for failure. The primary drivers of organizational effectiveness are fluid and dynamic; so too must be the primary elements and processes of strategy and organization. (p. 18)

The solution may not be to try to "refreeze" the organization as Lewin's classic model and others would suggest, but instead to develop organizations that can learn how to change. Practices that encourage evaluation and adaptation can be more effective in the long term. After all,

the purpose of change is to create an asset that did not exist before—a learning organization capable of adapting to a changing competitive environment. The organization has to know how to continually monitor its behavior—in effect, to learn how to learn. (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990, p. 164)

The objective is to develop practices that support the desired direction and remove barriers to the change, and to implement opportunities for regular evaluation and renewal that encourage appropriate and necessary alterations but avoid stagnation.

## Mechanisms to Sustain Change

Beckhard and Harris (1977) recommend seven practices that can encourage regular maintenance and renewal of a change. They write that these practices can help leaders understand the effectiveness of the change and also provide opportunities for information sharing about the change among members who may only see a certain aspect of the change given the limited view they may have in their individual roles. Most of these recommendations are directed toward team and organizational change, not personal change, but can be adapted to individuals:

1. *Periodic team meetings.* Perhaps the most fundamental mechanism for sustaining change is a regular meeting during which team members can come together to share results, perspectives, and opinions about how the change is operating. Beckhard and Harris (1977) write that such meetings invite “members to think through what they have done and what has happened since the last meeting and where they are going in the next intermediate period” (p. 101) in order to encourage members to think about the change as an ongoing process rather than a discrete event.
2. *Organization sensing meetings.* Especially for large-scale organizational changes, it is useful for top leaders to hear directly from organizational members about how the change is working. Sensing meetings are a process whereby the top leader may meet with groups of employees from various departments throughout the organization. These can be mixed groups of a random sample of employees, or they can include employees with a similar level or role. Provided that these are information-gathering meetings and not used to penalize or discipline anyone, they can be valuable ways of minimizing hierarchy and clarifying the change for both leaders and employees.
3. *Periodic intergroup meetings.* Particularly in intergroup changes where new roles, processes, or relationships are developed, a regular meeting among members of the groups involved can serve as a point to renew and evaluate the changes that have been made.
4. *Renewal conferences.* A renewal conference is a specific event, often held offsite, where organizational leaders or members meet to evaluate and discuss the change. Beckhard and Harris (1977) note that many organizations hold these offsite events annually during a strategic planning cycle to evaluate changes in the market or organizational environment, consider the organization’s response, and plan for the future. These can also be effective at a department or team level.
5. *Goal-directed performance review.* Performance reviews evaluate departments and individuals against specific measurable goals. “If an effective, goal-directed planning process is in place, one generally finds that the organization is alive, energized, and relatively clear about its priorities,” write Beckhard and Harris (1977, p. 103). Having clear and consistent goals, with rewards to support them, provides unambiguous support for the desired change. Documenting these goals and expected results in performance plans helps organizational members to focus on the activities that matter most in support of the change.
6. *Periodic visits from outside consultants.* A return visit from the change agent who helped to implement the change can encourage the organization to take an objective look at its progress:

We have found that insisting on such review visits for at least a year or so after a major change “forces” the organization leadership to have follow-up meetings. It forces them to look at the promises they made at the last meeting, to review progress, and to do some conscious thinking about priority planning for the future. (Beckhard & Harris, 1977, pp. 103–104)

A return visit from a change agent can prompt reflection on what has changed (or not) since the last meeting.

7. *Rewards.* Despite the best of intentions and regular reviews, a change will not be sustained if organizational members are rewarded or recognized (promoted, compensated, or even simply complimented) for doing something that is in opposition to the change. Recognition systems should be carefully analyzed for the activities and values that they support, and rewards should be put into place that “provide recognition to the people who maintain the new and different ways of doing things, especially when under pressure” (J. C. Jackson, 2006, p. 184). Burke (1993) agrees:

Formally and publicly recognizing people for having helped to move the organization in the change direction not only will serve to reinforce and stabilize the new behaviors but will send a clear signal as well to others in the organization as to what the “right” behaviors are. (p. 154)

To add to this list, Armenakis, Harris, and Feild (1999) have also proposed seven practices that change agents can use to institutionalize change:

1. *Active participation.* Giving organizational members the opportunity to influence the change as it takes shape, through participative decision-making practices or learning by practice and observation, can encourage adoption of the change and ownership of its implementation.
2. *Persuasive communication.* Regular communication about the status of the change, repetition of its rationale and purpose, and motivation to continue it can encourage hesitant organizational members and reinforce the change message.
3. *Management of internal/external information.* Survey data, benchmarking metrics, and other sources of data can reinforce the need for the change and increase confidence in the organization’s approach.
4. *Human resources management practices.* This includes not only rewards as mentioned above but also other human resources practices such as employee selection, performance appraisals, and training and development activities that can each support the change.
5. *Diffusion practices.* When changes are piloted in one area of the organization and then implemented in another, employees from the pilot division can help spread the message about the change to other divisions.
6. *Rites and ceremonies.* Activities such as employee meetings, leadership conferences, retirement parties, and recognition ceremonies can provide opportunities to symbolically reinforce the change. Armenakis et al. (1999) describe one organization that issued new badges to employees with motivational messages at a top leadership meeting to explain a new joint venture.

7. *Formalization activities.* Other changes in organizational structure, policies, and practices may be necessary to support the change and eliminate inconsistencies or barriers to adoption of the change.

These mechanisms need not be last-minute decisions after an intervention is carried out. They can be built into the intervention planning process and carefully considered as changes are debated so that all of the organization's systems, structures, processes, and cultural beliefs work seamlessly toward the same desired outcome. The most successful organizations, according to Lawler and Worley (2006), will learn not only how to master these practices, but how to encourage the next change to take shape as well. "This means creating an organization that encourages experimentation, learns about new practices and technologies, monitors the environment, assesses performance, and is committed to continuously improving performance" (p. 21). This view of sustaining change is less about institutionalizing and stabilizing practices, and more about learning how to change effectively as a regular part of organizational life.

## Evaluation

The word *evaluation* can bring up negative connotations for many people, perhaps rooted in poor current or past experiences with getting feedback: teachers and red pens slashing through a student's essay, or a manager's judgment about an employee's annual progress against performance goals. It is among the final stages of the organization development engagement, and is also frequently omitted. Practitioners and clients may be unsure about how to evaluate the effort, or what about it to evaluate, but such information can be invaluable to the client and practitioner personally as well as to the organization as it considers how the OD engagement made an impact. "The question that the consultant must answer is, 'Has the intervention in organization X made a difference?'" (Randolph & Elloy, 1989, p. 634). A deceptively simple question, it is also fraught with challenges.

## Challenges to Evaluation

Many practitioners and change agents fail to evaluate because of the many challenges and barriers to conducting an effective and thorough evaluation. As Burke (1993) puts it,

The evaluation process of OD practice can be compared to an annual physical examination—everyone agrees that it should be done, but no one, except a highly motivated researcher, wants to go to the trouble and expense of making it happen. (p. 168)

In fact, only relatively recently have OD practitioners pushed to evaluate their efforts. In the 1970s, practitioners lamented that they did not know enough about how to evaluate OD and that few practitioners conducted formal evaluations of their OD programs. A barrage of articles and meta-analyses appeared in which academic researchers were trying to figure out whether OD actually made a difference (see Armenakis, Feild, & Holley, 1976; Morrison, 1978; Porras & Berg, 1978a, 1978b). Most recommended increasing rigor for evaluative studies. While later analyses in the 1980s pointed to improvements in OD evaluation methodology and frequency (Vicars & Hartke, 1984), conducting an evaluation remains a challenge today. What's more, since there is a tendency for many change attempts to be short-lived and for organizations to slide back to the pre-change state, we have very few examples to demonstrate that OD makes a difference over a longer time period. Published cases of OD evaluation are difficult to find, since "very few studies have been able to substantiate the persistence of OD effects" and the preference has been to conduct evaluation studies that illustrate a short-term achievement of change (Boss, Dunford, Boss, & McConkie, 2010, p. 437).

The following are some of the most significant barriers to evaluation (see Martineau & Preskill, 2002):

- *Takes resources.* After a lengthy cycle of contracting, data gathering, data analysis, planning, and conducting interventions, many practitioners and clients are unwilling to commit the resources to evaluation. It takes the time of organizational members to gather and analyze data, to participate in interviews, or to respond to a survey.
- *Fear of the results.* The client may fear that resources were dedicated to producing nothing at all, or possibly that the situation has even deteriorated. The change agent may fear negative feedback or the possibility of developing a professional reputation for managing engagements that did not obtain desired results.
- *Takes energy.* Many clients and change agents would rather commit energy to producing change than to evaluating it. Occasionally the change agent is the only party interested in the results and may have difficulty persuading the client to expend the necessary energy to gather the data.
- *Accepted proof.* The client or change agent may have accepted that the intervention worked, from past experience or reports from others, and they may find no need to conduct an evaluation themselves.
- *Unsure what to evaluate.* Without a clear goal set during the contracting phase, clients and change agents may be unsure about what to evaluate. Some outcomes, such as "improved conflict management" or "better team meetings," may be vague or difficult to evaluate.

- *Seen as optional.* Evaluation is often seen as a “nice to have” step in the process rather than a requirement.
- *Practitioner training.* Many practitioners are not formally trained in evaluation methods. Some evaluation methodologies require statistical knowledge or a background in qualitative data analysis that practitioners may not have.
- *Research design and practice.* Early in the history of OD, social science preferences for quantitative, experimental research designs made it difficult to find true experimental groups so that variables could be isolated and assessed. This view has changed considerably since the 1970s, but it explains some of the lack of OD evaluation conducted in earlier years.

A further difficulty to conducting an evaluation of an OD effort is that organizational interventions are complex and it may not be possible to establish conclusively whether the organization's results are due directly to the specific activities of the OD program. Armenakis et al. (1976) noted that many practitioners found methodological challenges to evaluating OD efforts, such as the difficulty of assessing what constituted an improvement, the lack of true comparison groups, controlling for outside influences, and time lags that may mean years between intervention and results.



## Reasons to Evaluate

Despite these challenges, there are many good reasons to evaluate an organization development engagement:

1. *Evaluation provides focus.* “An evaluation forces the definition of the change objectives, . . . clarification of the change outcomes that are expected [and] clarification of how these change outcomes are to be measured” (Burke, 1993, p. 171). Being disciplined about evaluation will prompt the client and change agent to return to the original objectives of the engagement, to be specific about what outcomes were desired, and to document whether those objectives were achieved.
2. *Evaluation results may facilitate support.* Clients can have increased confidence that the OD effort was worthwhile and may be more likely to support such efforts in the future. Change agents can retain evaluation results (with permission) in a “success stories” file as part of a professional portfolio of successful engagements.
3. *Results provide feedback for change.* “An evaluation facilitates planning for next steps and stages of organizational improvement and development” (Burke, 1993, p. 171). An evaluation can uncover barriers to change and the results can point to future possibilities for improvement.
4. *Client and change agent growth.* Evaluation helps the change agent to understand the aspects of the intervention strategy that did or did not work as anticipated. The change agent can learn from this experience and potentially correct it next time, whether it is in the client’s organization or in another engagement.

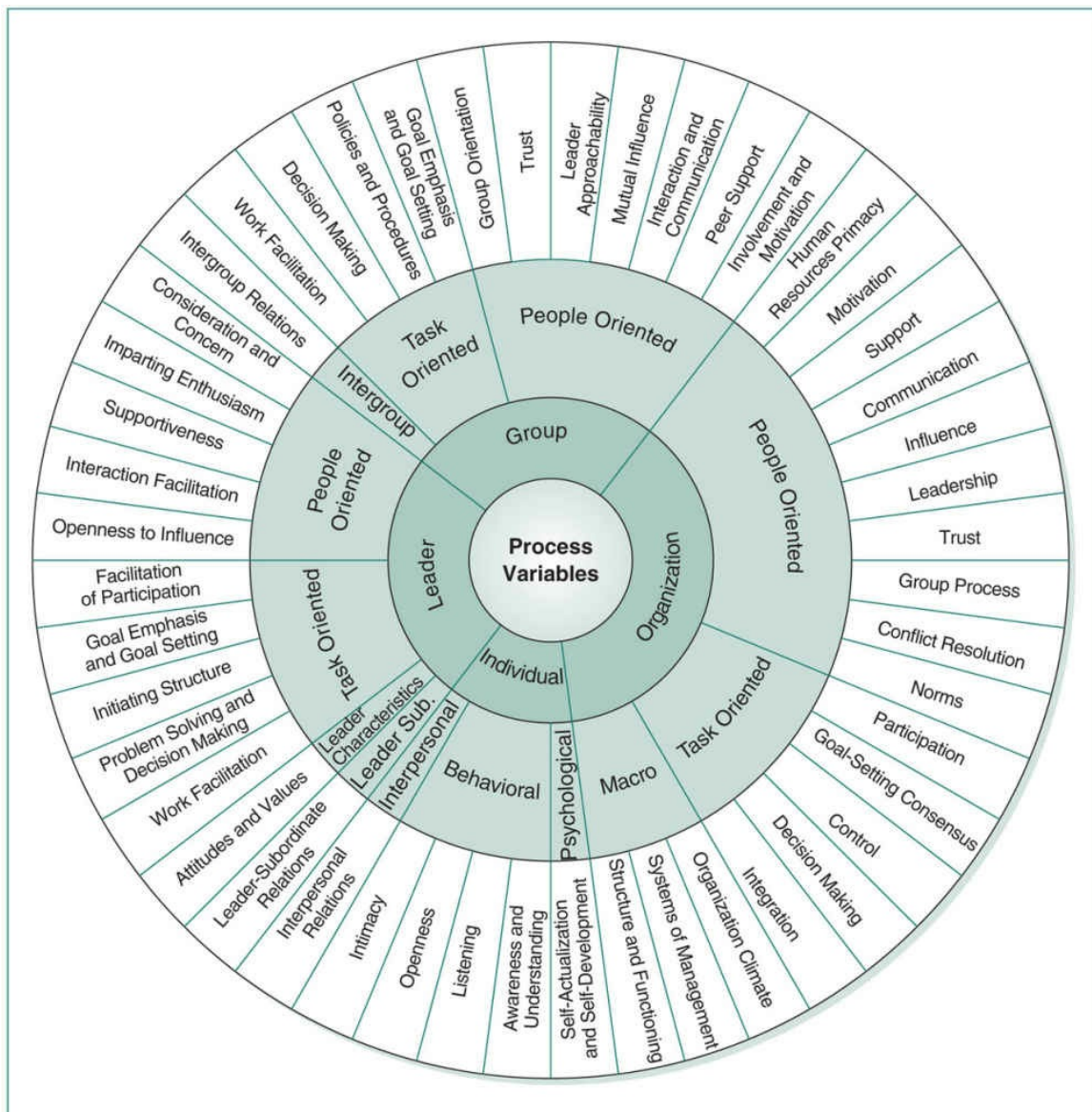
In several respects, evaluation may best be seen not as part of the ending of an engagement but as a transition to a new beginning. In [Figure 5.2](#), the OD process listed in [Chapter 5](#), an arrow connects the final stage of the model to entry, symbolizing the recursive and continuing process of improvement work. McLean, Sullivan, and Rothwell (1995) refer to evaluation as being both formative and summative; that is, it is formative when it is conducted during the intervention or looking forward to future interventions and it is summative when it looks back to address how effective the intervention was. Evaluation can be seen as another data gathering step that can then be developed into another contract, fed back to the client, and used for development of another intervention strategy.

## What to Evaluate

Evaluation can offer insights into both the organization's processes and the outcomes or results of the intervention. In addition, the OD engagement itself can be a target for evaluation. Porras and Berg (1978b) have developed an extensive set of process and outcome variables that practitioners can consider as they decide what to evaluate in any given engagement (see [Figures 14.1](#) and [14.2](#)).

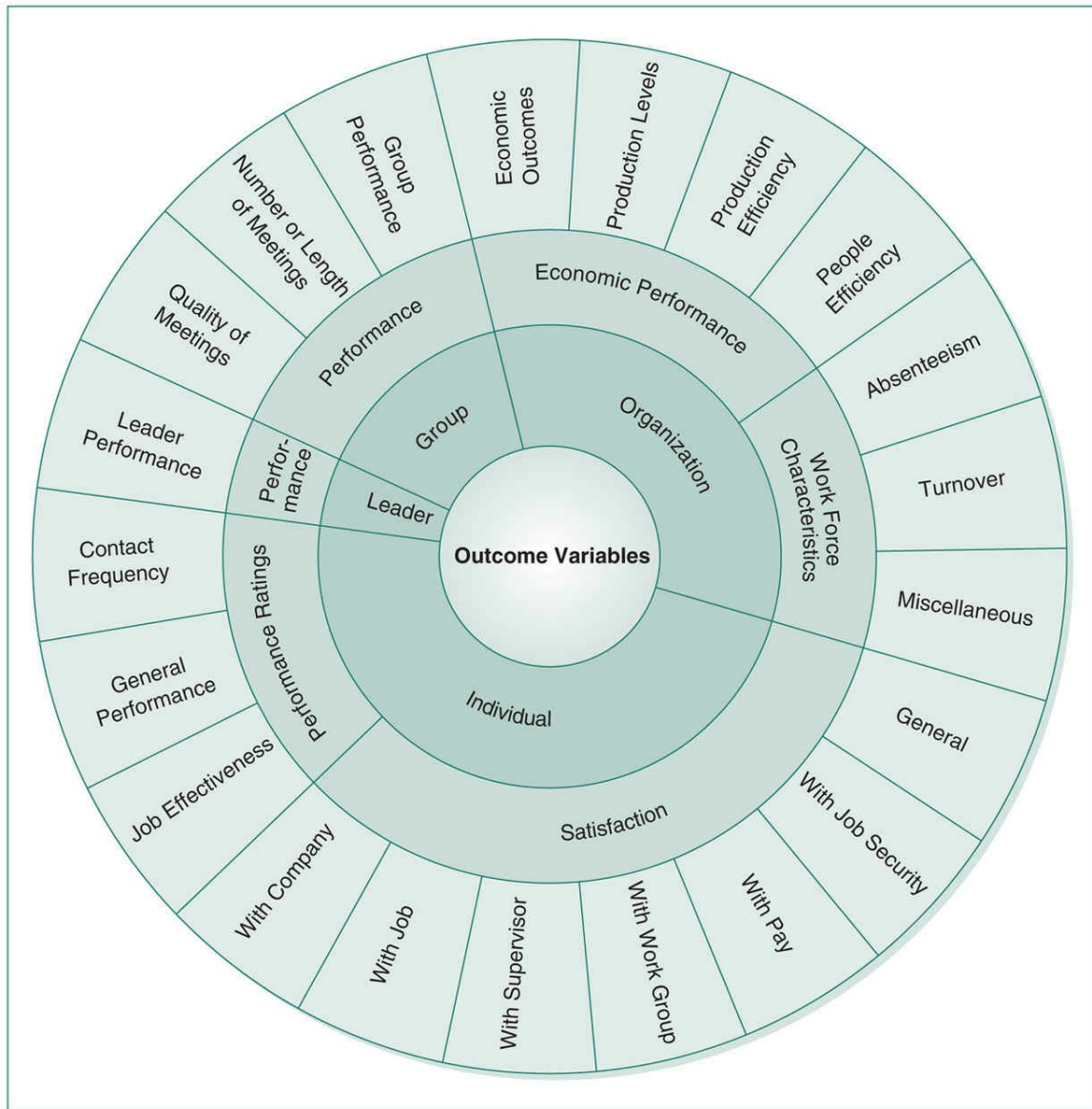
*Process variables* evaluation consists of how the intervention may have changed behavioral, people, and task processes. These consist of subjects such as motivation, conflict resolution, decision making, group trust, and participation. Process variables also consist of areas such as whether organizational members are completing the necessary activities they need to complete and whether employees are properly trained. Improving these areas may be the objective of any given intervention, but the overall outcome objective is usually an organizational result. In other words, the longer-term objective of a team-building activity would be improved team functioning with an end result of a more productive, effective team. Process variables contribute to outcome variables.

**Figure 14.1** Process Variables in Organization Development Evaluation



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**Figure 14.2** Outcome Variables in Organization Development Evaluation



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*Outcome variables* usually concern organizational-level outputs such as productivity, customer satisfaction, costs, revenue, quality, cycle time, and employee turnover. Many OD efforts work directly on process variables, but most clients are interested in outcome variables as results. Measuring both process and outcome variables may help to show the logical link between the OD effort and some impact (even if tentative) on the organization's results. In addition, measurement of this kind can demonstrate other changes, both beneficial and negative, even if they were unintended. These results can provide input to other possible interventions.

The OD engagement itself can be a topic for evaluation. Clients and practitioners can evaluate how well the OD process was followed, including client and practitioner satisfaction with contracting, data gathering, data

analysis, feedback, and the intervention strategy. Practitioners can evaluate how well they adhered to or modeled OD values. Holbeche (2006) recommends evaluating learning: “What new learning and knowledge have been embedded in the organization and how?” (p. 427). The change agent–client relationship itself can also be a topic for evaluation (see the next section on separation).

## Evaluation Process

The process of evaluation is not significantly different from developing a data gathering strategy, as discussed in [Chapter 7](#):

1. First, the client and change agent should meet to restate the original objectives of the engagement and to decide what data would best illustrate the changes desired at the personal, team, or organization level. They may choose to evaluate at each level, as some recommend (Livingston, 2006). They should also discuss the purpose for which they are evaluating the results and what will be done with the data.
2. Next, the practitioner should determine the form the evaluation should take and whether the data will be gathered through interviews, focus groups, surveys, or another method. Will it be a series of interviews with team members, will it be an organizationwide survey, or will it consist of gathering last quarter's employee turnover data? Which of these would best illustrate the effects of the OD program? Will the client be satisfied with qualitative data showing employee opinions from interviews, or are quantitative data necessary? Which process variables and outcome variables are of interest?
3. The change agent should then collect the data, following the recommendations for effective data collection listed in [Chapter 7](#).
4. The client and change agent should meet to evaluate the results and to plan next steps, if any. Some clients will want a final written report showing the objectives of the engagement, the activities conducted, and the end result (Stroh & Johnson, 2006). It may be advisable to be cautious about making sweeping claims about causation in any final report or interpretation, however tempting it may be.

## Examples of Evaluation

Here are just a few published examples spanning more than 40 years that evaluate the effectiveness of OD interventions:

- In one of the earliest published attempts to evaluate OD effectiveness, Bowers (1973) analyzed data from more than 14,000 employees in 23 organizations that had used one or more of four different kinds of OD interventions: survey feedback, interpersonal process consultation (approximating team development interventions where the practitioner helps the team with group maintenance/relationship issues), task process consultation (helping teams remove barriers to the effective accomplishment of tasks), or laboratory training (T-groups). These were compared with organizations as control groups that received either data handed back to managers with no follow-up or data sent to top leaders but not shared. All organizations were given the same organizational survey instrument to assess factors such as organizational climate and satisfaction with leadership and one's job and team both before and after the intervention. Bowers concludes that survey feedback was associated with "across-the-board, positive changes in organizational climate" (p. 42), interpersonal process consultation created minor change, task process consultation produced little to no change, and laboratory training produced a decline.
- In a meta-analysis of 35 published OD projects, Porras and Berg (1978b) examined the effects of OD interventions on the different process and outcome variables described earlier. They write that contrary to the assumption that OD affects only processes and not overall outcomes, "the impact of OD on people-oriented process variables and on task-oriented variables was shown to be equal, not as is often believed, that OD primarily changes people-oriented process variables and has very little relative effect on task-oriented variables" (p. 264).
- Osatuke, Moore, Ward, Dyrenforth, and Belton (2009), working with the U.S. Veterans Health Administration, implemented an intervention they called CREW: Civility, Respect, and Engagement in the Workforce. Using a survey feedback model, the authors surveyed more than 600 employees in 17 workgroups before and after the interventions took place to assess their opinions about civility in the workforce using an 8-item scale. The scale included items such as "People treat each other with respect in my work group" and "The organization does not tolerate discrimination." In each workgroup, employees generated ideas about how to improve civility and were supported by OD practitioners at each site. Workgroups themselves decided which actions to take. About 6 months later the civility survey was administered again, and the authors compared intervention sites with those that did not participate in an intervention, concluding that the intervention significantly affected employee perceptions of civility.
- In an extensive longitudinal study of a single law enforcement organization where the OD work began in 1973, Boss et al. (2010) "provide evidence that OD interventions can generate positive, lasting changes in an organization" (p. 459). Among others, interventions included whole organization interventions (organization design and restructuring, survey feedback), team interventions (team-building sessions, confrontation meetings), and individual interventions (coaching, management training). Surveys were administered seven times: before any interventions were conducted, during the

4-year intervention process, and 10 and 29 years afterward. The results were also contrasted with a comparison group. The researchers found that turnover decreased, satisfaction with leadership increased, assessments of the health of the organizational culture improved, and judgments about the organization's cooperation with outside groups improved. One participant who stayed with the organization during the majority of that time noted, "When they first started the OD project, I was more than a little bit skeptical. It sounded like a gimmick to me, a passing fad. But I saw the results on a firsthand basis" (p. 458). While the researchers acknowledge that there can be many factors that contribute to a sustained change over a 30-year period, the authors point to a number of factors that they believe helped this particular change to be successful, including careful contracting, an effective consultant–client relationship, committed leadership, the development of support systems such as training, individual accountability and commitment, and more. They conclude that "OD interventions can help employees maintain a clear focus on their goals, confront and resolve interpersonal problems in a proactive, preventive way, and make significant organizational changes without sacrificing participatory management or interpersonal trust" (p. 465).



## **Ethics of Evaluation**

Evaluation prompts ethical concerns similar to the data gathering and diagnosis phase of the OD process. The biggest potential ethical challenge in the evaluation phase is misinterpretation and misrepresentation of data (White & Wooten, 1985). This may occur somewhat innocently by both change agent and client, both of whom may badly wish for the data to show that the engagement made a difference. They may choose to gather or report on only the data that show a change and to ignore the data that show negative results. Issues of anonymity for those who participate in interviews apply at the evaluation data gathering phase, as employees may fear retribution if it is revealed that they do not see significant change, do not support the change effort, or are not doing what is required for the change to be successful.

## Ending an Engagement: Separation and Exit

Consulting engagements are by definition temporary relationships, and the project at some point must be turned over to the client. Attention to the ending process is necessary because “too many OD projects may linger unproductively or may end abruptly and without adequate follow up” (Van Eron & Burke, 1995, p. 395). Even if the client identifies additional work or a second project, in which case the client–consultant relationship may continue, the present engagement as it was defined during the contracting phase comes to an end. Just as the contracting phase sets the tone for how the consulting relationship will evolve, so too does the process of ending an engagement set the tone for the transition to a second engagement. Skillfully and ethically ending engagements is an important competency for an OD professional.

Endings can be initiated by clients, by consultants, or by mutual agreement. Ideally, engagements end by mutual agreement, but there may be reasons for either the change agent or client to end the engagement earlier. The moment to end the engagement may be obvious to both parties if goals have been reached and agreements of the original contract have been met. At other times, endings may need to be provoked and initiated, especially if the engagement is not progressing well. Among the telltale signs that an engagement might need to come to an end are the following:

- The client keeps putting things off.
- Agreements are made and forgotten (by either side).
- The consultant appears to have a higher emotional stake in the outcomes than the client does.
- The client is doing better and really doesn’t need outside help. (Weisbord, 1973/1994, p. 412)

Endings should be done explicitly and with planning rather than allowing an engagement to fade away without attention. Long delays or awkward extensions of unproductive engagements do a disservice to both the client and change agent, which is why Weisbord (1973/1994) notes that “I welcome ending a contract explicitly by having it tested and found wanting. Better a clean death than lingering agony” (p. 412). As Weisbord alludes, too often endings happen without planning or forethought. Clients and change agents run out of topics for the weekly project status meeting. The client lacks information or motivation to take another action and tells the change agent to wait for a few weeks until the situation becomes clearer. Eventually, both client and change agent find other projects or priorities and the engagement fades away.

Instead, change agents and clients can benefit from an explicit ending process by scheduling an ending feedback meeting. An ending meeting invites clients and change agents to articulate a number of subjects related to the engagement and intervention:

- What did we learn about the OD process?
- What did we learn from the consultant–client relationship?
- What was the initial presenting problem, and did that change as we did further investigation?
- Would the client engage with the practitioner again?
- To what extent has the client learned how to solve problems like these alone?

- What were the most successful aspects of the engagement?
- What were the most challenging aspects?
- What would we have done differently?
- What should we consider doing next time if we are faced with this problem again?

Clients and practitioners can also give each other feedback on strengths and opportunities for improvement: what each did that may have been particularly helpful to the success of the relationship and the engagement or specific things that may have created barriers to improvement. Postconsultation transition plans should also be discussed at the ending meeting so it is clear whether and how the change agent may be further involved with the client's organization. For example, the change agent may stop attending team meetings or may attend only once per month. These changes should be discussed so that the team is aware of the change and not surprised when the change agent abruptly fails to attend. Another topic for the postconsultation separation meeting concerns how the client may wish to follow up or contact the change agent for another engagement.

## Ethics of Endings

Ethical concerns can enter into the separation process, both when the act of separation is excessively delayed and when it happens too quickly. Extending an engagement for too long can be ethically questionable. As White and Wooten (1985) write,

As the change effort progresses through the continuation/maintenance stage reducing dependency is a difficult issue for most change agents to encounter. It involves reduction of effort and withholding of change agent services from the client system. Of specific ethical interest is the issue of the change agent continuing the intensity of a helping relationship or services. (p. 161)

Separation may be ethically necessary to reduce dependency on the change agent and to avoid the change agent's (especially for external consultants) continuing to accept payment if the contracted services have been completed or if the client is no longer benefiting. Moreover, the longer the change agent participates in the client system, the more he or she may "go native" or become such a part of the system that objectivity is lost and separation is psychologically difficult on both change agent and client. In such cases the change agent can become dependent (psychologically and financially) on the client.

Ending an engagement too early can also be ethically questionable, as it can mean leaving the client in a poor position to manage the change alone. Change agents who may feel that the client is not making enough progress or that the relationship is poor may look for reasons and ways to exit when things get difficult. The opposite can also occur, when a change agent may believe erroneously that the client is ready to assume the reins alone.

Of specific difficulty is the assessment of organizational capability to carry through the long-term aspects of a change effort, including the necessary processes to diagnose and solve problems. Improper assessment of client system health can lead to premature exit on the part of the change agent. (White & Wooten, 1985, p. 162)

An honest assessment of the motivation of the change agent and client to end the engagement is important to ensuring that it ends ethically.

## Summary

The final stages of the organization development process involve developing a process to sustain the change, evaluating the change, and exiting the engagement. Each of these steps involves the change agent gradually developing opportunities for the organization to maintain the momentum that ideally was achieved during the intervention process and to assume full ownership of the change process so that the change agent can separate from the environment. Sustaining change involves creating systems, structures, or processes so that relapse to the “old ways” of doing things is prevented. Barriers to implementing the change need to be understood and removed, and periodic opportunities to discuss, review, assess, and renew the change need to be put into place. Evaluating the engagement involves assessing the process and outcomes that the intervention strategy attempted to address, and it is best thought of as another data gathering stage that both looks back on what was achieved and looks forward to gather feedback that can lead to new interventions or future changes.

Last, all engagements come to an end. Ending meetings can provide an explicit opportunity to assess the engagement and discuss what was learned and accomplished. Ethically separating with integrity involves assessing one’s motivation for ending to ensure that it happens neither before the client is truly ready (to avoid leaving the client without skills to appropriately manage the change) nor too late so that it lingers and encourages the change agent or client to become dependent on the other.

## Questions for Discussion

1. In today's organizations that must constantly change and adapt to remain agile enough to keep up with the competition, is there any value in the concept of sustaining change? What other methods to sustain change have you seen?
2. Imagine that an OD consultant was going to conduct an intervention in an organization you know well. What outcome or process variables (see [Figures 14.1](#) and [14.2](#)) would you use to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention?
3. Why should a practitioner end one engagement before beginning another? If the relationship continues anyway, what value is there to the ending process?

## For Further Reading

Buchanan, D., Fitzgerald, L., Ketley, D., Gollop, R., Jones, J. L., Lamont, S. S., . . . Whitby, E. (2005). No going back: A review of the literature on sustaining organizational change. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 7(3), 189–205.

Livingston, R. E. (2006). Evaluation and termination phase. In B. B. Jones & R. Brazzel (Eds.), *The NTL handbook of organization development and change: Principles, practices, and perspectives* (pp. 231–245). San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer.

Porras, J. I., & Berg, P. O. (1978b). The impact of organization development. *Academy of Management Review*, 3, 249–266.

Van Eron, A., & Burke, W. W. (1995). Separation. In W. Rothwell, R. Sullivan, & G. N. McLean (Eds.), *Practicing organization development: A guide for consultants* (pp. 395–418). San Diego, CA: Pfeiffer.

## Exercise: Sustaining Change

Imagine that these are some examples of individual, team, and organizational changes that you have worked on with clients to implement. What methods to sustain change would you advise in each case?

1. The accounts payable department has implemented a new technology system for electronic payment of invoices, and all analysts were trained on a new payment process.
2. Before they escalate a conflict to their manager, two colleagues have agreed to meet personally first to see if they can resolve the conflict on their own.
3. An organization has implemented a “customer first” initiative to empower service technicians to do what it takes to ensure that customer problems are addressed promptly and accurately the first time.
4. A manager is working to delegate more tasks to her team instead of taking on too much alone.
5. Physicians, nurse practitioners, and specialists were trained on how to participate in a collaborative “360 view” process to ensure that patients receive the care of the whole team, not just an individual practitioner.
6. Two departments that had operated in silos have agreed to collaborate on projects together instead of independently.
7. An executive is working to improve his presentations by thoroughly rehearsing in advance instead of speaking extemporaneously.
8. An organization has implemented a sustainability program to encourage waste reduction, recycling, and environmentally responsible practices.



## Chapter 15 Global Issues in Organization Development

Student consulting teams from a Western university traveled to China to work with a client over a period of 4 years. The client was Liu Hai Ming, founder and chair of the Kun Lun company, a hospitality company that owned several restaurants and a hotel. Mr. Liu held a management philosophy he termed the Kun Lun Way, based on Chinese values and Confucian ideals of service to the community, honor to one's family, and a commitment to subordinates. These values he blended with his own entrepreneurial spirit, commitment to customer service, and business acumen.

In consulting with a Chinese organization, the student teams were often apprehensive. They studied cultural business practices and social customs in China to prepare themselves. The annual consulting cycle followed a regular pattern in which students would establish the opening relationship, conduct data gathering and diagnostic activities, offer feedback in an action planning meeting, conduct interventions, evaluate results, and exit. Each year brought new breakthroughs in the relationship with the client.

In the first year of the consulting engagement, both Mr. Liu and the students approached the relationship cautiously. The students had learned that the concept of *face* in Chinese culture means that individuals take seriously the idea that their behavior and language might threaten the harmony of a relationship with another individual or group. Recognizing that employees might be apprehensive about speaking negatively about their employer because of the face threat, interviews followed an appreciative inquiry model and inquired about strengths and achievements of the organization.

In the second year, interviews with organizational members indicated that the Kun Lun Way was not being transmitted throughout the organization, and students recommended implementing a shared leadership approach. During the presentation of feedback, the student consulting team leader deferred to consulting team colleagues regularly when questions from the client came up. At one point Mr. Liu saw how students were role modeling the very point they were trying to make about shared leadership, and he noted how everyone expressed a leadership role and acknowledged how he might take this approach throughout his own organization.

In the third year, students noticed that interviews acknowledged the importance of organizational systems and practices being consistent in order to continue to reinforce the Kun Lun Way. In their presentation, the consultants used the Confucian idea of harmony instead of alignment to reflect the connections in the five points of the star in the Galbraith (2002) model of organization design. Managers readily understood this concept.

In the fourth year, the consulting engagement took a different approach as the student teams took advantage of previous data and designed a management development workshop, focusing again not on the negative "problem solving," but the more positive "process improvement." In a bold move, the students reconfigured the room setup away from a formal arrangement to using small-group discussion, a cultural violation, but it was an arrangement to which the client organization cautiously adapted based on the established relationship.

The success of the engagement was due in no small part to the efforts by the consulting team to adapt Western practices to a Chinese cultural context, paying specific attention to cultural practices, values, and beliefs (Nyberg & Jensen, 2009).

- What challenges do you see in the OD process when the OD practitioner and client come from different cultures?
- How do you think an OD practitioner should approach an engagement where the cultural environment is unfamiliar?

As organizations move toward offshoring parts of their operations or opening subsidiaries in other countries, more people are facing being a member of a team or otherwise working with someone residing on another continent. As Friedman (2007) writes in his book *The World Is Flat*,

It is now possible for more people than ever to collaborate and compete in real time with more people on more different kinds of work from more different corners of the planet and on a more equal footing than at any previous time in the history of the world. (p. 8)

He goes on to emphasize the importance of jobs in the future that “will involve collaborating with others or orchestrating collaboration within and between companies, especially those employing diverse workforces from around the world” (p. 285). Combined with the increase in virtual teams and other changes in technology that work that we will discuss in the next chapter, the globalization of work has also influenced the globalization of organization development. OD interventions are no longer confined to the physically collocated intact project team located in a small office building. Today, many OD practitioners are likely to be working with clients or teams from multiple countries and cultures in both face-to-face and virtual environments.

Most organization development practitioners realize that cultures reflect some differences and that cultural sensitivity is important. Many practitioners therefore uneasily approach the task of working in a global environment or with clients and organizational members from another culture. Does the practitioner press ahead confidently with one’s own cultural preference, implementing models and practices that may not be accepted by the audience, and in effect forcing the culture to adapt to the practitioner? Or would the better approach be to implement only those interventions that work universally, if any exist? Perhaps the intervention should be adapted to the cultural context (and thus one might find oneself experimenting with an unfamiliar approach)? What if the audience itself comprises members from multiple cultures? This realization has prompted researchers and practitioners to pose a number of broader questions: Is OD restricted to North America? Are there other countries where OD is simply unfeasible based on cultural incompatibility?

In this chapter, our goal will be to explore a global and cultural perspective on organization development. (The term *global OD* will be used most often to refer to situations when the practitioner and client come from different cultures and to describe how OD interventions are implemented in different cultures.) We will first examine the complex issues brought to the fore when the OD practitioner, client, and/or organizational members come from different cultural perspectives. We will look at examples of how OD interventions have been implemented in different countries and conclude with recommendations for practitioners as they approach a global, multicultural environment.

Most research to this point has concentrated on single cultures and their adaptations of OD interventions. We know little about how OD interventions may need to be adapted and conducted with a global team comprising members from many different countries. The research that has been completed over the past several decades is offered here as a set of frameworks and lenses on global culture, but we should be cautious that in today’s rapidly changing global environment, developing a culturally sensitive thought process may be more important than firm conclusions about any individual culture. We will return to this point at the end of the chapter.

## OD's Challenges in a Global Environment

In an article titled "Is the Culture Hostile to Organization Development? The U.K. Example," Fritz Steele (1977) notes a common pattern in his OD projects, stating that "quite simply, I have never been able to negotiate an effective organization development (OD) contract with any firm in the U.K.," a pattern that caused him "to have some strong doubts about the extent to which OD work will be supported there" (pp. 23–24). He traced several assumptions about the cultural differences between the UK and OD as evidence for his view of the cultural incompatibility of OD, including the UK values of stability, the evasion of embarrassing subjects, strong respect for hierarchy, preference for predictability, and respect for the past. Similarly, several other authors have made broad generalizations about the effectiveness of OD interventions in various cultures.

Authors point to several reasons why understanding the applicability of OD and practicing OD are especially challenging in a global environment:

1. *Culture-bound theory and practice.* Theories of management and organization development are as culture-bound as the practitioners and theorists who subscribe to them. "The naïve assumption that management ideas are universal is not found only in popular literature" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 338), but in scholarly articles as well. Such theories were often developed through the perspectives of American researchers using American data or research subjects. Thus, many of our practices, approaches, and ideal management types in the field of organization development may reflect cultural assumptions that may not be applicable in other environments. Traditional OD practiced in a single country may reflect an ethnocentric view that is of little value to global organizations that require collaboration across cultures and boundaries (Evans, 1989).
2. *Evaluation is difficult.* Evaluating whether OD interventions are effective in multiple cultural environments presents the same challenges as any other evaluation of OD effectiveness. Recall from [Chapter 14](#) that practitioners find it challenging to prove that it was the intervention that made the difference in the change process, that evaluation takes time and resources that may not be available, and that few longitudinal studies of change exist. To answer the question about whether OD is effective in other cultures presents at least the same challenges as evaluating it in a single culture.
3. *Variation in meaning.* "Global OD" or "international OD" may have multiple meanings, from OD practiced in more than one country, to an OD intervention exported with or without adaptation from one country to another, to an OD intervention that involves a collaboration between members from multiple countries (Neumann, Lau, & Worley, 2009). Questions about "whether OD works in China" may oversimplify the various ways that OD might be practiced in different environments.
4. *Hidden assumptions about monolithic practices and values.* Keith Johnson, Thomas Head, and Peter Sorensen Jr. (1995) identify a number of assumptions and generalizations made in our quest to identify how OD interventions are practiced in global environments. First, they note a "unity of practice assumption" that assumes that all OD interventions are practiced in the same way. When we speak of adapting survey feedback or appreciative inquiry to other countries, we assume that every practitioner implements survey feedback or appreciative inquiry in the same way and that every engagement using

these interventions is conducted identically. There is not one monolithic organization development theory or practice. Second, they note an “inherent values assumption” that sees OD values as universal and unchanging. Third, they note a “unity of values assumption” that assumes that underlying values of different OD interventions all reflect equivalent core values. And finally, they note a “universal values assumption” that sees both OD and national culture as having universally shared values.

5. *Cultural generalizations and the prediction of behavior.* Broad conclusions about culture may be accurate at a general level, but such generalizations cannot accurately predict individual behavior. “Like the weather, culture is harder to predict precisely at the local level and easier at the aggregate. For example, you might not know whether it will rain next month on your doorstep, but you can tell what months are rainy and whether there is more precipitation on the coast or on the plains” (Taras, Steel, & Kirkman, 2011, p. 192). Thus, it is not likely that cultural difference lenses can be of much help in accurately predicting what reaction a certain individual will have to a specific type of intervention.
6. *Culture variation and change.* Just as there might be in an organization, national cultures have subcultures. What might work in California might not work in New York, just as what might work in one part of Russia may not be effective in another. What might be acceptable in one African or Asian organization could be rejected in another organization in the same country. Similarly, cultures change over time, influenced by intercultural contact, emigration, tourism, technology, and a host of other reasons. Some cultural values might be held strongly, whereas others might be held only loosely. Last, cultures change, so any conclusion about whether OD works in a given country may be only a temporary one. Cultural variation and change complicate our ability to draw firm conclusions about whether OD interventions will be more likely to succeed in a given engagement.

## Dimensions of Global Cultural Difference

OD practitioners are still coming to terms with global cultural differences and how organizational members react differently to different types of interventions. Several studies have compared different countries on dimensions of national culture first explored by Hofstede (2001) and extended by Hofstede et al. (2010): power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism–collectivism, masculinity–femininity, long-term orientation, and indulgence–restraint. The first four of these dimensions appeared in Hofstede’s seminal work *Culture’s Consequences*, and the final two were added based on subsequent research. The initial data for Hofstede’s study came from employees who worked at 40 (eventually 53) subsidiaries of IBM in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and since then the survey has been replicated, extended, and applied dozens of times.

In the 1990s another project, called the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) study, expanded Hofstede’s cultural dimensions to 18 (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Researchers currently debate which study more accurately portrays cultural differences, whether the GLOBE study is U.S.-centric, whether it is more accurate to study societal practices or values, whether there are differences between organizational and national culture captured in the studies, and whether the new GLOBE dimensions are genuinely new (see Hofstede, 2006; Javidan, House, Dorfman, Hanges, & de Luque, 2006).

Hofstede’s six dimensions and examples of where several countries fall on his scale are presented below.

## Power Distance

Power distance is defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 61). In countries with a high power distance, there will be more hierarchy in organizations. Employees will be less likely to contradict or disagree with the boss and there will be more formal rules. Organizations are likely to isolate power and control in the decisions of relatively few individuals at the top (a single CEO or small leadership team). There may be special status, compensation, or rewards given to those at the top (everything from a large salary to a reserved parking space). Management behavior is more likely to be that of System 1 (autocratic) than System 4 (participative).

In low power distance countries, there may still be a hierarchy in the organization, but it may be for convenience rather than based in a fundamental value about status. There may be fewer managers and a greater emphasis on teams and team collaboration. Organizational structures are likely to be flatter, with managers consulting employees who expect to participate. There will be a narrower salary range and overt status differences between the top and the bottom.

[Table 15.1](#) shows where several countries fall on the power distance scale.

## Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is defined as “the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 191). Strong uncertainty-avoiding countries appreciate laws, policies, and regulations that dictate standards of behavior and control employee rights. These countries see differences as dangerous and to be avoided; there is a hesitation to accept new technologies or products. In the workplace, employees expect standardized procedures and instructions to be provided prior to launching into a project or task. Detailed job descriptions are more likely to be provided, and fewer organizations will implement matrix structures that create ambiguity by assigning an employee to two bosses. Employees will seek job security and change jobs and employers less frequently.

**Table 15.1** Power Distance Index Examples

Country	<i>Power Distance (high numbers reflect greater power distance; range is 11–104)</i>
Mexico	81
China	80
India	77
Hong Kong	68
South Korea	60
Iran	58
Japan	54
South Africa	49
United States	40
Great Britain	35
Denmark	18

**SOURCE:** Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, pp. 57–58.

In weak uncertainty-avoiding countries, rules, policies, and processes are created when necessary but only when important to solve a problem. Differences are acknowledged and appreciated. Managers may not have all the answers and may expect employees to operate more independently with their own judgment. There is more acceptance of ambiguity and change, and managers and employees expect that unpredictability is common and flexibility is needed.

[Table 15.2](#) shows where several countries fall on the uncertainty avoidance scale.



## Individualism–Collectivism

Individualist societies are defined as those “in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him- or herself and his or her immediate family” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 92).

Management in individualist cultures is management of the person, whose skills and abilities are rewarded if performance is high, regardless of the individual’s family background or memberships. Tasks are given to an individual based on his or her skills and performance, and evaluations of performance may be used to terminate the relationship (which is more likely to be based on an economic relationship model than a familial one).

**Table 15.2** Uncertainty Avoidance Index Examples

Country	<i>Uncertainty Avoidance (high numbers reflect greater need for uncertainty avoidance; range is 8–112)</i>
Russia	95
Japan	92
South Korea	85
Mexico	82
Iran	59
South Africa	49
United States	46
India	40
Great Britain	35
China	30
Hong Kong	29
Denmark	23
Jamaica	13

**SOURCE:** Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, pp. 192–194.

Collectivist societies are those “in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 92). In workplaces in collectivist societies, individual relationships are important. Employment relationships and decisions (hiring and promotion) are made on the basis of the employee’s

ingroup memberships (hiring relatives or those with one's own identical group membership), but employee evaluations are less likely since termination may be less frequent. Instead, tasks may be shifted but the employee will be retained. Family members may work together or follow in one another's path (a family business, for example).

[Table 15.3](#) shows where several countries fall on the individualism–collectivism scale.

## Masculinity–Femininity

Masculine societies describe cultures where “emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.” Feminine societies describe cultures where “emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 141).

**Table 15.3** Individualism–Collectivism Index Examples

Country	<i>Individualism–Collectivism (high numbers reflect greater individualism; range is 6–91)</i>
United States	91
Great Britain	89
Denmark	74
South Africa	65
Israel	54
India	48
Japan	46
Iran	41
Mexico	30
Hong Kong	25
China	20
South Korea	18

**SOURCE:** Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, pp. 95–97.

What does a masculine or feminine workplace look like? In a workplace where the masculine culture dominates, managers are assertive and firm. They provide compensation or rewards based on achievement in a competitive environment. Success, challenge, ambition, and career promotions are important. Conflict is expected and encouraged, with the organization presuming that the winner of the conflict will achieve a better outcome. In a feminine workplace, there is more likely to be a sense of collaboration, compromise, or negotiation. Management encourages consensus rather than the manager being the locus of decision control, and managers are interested in humanizing the workplace with more equality in compensation and

promotions. Relationships and quality of working life are important considerations, where “employers will strive to create a cooperative and friendly atmosphere” (Yaeger, Head, & Sorensen, 2006, p. 51).

[Table 15.4](#) shows where several countries fall on the masculinity–femininity scale.

**Table 15.4** Masculinity–Femininity Index Examples

Country	<i>Masculinity–Femininity (high numbers reflect greater masculinity; range is 5–110)</i>
Japan	95
Mexico	69
China	66
Great Britain	66
South Africa	63
United States	62
Hong Kong	57
India	56
Israel	47
Iran	43
South Korea	39
Denmark	16

**SOURCE:** Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, pp. 141–143.

## Short-Term–Long-Term Orientation

Short-term orientation and long-term orientation were added to the four original dimensions defined above based on a set of new surveys implemented in the 1980s (the Chinese Values Survey). This dimension describes the degree to which a culture emphasizes the future or the past and present, with long-term orientation defined as “the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards—in particular, perseverance and thrift” and short-term orientation defined as “the fostering of virtues related to the past and present—in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of ‘face,’ and fulfilling social obligations” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 239).

In organizations reflecting short-term orientation values, the organization’s present financial success is most important (this quarter, this fiscal year), and managers may be punished for failing to achieve immediate results (even when these results may be due to decisions made years earlier). As the business changes, personal relationships may change as employees move between organizations or shift loyalties. Managers value present achievements and provide rewards based on ability. In a long-term orientation organization, managers are more likely to make decisions based on the decision’s impact on “profits 10 years from now” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 245). Learning and adaptability for the future are more important than immediate achievement, and extended relationships are seen as more important than shifting loyalties.

[Table 15.5](#) shows where several countries fall on the short-term–long-term orientation scale.

## Indulgence–Restraint

Indulgence refers to a “tendency to allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun,” whereas restraint “reflects a conviction that such gratification needs to be curbed and regulated by strict social norms” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 281). In an indulgent workplace, members may smile more often (or be required to smile, as in the case of offices or stores where customer-facing personnel may greet incoming customers). People expect the freedom of speech and generally express optimism. In restrained cultures, moral discipline is important and there is less importance placed on time with friends or leisure activities. Restrained cultures are more likely to see order as important and even tend to have more police officers per capita.

[Table 15.6](#) shows where several countries fall on the indulgence–restraint scale.

**Table 15.5** Short-Term–Long-Term Orientation Index Examples

Country	<i>Short-Term–Long-Term Orientation (high numbers reflect greater long-term orientation; range is 0–100)</i>
South Korea	100
Japan	88
China	87
Hong Kong	61
Great Britain	51
India	51
Denmark	35
South Africa	34
United States	26
Mexico	24
Iran	14

**SOURCE:** Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, pp. 256–258.

**Table 15.6** Indulgence–Restraint Index Examples

Country	Indulgence–Restraint (high numbers reflect greater indulgence; range is 0–100)
Mexico	97
Denmark	69
Great Britain	68
United States	68
South Africa	63
Japan	42
Iran	40
South Korea	29
India	26
China	24
Hong Kong	17

**SOURCE:** Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, pp. 282–285.

[Figure 15.1](#) summarizes Hofstede’s six dimensions. Taken together, these six dimensions offer OD practitioners the ability to contrast cultures to discover subtle similarities and differences that may not be immediately apparent. For example, Hofstede et al. (2010) report that the combination of uncertainty avoidance and power distance can illustrate why students in different countries hold different implicit models of organizations. They describe a conflict between two department heads (sales and manufacturing) in a textile company. The manufacturing manager delayed producing small, hard-to-manufacture orders until absolutely necessary, while the sales manager accepted all sales (large and small) and advocated rush orders. The two groups (sales and manufacturing production) continually fought.

Students in three countries were asked to interpret the cause of the conflict and make recommendations for what should happen next. French students (higher power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance) respected the hierarchy and recommended that the decisions about rush orders be taken to the next-level supervisor. German students (lower power distance and moderate uncertainty avoidance) ascribed the problem to lack of structure and recommended a clarification of rules. British students (low power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance) saw the problem as one of interpersonal relationships between the two leaders, and they recommended negotiation skills training.

**Figure 15.1** Six Dimensions of Culture



<i>Power Distance: How power in institutions and organizations is distributed</i>	
<b>Low Power Distance</b>	<b>High Power Distance</b>
"There will be less emotional resistance to change, higher levels of risk taking, and less emphasis on hierarchical structures" (Yaeger, Head, & Sorensen, 2006, p. 48).	Employees will do what is asked and will not take risks. Hierarchical decision making and communication flow patterns dominate. Change will be communicated from the top when appropriate and necessary.
<i>Uncertainty Avoidance: How a society feels about uncertain or ambiguous situations</i>	
<b>Weak Uncertainty Avoidance</b>	<b>Strong Uncertainty Avoidance</b>
Organizations will tolerate ambiguous situations, unknown variables, and unclear information. Members expect unpredictable situations to arise and will not be threatened by needing to adjust.	Organizations will adopt formal rules and policies and expect detailed risk mitigation plans in the event of a problem. Change is threatening and will likely prompt a high degree of resistance.
<i>Individualism Versus Collectivism</i>	
<b>Individualism</b>	<b>Collectivism</b>
The self is the basic unit. Employees prefer to work and be managed and rewarded as individuals. Sacrifice for the benefit of the collective is less persuasive.	The group is the basic unit. Employers may provide for employees as they would family members. Employees may work against their own self-interest if all will benefit.
<i>Masculinity Versus Femininity</i>	
<b>Masculinity</b>	<b>Femininity</b>
The organization is a competitive environment where performance and action are the central objectives. Rewards, status, and achievement are highly important, and work fits centrally into this culture.	Organizations promote cooperative and collaborative environments. The culture may value thought and planning before action. Spiritual achievement is more valued than economic achievement, and work fits less centrally into the lifestyle.
<i>Short-Term Versus Long-Term Orientation</i>	
<b>Short-Term Orientation</b>	<b>Long-Term Orientation</b>
The focus is on immediate profits, short-term gain, and rapid achievement of results. There is a greater tendency to spend versus save. People are highly concerned with status. What is "right" is always right, regardless of situation.	The focus is on later profits, competitive positioning, and sustained results. There is a greater tendency to save for later versus spend now. People are more concerned with social inequality than current status. What is "right" varies by circumstance and is not universally applicable.
<i>Indulgence Versus Restraint</i>	
<b>Indulgent</b>	<b>Restrained</b>
A high degree of importance is placed on friendship, networks, leisure time, and enjoying life. There is less emphasis on moral discipline. Maintaining societal order is not a high priority.	A lower degree of importance is placed on friendship, networks, and leisure time. There is a higher emphasis on moral discipline and high importance is placed on maintaining social order.

How we set up organizations, achieve success in them, identify possible changes, and recommend actions to achieve change may be based in part in our own cultural lens. This is also true of organization development practitioners, which will be discussed in the next section.



## OD Values, Interventions, and Culture

Jaeger (1986) argued that while the translation is not perfect, OD's values can be related to Hofstede's dimensions of culture. Jaeger found that by comparing OD's ratings on the Hofstede scale with those of different nations, we can better understand the likely degree of cultural fit of OD interventions and national culture. [Table 15.7](#) compares OD values and U.S. values on Hofstede's dimensions. (Note that short-term–long-term orientation and indulgence–restraint were not yet part of Hofstede's dimensions at the time of Jaeger's analysis. Labels of U.S. values as “high,” “medium,” and “low” are Jaeger's descriptors.)

Jaeger (1986) notes that OD can be considered low in power distance because many OD interventions require “persons at differing hierarchical levels to interact openly in order for problems to be resolved” (p. 182). OD can be considered weak in uncertainty avoidance because not every intervention can specify a precise outcome, and some level of ambiguity is necessary when problems are opened up for discussion and resolution. OD provides a middle ground on the individualism–collectivism range, as it respects both the needs and growth of individuals but also advocates collaborative dialogue and the development of groups and teams. OD can be considered low on the masculinity scale as it deemphasizes competition and emphasizes the development of cooperative relationships to improve the quality of working life. Jaeger noticed that with the exception of uncertainty avoidance, OD values and U.S. values range from moderately different (power distance and individualism–collectivism) to significantly different (masculinity–femininity). This values difference explains, in part, the reason why OD has occasionally found a slow reception in the United States.

**Table 15.7** Comparison of OD and U.S. Values on Hofstede's Dimensions

	<i>OD Values</i>	<i>U.S. Values</i>
Power Distance	Low	Medium
Uncertainty Avoidance	Low	Low
Individualism–Collectivism	Medium	High
Masculinity–Femininity	Low (femininity)	High (masculinity)

**SOURCE:** Jaeger, A. M. (1986). Organization development and national culture: Where's the fit? *Academy of Management Review*, 11, 178–190.

Taking this comparison a step further, Jaeger compared more than three dozen countries to the OD values displayed in [Table 15.7](#) and concluded that the values of several nations appear to match well with those of OD, including Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Evans (1989) notes that “the modal culture in these nations is more strongly feminine, and somewhat more collectivistic than in North America, while sharing the concern for power equalization and tolerance of uncertainty” (p. 9). Sorensen and Head (1995) write that in Denmark, OD interventions are used extensively, with the most frequently used including survey feedback, team building, role analysis, and confrontation meetings. They conclude that “in a culture which is strongly

democratic and egalitarian, OD interventions which reinforce these attitudinal patterns appear to be the most popular” (p. 51).

Cultural values in Germany, Great Britain, and the United States appear to provide moderate consistency with OD’s values:

The U.S. and Great Britain are high on individualism and masculinity, and low on power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Group-based activities can easily meet with resistance. . . . Germany is moderate on power distance and uncertainty avoidance, and high on individualism and masculinity. This means that some of the more “democratic” based processes might require extra effort. (Yaeger et al., 2006, p. 67)

Structural approaches seem to work well in Germany, though there has been a great deal of criticism of OD’s theoretical roots (Pieper, 1995).

OD’s values also seem to be inconsistent with those in several countries. In Italy, for example, Boss and Mariono (1987) found that “Italian culture is not conducive to dealing with emotionally charged issues in a group context” (p. 246), which might be the objective of an organization mirror or confrontation meeting intervention. They found that team-building interventions focused on tasks were more effective than those focused on interpersonal concerns. A study reported by Fagenson-Eland, Ensher, and Burke (2004) notes that 360 or multirater feedback was seen as threatening in Taiwan. Strong uncertainty avoidance in Russia has made worker empowerment initiatives particularly challenging (Fey & Shekshnia, 2011).

OD has been seen as particularly incompatible in Latin American countries whose values differed significantly from OD values. Keith Johnson (1995), for example, enumerates the challenges he found in implementing OD interventions in Venezuela, which appears to be the most different from Denmark’s values on Hofstede’s dimensions. Salinas (1981) argued that practitioners working in Latin American cultures should avoid affective interventions such as T-groups, and Yaeger et al. (2006) note that in countries where OD values are incompatible, practitioners may find more success with highly structured interventions “that are clearly focused on task, clear definition of the situation, and the maintenance of the organizational hierarchy” (p. 70).

In general, Yaeger et al. (2006) argue that Hofstede’s dimensions can be used to analyze the relative applicability of OD based on a country’s preferences. They offer the following conclusions:

- Cultures low in power differences are more compatible with organization development, with more decentralized, flatter, and collaborative organizations.
- Cultures low in uncertainty avoidance are more compatible as indicated by more collaboration, rejection of Theory X, and greater gender equity.
- Organization development is less compatible with cultures high in power distance because of more centralized, more hierarchical, and control-oriented organizations.
- Organization development is less compatible in countries high on uncertainty avoidance because of

more structured, more bureaucratic organizations, and more task-oriented, less flexible managers.

- Organization development is less compatible in high masculinity environments because of less collaboration, less acceptance of Theory Y, and less gender equity. (p. 52)

When selecting interventions, Head and Sorensen (1993) notice that “countries which are masculine generally use task-oriented interventions, and those with a feminine bias look to process. Process interventions are also preferred in cultures with a high tolerance for ambiguity, but task interventions are more common in high uncertainty cultures” (p. 7). Collectivist cultures may be more amenable to organization development interventions, particularly since many traditional OD interventions emphasize group problem solving and team development.

Perhaps due to their awareness of the cultural compatibility of various intervention techniques, there is evidence that practitioners in different countries prefer some interventions over others. Fagenson-Eland et al. (2004) found that attributes of national culture—such as the culture’s preferences for individualism or collectivism, centralized power, or egalitarian participation—affected practitioners’ preferences for certain interventions. In their analysis of intervention techniques in seven countries, they found (in part) that South African OD practitioners were more likely than others to use group process interventions and that OD practitioners in high-masculinity environments such as the United States were more likely than others to use training and career development interventions. Head and Sorensen (1993) also studied seven countries to examine the frequency of use and reported effectiveness of OD interventions, concluding that those used most frequently in a country are also generally reported as being the most effective.

What most seem to agree is that the success of an OD intervention in any cultural environment requires a degree of cultural “fit” between the intervention and the country’s values. As Robert, Probst, Martocchio, Drasgow, and Lawler (2000) put it,

The successes of managerial practices and implementation procedures are dependent on an appropriate fit between the assumptions, values, and beliefs inherent in any given managerial practices and the culturally based assumptions, values, and beliefs held by those who are being managed. (p. 643)

This does not mean that interventions that go against the prevailing assumptions of the dominant culture will not be possible, but it may be that they will require greater adaptations. As Lau, McMahan, and Woodman (1996) write, it is more likely that “some OD interventions could find little acceptance in a particular culture while others are easily accepted by the same culture” (p. 6).

We will see examples of this in the next section.

## Case Examples and Research Findings

In this section we will explore examples of OD interventions and recommendations for practice in different countries. Much may have changed in the respective geographies since these cases or analyses first appeared. Clearly this is not a comprehensive review, and not every country, geography, culture, or OD project is included, but these are offered here as examples of practitioners' experiences and research findings in these environments.

## China

Lau (1996) writes that Chinese values of harmony, face, conformity, and ordered relationships imply that large-scale change is risky and failures will mean loss of face, that executives see change as something to be imposed top-down, and that change that addresses relationship issues will be avoided. Within this cultural context, Head, Gong, Ma, Sorensen, and Yaeger (2006) presented 75 Chinese executives with a description of 16 different OD intervention types. For each intervention type, executives were asked to assess the degree to which they would be willing to use that intervention and their perceived assessment of its effectiveness. There was a strong relationship between the respondents' willingness to use an intervention and how effective they thought it would be. Those judged to be most effective included management by objectives (goal setting and performance review), team building, quality of work life, search conferences, and survey feedback. In China, role negotiation, confrontation meetings, third-party consultation, and organization mirror interventions were all judged by executives to be unacceptable interventions in that culture that executives were unwilling to adopt.

## Hong Kong

Lau et al. (1996) compared 70 Hong Kong firms and 110 U.S. firms on the degree to which they used different types of OD interventions. They noted that several OD values, particularly that of a long-term orientation, match those of organizations in Hong Kong and that structure and systems interventions might be most appropriate. They also argued that the unfavorable attitude toward open conflict or criticism would mean that confrontation meetings and other interventions that encourage public statements of negativity would not be accepted, as would large-scale changes that threaten existing structures. However, they advocate team-building activities that begin with task work first, only moving to relationship-building interventions over time.

## Japan

Kjar (2007) writes of a 225-year-old Japanese pharmaceutical firm, Takeda Pharmaceuticals, that established a subsidiary in North America. The challenge in creating a global organization involved developing and integrating systems and practices in both countries. Yet the perspectives of both the U.S. and Japanese organizations are significantly different in several ways: The Japanese parent company creates strategic plans projecting well beyond a 5-year time horizon, and employees are more likely to loyally remain with the employer for a very long time (though jobs may change every few years). Human resources personnel from the Japanese parent and the U.S. subsidiary met for a 4-day summit to discuss how better to integrate the two organizations, eventually settling on (among other programs) succession planning, leadership development, cross-cultural training, and a global engagement survey. They agreed on a set of global operating principles.

Not all interactions proceeded smoothly, however. A survey on cross-cultural work practices was received well in the United States, but in Japan it provoked irritation as protocol had been violated when a senior Japanese officer was not consulted. Over time, greater cross-cultural understanding prevailed, and the team learned that while cultural understanding was important to the development of the relationship, so were fundamental trust-building practices. Rather than finding success or failure in any one intervention technique, Kjar (2007) notes that “the intervention is the means for bringing together individuals and creating synergy from different business contexts” (p. 14). These included face-to-face meetings, small wins, being authentic, and being respectful of practical challenges of language and time zone differences.

## Taiwan

Noting the growth in OD practices in Taiwan over 3 decades, Chung and Klinger (2010) analyzed published research on OD in Taiwan since 1964. They found that three topics dominated the literature: career planning and development, mergers and acquisitions, and Total Quality Management (the latter was the most popular, they found). They argue that TQM is popular internationally and that it is no surprise that those in Taiwan would want to implement quality initiatives, particularly since many electronics products made in Taiwan depend on high quality. Most of the articles in their data set had been published in the previous 3 years, indicating a relatively recent growth of OD practices in Taiwan, and the authors conclude that OD in Taiwan has a promising future.



## India

Tracing the history of OD in India, Rao and Vijayalakshmi (2000) argue that OD should be well accepted due to Indian cultural values that “are largely supportive of organizational renewal and change” but that there has generally been suspicion of OD’s push for confrontation and that “the change agent style of informality and an attitude of openness is also not suited to the Indian context” (p. 52). They note that in the 1980s, when OD first became prominent in India, there were few organizations practicing it, but that in the decades since it has grown considerably, with 10 percent of organizations having institutionalized OD. Six types of OD interventions are especially prevalent in India: training, action research (participative data gathering, problem solving, and implementation of change), survey feedback, HRD audits (described as performance management, career planning, coaching, and team building), role-focused interventions (such as role negotiation), and person-focused interventions (such as 360 feedback and individual instruments). The authors point out several conclusions they have drawn about OD in India:

1. There is a preference for a directive, task-focused approach rather than a relationship-focused approach.
2. It is important to clarify goals and objectives of the intervention, communicate often, achieve small wins, and find ways to sustain enthusiasm.
3. It is important to understand the role of government regulation, particularly in the public sector.
4. Practitioners should link training to long-term goals.
5. Structural change should retain accountability while decreasing bureaucracy.
6. History, culture, and business environment must be considered in the context of change.
7. OD will require patience and flexibility.

In addition, Bhatnagar, Budhwar, Srivastava, and Saini (2010) present a case of organizational change in India. They note that the culture is one of high context, where “work relationships are personalized rather than contractual,” and that the Indian culture is characterized by “submissiveness, fatalism, power consciousness, possessiveness towards subordinates, fear of independent decision making, and resistance to change” (p. 487). Based on in-depth interviews with 30 managers at a utility company in India undergoing major change to understand what factors contributed to successful change in Indian organizations, the authors conclude that support from top leadership was significant, but that perhaps more important were the significant participation of employees in the change process itself, frequent communication about the change with emphasis on the rationale and need for the change, and institutionalizing expected outcomes in the performance assessment process.

Finally, Budhwar and Varma (2011) note several HR management trends that will influence OD practitioners in India, in particular the need to create challenging jobs that younger workers find meaningful in order to continue to motivate them, given that they find that younger workers are highly ambitious. As in the United States, they argue that managing the multigenerational workforce will be a significant trend.



## Africa and the Middle East

Africa is obviously a diverse and heterogeneous continent, and while OD has been practiced in Africa for some time, there is not an extensive literature on how OD has been used in African countries. Merrick Jones and Peter Blunt (1993) write that OD seems “not to have made much of an impact on the managers of African organizations or those international agencies concerned to impose organizational reforms in Africa” (p. 1744). They note that public organizations in particular are resistant to change, and that “there is generally in African public organizations an emphasis on control rather than performance” (p. 1752). Change in Africa, it seems, has not generally succeeded based on the attempt to export Western ideas about change to African culture.

Sulamoyo (2010) describes how OD practitioners might benefit from understanding the African cultural concept of *Ubuntu*. “Ubuntu represents a powerful philosophy and cultural approach whereby Africans view their existence through others in their society” (Sulamoyo, quoted in Yaeger & Sorensen, 2011, p. 50), exemplified by the proverb “*Ubuntu ungamuntu mgabunye abantu*: You do not live for yourself; you live for others.” Ubuntu as a collectivist value encourages empathy and reciprocity in relationships. Sulamoyo (2010) argues against researchers who see Africa as “inhospitable to OD because the culture itself discourages innovation, individualism and openness,” pointing out that these conclusions might be due to how OD has been implemented rather than OD itself, and he argues that “many cultural symbols and practices can be used as important levers for change” (p. 45). However, Ubuntu as a collectivist value in Africa is complex due to an extensive history of racial conflict where groups have been defined on the basis of race. Sulamoyo (2010) outlines the various meanings of Ubuntu and how OD practices of group process, work teams, work design, and team building might be considered advantageous in Africa.

Scholars also mention the use of proverbs as both a lens on African culture and an intervention tool since “proverbs are an integral part of African culture”; they “are guidelines for individual, family, village, and community behavior, built upon repeated real life experiences and observations over long periods of time” (Malunga, quoted in Yaeger & Sorensen, 2011, p. 51). Malunga states that in interventions, “the use of African proverbs . . . presents a new and creative way of communicating and discussing organizational principles that transcends the common communication barriers” (p. 51). For example, Malunga writes that the proverb “when elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers” can signify the destructive results of group conflict and “when spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion” can remind listeners of the benefits of collaboration.

## Ghana

Arthur advises that in Ghana, OD practitioners should “include consultations, discussions, consensus building, and coalition formation. These collective processes of problem solving are practiced in families, communities, and organizations” (quoted in Yaeger & Sorensen, 2011, p. 52). She notes that the culture in Ghana is conducive to team functioning but also the accomplishment of personal objectives, so both individual and group performance measures can be helpful in Africa.

## Egypt

Kenneth Murrell and E. H. Valsan (1985) provide a case study of a team-building workshop in Egypt for the Agricultural Sector Management Development Project. The objective of the project was to build the participants' capacity for working as a team to manage upcoming changes. Consultants began with a data gathering process, first conducting interviews of each team member, and then summarizing and feeding back the opportunities for improvement mentioned by the team. These were presented back in a positive light, since they felt an important practice, "especially in Egypt, is to build the process on a positive note and avoid criticism or a negative tone of evaluation" (p. 13). Consultants organized a workshop designed not only to teach participants about OD but to address the points important to the team, including goals and objectives, role clarification, team relationships, conflict, and rewards and incentives. The authors point out that this approach "is one case of success in a country struggling to develop its people and its resources. The team-building approach puts the emphasis on developing the people in the country so that they can take charge and develop their own country's resources. . . . Management development is the first step in human resource development, which is the most essential step in world development" (p. 16).

## South Africa

In South Africa, Preston, DuToit, Van Zyl, and Holscher (1993) describe an educational intervention intended to address the authoritarian culture and provide nonviolent alternative methods of problem solving, one in a school and another in an educational administration setting. The school intervention used team building to establish relationships among rival groups and invite participants to clarify their values, find points of common agreement, and learn skills in listening and debate. The second intervention helped educational administrators to gain skills in group problem solving, team building, and facilitating interpersonal conflicts. The authors strongly argue for the use of OD skills and practices to achieve social change in South Africa. They have also used this experience to enhance and extend theories about transitional and transformational change (Preston, DuToit, & Barber, 1996).

In another successful application of OD concepts in Africa, scholars from the University of Zimbabwe (Chirozva, Mukamuri, & Manjengwa, 2013) used a scenario planning process to involve local stakeholders in the development of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (GLTFCA) in southern Africa. The GLTFCA crosses Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and South Africa, making it imperative that the local communities participate in designing shared conservation strategies that also improve the livelihoods of local residents. In a scenario planning workshop, participants ranked driving forces important to them, such as access to agricultural facilities, education, employment, and infrastructure. Participants developed desired future narratives and action plans that provided specific strategies to reach their desired future. The facilitators point out that scenario planning “can facilitate the development of creative forums for stakeholders to discuss and determine solutions to some of the livelihood challenges in these areas” but that local adaptation is important to be “‘real,’ understandable, and meaningful to participants” (p. 785).

## Latin America

Magalhaes (1984) notes that OD finds a difficult audience in Latin America, writing that “many of the existing OD techniques are based on conditions of truth, trust, love and collaboration in the organization. In Latin countries, where the bureaucratic model prevails very strongly, these conditions are never found” (p. 21). He points out that the power distance and bureaucratic designs of most Latin American organizations would challenge the ability of an OD consultant to form the necessary partnership relationship needed to be successful with both clients and organizational members. Magalhaes concludes that the successful application of “OD in Latin countries would necessarily have to start with strong emphasis on changing old structures or introducing new ones” (p. 21) since revolutionary change is the norm.

By contrast to Magalhaes’s argument, Cole et al. (2013) offer an example of OD work in a hospital in Bolivia, pointing out that their experience was that “the language of organization development was universally applicable in the Bolivian context” (p. 42). Students in an OD graduate program in the United States worked with hospital administrators who wanted to address regulatory challenges and inefficiencies in processes and roles at the hospital. Administrators also wanted to focus on the future and to become an exemplary hospital in the community. The authors note that administrators initially expected the OD consultant to act like other “expert” management consultants who would offer both a diagnosis and solutions, so it was important to clarify the role of the OD consultant in the project. The consultants realized that despite the typical preference for hierarchy and top-down mandates for change in Bolivia, there would be an opportunity and a benefit in this engagement to encourage hospital staff to hear from staff directly about what motivated them in their work at the hospital. Interventions included a World Café and appreciative inquiry to invite participation from many members of the hospital staff. The project may have been unusual for many hospital staff since “partaking in the bottom-up development of the hospital’s future was unprecedented” for them “in the traditional hierarchical nature of the system” (p. 41). In the end, consultants learned that “the need to be creative and allow the time to be flexible was essential in the Bolivian culture” (p. 41), while administrators learned techniques to encourage staff participation and methods to solicit previously unheard voices.

## United Kingdom and Ireland

Sweetman and Gooding (2012) echo some of Steele's (1977) conclusions about the challenges in conducting OD in the UK, but they also note that the "demand for OD consultancy and learning is robust and practitioners are taking on new challenges in a positive way" (p. 74) as demand is increasing. They write that in the UK, OD is still seen as "an emerging field with relatively weak identity and visibility" (p. 72). You may recall that the sociotechnical systems perspective in OD began in the UK (in conjunction with its founding organization, the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations), so frequently OD has "a tendency to focus on task with an attention on behavior as a means to achieve the task" (p. 72). Sweetman and Gooding write that seven OD interventions tend to be the most frequently used in the UK: change management, leadership development, culture change, coaching, learning and development, employee engagement, and large-scale interventions. As evidence of the use and prevalence of these interventions, both Tanser and Lee (2012) and Watson and Cormack (2012) describe successful large-scale leadership development and culture change initiatives in the UK. Head (1994) has written that in Ireland, "participation/involvement appears to be a useful intervention" (p. 62; recall the employee participation case in [Chapter 1](#)), and that structural interventions and management development and career development interventions are also frequently used.

Neumann (2012) reflected on OD in the UK, noting that she learned "that doing OD in UK meant noticing micro and macro simultaneously. British people often articulate how enabled or constrained they feel by larger systems in their lives" (p. 14). She also notes that OD has multiple meanings in the UK, that it can refer to a wide variety of perspectives and approaches, and that clients often ask her to specify the country in which she has worked—England, Wales, Scotland, or Northern Ireland—"to acknowledge the many ways in which they say, 'we are different'" (p. 16).



## Beyond Single Cultures: Multicultural OD

To this point we have seen examples of OD programs and research findings as they have been applied or implemented in one culture, but what happens when multiple national cultures are involved? Raz (2009) shares an example of OD that exemplifies the cultural work involved in conducting OD in a global environment. The project was at a South Korean subsidiary of an Israeli global corporation. In Hofstede's terms, South Korea and Israel share cultural values of collectivism (Israel's higher individualism score reflects a simultaneous interest in individual integrity but within the social culture of the kibbutz), but they differ significantly in power distance. Raz writes that instead of national culture being deterministic of workplace behavior, the subsidiary developed a local culture that moderated national cultural preferences with a flexible and occasionally context-dependent approach. The OD intervention, a set of change workshops to develop a participative management approach, became the site where these multiple cultural ambiguities were worked out. Raz concludes that "the participative change was successful because it resolved cultural contradictions rather than strengthened dichotomies" (p. 299).

## Advice for the Global OD Practitioner

In the case study example that opens this chapter, the students found success in adapting organization development practices to the Chinese business environment. The authors conclude that because of the similarity in examining national culture and the more familiar concept of organizational culture,

all OD is cross-cultural. This begs the question, “Isn’t effective cross cultural OD just good OD?” Our answer is yes. Yet, cross-cultural OD is good OD . . . and something more. Cross-cultural OD is distinguished by its intensity. It is OD on steroids. Cultural differences and language barriers magnify the OD process. (Nyberg & Jensen, 2009, p. 334)

Clearly the OD process and intervention types we have discussed throughout this book are complicated by their implementation in a global cross-cultural environment.

We may never be able to conclusively say which interventions are universally applicable or which always fail in different countries. Indeed, Lau et al. (1996) have advised that “it is too simple to assert that OD interventions are appropriate or not appropriate to certain cultures” (p. 17). It may be that an outcome-based view (What will or will not succeed based on culture alone?) is probably not as helpful as a process-based view (How should OD practitioners proceed sensibly when working in a global environment?). OD practitioners will also need to continue to build their awareness of the ways that different interventions can be adapted to different cultures. At the very minimum, practitioners today must “be aware of their own cultural value orientation, the value orientation of organization development, and the value orientation of the culture in which they are working” (Yaeger et al., 2006, pp. 77–78). What may be needed is not any universal approach, but a contextual perspective that “allows one to assess the appropriateness of particular levers and processes for managing change to a particular situation” (Evans, 1989, p. 11). In a global context, this would also include considering cultural dimensions or preferences that impact how organizational members are likely to view the practitioner and the change process.

Several authors offer useful advice about how to proceed with a global OD intervention:

1. **Conduct a “cultural diagnosis” (Steele, 1977, p. 30) about the nature of change and perceptions of OD in the client environment.** Consider how a cross-cultural or multicultural setting might involve similarities or contradictions among the six cultural dimensions between organizational members and the practitioner, and “evaluate the rankings of the dimensions of culture in the given situation” (Jaeger, 1986, p. 189). Ask, “How is organization development perceived in the host nation? Do the native managers have biases for, or against, certain models and interventions? How am I to be perceived, by the client, as an organization development consultant?” (Yaeger et al., 2006, p. 40). “Is the nature of change (and relevant interventions) contradictory or complementary to the basic values of the affected group?” (Lau, 1996, p. 76).
2. **Consider stability of the cultural values, within-country variation, and organizational cultural**

**differences.** “Make a judgment as to which values are the most deeply held and unlikely to change” (Jaeger, 1986, p. 189). Consider within-country variation in subcultures or regions, which reminds us that any broad conclusions about OD in different cultures ought to be understood as broad trends that may miss subtle nuances. Are there differences in organizational culture that might be more important than national culture? Robert et al. (2000) note that national culture affects organizational culture, but that the latter “may represent more salient and proximal sets of norms, beliefs, and values that affect behavior” (p. 656).

3. **Consider what interventions might work in the given context for the relevant problem, and “evaluate the problem-appropriate interventions rankings on the dimensions of culture” (Jaeger, 1986, p. 189).** Learn what other practitioners have done and where they have found success, and if possible, discuss your judgment with the client. Ask, “What is the appropriate organization development process? What needs to be modified?” (Yaeger et al., 1996, p. 41). Consider how two OD practitioners might work together to conduct the intervention, one representing the native culture and one representing a visiting culture, if applicable.
4. **Consider the match between culture and intervention choice.** “Choose the intervention that would clash least with the most rigidly held values” (Jaeger, 1986, p. 189). Consider the degree of fit of the intervention, since “OD applications always have to deal with the fit between interventions and cultures, but the prime concern is with the subcultures of specific organizations or their subunits, as contrasted with the society or national culture in which the organization is embedded” (Golembiewski, 1991, p. 51).
5. **Adapt as necessary.** “Incorporate process modifications in the proposed intervention to fit with the given cultural situation” (Jaeger, 1986, p. 189). Many recommendations about adapting OD interventions fall into what Thatchenkery (2006) calls a “diffused” mind-set where the OD practitioner develops interventions specific to the local context but where the practitioner is unable to integrate cultural perspectives into a global mind-set. Instead of direct adaptation to the host culture, Thatchenkery writes of a “synchronous OD” practitioner who “understands and accurately judges the local cultural subtleties and at the same time is aware of the overall picture to create the necessary long-lasting changes in the organization” (p. 401). Challenged with multiple options about which intervention choice to make, the synchronous OD practitioner “is able to differentiate the cultural contour of client systems and yet come to actions that integrate the diverse perspectives emerging out of the differentiation” (p. 401). Global multicultural OD adaptation “seems to require thinking at both the international and local levels simultaneously. Intervention strategies need to reflect both integration and differentiation, usually across and between multiple boundaries of time, territory, task, nation, and culture. The role of locals as change agents may be more important than the carriers of ideas flying in and back out in a few days” (Neumann et al., 2009, p. 184).

Some argue that in a flat world where increasing globalization is creating a single global monoculture, there is no need to pay attention to cultural differences. Taras et al. (2011) counter that while there is some evidence that cultures are indeed changing and adopting Western perspectives, “we now have plenty of evidence to suggest that national cultural differences remain, despite the talk of flat worlds and Internet-fueled mega-

cultures” (p. 196). The consequences of not being mindful about culture are significant, they write, since “if management systems are devised without regard for culture or blindly generalized from one cultural environment to another, the result is often conflict, misunderstanding, dissatisfaction, undermined morale, and high turnover” (p. 196). Others, however, argue that a review of the literature demonstrates that there is more likelihood for success than failure. As Sorensen and Yaeger (2014) have written:

We might add that as the evidence continues to build over the years, our view of the relationship between OD and international values has changed. Our initial view, heavily influenced by Jaeger’s work, led us to organize our work in terms of national cultural values most and least compatible with the values of OD. Our thinking today is more optimistic; there is greater latitude and opportunity for the application of OD across national cultural boundaries. (p. 58)

## Summary

In an increasingly global and multicultural work environment, many OD practitioners are finding themselves collaborating with clients and teams that are composed of multiple cultures. They are challenged to develop interventions and client relationships using concepts and theories that may not be adaptable to the local context. Hofstede's cultural dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism–collectivism, masculinity–femininity, short-term–long-term orientation, and indulgence–restraint provide a set of lenses to differentiate cultures and offer at least one framework to understand the cultural compatibility of OD. This may also explain why some practitioners prefer certain interventions over others in various countries. To work with a cross-cultural OD intervention, many scholars advise conducting a cultural diagnosis by examining the culture's position on the six culture dimensions, selecting an intervention that seems to fit, and adapting as necessary, appreciating the local cultural requirements and integrating across cultures. Being conscious of cultural change and variation seems to be the responsible choice for an OD practitioner.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Reflect on a cross-cultural experience or interaction you have had. What challenges did you find in that experience? What could have made that interaction smoother?
2. What are some of the ways that you have seen globalization at play, either in your personal life or in your workplace?
3. Choose an intervention described in Chapters 10 through 13. Considering the cultural dimensions we have discussed, how might that intervention be used or adapted in one of the countries described in this chapter?

## For Further Reading

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Neumann, J. E., Lau, C. M., & Worley, C. G. (2009). Ready for consideration: International organization development and change as an emerging field of practice. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 45(2), 171–185.

Sorensen, P. F., Jr., Head, T. C., Mathys, N. J., Preston, J., & Cooperrider, D. (Eds.). (1995). *Global and international organization development*. Champaign, IL: Stipes.

Yaeger, T. F., Head, T. C., & Sorensen, P. F. (2006). *Global organization development: Managing unprecedented change*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

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## Case Study 8: A Global Partnership at GFAC Consulting

Read the GFAC Consulting case and answer the following questions:

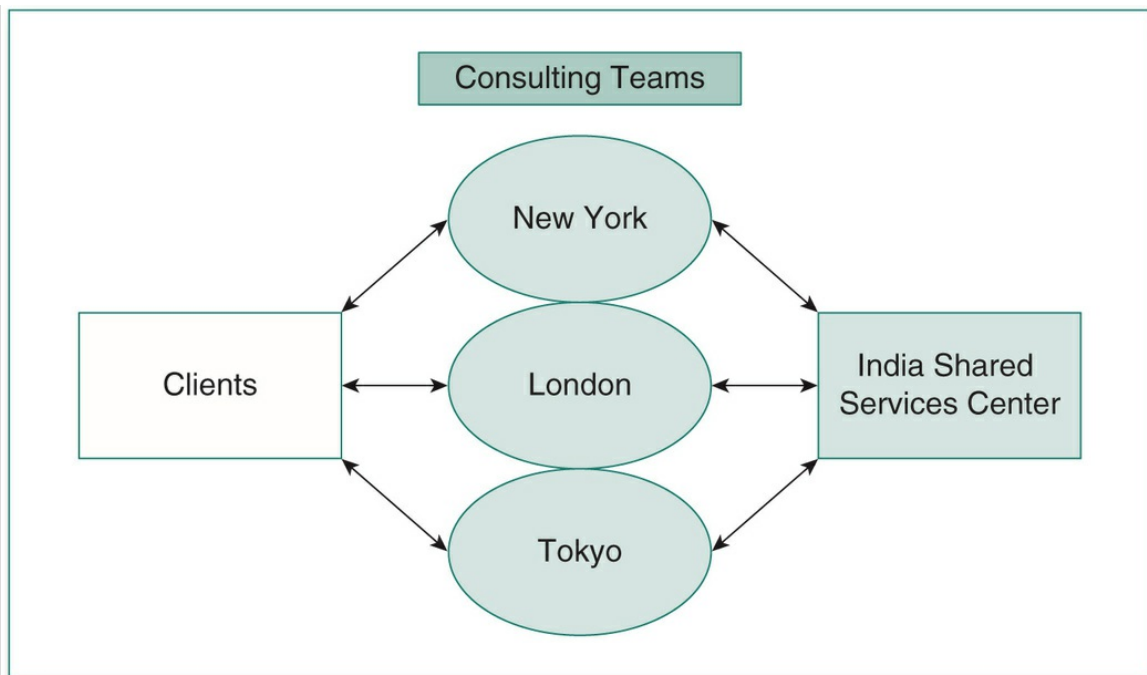
- What are the different sources of conflict between the two groups?
- What role do national culture and organizational culture play in this conflict?
- What intervention approach might you take in this case?

Global Financial Advising Consultants (GFAC) is a financial services consulting firm headquartered in New York City, with offices in London and Tokyo. GFAC provides outsourced financial services to multinational corporations to advise them in areas such as tax strategies and subsidiary financial structures. The company is structured as a set of global consulting teams led by a senior consultant that work with just one or two clients in depth in order to best understand their business structure and detailed financials. The senior consultants analyze the financial situation of the client company to provide advice and counsel.

Every GFAC employee worldwide goes through a rigorous orientation program to ensure that all employees understand the company's core values of "(1) Above all, client partnerships and satisfaction, (2) Operate with agility, (3) Dedication to team, (4) Respect and integrity, and (5) Sustainable long-term results." During orientation, employees watch a video showing the company president, Mark Rhoades, telling an apocryphal story of a client relationship early in the company's history that is intended to reinforce these core values. Apparently one consulting team was preparing to make a big presentation, and it spent an entire night in the New York office poring through financial reports for a large and important client. At 4 a.m., one of the analysts noted a major discrepancy in the data, and an investigation revealed unethical financial manipulation by the client. The consulting team conferred, and the next morning went into the presentation, immediately notifying the client that GFAC would no longer accept their business. "Sometimes respect, integrity, and sustainable long-term results can only be achieved by going against the grain," Rhoades says in the video. "We can only be partners with our clients as 'one team' if we have integrity."

As a part of the significant analysis work done at GFAC, the senior consultants require a great deal of reporting generated from the client financial software systems, so each consulting team initially had a staff of local analysts who were responsible for managing the reports needed from the systems. Two years ago the company opened a shared services center in India, where the global consulting teams now share a team of financial analysts who produce the necessary reports for the senior consultants. Most of the local financial analysts' jobs were moved to the India center and the local employees were let go. This change was intended to streamline the analysis process and provide global consistency by having one expert reporting team provide the same reports for all consulting teams. (The model is displayed in the figure below.) GFAC hired a staff of advanced professionals in India, most of whom hold public accounting certifications and degrees from India's top business schools.





Implementation of this change has been rocky worldwide, but this new process has not been well received by the New York team in particular. Specifically, the New York team seems to receive reports late (well beyond the agreed-upon deadlines), with errors and in what it terms an “unprofessional” presentation format. Turnover at the India center quickly approached 35 percent to 50 percent, and now most shared services center employees stay employed at GFAC only for an average of 6 months before leaving to a competitor.

You have been invited as an organization development practitioner to help design an intervention that will increase the partnership between the New York and India teams. Following are excerpts taken from interviews with each group. Each interview was conducted by a native of the respective culture.

## New York Team

“It’s impossible to get a direct answer out of them. We are under a tight deadline each week to get the reports produced in enough time for us to prepare for client meetings, and every week we seem to run into another difficulty. I wish they would just tell us when they can’t get them done so we could plan better.”

“There is so much turnover on the team, it’s hard to keep track of who is doing what.”

“I never agreed to this offshoring model in the first place, and I said this was going to happen from the start. We spend much more time and energy trying to work with a team thousands of miles away than when the team was downstairs in this building.”

“We really need to develop a more effective training program for the India team. They have very little idea how to produce a professional report that is ready for a client presentation.”

“They won’t take any action unless I also copy their manager on the e-mail and get the manager to tell them to do something. It is slowing us down, and I don’t understand why it takes so many people to get involved in a simple action.”

“If I press them on whether they can get me the report by Friday, they say yes, but then Friday comes and goes, and I don’t have my report. It will eventually show up over the weekend or on Monday, but I needed it on Friday.”

## India Team

“I find that it is very difficult to understand on our conference calls. They speak so quickly I often cannot understand what they are saying and they are very impatient when we ask them to repeat. Sometimes I cannot even get a word in between them to ask them to repeat, and by the time I do the moment is gone.”

“I think they do not understand our qualifications. Many of us on the team have advanced degrees and can do much more than the simple spreadsheet work they ask us to do. I wish they would trust that we could do more.”

“Often they invite us to participate in calls when it is very late in the evening or early in the morning. They have one standing call at 3:30 a.m. local India time and another at 9 p.m. local time. I am used to the hard work but it seems that if they really wanted us to be part of the team they would appreciate the burden this places on our families.”

“I do not know if it is appropriate for me to say this, but sometimes I feel that I have an idea about a better approach for the work to be done.”

“Recently the program team came here to visit us, which we all very much appreciated. We had a very collaborative meeting and I feel that they listened carefully to our opinion and got to know us better. Unfortunately they came during the week of *Diwali*, which is a major holiday so most people were not in the office, and we had to come in despite wanting to celebrate with our families.”

“They may stop involving us if we say no to their requests, but sometimes they ask us to do the impossible.”

## Chapter 16 The Future of Organization Development

Throughout this book we have seen examples of organization development (OD) interventions in action with individuals, teams, and whole organizations, and you have had the opportunity to apply these new skills through several case studies that represent how organizations face the challenges of change. Organizations today are facing increasing pressures in a challenging environment. This environment makes the interventions to achieve change discussed in previous chapters even more relevant.

In this chapter we will address a few of these challenges, from pressures that exist within and outside the organization, and we will address how OD concepts are relevant to helping organizations through these challenges.

The next sections review three major challenges that organizations face today and relate the relevance of OD to each:

- Increasing complexity of change
- Changing workforce demographics
- Changing nature of work

We will also review the current state of OD theory and practice, what challenges lie ahead for the field, and what the field can do to respond.

## Increasing Complexity of Change

Organizations face incredible pressure to quickly change in a complex and increasingly global environment. It is not just that the amount of change has increased over the past 5 to 10 years, but the speed of change has become even more noticeable. As Friedman (2007) writes,

The experiences of the high-tech companies in the last few decades that failed to navigate the rapid changes brought about in their marketplace . . . may be a warning to all the businesses, institutions, and nation-states that are now facing these inevitable, even predictable changes, but lack the leadership, flexibility, and imagination to adapt—not because they are not smart or aware, but because the speed of change is simply overwhelming them. (p. 49)

Indeed, the changes that organizations are making are more complex than ever. Many scholars note that the majority of these large-scale change initiatives fail to achieve their desired results, placing even more pressure on executives to search for the next major innovation that will help the organization become more competitive (Holbeche, 2006).

Outsourcing and offshoring are perhaps the two most obvious examples of major changes that affect almost every large organization. In fact,

depending on whom you ask, anywhere from one-half to two-thirds of all Fortune 500 companies are already outsourcing and offshoring to China, India, and other countries. If companies are not already [doing so] chances are they're either looking into it or their financial department is asking why they are not. (Kehal & Singh, 2006, p. vii)

Early outsourcing involved relatively simple decisions such as the outsourcing of janitorial services or copy machine maintenance, but in the 1980s a more complex, second generation of outsourcing decisions came into play as more companies outsourced their information technology and non-core manufacturing processes. Even some parts of the organization previously thought to be “immune” to outsourcing are now being outsourced. Outsourcing is not isolated just to IT or payroll; human resources and even legal departments are being outsourced. CAT scans completed in a Vail, Colorado, hospital may now be read and interpreted by a radiologist overseas (Friedman, 2007). Product engineering, marketing, and public relations are all facing outsourcing to some degree (see De Vita & Wang, 2006, for a review of the history of outsourcing).

From an OD perspective, this is significant because familiar ways of working and our commonly held assumptions about work are rapidly disappearing. Organizational boundaries are dissolving. Organizations are now better thought of as loosely coupled systems where suppliers are given unprecedented access and insight into organizational strategies, technologies, proprietary intellectual property, and work sites. This creates such complexity that some scholars are questioning our old assumptions about the very definition of *organization*.

Outsourcing of this magnitude has enormous implications on a system as new processes must be developed and handed over, and staffing changes often accompany the change to justify the financial costs. Changes in the very boundaries of organizations are taking place as networked organizations and joint ventures require a network choreographer to bring together a loosely coupled system. Even though some employees usually stay behind to manage the outsourced relationship, it takes a Herculean effort to get attention, engagement, and motivation to make the change effective. Moreover, old teams are broken up and new teams are formed, requiring attention to team transitions and coping with the loss of friends and former colleagues.

In the face of overwhelming and complex change and high expectations for productivity, the role of the human resources and OD practitioner is more relevant than ever. Consider the tremendous impact on people in this context. OD consultants understand the human dynamics of change and are attuned to the social costs and benefits of organizational challenges. “In a world where change is constant, for organizations to be adaptive decisions must be pushed down the hierarchy and members must be aligned around the same strategic goals. OD practitioners know how to do this” (D. L. Bradford & Burke, 2005, p. 196). As improvements to processes are needed, and outsourcing arrangements mean new ways of working, skilled OD consultants provide a valuable service. They facilitate work redesign sessions and they encourage leaders to follow appropriate communication and change management practices. As organizations cope with increased expectations and struggle to define their futures, OD practitioners can help to structure the kinds of interventions discussed in Chapters 10 through 13 to improve the effectiveness of individuals and groups. Recall Weisbord’s imperative to get the “whole system in the room”—employees, management, customers, suppliers, and the community—in sessions such as future search conferences where a collaborative process increases the likelihood of successful implementation of change.

## Changing Workforce Demographics

A second major trend affecting organizations today relates to the changing diversity of the workplace. You may have heard about the workforce demographic trends starting to hit society, and many of them are indeed staggering. Slowing population growth rates, an increasing proportion of older workers, and a diverse and global workforce are all converging to change the face of the workforce. In 1990, the number of workers 55 and over was 11.9 percent of the working population, a proportion that will rise to 25.2 percent by 2020 (Toossi, 2012). The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that due to the elimination of mandatory retirement, economic uncertainty, and changes in Social Security benefits, the working population is getting older. “The shift in the composition of the labor force from the younger to the older age groups is expected to continue,” writes Toossi (2012, p. 57). Adapting the organization to these demographic changes and being at the forefront of these trends is critical.

Most demographers believe when the first baby boomers begin to retire in substantial numbers, the number of new workers may not be enough to replace them. This has serious implications for the health care system, but consider some of the additional implications. Some analysts predict significant labor shortages even in the next several years. “If all the baby boomers were to retire at traditional retirement age, then there wouldn’t be enough workers to meet the needs of businesses,” write Venneberg and Eversole (2010, p. 4). Where will that knowledge go and where will the skills come from?

HR practitioners and OD consultants can develop programs to account for these changes, such as the mentoring or coaching programs discussed in [Chapter 10](#). Many organizations are developing coaching programs where older workers share their knowledge and experience with the next generation. Others are developing part-time or consulting arrangements for what some call the “new retirement.” Still other organizations are working closely with universities to hire graduates with skills they need, while others are investing in job training for new hires.

In addition, with the changing demographics of the workforce come different work relationships and ways to manage. Some researchers have noted that people belonging to Generation X (those born roughly between 1965 and 1979) and Generation Y (also called Millennials, those born roughly between 1980 and the late 1990s/2000) hold different attitudes about work than those in earlier generations, necessitating new organizational policies and management practices. Baby boomers (those born from 1945 to 1963) now represent 32 percent of the workforce, whereas Generation X represents 27 percent and the Millennials represent 25 percent (Eversole, Venneberg, & Crowder, 2012). Including the Traditionalist generation (those born before 1946) and the newest generation approaching working age, what one set of authors calls Generation 2020 (born after 1997), the workforce is very diverse by age. Summarizing this unprecedented situation, Meister and Willyerd (2010) write, “Never in the history of the modern world have there been four generations—much less five—in the workplace that bring such vastly different sets of values, beliefs, and expectations” (p. 5).

However, most organizational policies and management practices have been created to manage, develop,

attract, and retain workers in ways that no longer fit the needs, expectations, and desires of these new generations. With baby boomers retiring in record numbers (consider that more than 50 percent of the federal workforce is now eligible for retirement, according to Ludwick, 2007), if organizations are to successfully attract and retain the new generations of employees, they will need to make significant changes to compete for talent (O'Bannon, 2001). Examining the expectations and relationships to work and management for Generations X and Millennials can illuminate what these changes might be. [Figure 16.1](#) explores the similarities and differences between Generations X and Millennials on a number of work-relevant dimensions.

At work, Generation X has widely been portrayed as lazy, “slackers,” disloyal, and uncommitted, but Tulgan (2000) emphasizes that such stereotypes are inaccurate and arise from conflicts they experience with poor management. In his interviews with Gen Xers, Tulgan writes that four themes consistently emerge:

Belonging (is this a team where I can make a meaningful contribution?), learning (do I have access to information?), entrepreneurship (is there room in my work to define problems, develop solutions at my own pace, and produce results?), [and] security (am I able to monitor the success rate of my performance, my status at work, and the return on my investment?). (p. 33)

**Figure 16.1** Generation X and Millennials in the Workplace

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Generation X</i>	<i>Millennials</i>
<i>Birth Years</i>	<i>Between 1965 and 1979</i>	<i>Between 1980 and 2000</i>
Attitudes toward work	Independent, free agent mentality toward work Desires to keep skills current Strives for work-life balance Willing to forgo some financial gains and status for personal time Technologically literate	More open than Gen X to leaving if work requirements not met Desires challenging work Wants to meet personal goals Wants flexibility in work Wants to know why before tackling the job Continually wired and connected to digital media
Attitudes toward management	Would rather be left alone to complete tasks Would prefer to learn just-in-time as needed Low confidence in leaders and organizations	Prefers a participative style of management Wants to participate in decision making Desires immediate feedback about performance Respects ability and skills over rank

They value flexibility at work to the point that they will leave for jobs elsewhere when better opportunities present themselves, not expecting lifelong employment with a single company. Thus, they view themselves as “free agents” with the right to move as necessary to make best use of their skills in the right environment. They also value their family and free time and strive for a healthy balance with work. Financial gains are important, but Gen Xers are willing to earn less in order to maintain personal time.



Generations X and Millennials share many similarities but also important differences. For example, while they were both raised close to technology, Millennials tend to be much more advanced with their knowledge of technology, spending 6 hours per day, on average, online (Eisner, 2005) and taking those skills to the workplace, where they multitask at their desks and in meetings. Millennials prize ability and skill development (rather than rank and job titles) and often seek out opportunities for learning. At work, they ask questions frequently with curiosity and a learning approach to their jobs, which can be perceived by their managers as threatening or challenging (Kehrli & Sopp, 2006). They dislike micromanagement yet value access to a manager who can provide immediate feedback and information as necessary. Jamison (2008) writes of four themes that emerge in work with Millennials:

*Recognize me:* “Millennial beliefs that everyone is equal and that everyone should be encouraged to embrace the differences in others . . . are beliefs that can be critically important to organizations struggling with how to leverage differences and build cultures of inclusion in which everyone feels valued.”

*Include me:* “Twentysomethings were brought up to voice opinions and believe that their opinions are valued. . . . Millennials have been accustomed to being involved in decisions that affect them.”

*Challenge me:* “Millennials are multi-taskers . . . [who desire] working on multiple assignments and participating in numerous projects.”

*Work with me:* “Millennials . . . work, think, and create better in groups and bring a collaborative approach to projects and situations.” (p. 56)

A number of management practices are implicated in the expectations and work preferences of Generations X and Millennials. Both generations are likely to hold less loyalty to their employer than did people of previous generations, moving on quickly to new jobs when opportunities arise and the current job is no longer satisfying. Consequently, adapting management styles to their needs will encourage stronger relationships to the organization. Minimally, the work environment should be flexible and ideally virtual, making use of both generations’ technological literacy. Organizationwide communications can be sent through technology with the ability to be downloaded to portable media devices. Training can be delivered through these same methods in short packets of information that can be learned quickly. Managers should design jobs that provide challenge, opportunities to genuinely contribute (rather than put in time or “pay dues”), opportunities to participate in decision making, and opportunities to learn. Managers can follow up with employees by inviting text messages with status updates on projects (Kehrli & Sopp, 2006). Some have noted that despite these management challenges, employees from Generation Y (Millennials) may be easier to manage than those of Generation X. “Gen Y tends to value teamwork and fairness and is likely to be more positive than Gen X on a range of workplace issues including work-life balance, performance reviews, and availability of supervisors” (Eisner, 2005, p. 9). Rewards such as additional time off can be valuable retention mechanisms.

Last, employers would do well to consider the future workforce. Today’s teenagers (so named Generation 2020 to refer to the year in which they will graduate college and enter the workforce) have grown up in a hyperconnected world, and this experience will translate to values and expectations at work. One study highlighted the technology expectations of Gen 2020:

- 66 percent want the freedom to get an education anywhere on Earth, even through their phone.
- 57 percent of smartphone users and 29 percent of regular cell phone users said they carry their cell phone because it is how they stay connected to their world.
- 59 percent want mobile access to help them organize their volunteering opportunities and corporate social responsibilities. (Meister & Willyerd, 2010, p. 53)

With most Gen 2020ers expecting to interact with their organizations through mobile technology, organizations must consider the ways that this expectation will change the nature of work responsibilities, management, recruitment, team communication, retention, and more.

To cite a final example of the changes in workforce demographics, based on the 2010 census, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that half of the nation's population growth since 1990 was due to immigration. There is increasing diversity in the U.S. workplace and an increasing trend toward global teams and virtual teams. Local and global workforce diversity must prompt organizations to take seriously the need for training and dialogue to develop understanding among people of different backgrounds. Diverse organizations contain the seeds of diverse ideas, and when these ideas have an opportunity to be surfaced and are considered seriously, the organization has a greater likelihood of developing more innovative solutions. An organization that does not reflect these population trends or does not take them seriously is not likely to succeed for long. It also magnifies the complexities of working in a team environment.

OD practitioners who understand the complexities of global teaming (recall our discussions of team effectiveness in [Chapter 11](#)) are helping to design team interventions to maximize team effectiveness and helping teams become explicit about their roles and assumptions about how they work. OD consultants who work with clients and organizational teams can help managers “recognize that all employees cannot be managed the same way. Individual employees, especially those from different generations or at different life stages, have different needs, goals, and motivators” (Eversole et al., 2012, p. 618). Whether the challenges are between individuals of different age groups or cultural backgrounds, OD practitioners can work with teams and organizations to facilitate effective communication and enhance collaboration.

## Changing Nature of Work

A third major trend is influenced by these changing workforce demographics. Work itself is changing. The 40-hour work week, with a 30-year career in one job for a single organization and a gold watch as a gift on retirement, is the exception rather than the rule. As discussed in [Chapter 10](#), most people now have multiple careers, with little need for a long-term tie to one organization—mirroring the loyalty that organizations often have for employees. Years of workplace downsizing and ever-reducing benefits have created what one study calls a “simmering malaise” (“Fast Forward,” 2003), noting that when the economy improves, anger and dissatisfaction remain among employees still on the job. As Holbeche (2006) puts it, “This erosion of trust has undermined the basis of both commitment to the organization and higher levels of motivation” (p. 15).

As we discussed in [Chapter 2](#), the new term for this is *employee engagement*, and some studies show disconcerting trends. Almost half of all Americans can be described as disengaged in their work; that is, they are not described as willing to put in discretionary effort to go above and beyond to perform at a high level (Saks, 2006). The solution is not simply to pay people more or find ways to make them “happy.” Researchers are finding that those factors seem to play a less important role than ever in engagement, particularly among newer generations. As one set of researchers put it,

Employees are emotionally and cognitively engaged when they know what is expected of them, have what they need to do their work, have opportunities to feel an impact and fulfillment in their work, perceive that they are part of something significant with coworkers whom they trust, and have chances to improve and develop. (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002, p. 269)

What people report seeking in a job are accountability, autonomy, strong leadership, a sense of control, and opportunities for development. This is the reason why some believe that engagement is the highest in the nonprofit sector. A sense of a larger mission and passion for work is what many people desire.

Because of these desires to find a workplace that matches their own schedules and values, people are making new choices, redefining the very meaning of work and career. Consider just a few ways that this is happening:

- Almost 16 million Americans, or “about 1 in 9 workers” according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Hipple, 2010, p. 17), are fully self-employed, and four in five organizations report that they will increase their use of flexible workers (“Intuit 2020 Report,” 2010). The Career Advisory Board projects that by 2020 as many as 1 in 2 workers will be independent contractors or will do at least some contract work. It is now frequently difficult to tell the difference between an employee and a contractor in many organizations. Microsoft, for example, has such a volume of current and past contract employees that contractors at one point developed an online community devoted to those who have “orange badges” (special colored badges that distinguish contract from noncontract employees). Holbeche (2006) writes, “In some businesses, managing contractors and consultants is increasingly the norm rather than the exception” (p. 43). Many workers choose to work for themselves, setting their own hours and choosing

their own work locations.

- More people are making the choice to work part-time, work flexible hours, or telecommute. About 24 percent of all full-time employees did some work at home according to a recent report (Noonan & Glass, 2012), and more than 33 million employees telecommute at least once a month (Hodges, 2009). Technology changes now allow some employees to work from anywhere, making the term *telecommuting* somewhat outdated (Regenold, 2009). According to Lawler (2011), “IBM is among an increasing number of companies where close to 50 percent of employees have no regular office space; instead, they telecommute and use hoteling offices, depending upon where they are at a particular time” (p. 304). There is evidence that this increase in flexibility comes at a cost as well, as the availability of work-from-anywhere scenarios may add hours to the workday, and “the ability of employees to work at home may actually allow employers to raise expectations for work availability during evenings and weekends and foster longer workdays and workweeks” (Noonan & Glass, 2012, p. 45).
- In some organizations, the fixed job description with a set of meticulously itemized work tasks has become obsolete. These organizations encourage “individuals to design a career that meets their needs” (Lawler, 2011, p. 305) by creating a flexible role that matches their skills and interests. One example of this trend can be found at W. L. Gore, where the company “has allowed individuals to create their own jobs by creating projects and building work groups” (Lawler, 2011, p. 304). These approaches take individual differences, skills, and interests into account by allowing employees to take a significant amount of responsibility to select how their career direction changes (and how often) and how their roles can best match their talents.
- As more employees work at a distance from one another, team dynamics change. In fact, global and virtual teaming has already become the norm: Virtual teams exist in more than half of all large companies (Martins, Gilson, & Maynard, 2004). Tammy Johns and Lynda Gratton (2013) report that “experts project that within a few years, more than 1.3 billion people will work virtually” (p. 68), forcing employers to rethink the structure of jobs and physical offices, and that this rise in virtual work requires us to learn how to ensure “that the value gained by tapping world-class talent sources is not lost in clumsy handoffs” (p. 72). Indeed, as Gratton (2011) puts it, “one of the overwhelming aspects of the future of work is the need to work collaboratively across boundaries” (p. 253).

Consider the implications of these trends on working conditions and collaboration. With more fluid boundaries of organizational membership and greater physical distance comes an increase in social isolation in the workplace (Richardson, 2008). With increasingly mobile employees, changing teams and managers, and a decreasing loyalty and engagement in work, organizations may have no choice but to learn and adopt some of the fundamental values of OD to survive. While it may be a start to develop part-time work arrangements or telecommuting policies, there are fundamental values changes needed as well. If organizations are to survive, their basic leadership and management values must change. This is where the values of OD work collide with some commonly held management practices (recall our discussion of OD values in [Chapter 3](#)). Hierarchical command and control management must give way to participative management and teamwork, competition must give way to collaboration, and the growth and development of the individual must be taken into account. Many organizations are rethinking their tall hierarchies, seeking new ways of designing organizations for

involvement, participation, and empowerment.

OD practitioners have several ways that they can help in the current environment. They can coach managers and leaders ([Chapter 10](#)) to help them learn new ways of managing in the current environment. They can develop employee participation programs that will grow and develop the skills of individuals, engage them in their work, and create passion for the organization. They can help design new structures and enhance them with effective lateral coordination mechanisms ([Chapter 12](#)). They can confront leaders with hard truths, addressing systemic conflicts and creating cultures of collaboration (through effective feedback mechanisms as described in [Chapter 10](#) or cultural change as illustrated in [Chapter 12](#)). As people change and teams form, work, and dissolve, OD practitioners who understand the dynamics of teamwork and the uncertainty in changing social relationships facilitate the healthy start-up of new teams through transition meetings and team-building activities ([Chapter 11](#)). Left to their own trial and error, sorting through interpersonal issues on their own, a new team can take months to develop their work processes or understand roles and relationships. With the help of an OD consultant, this time can be cut significantly, and employees tend to have a greater tie to the team with greater engagement and satisfaction.

## OD and Technology

It is obvious that technology is allowing the world to become more connected. As more and more of our clients use technology to connect employees around the globe, OD practitioners must become familiar with the benefits and challenges of technological connection. As a field dedicated in part to helping employees collaborate, coordinate, and relate to one another more effectively, OD has a tremendous opportunity to understand how to use technology to do so while we also help build face-to-face relationships. As Townsend et al. (2008) put it,

Companies have not yet learned how to develop the rich conversations and deep trust that can be achieved through face to face engagement. . . . Our challenge as OD practitioners is to help people engage in generative conversations and leverage emotions despite being challenged by constant change, new technology and numerous cultural differences . . . and help them build trust in the wired world. (p. 63)

Technology in itself is not the end, but it is often the means to engage people in a new collaborative way.

OD has been influenced by technological developments in many areas such as data gathering in employee surveys and 360 feedback; employee development such as training, distance coaching, and mentoring; and OD work methods themselves, through virtual work and distance communications (Church, Gilbert, Oliver, Paquet, & Surface, 2002; Tippins, 2002). OD practitioners commonly administer employee surveys using electronic and Web-based methods, and they frequently use Internet-based assessment tools in 360 feedback and individual instruments. Virtual coaching and mentoring at a distance are now commonplace. Church et al. (2002) describe an intervention at PepsiCo in which career development and individual performance tools were implemented through an internal website. A new culture of individual growth and development was

created in which individuals had access unlike ever before to a wealth of personal development and career resources.

As organizations change their uses of technology, OD practitioners will need to continue to evolve methods for using technology to conduct OD interventions with virtual teams and at a distance. Familiar OD “technologies” such as whiteboards and flip charts can be enhanced with social networking and distance collaboration tools, and more clients will expect OD practitioners to be adaptable to the needs of virtual teams (Church et al., 2002). The success of such efforts likely will depend heavily on the organization’s familiarity with technology. Practitioners will need to be educated on how organizational members use technology, when and why they might reject an intervention using technology, and what tradeoffs exist in conducting interventions virtually versus face-to-face. Speake (2008) argues that OD needs to move into the digital world to create “Cyber-OD qualified professionals” (p. 60) who can use technology to facilitate collaboration.

As an example, technology is changing the face of familiar OD events such as workshops, meetings, and conferences. Consider a traditional workshop meeting of a Fortune 100 company described by Lind and Danskin (2008). The typical annual meeting invited 350 leaders to listen attentively as executives delivered presentations on past results, upcoming business goals, and the company’s strategic direction, with little opportunity to interact. The meeting has now been transformed into an interactive and vibrant event where participants meeting in small groups can share immediate feedback and opinions using a groupware system.

Online tools such as wikis and asynchronous discussion forums can enhance workshops—or substitute for them—by providing a place for members to share ideas, edit documents, and debate action plans. The addition of technology to workshops—“Meetings 2.0”—creates a new environment where participants who are physically present and those who are not can collaborate equally, enhancing the traditional workshop format through new ways of gathering information from participants, assessing proposals and surveying participants on those proposals, building and enhancing ideas, and creating follow-up teams. Online platforms hold the repository of all of this history and the files created from it. Such meetings can enhance engagement and broaden communication, enhancing the possibility for deeper collaboration.

To cite another example of the potential for technology in an OD engagement, McWhorter and Lynham (2014) explain how scenario planning can be done virtually. They point out that in the phases of scenario planning, interviews, surveys, polling features, and social networking platforms can all be used to gather and feed back current state data and environmental scanning practices. Scenario development workshops can be conducted using video- or webconference technology. Scenarios themselves can take the form of virtual worlds or videos. Electronic surveys, bulletin boards, and wikis can help to capture feedback about the scenarios. The authors point out that such a scenario planning project can involve even more people from more locations, enhancing the diversity of the participant population and encouraging a broader range of ideas.

Speake (2008) points out that the traditional role of the OD practitioner can be challenged in these virtual, open, cyberspace meetings. When all participants are physically present, the practitioner can read the interpersonal signs of confusion, disagreement, frustration, and impatience (or energy, enthusiasm, and engagement). When participants are online, these cues are not as easy to recognize. Though online polling

and other tools offer some solutions, they cannot fully substitute for the feedback the practitioner gets from participants in other settings. In addition, not everyone may choose to actively participate as some may be uncomfortable or untrained in this form of communication, so while technology may offer the potential to enhance collaboration, it does not guarantee it. Last, the volume of communication and content produced can quickly overwhelm even the most engaged participant. As technology changes and new forms of communication continue to grow and evolve, OD practitioners must remain attuned to the ways in which people collaborate and connect, and we must be sensitive to the implications for our technology choices in our engagements.

## **The Current State of OD: Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities**

As several authors have put the situation, organization development finds itself at a “crossroads” (Beer, 2014; Worley & Feyerherm, 2003, p. 97). From one perspective, Worley and Feyerherm (2003) argue, the central aim of OD initiatives to assist leaders in implementing change has never been a higher priority for executives. From another perspective, the traditional work and values of OD appear to lack the urgency needed by executives today. Despite the relevance of OD to address the challenges of the current environment, OD practice has not responded quickly enough to meet contemporary demands.

Several studies of OD practitioners and executives have been undertaken to determine the strengths, weaknesses, and potential opportunities for OD to add more value to organizations. Wirtenberg and associates (Wirtenberg, Abrams, & Ott, 2004; Wirtenberg, Lipsky, Abrams, Conway, & Slepian, 2007) report on research conducted by the Global Committee on the Future of Organization Development, a consortium sponsored by major professional associations involved in OD. Shull, Church, and Burke (2013, 2014) report on a survey of almost 400 internal, external, and academic OD practitioners from a variety of professional organizations.



## Strengths of OD Practice Today

The following are some of the strengths of OD that were mentioned by practitioners:

- The systemic orientation that practitioners bring
- Their ability to assist in managing change
- The techniques and processes they use (i.e., supporting teamwork and leadership development)
- Humanistic values that underlie OD practice (Wirtenberg et al., 2007, p. 12)

In addition, in an in-depth set of interviews with OD practitioners, Worley and Feyerherm (2003) found that the practitioners attributed their success to several skills and abilities, including broad education, training, experience, interpersonal skills, and a clear knowledge of self. Practitioners today are motivated to improve organizations and society, and appear to be optimistic about the direction of the field. A commitment to traditional values such as openness, empowerment, and participation remain strong in the field today (Shull, Church, & Burke, 2013).

## Weaknesses in OD Practice Today

Nonetheless, despite these strengths, business leaders often do not select an OD practitioner when faced with implementing a major change (Wirtenberg et al., 2007). Studies of practitioners and executives report several weaknesses with how OD is practiced today:

- Different practitioners define and practice OD differently. Intervention typologies are inconsistent and the boundaries are fluid between OD and other fields such as organizational behavior, management, and psychology (Worley & Feyerherm, 2003).
- OD practitioners have a tendency to rapidly adopt the latest intervention techniques and technologies, perhaps without fully considering their use or impact. Some practitioners “expressed concern that OD was jumping on bandwagons and in doing so risked its identity” (Worley & Feyerherm, 2003, p. 112).
- OD values are challenged by prevailing business-oriented values of efficiency, profitability, and productivity, which are rising above OD’s historical values of humanism, participation, and democracy. As a result, OD practitioners struggle with how to reconcile situations in which these values conflict with each other.
- There is not a consistent set of skills and competencies required to be an OD practitioner, and a single certification path does not exist.
- While practitioners find themselves facilitating meetings, conducting Myers-Briggs sessions, coaching individuals, and resolving conflicts, these are not systemic change activities (Burke & Bradford, 2005). Beer (2014) argues that “softer interventions aimed at improving interpersonal relationships and group effectiveness are overrepresented in the intervention repertoire of OD practitioners. Harder interventions aimed at performance alignment such as strategy development processes, organization design, work system design, and the design of strategic management processes for goal setting, prioritization and resource allocation are underrepresented” (p. 61).
- OD needs to sort out its relationship with HR colleagues. Some believe that departments of organization development in most companies are hidden within human resources departments, reducing their influence (Burke & Bradford, 2005). In addition, “in organizations around the world, the HR function is monopolizing the OD function at an unprecedented pace, which is limiting our reach, blunting our effectiveness, and compromising our role” (Minahan, 2010, p. 18).
- While studies that evaluate the effectiveness of OD interventions show promising results, clients continue to demand evidence of OD’s value, and “the credibility of OD depends on being able to demonstrate robustly the effectiveness of the various OD methods, i.e., what works, where does it work and how does it work?” (Burnes & Cooke, 2012, p. 1415).
- Newer practitioners report a weakening of traditional OD values, and more tenured practitioners tend to believe that newer practitioners lack the theoretical background needed (Shull, Church, & Burke, 2013).



## Opportunities for OD in the Future

Organization development can continue its evolution and better adapt to the needs of contemporary organizational challenges if it makes several changes. Several writers have noted that OD should make both content and process changes, and some trends indicate this is already occurring in several areas. Others observe that not much is changing. In a study of OD practitioners done in the 1990s and again in 2012, Shull, Church, and Burke (2013) note that not much had changed in practitioner responses between the two administrations of the survey, wondering whether the field was becoming complacent.

Greiner and Cummings (2005) review OD's history and current practice and draw a parallel between an earlier crisis in OD and today. They show that in the 1970s, when OD narrowed its focus, it was initially unable to adapt to the changing conditions in many organizations and lost support among managers and executives. While the field eventually responded, the current state of OD points to six new red flags that they believe point to both OD's lack of relevance today and future opportunities for OD to create "integrative solutions to the major issues facing tomorrow's organizations" (Greiner & Cummings, 2005, p. 108):

- Neglected involvement in top-management decision making
- Neglected involvement in strategy formulation
- Neglected involvement in mergers and acquisitions
- Neglected involvement in globalization
- Neglected involvement in alliances and virtual organizations
- Neglected involvement in corporate governance and personal integrity

Burke (2011) draws a distinction between organization development (OD; the field that addresses planned organizational changes) and the field of organization development and change (ODC; the more academic-oriented field that deals with both planned and unplanned changes). In doing so, he points out that the field of OD has developed few innovations in recent years but that the influence of the ODC community has opened opportunities for innovation in four areas:

1. An understanding of loosely coupled systems, where change is continuous, emergent, improvisational, and small scale
2. The development of new techniques and tools to change organizational culture, which must be more than identifying a desired set of shared values; instead, practitioners must work to translate these values into behaviors so that "the emphasis needs to be on these key behaviors not so much on the values and desired culture per se" (Burke, 2011, p. 152)
3. A new understanding of resistance, as discussed in [Chapter 8](#), where resistance is not an objective truth outside the change agent–organizational member relationship
4. A new way of developing leaders which is less about training programs and more about a set of stages in the development of a leader who can reflect and learn from challenging assignments

Researchers and practitioners have noted several other ways that OD practitioners can enhance their practice

and add more value. Improvements in leadership will be a constant need, so one trend will be “building leadership capacity now and for the future” (Wirtenberg et al., 2007, p. 15). Part of this capacity building will involve helping leaders with the complexity of managing change in a global environment. Practitioners and researchers know that not all processes for managing change and not all OD interventions work equally well in all cultures. “Global organization development practitioners have the discerning ability to encounter and overcome cross-culture complexities while accomplishing successful global organization development work” (Yaeger, Head, & Sorensen, 2006, p. 134).

Others note that in the future of the OD practitioner role, business skills will be highly important. Many OD practitioners lack deep business training and thus lack background knowledge of finance, customers and market needs, competitive opportunities and threats, and more. As a result, they may not be sufficiently aware of the business context for a change to be able to speak credibly with a client or potential client in the client’s language, linking OD outcomes with business needs and results. Increasing business knowledge and developing interventions that address contemporary business issues will increase the value that the OD practitioner can provide, such as “effectively addressing organizational culture during organizational realignments, industry consolidations and mergers and acquisitions” (Wirtenberg et al., 2007, p. 15).

Adapting OD to the needs of the organization will require delivering value on a shorter time scale and learning how to balance classic techniques with new interventions, and to “rely a lot less on techniques and jumping on the latest fad” (Worley & Feyerherm, 2003, p. 104). This may involve practitioners learning how to adapt OD values to contemporary needs rather than insist on a set of humanistic values as appropriate in every situation. The question is whether the field can remain relevant to contemporary organizations and at the same time keep a core set of concepts and values that practitioners share. OD’s emphasis on its humanistic values (those explored in [Chapter 3](#)) may contradict some of the changes that practitioners are asked to implement. The field must struggle with the issue of how practitioners should balance the need to assist clients in making difficult business decisions (such as outsourcing, layoffs, and site closures) with OD’s presumption that organizational members should be involved and participate in decisions that affect them.

Greiner, Motamedi, and Jamieson (2011) write that future consulting relationships will change as the role of the consultant changes: “Content must be integrated with process toward finding action solutions quickly and acted upon with full commitment. Consultants, operating in a fast response mode, will help their clients create solutions through collective knowledge generating rapid and consensual decisions” (p. 167). They write of new consulting types: (1) a “facilitator consultant” who helps members rapidly and openly discuss and reach agreement, but also integrate content expertise by selecting topics for discussion and influencing the agenda, and (2) “transorg” consultants who specialize in building cooperative cross-organization relationships to negotiate rapid action among a diverse group of stakeholders in multiple organizations. They point out that the new consulting roles require new processes of networking, guided involvement, and constructive social dialogue to help organizational members engage in effective dialogue, build relationships, negotiate difficulty, and collaborate. They argue that these new consulting roles will rely on content expertise more than OD has traditionally done in the past.

## OD and Sustainability

In recent years there has been a growing interest and acknowledgment that OD practitioners have a role to play in the move to create sustainable organizations and communities. OD has historically aimed to affect both the social and economic aspects of organizations, and this new call has been for OD to embrace a “triple bottom line” of social, economic, and environmental responsibility (or people, profit, and planet). How can organizations minimize their impact on the planet? How can they go even further to proactively contribute to a healthier environment and community? Responding to these questions is a major challenge, due in no small part to the diverse beliefs and opinions about the problem itself:

At one extreme are those contesting the scientific consensus that global warming is occurring and/or that human activity has contributed to it. They tend to deny corporate accountability for remedying the situation or any other ills caused by toxicity, pollution, or social injustice. At the other end of the continuum are firms that have made a fundamental commitment to build a more sustainable future, and see it as the right business model to bring us out of this mess. (S. A. Mohrman & Worley, 2010, p. 289)

Laszlo and Laszlo (2011) explain that many organizations begin their work toward sustainability by first complying with mandated regulations in a “business as usual” capacity, for example, to recycle, reduce their emissions and pollution into the atmosphere, or eliminate certain environmentally toxic or hazardous materials in their products. This reactive compliance to reduce the ecological damage the organization inflicts can be contrasted with organizations that intend to proactively create healthy ecosystems. Laszlo and Laszlo call this a “sustainability as usual” capacity where sustainable practices become a systemic part of the organization.

There is also evidence that the sustainability movement will be particularly important for the newest generations entering the workforce, who are attracted to work for organizations that engage in socially responsible practices. Meister and Willyerd (2010) write that

organizations that pay attention to their environmental impact can attract a generation who were sensitized to environmental issues in kindergarten. . . . Progressing to a workplace where they have the opportunity to play a proactive role on the issues they care about in the world will be an appealing proposition. (p. 80)

Many OD practitioners who are already attuned to the interconnected nature of systems and experienced at the implementation of large-scale change are drawn to this important cause that makes use of several OD skills:

Our systems thinking skills are going to be sorely needed. Our planning, conflict, creativity, large

group intervention, and many other capabilities are all needed in many quarters already. Resource depletion and economic limits may call us to work towards greater local self-sufficiency. There is much work to do. (Adams, Royal, & Church, 2011, p. 1)

As our clients begin to enhance their isolated sustainability efforts and transform sustainable thinking into their organizational cultures, OD practitioners have a part to play. Specifically, OD practitioners can help in the movement to create sustainable organizations in several ways:

- Drawing upon their motivations for making the world a better place, they can advocate and champion for sustainable organizations (Lawler, 2014)
- Helping organizations to gain agreement on and develop goals and objectives that drive sustainable practices throughout the organization
- Manage external demands of customers and government regulations and decide how to implement changes to current practices
- Harnessing internal employee energies toward the creation of socially responsible organizations
- Aligning and coordinating multiple departments and functions, including engineering, marketing and public relations, operations, finance, and more, as each has a role to play. “Organizations are complex systems that may have difficulty creating solutions alone due to employees getting stuck in silos, daily routines, and not thinking on a systems level about potential solutions. Therein lays the opportunity for sustainable OD” (Yeganeh & Glavas, 2014, p. 224)
- Helping organizations in their work with suppliers, customers, and other formal and informal networks as there is growing recognition that organizations working in isolation may not have the capability or capacity to respond effectively to such a large mandate
- Integrate the sustainability vision into metrics, rewards, and other internal structures, processes, and systems. Epstein and Buhovac (2010) list a number of possible metrics to consider, including volume of hazardous waste used, cost of energy, human rights violations, cost of fines and environmental cleanup, and improved reputation from environmentally sustainable practices

## **Conclusion: The Future of OD**

Just as contemporary organizations struggle with issues of the pace of change, increasing technology, a global and demographically diverse workforce, and changes in work practices and values, so must OD change its own practices to model these new ways of operating for our clients. Opportunities abound, and stubborn adherence to old practices and values will not bring our clients along; it will instead further alienate the field from today's reality. At the same time, OD practices, techniques, and values remain relevant to the needs of contemporary workers. The field's current challenge is how to adapt its practices without abandoning its core precepts.



## Summary

The nature of the organization is changing at the same time that the workforce and the nature of work itself are changing. The intertwined trends described in this chapter are creating an environment that organizations must understand and address if they are to find the path to future sustainability. The new environment requires complex thinking, creativity, and attention to the human dynamics of organizations. As a result, this is a particularly relevant and necessary time to have the skills of a human resources or OD professional, given these challenges. These are not just skills needed by those formally designated with “OD consultant” titles. The skills of OD apply to managers, project managers, and team members.

OD is an optimistic field driven by the possibility that a positive future lies ahead, and that change can be effectively accomplished through the appropriate application of social science theory to organizational practice. It is this optimism that brings many OD practitioners into the field and encourages their ongoing work to help individuals, groups, and whole organizations continue to change and grow. As the world changes and develops, new and multifaceted thorny issues will continue to present themselves, and the field of OD will continue to adapt and grow to find new ways of addressing our new problems.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Do you agree with the characterization of Generation X and Millennials? Why or why not? What implications do you think these preferences for work have for the workplace? How do you prefer to be managed? What do you think a manager needs to do to engage and retain a person in your generation?
2. The chapter reviews sustainability as one area where OD is increasingly playing an important role. Can you think of other opportunities for OD practitioners to apply the skills, values, and concepts you have learned in this book?
3. Can you think of additional ways that OD might make use of technology in an intervention?

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