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A Framework To Map A Practice As Organization Development

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Abstract

Purpose – Characteristics, values and principles of OD make it a distinct and extremely valuable practice for the development of organizations, people and society at large. However, OD has also traditionally remained a hazy field of practice. This paper explores existing ambiguities about OD in practice in Indian organizations, and proposes a framework of guidelines that Indian organization and professionals could use to map and distinguish OD practices.

Design/methodology/approach – Exploratory research based on quantitative primary data collection and secondary data collection from literature review.

Findings – This research paper identified existing ambiguities in distinguishing OD from other business practices such as HR. It helped in developing clarity about distinguishing OD from other consulting practices and HR through a proposed framework of reference for mapping.

Research limitations/implications – The paper is an exploratory study based on Indian OD, HR Training and Talent Management professionals.

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Practical implications – The paper provides insights into the perceptions, theories and practices of organization development; explores existing ambiguities in practice in India and provides a framework that consultants, practitioners and academia could use to map and distinguish a practice as OD. Organizations and practitioners could now leverage the true benefits of OD as a distinct practice having specific values and principles which have ever-increasing significance for wholesome development of organizations, their eco-systems, and people in particular.

Originality/value – The paper is probably the first exploratory research that attempts at providing a comprehensive framework of guidelines that could be used to map a practice as OD.

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1. Introduction

Apart from broad agreements on values and principles, OD has remained a hazy field of practice owing to multiple definitions, approaches, processes, interventions and role overlap with HR. The authors believe that blurred lines between HR, OD, Training and Talent Management, have prevented the significant contribution of OD practices, principles and values from being leveraged by the practitioners in India, to the wholesome development of organizations and society at large. Therefore, this article explores multiple approaches, frameworks, roles and interventions of OD and proposes a framework of broad guidelines that could be used for mapping a practice to qualify it as OD.

The first part of the article is based on the exploratory research that prompted the need for a framework that practitioners could use to qualify a practice as OD. It comprises of literature review that delineates an array of definitions, approaches and overlapping roles of OD with HR; and outcome of the secondary data collected from the practitioners based in India. The first part outlines the hazy nature of OD as a practice that the authors believe to be the reason for OD not being leveraged to its full potential by the practitioners for the inclusive development of people, organizations and society at large. The second part of the article filters diverse OD practices and proposes a framework of guidelines that could be used to qualify a practice as OD.

In this part, the researchers explore multiple definitions and practices of OD that lead to the hazy nature of OD; and then further explore whether the same uncertainty about how OD practice is different from other business consulting practices, HR, Training and Talent Management; prevails in India.
2. Organization Development

Organization Development has been defined in many different ways, primarily owing to its sundry nature of practice and multiple theoretical perspectives. The following are the known definitions of Organization Development:

“An effort planned organization wide and managed from the top, to increase organizational effectiveness and health through planned interventions in the organizations’ processes using behavioral science knowledge”. (Beckhard, 1969)

“OD is a planned effort, initiated by process specialists to help an organization develop its diagnostic skills, coping capabilities, linkage strategies in the form of temporary and semi-permanent systems and a culture of mutuality”. (Pareek, 1975)

“OD is a systematic effort, using behavioral science knowledge and skill, to change or transform the organization to a new state”. (Beckhard, 1999)

“OD is a response to change, a complex educational strategy intended to change the beliefs, attitudes, values, and structure of an organization so that they can better adapt to new technologies, markets, and challenges, and the dizzying rate of change itself. OD is an educational strategy employing the widest possible means of experience-based behavior in order to achieve more and better organizational choices in a highly turbulent world.” (Bennis, 1969)

The methodological model for OD is action research; data on the nature of certain problems are systematically collected and then action is taken as a function of what the analyzed data indicates. OD is a process of fundamental change, as opposed to fixing a problem or improving a procedure. To be OD, it must respond to an actual and perceived need for change on the part of the client, involve the client in the planning and implementation of the change, and lead to change in the organization’s culture. (Warner Burke, 1982)

“OD is a system-wide and value based collaborative process of applying behavioral science knowledge to the adaptive development, improvement, and reinforcement of such organizational features as the strategies, structures, processes, people, and cultures that lead to organizational effectiveness” (Bradford, Burke, Seashore and Worley, 2004 as quoted by Warrick, 2005)

“OD…is a long term effort, led and supported by top management, to improve an organization’s visioning, empowerment, learning, and problem solving processes, through an ongoing, collaborative management of organization culture with special emphasis on the culture of intact work teams and other team configurations - utilizing the consultant-facilitator role and the theory and technology of applied behavioral science including action research” (French and Bell, 1999)

The aims of OD are (1) enhancing congruence between organizational structure, process, strategy, people and culture; (2) developing new and creative organizational solutions; and (3) developing the organization’s self-renewal capacity (M. Beer, 1980)

OD is a systematic application of behavioral science knowledge to the planned development and reinforcement of organizational strategies, structures, and processes for improving an organization’s effectiveness. (Cummings and
Worley, 2005)

OD is typically defined as a planned organization-wide kind of program, but its component parts are usually activities that the consultant carries out with individuals or groups, and the attitudes with which these activities are carried out reflect the assumptions that underlie process consultation. (Edgar Schein, 1992)

After examining a lot of definitions Warrick (2005) has offered the following definition: “OD is a planned and collaborative process for understanding, developing, and changing organizations to improve their health, effectiveness and self renewing capabilities” (Warrick, 2005, p 172).

As per the study carried out by Warrick, the most frequently mentioned definition of OD is by Richard Beckhard and it is more widely accepted to be the relevant definition of OD, by the experts (Rothwell and Sullivan, Study by Warrick, 2005).

Apart from these, there are questions such as should organization development be defined? Since that has already been done by numerous experts in the field, there are questions that remain in terms of what is meant by ‘organization’ in OD! Is organization, the entire organization even if it’s a global organization, or should it be a unit or a subsidiary in a country? What is meant by improvement in organizational health? Is it developing organizational resilience to future challenges, is it developing individual resilience, is it improving competence of the organizational members or is it anything and everything that is done by the organizations that will help it in improved performance and/or continuity of success? Waclawski and Church (2002) for example suggest that ‘the field itself has yet to come to agreement on its basic boundaries or parameters... thus for some, OD represents anything and everything that might be offered. Wirtenberg et al. (2004), through a global survey of 6,000 members of various OD networks, identified that there is a lack of definition and distinctiveness in what OD does.

Apart from traditional organization development approaches there are emergent variations organization development approaches such as dialogic approaches (Bushe, G.R., & Marshak, R.J., 2008, 2009). Traditionally organization development process includes diagnosis to identify underlying issues, assumptions and challenges. Dialogic Organization Development is an emergent approach to OD. Examples of Dialogic OD interventions are appreciative inquiry, search conferences, future search, open space.

OD is also applied in organizations of all kinds, communities, government set-ups, social interventions. OD interventions are also used for a wide range of organization development objectives impacting individuals, groups, organizations, communities and society at large. OD is thus, a vast field of practice.

Organizational customers are looking for newer and agile solutions to drive change vs. traditional OD interventions (Bunker, Alban and Lewicki 2004). Some clients, students and practitioners have doubts about Curt Lewin’s model of unfreezing, moving and refreezing for change management being relevant to today’s dynamic business environment. The clients are increasingly using ‘purchase of expertise’ and ‘doctor-patient; models (Edgar Schein) as compared to process consultation models. Emergence of the Dialogic model is suggestive of the contextual factors that bring about changes in the ways in which OD is being practiced.
OD is being practiced in many different ways and by people in different fields, who, may neither be professionally trained to practice OD, nor would they have gone through the formal university education. In some organizations, OD interventions happen in different semblances and may not be badged as OD interventions - Rowland (2007) whereas in others; non-od interventions are labeled as OD. The terms used in OD are unclear to many practitioners. OD also lacks a standard robust theory about organizational change (Cummings and Worley, 2001; Worley and Feyerherm, 2003; Boonstra, 2004; Bradford and Burke, 2004; Wirtenberg et al., 2004; Marshak, 2005). Lack of clarity about what organization means in OD, such as whether it should be entire organization, or an SBU, or a department, a plant or a country office or a cluster of all these, needs to be addressed. OD as a field and profession has generated diversity of approaches and methods (Mirvis, 2006; Marshak and Grant, 2008).

Whole-systems approaches such as strategic scenario planning, whole-scale change and appreciative inquiry are now being used over and above individual and small-group dynamics (Van Nistelrooij and De Wilde, 2008). These new OD practices are taken to be applicable not only to interpersonal matters, but also to more strategic issues (Sminia and Van Nistelrooij, 2006). Anchored into humane values, OD interventions are, in general, used to enhance organizational performance (Burke, 1987; Jamieson and Worley, 2008).

3. OD and HR

In addition to the definitions that abound, there is ambiguity about HR and OD. Dialogues on whether OD should be a sub-function of HR or not, differences between OD and HR, differences in roles and competencies of HR and OD professionals have been going on for a long time. Many service providers and clients use OD and HR casually and interchangeably and their services are overlapping in the minds of many consultants and clients. (2010 Martin Goldberg and Claudy Jules)

Internal OD practitioners are usually buried within the HR function and lack contact with senior executives (Burke, 2004). In India, training, learning, change management, organizational change, are interchangeably used for OD.

Based on all these differences and ambiguities; the researchers carried out a survey to explore if the same ambiguities prevail in India through the following problem statement.

4. Problem Statement

“Whether traditional ambiguity prevalent in OD still prevails in practice in India?”

5. Hypothesis

Traditional diversity and complexity of OD practice has resulted into lack of clarity about the qualification of a practice, as OD practice; in Indian organizations
6. Research Methodology

Primary data were obtained through surveys and interviews from internal and external OD consultants, managers in HR, OD, Training and Talent Management selected randomly. Secondary data were obtained from the review of relevant literature such as research papers, books, articles, expert interviews, views, and discussions. Qualitative survey questioners used close ended questions to obtain data from the simple random sample of practitioners and managers in the fields of OD, HR, Training and Talent Management. Qualitative survey questionnaire was sent to more than two hundred and fifty OD, HR, Training and Talent Management professionals, which generated responses from sixty two professionals. In addition, twenty five professionals in OD, HR, Training and Talent Management were interviewed for qualitative data.

7. Findings

The data analysis provided the following results:

| Percentage of Respondents | The respondents believe that |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 80%                       | any activity that helps improve top-line and bottom-line is OD intervention |
| 64%                       | They have dedicated/separate OD function |
| 68%                       | Their OD reports to HR |
| 56%                       | Their Training team manages OD |
| 56%                       | Their OD head reports to HR Head |
| 36%                       | Their Talent management team manages OD |
| 13.9%                     | OD is a practice |
| 9.8%                      | OD and HR are independent and separate functions |
| 67.2%                     | Townhall meetings and training programs such as selling skills, communication skills, etc. are OD interventions |
| 17.8%                     | They use OD for change management |
| 75.6%                     | All training programs are OD |
| 41%                       | They use talent management, career management and training program such as personal effectiveness as OD interventions |
| 6.2%                      | They use fish-bowl meetings as OD interventions |

The data analysis corroborates prevailing uncertainty amongst OD professionals about how OD practice is distinct from other business consulting practices and HR, training and talent management. We therefore developed a framework that the professionals in the arena of OD, HR, Talent Management and training could use to map their practice and distinguish an OD practice from the other practices.
8. Proposed Framework

In order to help the OD practitioners distinguish their practices by mapping them with a framework in order to leverage the truly significant benefits of OD values and principles, the researchers hereby propose a framework of guidelines that they could use to map their practice as OD.

9. Organization Development

While there are multiple definitions of OD, Richard Bekhard’s definition of OD is widely accepted as the most relevant definition even in today’s context. Terms such as planned change, usage of behavioral science and social science knowledge, consulting process, organization-wide changes in structure, process, and culture, uses OD values and principles, improves organizational health and effectiveness; are distinctly associated with OD.

Warrick (2005) from his research identified the following characteristics and values of OD:

1. Recognizes what you change and how you change as equally important, and emphasizes health, effectiveness, and adaptability of an organization.
2. OD can be used with all sizes of organizations and at all levels of an organization.
3. Recognizes the dynamic process of change, and that change takes time and quick fix solutions rarely last.
4. Approaches change from systems or big picture perspective, and considers interrelatedness of various systems and components.
5. OD is an interdisciplinary approach and draws heavily from behavioral science knowledge.
6. OD is data driven.
7. OD uses action research process and involves key stakeholders.
8. OD is typically facilitated by professionally trained change agents who believe in helping others to discover solutions to their own issues rather than dictating what should be done.
9. OD is a value driven approach that seeks to instill values and build cultures that bring out the best in people.
10. OD is a collaborative top down and bottom up process.
11. OD is an education based strategy.
12. OD is committed to transference of knowledge and skills.
13. OD emphasizes the importance of reliable feedback in monitoring and managing the change process.

10. OD Values

There is a consensus that OD is a value based profession. The researchers propose the following values to be associated with OD consulting practice.
**OD values (Warrick 2005)**

1. Development
2. Professionalism
3. Helping people and organizations
4. Respect to all individuals
5. Inclusion, collaboration and participation
6. Open, honest and candid communications
7. Authenticity
8. Inquiry
9. Community
10. Diversity
11. Personal and organization awareness, growth and learning
12. Experimentation
13. Creating a realistic hope
14. Integrity
15. Confidentiality

Values mentioned by French & Bell and Cummings & Worley

1. Humanistic
2. Democratic
3. Client-Centered
4. Socio-Ecological Systems Orientation

Values proposed by Yaeger, Head, & Sorensen

1. Social Justice
2. Ethics

**11. OD and HR**

The basic difference between HR and OD is that they treat people differently. While HR deals with people as resources, OD deals with people as persons. While OD regards people to be the lifeblood of the organization, HR regards people to be the instruments to meet organizational objectives. (Martin Goldberg and Claudy Jules, 2010)

With increasing theories, research and practices on OD and HR as professions, both OD and HR professionals and clients are increasingly being clear about the distinctions, similarities and interdependencies of both the professions.
While HR is a function, OD should not be considered a function but a field of practice. (TV Rao, 2010).

Dave Hanna argues that OD and HR should not be housed together as HR could be a force against the change that OD is mandated to realize. (Dave Hanna, 2010). OD is a distinct field of practice (Cummings & Worley, 2005; Marshak, 2009; Feyerherm & Worley, 2009; Rothwell, et al., 2009).

This article proposes the following clarity in a nutshell from the haziness of OD and HR

1. While HR knows what is to be done, OD knows how it is to be done. This also provides guideline for the difference in competency of HR and OD professionals
2. OD should not be a sub-function of HD but a field of practice housed separately from HR
3. OD should directly report to the top management in order to effectively plan, drive and institutionalize change and transformation
4. OD and HR are distinct but interdependent

12. Characteristics of OD Interventions

Characteristics proposed by T.V.Rao, could be used to discern an intervention as OD:

a) It should be planned (unplanned activities and problem solving efforts are not OD).
b) It follows a sequential process. Burke (1982) presented the following eight steps of entry: start up, diagnosis or assessment and feedback, action planning, interventions, evaluation including an assessment of change and improvements, adoption and separation or disengagement.
c) It should be long term. Short term interventions, one time activities and specific time bound tasks or problem solving experiences by themselves are not OD.
d) It should aim at the whole organization. The organization may be a sub-unit within the unit but the whole of it must be dealt with. Tinkering with the small unit of a unit cannot be considered as OD. Can improvements in delegation by the top management through a task force be considered OD? The answer is No. the same may be considered as OD if it is initiated by a specialist
e) Should start from the top. This ensures seriousness and implementation.
f) Should be based on behavioral science knowledge. Should be a collaborative effort between the organization and the facilitator (external or internal)
g) Should be value based
h) Should aim at improvements in the organization which means change, effectiveness, vision, any one or more aspects of the organization functioning
i) Top management should be aware of, and committed to the OD effort
Traditional OD approaches are based on diagnosis and action research, dialogic approaches such as search conference and appreciative inquiry, as well as socio economic approach to management (Sorensen and Therese F. Yaeger, Henri Savall, Veronique Zardet, Marc Bonnet and Michel Peron, 2010) are now increasingly being used. This guideline proposes that an intervention that excludes the diagnosis step, but meets other criteria such as planned change based on values to improve organizational health and effectiveness should be considered as OD intervention.

Apart from traditional individual and group focused interventions, OD is now increasingly being used for large group interventions. Over the years, there has been a rapid and steady increase of interest in spirituality at work (Cavanagh, 1999; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Ashmos and Duchon, 2000). Paradigms such as positivity, ethics, spirituality, reducing organizational incivility are all important OD interventions. This framework thus proposes that such interventions meeting the criteria as proposed by TV Rao be considered as OD interventions.

13. Caveats and Limitations

The proposed framework of guidelines is based on the study of data analysis of the professionals in the field of OD, HR, Talent Management, and Training in Indian organizations. The framework provides broad guidelines as the author believes that the field of OD as a practice is too wide to be confined to a model, which leaves a scope for differing interpretation of the framework and empirical testing of the framework for its utility.

14. Scope for further study

The interpretation of guidelines for empirically testing the framework is proposed. Further refinement of the framework based on the empirical testing could be explored. The study could be extended global organizations.

15. Summary and Conclusion

Proposed framework needs to be evaluated empirically to test its efficacy and to improve it further. The researchers invite OD researchers and practitioners to carry out similar study in other countries and provide further insights into the differing perspectives on OD. The researchers also invite OD practitioners to implement this framework and compare how OD is practiced globally. There is a need to study recent OD practices globally using the proposed framework, to draw important lessons on current OD practices to explore the possibility of standardization of OD practices.

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