



Organization Development, Transformation, and Change

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What are organization development (OD), transformation, and change? Why should you care about them? What key terms are associated with OD, transformation, and change? What is systems thinking, and why is it important to OD practitioners? This first chapter addresses these concepts and related questions.

WHAT ARE ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT, TRANSFORMATION, AND CHANGE?

Organization development (OD) helps people in organizations plan how to deal with changes in their environment. Before we define it more precisely, try the following exercise. Get paper and write down the first thing that comes to your mind in response to each question:

1. *Who* should be involved in an organization change effort, and how should they be involved?
2. *Who* should decide about how a change effort of any kind is launched? Implemented continually? Evaluated?
3. *What* do you believe about change in the world and today's organizations?
4. *What* does transformation mean to you?

5. *What* do you believe are the biggest challenges facing decision makers in organization change efforts?
6. *What* do you believe are your strengths and developmental needs in enacting the role of helper to others in a change effort? What do you do especially well? What do you wish to develop to become a more effective change agent? On what basis do you believe as you do?
7. *When* do you believe that a group of people might need an external facilitator in a change effort?
8. *Why* should OD, transformation, and change be a focus for managers? Other groups?
9. *How* should change be defined? Marketed? Launched? Implemented? Evaluated?
10. *How* have you reacted or felt in the past to change in an organization in which you have been employed or to which you have been a consultant?

Now identify a few professional peers or colleagues and pose these questions to them. Use this activity as a warm-up exercise to focus your thinking and understanding about OD, transformation, and change. When you finish, continue reading because many of your answers may *change*.

Organization Development Defined

Over the years, OD has been defined by many scholars, and each definition has a different emphasis. A few definitions are presented chronologically as follows:

Organization development is “an effort (1) planned, (2) organization-wide, 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” (Beckhard 1969, 9).

Warner Burke said, “Most people in the field agree that OD involves consultants who work to help clients improve their organizations by applying knowledge from the behavioral sciences—psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, and other related disciplines. Most would also agree that OD implies change; and, if we accept that shifts in the way an organization functions suggest that change has occurred, then, broadly defined, OD is analogous to organizational change” (Burke 1982, 3).

Organization development is “a system-wide application and transfer of behavioral science knowledge to the planned development, improvement, and reinforcement of the strategies, structures, and process that lead to organization effectiveness” (Cummings and Worley 2015, 2).

These definitions imply several key themes. First, OD is long-range in perspective. Second, OD works best when supported by senior leadership. Third,

OD effects change primarily, although not exclusively, through education. Fourth, OD emphasizes employee participation in assessing the current state and in planning for a positive future state; making free and collaborative choices on how implementation should proceed; and, empowering the system to take responsibility for creating and evaluating results.

What Organization Development Is Not

OD is not a toolkit filled with canned tricks, piecemeal programs, gimmicks, techniques, and methodologies. As Cummings and Worley (2015) write, “The human resource function tends to provide change management skills through traditional training programs, not through a learning-by-doing process that has been so effective in OD” (145). OD involves people in change and does not coerce them into doing that which they vehemently oppose. Ideas for what and how to change come from everyone and not just managers.

OD is not a mindless application of someone else’s best practice. It uses one’s whole self, encountering the full and quantum living system. Living systems comprise vibrant communities and changing networks (formal and informal) that practice feedback, self-organization, continuous change, and learning. OD is not about short-term manipulation to achieve immediate financial gains. Instead, OD is interactive, relational, participative, and engaging.

Effective trainers are often understood to be in control of a management development effort. But facilitators of organization change are not in control of the change effort. Instead, they *facilitate* collaboration with internal partners. Facilitators learn, shift, and change with the organization. Successful change efforts require an ebb and flow.

Transformation and Change Management Defined

Transformation means to transcend from a static state. The translation of *trans* means to transcend or rise above. When an organization transforms, it is going through a transformation process that is “primarily the performance of the organization that is mediated via the performance of both groups and individuals” (Palmer, Dunford, and Akin 2009, 128). Noel Tichy and Mary Anne Devanna, in their classic work of 1986, outline a three-step process for transforming organizations: (1) revitalize, (2) create a new vision, and (3) institutionalize the change. Transformation brings about dynamic change in an organization. Hence, there is a connection to OD and transformation. Transformation is viewed in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Change is part of organizational life, and the sustainability and growth of an organization depends on change and transformation. *Change management* means the process of helping individuals, groups, or organizations change.

The word “management” implies an effort to best manage and implement the change. Warner Burke (2008) believes, “The change that occurs in organization is, for the most part, unplanned and gradual” (1).

Burke further states, “Planned organization change, especially on a large scale, affecting the entire system, is unusual; not exactly an everyday occurrence” (1). Planned change has always been a key component of OD (Marshak 2006). Change can happen at any level, and this is examined in Part Three of this book. Many of the most popular OD interventions, techniques, and methods involving the whole system are presented throughout this book.

WHY CARE ABOUT OD AND CHANGE?

According to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, “There is nothing permanent but change.” By that he meant that everything is always in flux.

The recent radical changes in global markets and national economies show that the world is becoming more interconnected and economies and industries are global. We will likely experience more change during the next few decades than has been experienced since the beginning of civilization. We can expect more confusion in our organizations attempting to cope with change than at any other time in history.

Why Is Change Occurring So Fast?

The challenge of the future is to help people learn to ride the waves of transformation and change in real-time and as events unfold. Time has become important precisely because changing technology provides strategic advantages to organizations that understand the importance of timely action. Today, the organization that makes it to market first often seizes the lion’s share of the market and is likely to keep it. And, organizations that miss technological innovations that increase production speed or improve quality lose out to global competitors who function in a world where differences in labor costs can easily be taken advantage of because of the relative ease of international travel and communication.

Changing technology is also a driver for the information explosion—and vice versa. Consider the sheer magnitude and pace of the information explosion stimulated by technological change. The quantity of information is increasing so fast that no one can keep pace with it. The information created and consumed over the past 30 years are far greater than what was produced over the previous 5,000 years. “Researchers estimate that global information consumption exceeds 9,570,000,000,000,000,000 bytes (or 9.57 zetabytes) per year.

In other words, if this information were a stack of books, it would measure 5.6 billion miles and would stretch from Earth to Neptune 20 times over” (Smith 2011, para. 2). The information stored on the Internet is huge because it is not on one computer but on a network comprising millions of computers. No one, not even Google or MSN, has successfully indexed or cataloged the entire Internet because it is so vast (see www.barbarafeldman.com, *Where Is All the Data Stored?*).

People have different ways of responding to information overload and change. One approach is to give up. Another approach is to multitask. But efforts to cope with the effects of change by trying to do more than one thing at a time are causing additional problems. Multitasking can reduce productivity because it may take as much as 50 percent longer to process two tasks performed simultaneously than it takes to do them one after the other (Rubinstein, Meyer, and Evans 2001).

What Effects Are Those Changes Having?

There are many effects of change.

One effect is that change begets more change. As organization leaders struggle to meet competitive challenges, they search for ways to slash cycle times for product development, chase fads to discover new ways to gain advantage, and struggle with efforts to manage too many simultaneously implemented initiatives and improvement programs.

A second effect is that the turbulent changes in the environment (political, economic, technological, and social) have prompted increasing cynicism about change, an emerging theme in the literature about change management (Bruhn et al. 2001; Stanley, Meyer, and Topolnytsky 2005). Cynicism about change means that workers and managers increasingly question the motives of those who sponsor, champion, or drive change. Cynicism about the motives of other people erodes trust and confidence in organizational leaders. A growing number of scandals in business, government, education, the media, and the church only reinforce that cynicism. Conspiracy theorists also intensify that cynicism about why events happen and what motives are behind them.

A third effect is growing stress on individuals and their families. As the rate and magnitude of change increase, individuals struggle to keep up emotionally and cognitively. Their stressed-out feelings about change, if expressed, occasionally erupt in increased alcohol abuse, drug abuse, workplace violence, domestic violence, suicide rates, heart disease, and even cancer (Magyar 2003). Stress may also prompt increasing instances of “desk rage” (Wulfhorst 2008), create push-back through growing interest in work/life balance programs, and encourage people to seek innovative ways to work that distance them from others.

So Why Should Anyone Care?

The field of OD can help an organization anticipate, adapt, and respond to transformation and change at any level: individual, team, department, organization, and even society. According to Cummings and Worley (2015), “OD is both a professional field of social action and an area of scientific inquiry” (p. 1) that we feel can positively impact human and organizational effectiveness and performance. So people should care about OD because it is rapidly emerging as the leading business topic—if not *the* key business topic—on how to handle transformation and change effectively.

The ability to lead and manage transformation and change successfully sets leaders apart from followers. A study by the Center for Creative Leadership on “Essential Leadership Skills for Leading Change” (2006) found the ability to lead employees is number one, and the ability to manage change is number two (whereas they were number 1 and 7, respectively, in the 2002 study) as requirements for continued success and competent change leadership. As the pace increases, the field of OD is experimenting with the idea that “transformational leadership” skills will be essential at every level of the organization. OD processes create ways to empower all levels and categories of workers to become leaders and innovators within their own spheres of influence to positively impact others and the organization’s performance.

WHAT SPECIAL TERMS ARE USED IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT?

As in every other field of endeavor, OD has its own special terms. Although these terms can create barriers to understanding and may be sources of suspicion for those not versed in them, the following terms are useful to know in communicating with others.

Organization Change

Change is a departure from the status quo. It implies movement toward a goal, an idealized state, or a vision of what should be, and movement away from present conditions, beliefs, or attitudes. Different degrees of change exist. In a classic discussion on that topic, Golembiewski (1990) distinguished among three levels of change:

1. *Alpha change* implies constant progress, a shift from a prechange state to a postchange state in which variables and measurement remain constant. It is sometimes associated with incremental change.
2. *Beta change* implies variable progress, a shift from a prechange state to a postchange state in which variables and measurement methods

themselves change. As members of an organization participate in a change effort, they learn of emerging issues that were unknown to them at the outset. The members change their vision of what should be and alter the course of the change effort itself.

3. *Gamma change* implies, besides beta change, a radical shift from what was originally defined as a prechange state and a postchange state. It is sometimes called transformational change, a radical alteration from the status quo, a quantum leap or paradigm shift. It involves a complete revolution in “how we do things” or “what results we strive to achieve.”

Anderson and Anderson (2010) provide another classic perspective on levels or types of change. They distinguish among:

Developmental change: “[It] represents the improvement of an existing skill, method, performance standard, or condition that for some reason does not measure up to current or future needs” (34).

Transitional change: “Rather than simply improve what is, transitional change replaces what is with something entirely different” (35).

Transformational change: It is the “most complex type of change facing organizations today. Simply said, transformation is the radical shift from one state of being to another, so significant that it requires a shift of culture, behavior, and mindset to implement successfully and sustain over time” (39).

Change Agent

In the 1950s, the National Training Laboratories (NTL) founders were in Europe collaborating with the Tavistock Institute. Someone from Tavistock used the phrase “change agent” to describe a person who facilitates change by intervening in groups and organizations. The NTL group used it, and now it is a common phrase among change makers and leaders. OD practitioners are agents who facilitate positive learning, change, and development.

A change agent attempts to facilitate change in an aspect of an organization or an environment. Change agents “are often OD practitioners who assist through their process and OD expertise” (Jones and Brazzel 2014, 117). These practitioners may be internal or external to the organization. A major impact of this new age of continuous change on the field of OD is on the role and tasks of the “change agents” themselves. While OD practitioners have most often been defined as “facilitators” of change (rather than “leaders”), the complexity of every individual environment in which OD practitioners work demands a more “facilitative” and even “educational” approach to helping the system identify and plan for new ways of functioning and relating. The major reason for this shift is that people internal to any organization must learn how to cope with

the changing rate of change. Without this approach of imbedding the OD skills in the system itself, we see high rates of “failure” reported.

In response to this reality, it is interesting to note that Drucker took the term “change agent” to a new level. As the classic definition above states, the phrase traditionally refers to a *person*. But management pundit Drucker (2004) challenges us now to see the *organization* as change agent. In his conscious shifting of meaning we attach to the work “change,” Drucker tapped into the emerging idea in OD that “change” is not an event, but the constant state in which we live. While the rate of change may vary as in any living system from the human body to the universe, once change ends, the living system is dead! Change is the water we swim in. OD is a process for enabling human systems to embrace and continuously build upon the changes that are an inevitable part of a living system.

Client. The *client* is the organization, group, or individuals whose interests the change agent primarily serves. Although OD practitioners often think of the client as the one who authorized the change effort and pays their bills, they are not always certain whose purposes are to be served. A key question for any OD practitioner to consider is “Who is the client?” (Varney 1977). Occasionally, the “client” may not be the one who originally sponsored or participated in the change effort. Again, in this new era, the potential exists for the whole system to be the client.

Culture. One focal point of OD is changing an organization’s *culture*. Prior to the early 1980s, culture was restricted to anthropology and OD circles, but culture became a popular buzzword after the publication of *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life* by Deal and Kennedy (1982) and *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America’s Best-Run Companies* by Peters and Waterman (1982). Peters and Waterman provided numerous examples demonstrating the importance of culture in many of the best-known and best-run companies in the United States. Corporate culture means: “Basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic ‘taken-for-granted’ fashion an organization’s view of itself and its environment. These assumptions and beliefs are learned responses to a group’s problems. They come to be taken for granted because they solve those problems repeatedly and reliably” (Schein 1985, 6).

Intervention. In the nomenclature of OD, an *intervention* is a change effort or a change process. It implies an intentional entry into an ongoing system. Cummings and Worley (2015) define intervention as “a sequence of activities, actions, and events intended to help an organization improve its performance and effectiveness” (157). It is the implementation or execution phases of a change effort.

Sponsor. A *sponsor* underwrites, legitimizes, and champions a change effort or OD intervention. Sponsor tactics can include listening, supporting, developing, empowering, or promoting a person or group as capable. It can include verbalizing positive impressions and images regarding performance, expression of feelings of goodwill, or promoting acceptance, or making statements of capability, or the likeability of a person or group. Of necessity, sponsorship is not a one-time gesture.

Stakeholder. A *stakeholder* is anyone who has a stake in an OD intervention. Stakeholders are the people who maintain an interest in the organization's success or failure. Stakeholders may be employees, board members, customers, suppliers, distributors, and government regulators.

WHAT IS SYSTEMS THINKING AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

In the simplest sense, a *system* comprises interdependent components (Burke 1980). Organizations may be viewed as social systems because they depend on interactions among people (Katz and Kahn 1978). In addition, any organization that gives and takes information from the environment is an *open system*. Organizations take in *inputs* (customer requirements, raw materials, capital, information, or people), appreciate value through the input of a *transformation process* (production or service-delivery methods), and release them into the environment as *outputs* (finished goods, services, information, or people; see Figure 1.1). This transformation cycle must continue to add value in producing desired results if an organization is to survive.

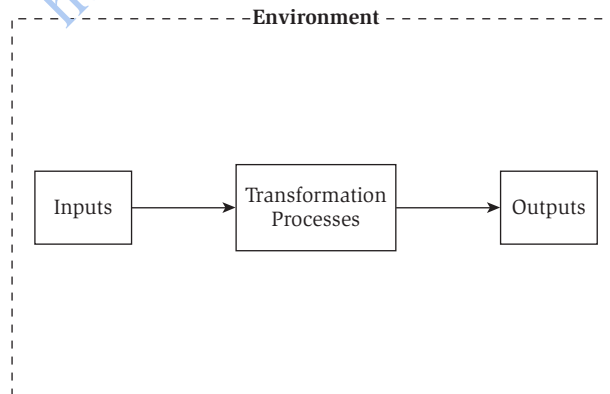


Figure 1.1. A Model of a System

A *subsystem* is part of a larger system. In one sense, subsystems of an organization (a system) may include work units, departments, or divisions. In another sense, subsystems may cut across an organization and encompass activities, processes, or structures. It is possible to focus on an organization's maintenance, adaptive, or managerial subsystems (Katz and Kahn 1978).

Facilitating collaboration with clients is a key competency for OD practitioners. The identity of a system shifts when it creates a new collective and common understanding. The shift creates a culture where many ideas for action will bubble up. Helping the system distill "B" (suboptimal) ideas from "A" (best) ideas is a role much needed today. And, as OD practitioners experiment with whole system processes, the trend is toward "trying out" ideas in multiple experimental processes rather than trying to sort ideas with pre-experimental judgments. It is sometimes the idea we might label "suboptimal" that turns out to be the solution!

Systems thinking is also important to OD because a change in any part of a system inevitably changes other parts of the system. The implications of this simple statement are profound. The change process in any part of a system creates change in all parts of the system. Any change in a system will have both predictable and unpredictable consequences. Mitigating the unpredictable consequences best occurs if all parts of the system are in collaboration throughout the change effort.

WHAT ARE THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT, AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

One way to view the history of OD stresses its emergence from four separate but related behavioral-science applications: (1) laboratory training, (2) survey research and feedback, (3) Tavistock sociotechnical systems, and (4) process consultation. It is worthwhile here to offer a brief view of historical influences to provide readers with essential background information at the start of this handbook.

Laboratory Training

An early precursor of thinking about OD and change, laboratory training is associated with unstructured, small-group sessions in which participants share their experiences and learn from their interactions. Bradford, Gibb, and Benne (1964) explain this application in the following way: "The term 'laboratory' was not idly chosen. A training laboratory is a community dedicated to the

stimulation and support of experimental learning and change. New patterns of behavior are invented and tested in a climate supporting change and protected for the time from the full practical consequences of innovative action in ongoing associations” (3).

Unlike employee-training sessions, which focus on increasing individual knowledge or skill in conformance with the participant’s job requirements, laboratory-training sessions focus on group processes and group dynamics. The first laboratory-training sessions were carried out in the 1940s, the work of the New Britain Workshop in 1946, under the direction of such major social scientists as Kurt Lewin, Kenneth Benne, Leland Bradford, and Ronald Lippitt, stimulated much interest in laboratory training. The leaders and members of the workshop accidentally discovered that providing feedback to groups and individuals at the *end of each day* produced more real learning about group dynamics than did lectures. The groundbreaking work of the New Britain Workshop led to the founding of the National Training Laboratories (NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science).

Early laboratory-training sessions were usually composed of participants from different organizations, a fact that led such groups to be called “stranger T-groups.” (The term *T-group* is an abbreviation of “training group.”) Bradford, Gibb, and Benne (1964) define a T-group as relatively unstructured where individuals participate as learners. The data for learning are not outside these individuals or removed from their immediate experience within the T-group. The data are transactions among members’ behaviors in the group, as they work to create a productive and viable organization and support one another’s learning within that society.

Behavioral scientists later discovered that the participants had difficulty transferring insights and behavioral changes to their work lives. This transfer-of-learning problem increased interest in conducting such sessions in a single organization, a technique that has evolved into what is now called *team building*. Laboratory training was an important forerunner of OD because it focused attention on the dynamics of group or team interaction.

Survey Research and Feedback

Survey research and feedback also contributed to the evolution of OD. This approach to change was developed and refined by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan under the direction of Rensis Likert. Likert directed the Survey Research Center from 1950 to 1970. He became widely recognized for his innovative use of written survey questionnaires to collect information about an organization and its problems, provide feedback to survey respondents, and stimulate joint planning for improvement. This technique is called *survey research and feedback* or *survey-guided development*.

Likert's method evolved when he observed that many organizations seldom used the results from attitude surveys to guide their change efforts. Managers authorized the surveys but did not always act on the results. This "ask-but-don't-act" approach produced greater frustration among employees than not asking for their opinions.

The centerpiece of Likert's approach was a technique called the *interlocking conference*. Survey results were given to top managers during the first conference, and then other conferences were held to inform the organization's successively lower levels. In each conference, group members worked together to establish an action plan to address problems or weaknesses revealed by the survey. This top-down strategy of feedback and performance planning ensured that the action plan devised by each group was tied to those at higher levels.

Likert's views, described in his two seminal books, *New Patterns of Management* (1961) and *The Human Organization* (1967), had a profound influence on OD. He demonstrated how information can be collected from members of an organization and used as the basis for participative problem solving and action planning. In addition, he advocated pursuit of a norm for organizational functioning that has since prompted others to pursue similar norms for organizations.

Tavistock Sociotechnical Systems

Another major contributor to the evolution of OD is Tavistock Sociotechnical Systems. Tavistock, founded in 1920, is a clinic in England. Its earliest work was devoted to family therapy in which both child and parents received simultaneous treatment.

A team of Tavistock researchers experimented in work redesign for coal miners at about the same time that laboratory training was introduced in the United States. Before the experiment, coal miners worked closely in teams of six. They maintained control over who was placed on a team and were rewarded for team production. New technology was introduced to the mine, changing work methods from a team to an individual orientation. The result was a decrease in productivity and an increase in absenteeism. The Tavistock researchers then recommended that the new technology could be used by miners grouped into teams. The researchers' advice, when implemented, improved productivity and restored absenteeism rates to historically low levels in the organization.

Tavistock sociotechnical systems' key contribution to OD was an emphasis on both the social and the technical subsystems. Tavistock researchers believed that organizations are systems composed of key subsystems. One such subsystem is the people in an organization. The other is the nonhuman subsystem. Both must be considered if a change is to succeed.

Process Consultation

A more recent influence on the OD field has been Edgar Schein's (1999) process consultation. *Process consultation* can be defined as the creation of a relationship that permits both the consultant and the client to perceive, understand, and act on the process events that occur in the client's internal and external environment to improve the situation as defined by the client. It involves intervening to improve the ways groups of people work together to achieve results.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we explore the meaning of OD, transformation, and change, with the primary focus on OD. We discuss what OD is and what it is not and define terms that are specific to OD. With these topics and others, it has been our goal to give you a foundation to understanding what OD is, and how OD relates to transformation and change to prepare you for what comes next in this book.

Discussion Questions

1. What are transformation and change management (CM) key components of organization development (OD)?
2. What organizational functions are impacted by OD?
3. What is systems thinking, and why is it important to OD?

Resources

Mind-Blender, from *Psychology Today* website: "Why Is the World Changing So Fast?": www.psychologytoday.com/blog/mind-blender/201403/why-is-the-world-changing-so-fast

Valerie Keller, "Fit for Purpose: Changing in a Changing World," on the *Huffington Post* website: www.huffingtonpost.com/valerie-keller/fit-for-purpose-changing-_b_3697932.html

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