



Organization Development and Change

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What is Organization Development (OD), and why does it matter to you? How does this field as a profession shape people, teams, organizations, and society? What key concepts and terms should you understand to navigate change effectively? And what role do human systems play in the work of OD practitioners? In this opening chapter, we'll explore these questions and foundational ideas.

REFLECTING ON THE FIELD

OD empowers human systems to thrive in a world of constant flux. Rooted in systemic thinking and collaborative engagement, OD offers tools and frameworks to address the complexities of organizational change. To spark reflection and exploration, consider the following foundational questions to frame your understanding and approach to OD.

1. What do you believe about change in organizations, and how does an organization's culture influence its ability to adapt successfully?
2. Who should be involved in driving organizational change efforts, and how can their contributions be optimized for collaborative success?
3. What values, skills, and competencies are essential for effective change agents, and how can they be cultivated?

4. How can the success of change initiatives be defined and measured in ways that go beyond immediate outcomes?
5. What strategies address the emotional and cultural dynamics of change, fostering trust and resilience among employees?

Reflecting on these questions provides a foundation for understanding the principles and practices of OD. By engaging with colleagues or peers to explore these topics, you can deepen your insights and develop a more nuanced approach to leading change. This process highlights the evolving nature of OD, where learning, adaptability, and systemic thinking are integral to creating sustainable organizational improvements. As you progress, remain open to revisiting these questions and refining your perspectives.

Adding the “C” to OD&C

The addition of “Change” to Organization Development (OD), resulting in the Organization Development and Change (OD&C) Division within the Academy of Management (AOM), reflects an evolving understanding of the field. The Academy of Management is the leading professional association dedicated to advancing the field of management and organization science. Founded in 1936, it is the preeminent global community for management and organization scholars. This shift to adding the “C” acknowledges that effective organization development involves navigating and implementing change processes. In making this modification, the ODC Division emphasizes its commitment to the scholarship and practice of inclusive change, highlighting the dynamic nature of organizations and the necessity for adaptability in today’s complex environments.

Bob Quinn, Chair of the Academy of Management’s OD&C Division when “Change” was added to the title in the mid-1990s, provided insights into this decision. He emphasized that “Change” was intended to broaden the division’s scope, reflecting the integral role of change management within organizational development practices. This addition aimed to attract scholars and practitioners focused on change processes, ensuring the division remained relevant and inclusive of emerging trends in organizational studies (Quinn 2025).

This evolution mirrors the broader trajectory of the field, where the interplay between development and change is recognized as central to organizational success. By incorporating “Change” into its title, the division underscores its dedication to understanding and facilitating organizations’ complex transformations in response to internal and external pressures. You will notice that OD and OD&C are used interchangeably throughout this book, as the word “change” is still catching on.

OD&C Defined

For decades, the field of Organization Development (OD), now OD&C, has grappled with defining its essence, competencies, and future direction. To address this challenge, we explore three contributions that comprehensively examined the field: Don Warrick (2005), *The 2017–2019 OD Gatherings* (Smendzuik-O’Brien and Gilpin-Jackson 2021), and Cheung-Judge (2020). We will share these contributions and offer a unified definition of OD&C.

Don Warrick is a Lifetime Achievement Award Winner in OD and the Academy of Management OD&C Division’s Distinguished Educator who has contributed significantly to helping define the field of Organization Development and Change. In the 1970s, he conducted a comprehensive examination of organization development (OD). This research involved prominent figures in the field to understand their definitions of OD, as well as surveying members of AACSB-accredited business schools. He subsequently published his findings in a series of papers (Warrick 1977–1979). In 2005, he conducted another survey of leaders in the field, including pioneers and second-generation leaders, to see if definitions had changed. The results were published in the Second Edition of *Practicing OD*. According to Warrick (2005):

“Organization Development is a planned and collaborative process for understanding, developing, and changing organizations to improve their health, effectiveness, and self-renewing capabilities” (260).

In the conclusion section of this edition, Warrick contributes a chapter summarizing the results from another survey of our authors exploring their views on practicing OD. Reflecting on his work over the past 50 years, Warrick (2023) emphasizes that OD is more than just a set of techniques—it is a systematic approach to making organizations healthier, more effective, and adaptable. Warrick highlights key OD principles, including the importance of trust, collaboration, and ethical leadership, which enable organizations to thrive in complex environments. He also stresses that OD is both a science and an art, combining research-based methodologies with humanistic values to facilitate sustainable change. Ultimately, OD practitioners serve as change agents who help organizations evolve while fostering employee engagement and commitment.

Next, the OD Gathering (2017–2019) was launched as a three-year collaborative initiative aimed at redefining and strengthening the field of Organization Development (OD) by bringing together 125 scholars, practitioners, and thought leaders (Minihan 2025). Recognizing the increasing fragmentation within the OD community and the evolving needs of organizations, the Gathering sought to establish a shared vision, common values, and a renewed definition of OD. Over three years, participants engaged in deep dialogues,

action research, and collective sense-making, culminating in four primary focus areas: Defining OD, Establishing Core Values, Identifying Critical Needs, and Determining Future Competencies (Blouch and Cotten 2021).

One of the Gathering’s most significant contributions was the development of a consensus-driven definition of OD, emphasizing its interdisciplinary nature, system-wide impact, and values-based approach (Smendzuik-O’Brien and Gilpin-Jackson 2021). The group reviewed 38 historical definitions (including Egan 2002) and synthesized them into a contemporary statement that reflects OD’s commitment to collaborative, inquiry-based change processes. Through its structured action research process, the OD Gathering laid a foundation for aligning the field around a coherent identity and direction. The initiative reinforced OD’s role in helping organizations navigate complexity, foster inclusion, and drive sustainable transformation. While the Gathering concluded in 2019, its outputs—particularly its revised definition, value framework, and competency model—continue to influence the field, providing a roadmap for the future of OD practice (Smendzuik-O’Brien and Gilpin-Jackson 2021). The result is the following definition:

“OD is the interdisciplinary field of scholars and practitioners who work collaboratively with organizations and communities to develop their system-wide capacity for effectiveness and vitality. It is grounded in the organization and social sciences” (Smendzuik-O’Brien and Gilpin-Jackson 2021, 12).

In 2020, Cheung-Judge conducted an in-depth historical analysis of the field’s principles and precepts, highlighting the contributions of more than 50 thought leaders across more than six decades. As the founder of the NTL OD Certificate program for Europe and recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from OD Network, she emphasized that OD is a field of applied behavioral science dedicated to improving organizational effectiveness by enhancing performance and internal health. According to Cheung-Judge, OD practitioners serve as facilitators of self-sustaining change rather than external fixers, guiding organizations through participatory and inquiry-driven processes. With her coauthor (Cheung-Judge and Holbeche 2021), Cheung-Judge defines OD as:

“a field of applied behavioral science expanding our understanding of human and group behavior... using group and human dynamic processes from applied behavioral science research, theories, and methods to facilitate self-organizing movement of groups and organizations. [The Dual Goals are] to improve the organization effectiveness (performance) that benefits the constituents of the organization, while maintaining the health of the organization to support the people that work within the system in a sustainable way” (11).

Her work underscores OD’s dual focus on achieving business outcomes while maintaining organizational vitality, a distinction that differentiates it from other consulting approaches. She also highlights the critical role of the “use of self,” arguing that OD practitioners must engage in continuous personal development to support change effectively. Through her research and practice, Cheung-Judge advances a competency model that balances technical expertise with ethical leadership, inclusivity, and adaptability in today’s complex organizational landscape.

A review of OD&C definitions examined here highlights key recurring elements: the integration of behavioral science, a systemic and participatory approach to change, and a commitment to both organizational effectiveness and human well-being. Table 1.1 synthesizes these core themes drawn from Warrick (2005, 2023), the 2017–2019 OD Gathering (Minihan 2025), and Cheung-Judge (2020), offering a comparative perspective on the defining attributes of the field. These three perspectives encapsulate OD&C’s broad, interdisciplinary nature, emphasizing its foundation in behavioral science and its focus on planned, systemic, and strategic change. Despite differences

Table 1.1. Key Themes in OD Definitions

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Description</i>
Interdisciplinary Foundation	OD integrates behavioral science, organizational psychology, and social sciences to drive change (Egan 2002; Warrick 2005).
System-Wide Application	OD focuses on large-scale, organization-wide transformation rather than isolated interventions (Smendzuik-O’Brien and Gilpin-Jackson 2021; Warrick 2005).
Planned & Adaptive Change	OD uses structured interventions while allowing for emergent, evolving processes in response to organizational needs (Blouch and Cotten 2021; Warrick 2005, 2023).
Effectiveness & Vitality	OD aims to enhance performance, organizational health, and human potential , balancing efficiency with well-being (Farley et al. 2021).
Collaborative & Participatory Approach	Change is driven by stakeholder engagement, dialogue, and shared ownership of the process (Cheung-Judge 2020; Warrick 2005, 2023).
Inquiry-Based & Data-Driven	Uses action research, continuous learning, and assessment to inform interventions (Cheung-Judge 2020; Egan 2002).
Ethical & Values-Driven	OD is rooted in trust, integrity, diversity, and inclusion . It aligns organizational transformation with ethical leadership (Farley et al. 2021; Warrick, 2005, 2023).

in emphasis, common themes emerge across these definitions: OD&C is fundamentally about improving organizations through people-centered approaches, fostering collaboration, and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Based on this thematic analysis, the following definition of OD&C incorporates the core:

Organization Development and Change (OD&C) is an interdisciplinary, values-driven field that applies social and behavioral sciences to facilitate system-wide, planned, and adaptive change in organizations and communities. Through collaborative engagement, OD&C professionals (scholars and practitioners) enhance organizational effectiveness and vitality while fostering human potential and ethical leadership.

This definition reflects OD&C's scientific foundation, human-centric philosophy, and strategic focus on organizational transformation. It captures OD's technical and relational aspects, emphasizing structured interventions, inquiry-driven methodologies, and ethical change leadership. While many additional definitions of OD&C exist, key themes emerge. OD&C is a forward-looking, long-term process that thrives with the support of senior leadership. It leverages education to drive change and emphasizes active participation from employees in assessing the current state, planning a positive future, making informed choices during implementation, and taking responsibility for results. These principles highlight OD&C's broad applicability within and beyond traditional organizational boundaries (Rothwell 2023; Rothwell et al. 2024).

What Organization Development Is Not

Organization Development is not a collection of isolated programs, projects, or quick fixes. Beyond traditional training, it offers a holistic, systemic approach to transforming organizations, revitalizing communities, and developing human potential. It is not a top-down directive strategy, policy, or decision. OD is a collaborative process that engages all levels of an organization, not just senior leadership. It is not exclusionary. Instead, OD recognizes organizations as complex, adaptive systems and fosters sustainable growth through continuous learning, feedback loops, and self-organization. Unlike mandates aimed at immediate performance gains, OD prioritizes engaged, participative approaches that align with the organization's unique culture and needs. As a result, the role of OD professionals has evolved from that of trainers to facilitators of change. Those who practice OD use thoughtful questions and collaborative processes to guide the system without controlling it. The approaches are adapted alongside organizational members, recognizing

the dynamic nature of change. It is based on the belief that wisdom and expertise reside within the system. Peter Block (2008) emphasizes the importance of relationships and connectedness as foundational to achieving meaningful change. He asserts, “Engagement and the accountability that grows out of it, occurs when we ask people to be in charge of their own experience and act on the well-being of the whole.” (88)

WHY CARE ABOUT OD

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus famously remarked, “The only constant in life is change,” a truth that resonates deeply within OD. Organizations, like the world around them, are continuously evolving, driven by shifting environments, emerging technologies, and changing human needs. Changing environments are based on things we cannot control, like political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal (PESTEL Factors). OD provides the framework and tools to navigate this perpetual flux and harness it, turning challenges into opportunities for growth and transformation. Heraclitus’s wisdom serves as a reminder that embracing change is not just inevitable but essential for organizational success.

Recent upheavals in global markets, nation-states, and national economies underscore the world’s increasing interconnectedness, where industries and economies operate across many borders. The pace of change in the coming decades is expected to surpass anything humanity has experienced throughout history. As organizations grapple with this unprecedented change, they face more uncertainty and complexity than ever before. Insights from the study of complexity have proven valuable for navigating this turbulence, offering critical strategies for managing change and organizations in a rapidly evolving landscape.

Nothing better exemplifies the world’s challenges as black swan events like COVID-19 (Talib 2010). (A *black swan event* is a situation that seems inconsequential when it first appears but eventually spirals out of control and may subsequently be global in its consequences.) COVID-19, a minor outbreak in an obscure Chinese city, soon infected so many that it provoked an international crisis. Organizations are also experiencing gray rhino events. A *gray rhino event* is a phenomenon everyone recognizes but largely ignores (Wucker 2016). Climate change and demographic change are often examples of gray rhino issues. Everyone knows climate change is happening but usually feels powerless to affect it. Everyone also knows that the world’s population is growing older due to fewer births and people living longer. People ignore these large-scale issues because they do not know how to influence them.

Why Is Change Occurring So Fast?

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

Changing technology also drives the information explosion—and vice versa. Consider the sheer magnitude and pace of the information explosion stimulated by technological change. Information is increasing so fast that no one can keep pace with it. The information created and consumed over the past 30 years is far greater than that produced over 5,000 years. Per the website Exploding topics, they share that

90% of the world's data was generated in the last two years alone. In the space of 13 years, this figure has increased by an estimated 74x from just 2 zettabytes in 2010. The 120 zettabytes generated in 2023 are expected to increase by over 150% in 2025, hitting 181 zettabytes. (Duarte 2025, para.4)

That's a vast amount of information on the internet, which is distributed across a global network of servers. While search engines index much of the web, no entity has fully cataloged it due to its immense and ever-expanding nature, including the deep and dark web ("The Ultimate Guide to the Invisible Net," n.d.).

What Effects Are Changes Having?

There are many effects of change.

One effect of constant change is that it often accelerates further change. As organizational leaders strive to stay competitive, they race to shorten product development cycles, adopt emerging trends in search of an edge, and juggle the complexities of managing multiple initiatives and improvement programs simultaneously. This relentless pace can make sustaining focus and achieving meaningful progress increasingly challenging.

A second effect of turbulent environmental changes—spanning political, economic, technological, and social domains—is a rising cynicism about organizational change, a growing focus in change management research

(Mishra et al. 2023; Rho et al. 2021). This cynicism leads workers and managers to increasingly question the motives of those who sponsor, champion, or drive change, which can undermine trust and confidence in organizational leaders. High-profile scandals in business, government, education, the media, and religious institutions further amplify this skepticism, deepening leaders' challenges in fostering credibility and support for change efforts. Conspiracy theorists and purveyors of “fake news” 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” (“Do You Suffer from Desk Rage?,” 2008), create pushback through growing interest in work/life balance programs, and encourage people to seek innovative ways to work that distance them from others. After the COVID-19 pandemic, where so many people have learned to work from home, people feel increasingly isolated and are bereft of friends. Feelings of loneliness and isolation have grown to be epidemics in their own right and are contributing to skyrocketing suicide rates (McPhillips 2023; Mettes 2021; Wernau 2023).

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP IN OD

The field of OD can help an organization's people anticipate, adapt, and respond to change at any level: individual, team, department, organization, and even society. OD is a professional social action and scientific inquiry field that can positively impact human and organizational effectiveness and performance. People should care about OD because it is rapidly emerging as the leading business topic—if not *the* key—to effectively caring for our people and handling (or even anticipating) change. A study conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) in 2024 revealed several key insights about change leadership (2024):

- Change as a constant: On average, employees experienced 10 planned enterprise changes in 2022, up from just two in 2016.
- Declining employee support: Employee support for enterprise change fell from 74% in 2016 to 43% in 2022.
- High-stress levels: 73% of employees affected by change report moderate to high stress.
- Leadership training gap: Only 29% of leaders have received training on leading change.

These findings underscore the importance of changing leadership skills in today's rapidly evolving business environment. As the pace increases, the field of OD is experimenting with the idea that leadership skills are 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 spheres of influence to impact others' organizational performance positively.

SPECIAL TERMS USED IN OD

As in every other field of endeavor, OD has its 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 helpful to know when communicating with others.

Organizational 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 pre-change state to a post-change state in which variables and measurements remain constant. It is sometimes associated with incremental change.
2. *Beta change* implies variable progress, a shift from a pre-change state to a post-change state in which variables and measurement methods change. As members of an organization participate in a change effort, they learn of emerging issues 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, in addition to beta change, a radical shift from what was initially defined as a pre-change state and a post-change state. It is 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* is the “most complex type of change facing organizations today. Simply said, transformation is the radical shift from one state of being to another. It is so significant that it requires a shift of culture, behavior, and mindset to implement successfully and sustain over time” (39).

We define organizational change as a departure from the status quo, involving movement toward a desired state or vision through varying degrees of progress—from incremental improvements and adaptive approaches to transformational paradigm shifts that redefine how organizations operate and achieve results.

Change Agent

In the 1950s, the founders of the National Training Laboratories (NTL) collaborated with the Tavistock Institute in Europe. 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, which is now a common phrase among change-makers and leaders. OD practitioners are agents who facilitate positive learning, change, and development.

A change agent facilitates organizational or environmental change, often as an OD practitioner using process and expertise (Jones and Brazzel 2014). These practitioners, whether internal or external, increasingly adopt a facilitative and educational role, helping individuals within the organization plan and adapt to continuous change. This approach is critical for building internal capacity to manage change effectively and reducing the high rates of “change failure.”

In response to this reality, it is interesting that Peter Drucker took the term “change agent” to a new level. The classic definition above states that the phrase traditionally refers to a *person*. However, management pundit Drucker (2004) challenges us to see the *organization* as a change agent. In his conscious shifting of meaning we attach to the word “change,” Drucker tapped into the emerging idea in OD that “change” is not an event but a 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, the living system is dead once change ends! Change is the water we swim in. OD is a process that enables human systems to embrace and continuously build upon the inevitable changes of a living system.

A change agent is an individual or entity that facilitates and enables positive learning and development within groups, organizations, or systems. They help them embrace and navigate continuous change as an integral aspect of growth and vitality.

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

Culture. One focal point of OD is changing an organization’s *culture*. Before the early 1980s, the word “culture” was restricted to use in anthropology and OD circles. However, culture became a popular buzzword after publishing *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, 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).

Culture is the shared beliefs and values within an organization that operate unconsciously. It shapes how its members perceive their roles, interact, and respond to challenges, serving as a foundation for addressing recurring problems and driving collective behavior.

Intervention. In the nomenclature of OD, an *intervention* is a change effort or process. It implies an intentional entry into an ongoing system. An OD intervention is a planned sequence of activities and actions to improve an organization’s performance and effectiveness. OD interventions are also known as adapting, planning, structuring, or improving, many of which are introduced in this handbook. They are the implementation or execution phases of a change effort (Rothwell et al. 2021).

The intervention is the deliberate action or series of steps introduced to the organization members to influence its processes, behaviors, or systems to foster growth, address challenges, and align with desired outcomes.

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 consist of verbalizing positive impressions and images regarding performance, expressing goodwill, promoting acceptance, and making statements of capability or the likeability of a person or group. It is necessary to note that sponsorship is not a one-time gesture but a continuing process during a change effort.

We see the sponsor as a key stakeholder who actively endorses and drives a change effort or OD intervention by fostering credibility, providing resources, and sustaining momentum throughout the process.

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. Employees, board members, customers, suppliers, distributors, and government regulators may be stakeholders.

WHAT IS SYSTEMS THINKING, AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A *system* consists of interdependent components working in harmony (Burke 1980) (See Figure 1.1). Organizations thrive on interconnectedness as living systems, relying on dynamic interactions among people to function effectively (Katz and Kahn 1978). As open systems, organizations continuously exchange resources, information, and energy with their environment. They take in inputs—such as customer requirements, raw materials, capital, information, or people—transform them through production or service delivery

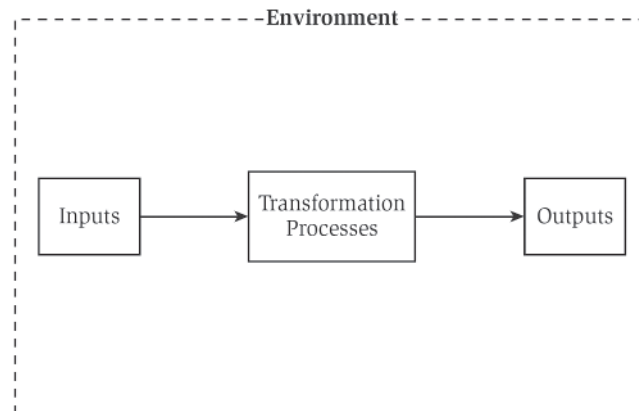


Figure 1.1. A Model of a System

Source: *Practicing Organization Development*, 4th edition.

processes, and release outputs, including goods, services, information, or skilled individuals. For organizations to survive and evolve as living systems, this transformation cycle must remain adaptive interconnected, and consistently add value to meet changing demands.

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).

Two key competencies for OD practitioners are designing and facilitating interventions based on whole systems approaches with clients. These approaches help those in their organizations develop a new collective and shared understanding, which can lead to shifts in the system's identity. 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. As OD practitioners experiment with whole systems approaches, the trend is toward "trying out" ideas in multiple experimental processes rather than trying to sort ideas with pre-experimental judgments. Sometimes, the idea we label "suboptimal" is the solution!

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

OD also carries essential values (Farley et al. 2021). While there are many such values, most practitioners agree that OD carries humanistic, collaborative, systems-oriented, and inquiry-focused values. OD practitioners must serve as role models for these values.

WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF OD?

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 you 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 stimulating and supporting 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 prominent 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 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, which led such groups to T-group (training group). This small, facilitated group experience is designed to enhance self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and group dynamics through open feedback and interaction. The data 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 team and support one another’s learning.

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 essential forerunner of OD because it focused on group or team interaction dynamics.

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, which was directed by Rensis Likert from

1950 to 1970. Likert 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 improvement planning. 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 more incredible frustration among employees than not asking for their opinions.

The centerpiece of Likert's approach was the *interlocking conference technique*. 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 feedback and performance planning strategy ensured that each group's action plan was tied to those at higher levels.

His seminal works, *New Patterns of Management* (1961) and *The Human Organization* (1967), profoundly influenced OD by demonstrating how participative problem-solving and action planning could drive meaningful organizational change. This foundation continues to shape the field today.

Tavistock Sociotechnical Systems

Another major contributor to the evolution of OD is Tavistock Sociotechnical Systems. Founded in 1920, Tavistock is an English clinic. Its earliest work was devoted to family therapy, where children and parents received simultaneous treatment.

A team of Tavistock researchers experimented with work redesign for coal miners at about the same time 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 miners grouped into teams could use the new technology. The researchers' advice, when implemented, improved productivity and restored absenteeism rates to historically low levels in the organization.

Tavistock's sociotechnical systems approach, which emphasizes social and technical subsystems, is key to OD. Tavistock researchers believe that organizations are systems composed of key subsystems. One such subsystem

is the people in an organization, and the other is the nonhuman subsystem. Both must be considered if a change is to succeed. Tavistock Institute's Sociotechnical Systems approach has evolved to meet the demands of today's organizational environments, focusing on the critical balance between social and technical elements to foster effective and humane work systems.

Process Consultation

Edgar Schein's (1999) process consultation has significantly influenced the OD field. *Process consultation* involves creating a relationship that permits both the consultant and the client to perceive, understand, and act on the process events in the client's internal and external environment to improve the situation defined by the client. It involves intervening to strengthen the ways groups of people work together to achieve results.

What matters is the way people interact. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing numbers of people have worked in hybrid environments. When people work together in virtual settings, their interaction modes differ from onsite interaction. That has spawned a new process consultation method called *virtual group coaching* (Rothwell and Park 2021; Rothwell and Sadique 2023).

SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the concepts of Organization Development (OD) and change management, highlighting their significance and interconnectedness. We clarified the definition of OD, distinguished it from what it is not, and introduced key terms essential to understanding the field. Then, we briefly explored OD's evolution through laboratory training, survey feedback, sociotechnical systems, and process consultation. By laying this foundation, we aimed to equip you with a clear understanding of OD and its relationship to change, setting the stage for the topics explored in the rest of this book.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the change management (CM) components of organization development (OD)?
2. OD impacts what organizational functions?
3. What is systems thinking, and why is it essential to OD?
4. Now that you've been introduced to OD and change management, how have you applied these concepts within your organization?
5. What is your definition of OD? Would you add the "C" and why or why not?

Resources

- Aby McCain. “How Fast Is Technology Advancing? [2023]: Growing, Evolving, And Accelerating At Exponential Rates” at the Zippia website:
<https://www.zippia.com/advice/how-fast-is-technology-advancing/Is-technology-growing-exponentially?,longer,it's-true-for-now>.
- Change Management Resources. <https://www.changefirst.com/resources>.
- Collaborative Change Resources. <https://www.nexus4change.com>.
- OD Resources. <https://www.odnetwork.org/page/od-resources>.

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