Emerging Directions: Is There a New OD?

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There has been a great deal of commentary and controversy about the current state of organization development (OD). One ongoing concern is the underlying value system of OD and whether the traditional humanistic values espoused by the founders of the field are still relevant or whether they should be replaced by a set of more pragmatic business considerations as articulated by newer practitioners (Worley & Feyerherm, 2003). As I experienced in teaching a class titled "Values and Ethics in Organization Development," this set of issues reveals itself in stark terms. After reviewing several OD statements of values and ethics (for example, Gellermann, Frankel & Ladenson, 1990), I was asked if I really believed in "all that stuff?" I was then told that if anyone actually practiced that value system they would not get any work. The controversy over OD's values continues today and is part of a larger set of concerns about the field's future, relevance and continued viability (Bradford & Burke, 2004; 2005).

Overlooked in these discussions, however, is a larger and more basic issue: OD may be facing a challenge from within the field - an emerging "New OD" that is not necessarily different in values so much as in ontology and epistemology. This emerging set of OD beliefs and practices is based on philosophical assumptions and methodologies about social phenomena and social reality that are widely different from the key assumptions of the field's founders. This chapter explores the possibilities of an emergent new OD and outlines potential implications for the field and its practitioners.

Classical Organization Development

The original formulation of OD included a strong positivist orientation based in mid-twentieth-century social science research methodologies. The whole idea of data-based change, like action research and survey research methods, presumes the existence and validity of an objective, discernable reality that can be investigated to produce valid data and information to influence change. For example, one of Argyris's three core tasks of a change agent is the creation of valid data. "It has been accepted as axiomatic that valid and useful information is the foundation for effective intervention" (Argyris, 1973: 17). This theme is echoed by Chin and Benne (1976) in their classic discussion of general strategies for effecting change in human systems. "One element in all approaches to planned change is the conscious utilization and application of knowledge as an instrument or tool for modifying patterns and institutions of practice" (p. 22). Knowledge in this perspective is discovered through the scientific method, which historically assumed an objective, transcendent and knowable reality. Blake and Mouton (1976) also

reflect this theme in their extended discussion of five basic types of interventions, including catalytic interventions which are closest to classic OD. "Catalytic interventions assist the client in collecting data and information to reintegrate his or her perceptions as to how things are" (p. 4).

In sum, classical OD is based explicitly or implicitly in an ontology and epistemology that assume an objective, transcendent, knowable, world. The ideas are consistent with the central assumptions of most mainstream mid-twentieth-century social, biological, and physical sciences. Methodologies based on these assumptions, such as action research, are then employed to help discover or reveal this reality to client systems in order to help correct distortions and misperceptions. The use of objective data in a process of social discovery, therefore, is a central foundation in classical OD's approach to change.

The New Organization Development

In the 1980s, constructionist and postmodern approaches heavily influenced the social sciences with their ideas about multiple realities and the inherent subjectivity of experience (for example, Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bergquist, 1993; Searle, 1995). Their notion of multiple realities implies that there can be no transcendent, objective truth to be discovered. Instead the issue is how immanent agreements about the reality of a situation are or could be most effectively negotiated among the contending points-of-view. This framing raises issues of power and how it is used to create or impose a socially agreed-on or "privileged" version of things. In addition, ideas from the new sciences, including chaos theory and self-organizing systems, influenced how people thought about change in organizations, especially assumptions about and approaches to planned change (Wheatley, 1992).

These ideas naturally made their way into the OD world. They have been incorporated into theory and practice in recent years, although perhaps without a conscious intent to create a new OD. At least six contemporary OD-related theories and practices are based on these newer assumptions and will be explored in this chapter: appreciative inquiry; large group interventions; approaches to transformational change through individual mind-sets and consciousness; practices that address diversity and multi-cultural realities; approaches based on the new sciences such as complex adaptive systems theory; and models of change that differ from the classical "unfreezing-movement-refreezing" paradigm.

Appreciative Inquiry

The development of appreciative inquiry is based on the social constructionist premise that reality is partially (if not completely) a result of one's mindset. Watkins and Mohr (2001) assert that appreciative inquiry is postmodern in orientation and is "grounded in the theory of social constructionism" (p. 26). They contrast it with practices based on a "modernist," objectivist and scientific orientation, and conclude: "Post-modernism, on the other hand, rejects the idea of an underlying structure and of an underlying truth.

Post-modern thought embraces the idea of multiple and contextually determined realities. Social constructionism is a formative theory of the post-modern era. (p. 27)

The power of socially constructed mind-sets is also reflected in appreciative inquiry's concerns about the negative impact of the "deficit-focused thinking" of traditional action research. "Positive-focused thinking" is the core of appreciative inquiry.

Common Ground and Social Agreements

Large group interventions seeking "common ground" – as opposed to objective common truth – are designed to achieve agreement among multiple constituencies, all of whose points-of-view are considered legitimate versions of reality, is another example (see, for example, Bunker & Alban, 2005). Although data are gathered and used in these approaches, data gathering is more for the purpose of presenting multiple possibilities and perspectives than for bringing "facts" to bear on the situation. Greater emphasis is on reaching social agreements and adopting new ways of seeing reality that will guide future actions. "Future Search is designed to help the group arrive at agreements about the future they want and actions to achieve it" (Lent, McCormick, & Pearce, 2005: 61). The underlying power and political dimensions involved in large group interventions are recognized by researchers, if not practitioners. In analyzing a case example of a Search Conference (SC), for example, Clarke (2005) comments that "it was found that the most important outcome from the SC was its predominately political effects" (p. 42). Tenkasi and Chesmore (2003) provide additional evidence for the impact of large group interventions on networks, connections, influence, politics, and power dynamics in organizations.

Changing Mind-Sets and Consciousness

In another stream of work related to multiple realities is the development of theories and models that promote changes in mind-sets and consciousness as the route to organizational transformation (for example, Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2001). These have been developed by OD consultants and academics in direct reaction to the perceived limitations of the classical, Newtonian, Industrial Age views of change and are being used to think, talk about, and address contemporary and emerging change dynamics. For example, Ackerman-Anderson and Anderson (2001) assert, "We call the traditional leadership mindset, most prevalent today, the Industrial Mindset. This worldview contains the very blinders that prevent leaders from seeing the dynamics of transformation" (p. 7). Organizational transformation from this perspective requires shifts in individual consciousness, starting with the leadership and extending throughout the organization.

Diversity and Multcultural Realities

A third change in the field has been an increased interest in diversity and multicultural realities, and explorations of how power is used to establish or reinforce exclusionary standards, practices and paradigms. Miller & Katz (2002) capture the essence of the

issues: "Most organizations are filled with barriers – rigid structures, poor training processes, outmoded equipment, misguided incentive programs, and discriminatory promotion and assignment practices that keep people from contributing the full breadth of their skills, ideas, and energies to the organization's success. Expressed in conscious and unconscious behaviors, as well as routine practices, procedures, and bylaws, these barriers are typically rooted in the very culture of an organization. They favor people who are most like the founders or senior leaders of the organization." (p. 7)

Most contemporary approaches to diversity and multicultural dynamics in organizations also include explicit recognition of the linkages between power dynamics the version of reality that favors some groups and interests over others, and they have practices for addressing this kind of political asymmetry.

Applications of the New Sciences

Some OD practitioners have embraced ideas from the new sciences, such as complexity theory and self-organizing systems. Olson and Eoyang (2001), for example, see the need for a new OD change paradigm that incorporates these ideas. "The use of rational planned change approaches, driven by leaders with the help of change facilitators, has fallen short even when bolstered by formal (and expensive) programs such as TQM and re-engineering" (p.19). They believe that "The emerging science of complex adaptive systems offers such a paradigm" (p. 19), and that "establishes a foundation for a new theory of change…" (p. 19).

Different Models of Change

Finally, these trends and changes in the contexts, technologies, and requirements of late twenty-first-century organizations have raised questions about the theories and practices needed to address contemporary change dynamics and have led to the development of new change models. These include interests in cyclical change that flow from the new sciences as well as from some cultural traditions, and stand in contrast to classical OD's linear unfreezing-movement-refreezing model (Marshak, 1993); continuous, as opposed to episodic approaches to change (Weick & Quinn, 1999); "spiral dynamics," which combines consciousness-changing with other nonlinear approaches to change (Beck & Cowan, 1996), and processes of continuous transformation (Marshak, 2004). For OD practitioners, these new models and approaches will require a conscious shift from the field's implicit bias for stability "start-stop" models of change to alternative theories and assumptions that better support thinking and acting within the concept of continuous whole-system growth.

All these changes and factors - emphases on socially constructing reality, transforming mind-sets and consciousness, operating from multicultural realities, exploring different models and assumptions about change, and creating common social perceptions and agreements - contribute to a contemporary OD whose theories, assumptions, and practices are vastly different from OD's classical roots. Table 1 summarizes classical OD and what I call the new OD.

Table 1: Classical OD and the New OD

Classical OD	New OD
Approach is influenced by classical science and modern thought and philosophy	Approach is influence by the new sciences and postmodern thought and philosophy
Reality is an objective fact	Reality is socially constructed
There is a single reality	There are multiple realities
Truth is transcendent and discoverable	Truth is immanent and emerges from the situation
Reality is discovered by using rational and analytic processes	Reality is negotiated and involves power and political processes
Change results from collecting and applying valid data using objective problem-solving methods	Change results from creating new social agreements through explicit or implicit negotiation
Change can be created, planned and managed	Change is inherent and can be self-organizing
Change is episodic and linear	Change is continuous, cyclical, or both
Emphasis is on changing behavior and what one does	Emphasis is on changing mind-sets and how one thinks

Source: Adapted from R. J. Marshak (2005).

Implications

If a new OD is emerging (or has emerged), there are important implications for theory and practice.

1. We will need to do something about definitions and terminology. When practitioners, academics or managers talk about organization development, are they referring to classical OD, new OD or something else? We need better definitions and ways to know and compare the variations of OD over time. Without additional philosophical and conceptual clarity, talking about the current state of the field is difficult. Witness the discussions in recent years about whether or not organization development (OD) and organization transformation (OT) are different. Add to that the ongoing discussion about whether appreciative inquiry is revolutionary, or simply another form of action research. Clarifying concepts, assumptions, and philosophy also brings benefits to clients and client systems. Now, practitioners of both classical OD and new OD claim they are doing "organization development" yet each offers different services and expertise often based on differing, but unarticulated, philosophical premises.

2. *We will need to explicitly identify philosophical differences when discussing and teaching OD and its practices*. Presently, OD practitioners and scholars discuss the theory and practice of organization development as if it is a single entity and based on the same set of values and premises. This chapter raises questions about whether that is true. Differing perspectives can easily lead to cross-communication and confusion. Worse, those entrenched in one set of assumptions may question or challenge the practices of those in another. The two parties may never fully recognize that they are not talking about the same things at all. Discussions about organization development theory and practice are no longer univocal: they are plurivocal. The field must find ways to contend with its own multiple realities and competing discourses in order to advance theory and practice, as well as support all engaged in our shared efforts to enhance organizational effectiveness. By clarifying and differentiating premises and associated practices, we have the opportunity to develop new social technologies and approaches based on the field's well-established principles.

3. We may need to purposefully articulate and legitimate the new OD. A fully articulated and legitimated new OD needs a more self-conscious foundation in constructionist approaches in the social sciences, and in the latest developments in the new sciences. The new OD might have an emphasis on affecting consciousness or mind-sets and on using social interaction in large and small groups to create or negotiate meaning and reality. Its core methods would be based more on practices in constructionist social and symbolic interaction, not on objectivist action research focused on problem-solving. It would explicitly recognize that reality is created and maintained through negotiations involving power. It would develop and advance values, theories, and methodologies for dealing effectively with these kinds of political dynamics.

Developing new premises and practices related to the role and uses of negotiation, for example, would be in order. So would new approaches to the power and political processes that establish and maintain socially constructed realities, agreements, and mind-sets that guide day-to-day behavior. All this may be challenging to the field given classical OD's seeming aversion to the positive possibilities of power and preference for rational, objective and fact-based processes. Many OD consultants presently treat power and political processes as if they were evil forces operating in organizations. At best, many have a profound ambivalence towards power and its manifestations (Marshak, 1992; 2001). Exactly when, how, and what kinds of power be used in the new OD and by to facilitate social agreements among contending realities will be a critical question and complex question for the field to confront and explore.

The new OD does not necessarily negate other classical OD practices. It would, however, ultimately require those practices to be consistent with the philosophical premises of the new approach. All this might also stimulate academics and practitioners to pursue new approaches, innovative practices, and social technologies for addressing change in human systems.

A Concluding Comment

The jury is still out as to whether or not there is a distinctive new OD. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that there have been ongoing developments and evolutions in the philosophy, values, theories, and practices of organization development since its origin. These need to be more clearly articulated, distinguished, and addressed by practitioners and scholars in the field. Absent clearer delineations and understandings, we continue to risk miscommunication, confusion, or worse.

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