CHAPTER 8

An Overview of OD Interventions

Work gets done in organization development when organization leaders and members systematically address problems and opportunities, usually guided by an OD practitioner. Practitioners have created an array of interventions to help organization members address specific problems effectively. Interventions such as team building, survey feedback, role analysis, and intergroup conflict resolution were developed during the early years of organization development. Interventions such as quality of work life (QWL), work redesign using sociotechnical systems theory (STS), collateral organization (also known as parallel learning structures), and strategic planning methods were developed as the field continued to evolve. Today we have interventions aimed at developing self-directed teams, high-performance work systems, and self-designing organizations, as well as large-scale systems change models to help organizations adapt and survive. OD interventions address a wide range of specific problems and opportunities. But OD is much more than just reaching into the "kit bag" and executing an intervention. OD is a complete strategy for change that encompasses theory, practice methods, and values. Interventions are just one component of the OD formula.

Practice methods refer to *how* practitioners ply their craft to cause organizational change. Principles, rules of thumb, and practical knowledge have accumulated so that a practice theory exists to tell practitioners what to do and how to do it to effect change in human systems. For example, people often resist change and lapse back into old habits after a change. Practice theory tells how to deal with these situations. The secrets to success in OD programs lie in the practice theory. Advances in behavioral science theory, practice theory, and the range and scope of interventions have significantly increased the power of OD as a strategy for change.

In this and the next several chapters we discuss OD interventions and describe the most important ones. Knowing the OD interventions and the rationale for their use shows you how change takes place in OD programs because interventions are the vehicles for causing change. In this overview chapter we clarify what interventions are, examine some rules of thumb for implementing interventions, and then explore different ways to classify interventions.

OD interventions are *sets of structured activities* in which selected organizational units (target groups or individuals) engage in a task or a sequence of tasks with the goals of organizational improvement and individual development. Interventions constitute the action thrust of organization development. The OD practitioner, a professional versed in the theory and practice of OD, brings four sets of attributes to the organizational setting: a set of values; a set of assumptions about people, organizations, and interpersonal relationships; a set of goals for the practitioner and the organization and its

members; and a set of structured activities that are the *means* for achieving the values, assumptions, and goals. These activities are what we mean by the word *interventions.*

HINKING ABOUT OD INTERVENTIONS

We said OD is more than reaching into the "kit bag" and pulling out an intervention or two. Let's explore some of the factors that leaders and practitioners consider as they plan and implement OD.

First, behind every program is an overall game plan or *intervention strategy.* This plan integrates the problem or opportunity to be addressed, the desired outcomes of the program, and the sequencing and timing of the various interventions. Intervention strategies are based on diagnosis and the goals desired by the client system. Let's say the clients want to redesign the way work is done at a production facility, changing from an assembly-line arrangement of individualized simple tasks to complex tasks performed by self-managed teams. This desired redesign requires diagnosis to determine whether the work is amenable to such a system, to test the employees' willingness to undertake such a change, to calculate the time and effort required to make the change, and to assess the probable benefits. Sociotechnical systems theory would likely be the guiding model for the program, which would entail dozens of significant changes and different interventions—training, education, parallel structures, employee involvement, modified reward systems and management philosophy, and so forth. A series of activities designed to move the system in step-wise fashion from the current state to a new state would be laid out against a time line of several years. This overall strategy would be the road map for the change program. The key questions are: What are we trying to accomplish? What activities/interventions will help us get there? What is the proper timing and sequencing of the interventions? What have we learned from the diagnosis about readiness to change, barriers and obstacles, key stakeholders, and sources of energy and leadership?

Second, some ways to structure activities to promote learning and change are "better"; and some are "worse." The following points help practitioners structure activities in "better" ways:

1. Structure the activity to include the relevant people, the people affected by the problem or the opportunity. For example, if the goal is improved team effectiveness, have the whole team engage in the activities. If the goal is improved relations between two separate work groups, have both work groups present. If the goal is to build linkages with some special group, say, the industrial relations people, have them there along with the people from the home group. If the goal is better customer service, include customers in the activity. Preplanning the group composition is necessary for properly structuring the activity.
2. Structure the activity so that it is (a) problem oriented or opportunity oriented and (b) oriented to the problems and opportunities generated by the clients themselves. Solving problems and capitalizing on opportunities are involving, interesting, and enjoyable tasks for most people, whether due to a desire for competence or mastery (as suggested by White[1]), or a desire to achieve (as suggested by McClelland[2]), especially when the issues have been defined by the client. When clients are solving issues that they have stated have highest pri-

Structure the activity so that the goal is clear and the way to reach the goal is clear. Few things are as demotivating as not knowing what one is working toward and not knowing how what one is doing contributes to goal attainment. Both these points are part of structuring the activity properly. (Parenthetically, the goals will be important for the individuals if point 2 is followed.)

Structure the activity to ensure a high probability of success. Implicit in this point is the warning that the practitioners' and clients' expectations should be realistic. But more than that, manageable, attainable objectives once achieved produce feelings of success, competence, and potency for the people involved. This sense of achievement, in turn, raises aspiration levels and feelings of self- and group-worth. The task can still be hard, complicated, taxing—but it should be attainable. And if participants fail to accomplish the goal, the reasons should be examined so this can be avoided in the future.

Structure the activity so that it contains both experience-based learning and conceptual learning. New learnings gained through experience become a permanent part of the individual's repertoire when augmented with conceptual material that puts the experience into a broader framework of theory and behavior. Relating the experience to conceptual models and other experiences helps the learning become integrated for the individual.

Structure the climate of the activity so that individuals are "freed up" rather than anxious or defensive. That is, set the climate of interventions so that people expect "to learn together" and "to look at practices in an experimenting way so that we can build better procedures."

Structure the activity so that the participants learn both how to solve a particular problem and "learn how to learn." Such structure often means scheduling time for reflecting on the activity and teasing out learnings; it may mean devoting as much as half the activity to one focus and half to the other.

Structure the activity so that individuals learn about both *task* and *process*. The task is what the group is working on, that is, the stated agenda items. The term *process* refers to *how* the group is working and *what else is going on* as participants work on the task, including the group's processes and dynamics, individual styles of interacting and behaving, and so on. Learning to be skillful in both of these areas is a powerful asset.

Structure the activity so that individuals are engaged as whole persons, not segmented persons. It means calling into play role demands, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and strivings. Integrating disparate parts of individuals in an organizational world that commonly divides roles, feelings, and thoughts enhances the individual's ability to learn and grow.

These points developed from practice theory, and implementing these points interventions to be more effective.

A third set of considerations concerns choosing and sequencing intervention ac-. Michael Beer suggests the following guidelines:

> These decision rules can help a change agent focus on the relevant issues in making decisions about how to integrate a variety of interventions. They are rules for managing the implementation process.
>
> 1. *Maximize diagnostic data.* In general, interventions that will provide data needed to make subsequent intervention decisions should come first. This is particularly true when change agents do not know much about the situation. Violation of this rule can lead to choosing inappropriate interventions.
> 2. *Maximize effectiveness.* Interventions should be sequenced so that early inter-

interventions that develop readiness, motivation, knowledge, or skills required by other interventions should come first. Violation of this rule (leapfrogging) can result in interventions that do not achieve their objectives, regression, and the need to start a new sequence of interventions.

3. *Maximize efficiency.* Interventions should be sequenced to conserve organizational resources such as time, energy, and money. Violation of this rule will result in overlapping interventions or in interventions that are not needed by certain people or parts of the organization.
4. *Maximize speed.* Interventions should be sequenced to maximize the speed with which ultimate organizational improvement is attained. Violation of this rule occurs when progress is slower than is necessary to conform to all the other rules.
5. *Maximize relevance.* Interventions that management sees as most relevant to immediate problems should come first. In general, this means interventions that will have an impact on the organization's performance or task come before interventions that will have an impact on individuals or culture. Violation of this rule will result in loss of motivation to continue with organization development.
6. *Minimize psychological and organizational strain.* A sequence of interventions should be chosen that is least likely to create dysfunctional effects such as anxiety, insecurity, distrust, dashed expectations, psychological damage to people, and unanticipated and unwanted effects on organizational performance. Violating this rule will lower people's sense of competence and confidence and their commitment to organizational improvement.[3]

Good advice. Paying attention to these guidelines helps ensure success. Disregard of these rules has caused many an OD program to flounder.

Fourth, different interventions have different dynamics; they do different things because they are based on different causal mechanisms. It's important to know the underlying causal mechanisms of interventions to ensure the intervention fits the desired outcomes. Robert Blake and Jane Mouton identified the following types of interventions based on the underlying causal mechanisms:

1. *Discrepancy intervention*, which calls attention to a contradiction in action or attitudes that then leads to exploration.
2. *Theory intervention*, where behavioral science knowledge and theory are used to explain present behavior and assumptions underlying the behavior.
3. *Procedural intervention*, which represents a critiquing of how something is being done to determine whether the best methods are being used.
4. *Relationship intervention*, which focuses attention on interpersonal relationships (particularly those where there are strong negative feelings) and surfaces the issues for exploration and possible resolution.
5. *Experimentation intervention*, in which two different action plans are tested for their consequences before a final decision on one is made.
6. *Dilemma intervention*, in which an imposed or emergent dilemma is used to force close examination of the possible choices involved and the assumptions underlying them.
7. *Perspective intervention*, which draws attention away from immediate actions and demands and allows a look at historical background, context, and future objectives in order to assess whether or not the actions are "still on target."
8. *Organization structure intervention*, which calls for examination and evaluation of structural causes for organizational ineffectiveness.
9. *Cultural intervention*, which examines traditions, precedents, and practices—the fab-

mechanism probably operates in team building, intergroup team-building activities, culture analysis, Grid OD, and sociotechnical systems programs.

3. *Increased Interaction and Communication.* Increasing interaction and communication between individuals and groups causes changes in attitudes and behavior. Homans, for example, suggests that increased interaction leads to increased positive sentiments.[6] Individuals and groups in isolation tend to develop "tunnel vision" or "autism," according to Murphy.[7] Increasing communication counteracts this tendency. Increased communication allows one to check one's perceptions to see if they are socially validated and shared. This mechanism underlies almost all OD interventions. The rule of thumb is: Get people talking and interacting in new, constructive ways and good things will result.
4. *Confrontation.* This term refers to surfacing and examining differences in beliefs, feelings, attitudes, values, or norms to remove obstacles to effective interaction. Confrontation is a process that seeks to discern real differences that are "getting in the way," to uncover those issues, and to work on them in a constructive way. Many obstacles to growth and learning exist, and they continue to exist when they are not actively examined. Confrontation underlies conflict resolution interventions such as intergroup team building, third-party peacemaking, and role negotiation.
5. *Education.* Education activities upgrade (a) knowledge and concepts, (b) beliefs and attitudes, and (c) skills. In organization development education activities increase these three components in several content areas: task achievement, social relationships, organizational dynamics and processes, and processes for managing change. Education is the primary mechanism operating in behavior modeling, force-field analysis, life- and career-planning, self-directed teams, and T-groups.
6. *Participation.* Increasing the number of people involved in problem solving, goal setting, and generating new ideas increases the quality and acceptance of decisions, increases job satisfaction, and promotes employee well-being. Participation activities are found in quality circles, collateral organizations, quality of work life (QWL) programs, team building, search conferences, survey feedback, and Beckhard's Confrontation Meeting. Participation plays a role in most OD interventions.
7. *Increased Accountability.* Activities that clarify people's responsibilities and that monitor performance related to those responsibilities increase accountability. Both features must be present for accountability to enhance performance. OD interventions that increase accountability are the role analysis technique, responsibility charting, Gestalt OD, life- and career-planning, quality circles, MBO, self-managed teams, and partnering.
8. *Increased Energy and Optimism.* Activities that energize and motivate people through visions of new possibilities contribute toward a future that is desirable, worthwhile, and attainable. Increased energy and optimism are direct results of interventions such as appreciative inquiry, visioning, "getting the whole system in the room," quality of work life programs, search conferences, total quality programs, self-managed teams, and so forth.

These ideas are only some aspects to consider when planning OD programs and choosing and implementing OD interventions. One learns this practice theory through experience, reading, workshops, mentors, and reflecting on successes and failures.

CLASSIFYING OD INTERVENTIONS

The inventory of OD interventions is quite extensive. We will explore several classifi-

hese different kinds of interventions provide a range of ways for the OD practitioner) intervene in the client system. They also explain the underlying dynamics of inter- :ntions.

Blake and Mouton have continued to refine the nature of interventions and 'oposed a theory and typology for the entire consultation field.[5] The typology, called e Consulcube™, is a 100-cell cube depicting virtually all consultation situations. The be is built on three dimensions. The first is what the consultant *does*, that is, which of 'e basic types of interventions the consultant uses—*acceptant* (the consultant gives the ent a sense of worth, value, acceptance, and support); *catalytic* (the consultant helps e client generate data and information to restructure the client's perceptions); *con-)ntation* (the consultant points out value discrepancies in the client's beliefs and ac- ns); *prescription* (the consultant tells the client what to do to solve the problem); and *'ories and principles* (the consultant teaches the client relevant behavioral science :ory so the client can learn to diagnose and solve his or her own problems).

The second dimension is the *focal issues* causing the client's problems. Blake and)uton identify four focal issue categories: power/authority, morale/cohesion, :ms/standards of conduct, and goals/objectives.

The third dimension of the cube is the unit of change that is the target of the con- tation. Five units are proposed: individual, group, intergroup, organization, and larger ial systems such as a community or even a society.

Five kinds of interventions, four different focal issues, and five different units of nge thus encompass the range of consultation possibilities. Blake and Mouton's ısulcube represents a major contribution to developing a theory of consultation and :rvention.

As we said, interventions *do* different things; they *cause different things to pen.* One intervention's major result may be increasing interaction and commu- ıtion between parties. Another intervention's major result may be increasing lback, or increasing accountability. These *differential* results are often exactly :t is needed to produce change in the particular situation. For example, a situa- requiring increased accountability will benefit more from an intervention that ctly increases accountability than an intervention that increases interaction and munication. The following list shows some of the results one can expect from interventions.

Feedback. It refers to learning new data about oneself, others, group processes, or organi- zational dynamics—data that one did not previously take active account of and that reflects an objective picture of the real world. Awareness of this new information may lead to change if the feedback is not too threatening. Feedback is prominent in interventions such as process consultation, organization mirroring, sensitivity training, coaching and counsel- ing, and survey feedback.

Awareness of Changing Sociocultural Norms or Dysfunctional Current Norms. Often peo- ple modify their behavior, attitudes, and values when they become aware of changes in the *norms* influencing their behavior. This awareness has change potential because the indi- vidual will adjust his or her behavior to bring it in line with the new norms. One's aware- ness that "this is a new ball game" or that "we're now playing with a new set of rules" causes changes in individual behavior. Also, awareness of dysfunctional current norms serves as an incentive to change. When people sense a discrepancy be-

ms of (1) the objectives of the interventions, and (2) the targets of the interventions. coming familiar with how interventions relate to one another is useful for planning overall OD strategy.

As we see it, the following are the major "families" of OD interventions.

1. *Diagnostic Activities.* Fact-finding activities designed to ascertain the state of the system, the status of a problem, the "way things are." Available methods range from projective devices such as "build a collage that represents your place in this organization" to the more traditional data collection methods of interviews, questionnaires, surveys, meetings, and examining organizational records.
2. *Team-Building Activities.* Activities designed to enhance the effective operation of system teams. These activities focus on task issues, such as the way things are done, the skills and resources needed to accomplish tasks, the quality of relationship among the team members or between members and the leader, and how well the team gets its job done. In addition, one must consider different kinds of teams, such as formal work teams, temporary task force teams, newly constituted teams, and cross-functional teams.
3. *Intergroup Activities.* Activities designed to improve the effectiveness of interdependent groups—groups that must work together to produce a common output. They focus on joint activities and the output of the groups considered as a single system rather than as two subsystems. When two groups are involved, the activities are designated intergroup or interface activities; when more than two groups are involved, the activities are called *organizational mirroring.*
4. *Survey Feedback Activities.* Activities that rely on questionnaire surveys to generate information that is then used to identify problems and opportunities. Groups analyze the data regarding *their* performance and design action plans to correct problems.
5. *Education and Training Activities.* Activities designed to improve individuals' skills, abilities, and knowledge. Several activities are available and several approaches possible. For example, the individual can be educated in isolation from his or her own work group (say, in a T-group comprised of strangers), or one can be educated in relation to the work group (say, when a work team learns how better to manage interpersonal conflict). The activities may be directed toward technical skills required for performing tasks or may be directed toward improving interpersonal competence. The activities may be directed toward leadership issues, responsibilities and functions of group members, decision making, problem solving, goal setting and planning, and so forth.

Technostructural or Structural Activities. Activities designed to improve the effectiveness of organizational structures and job designs. The activities may take the form of (a) experimenting with new organization structures and evaluating their effectiveness in terms of specific goals or (b) devising new ways to bring technical resources to bear on problems. In chapter 12 we discuss these activities and label them "structural interventions," defined as "the broad class of interventions or change efforts aimed at improving organization effectiveness through changes in the task, structural, and technological subsystems." Included in these activities are job enrichment, management by objectives, sociotechnical systems, collateral organizations, and physical settings interventions.

Process Consultation Activities. Activities that "help the client to perceive, understand, and act upon process events which occur in the client's environment."[8] These activities perhaps more accurately describe an approach, a consulting mode in which the client gains insight into the human processes in organizations and learns skills in diagnosing and managing them. Primary emphasis is on processes such as communications, leader and member roles in groups, problem solving and decision making, group norms and

8. *Grid Organization Development Activities.* Activities developed by Robert Blake and Jane Mouton, which constitute a six-phase change model involving the total organization.[9] Internal resources are developed to conduct most of the programs, which may take from three to five years to complete. The model starts with upgrading individual managers' skills and leadership abilities, moves to team improvement activities, then to intergroup relations activities. Later phases include corporate planning for improvement, developing implementation tactics, and finally, an evaluation phase assessing change in the organization culture and looking toward future directions.
9. *Third-Party Peacemaking Activities.* Activities conducted by a skilled consultant (the third party), designed to "help two members of an organization manage their interpersonal conflict."[10] These activities are based on confrontation tactics and an understanding of the processes involved in conflict and conflict resolution.
10. *Coaching and Counseling Activities.* Activities that entail the consultant or other organization members working with individuals to help (a) define learning goals, (b) learn how others see their behavior, and (c) learn new behaviors to help them better achieve their goals. A central feature of this activity is nonevaluative feedback others give to an individual. A second feature is the joint exploration of alternative behaviors.
11. *Life- and Career-Planning Activities.* Activities that enable individuals to focus on their life and career objectives and how to go about achieving them. Structured activities include producing life and career inventories, discussing goals and objectives, and assessing capabilities, needed additional training, and areas of strength and deficiency.
12. *Planning and Goal-Setting Activities.* Activities that include theory and experience in planning and goal setting, problem-solving models, planning paradigms, ideal organization versus real organization "discrepancy" models, and the like. The goal is to improve these skills at the levels of the individual, group, and total organization.
13. *Strategic Management Activities.* Activities that help key policymakers to reflect systematically on the organization's basic mission and goals and environmental demands, threats, and opportunities, and to engage in long-range action planning of both a reactive and proactive nature. These activities direct attention in two important directions: outside the organization to a consideration of the environment, and away from the present to the future.
14. *Organizational Transformation Activities.* Activities that involve large-scale system changes; activities designed to fundamentally change the nature of the organization. Almost everything about the organization is changed—structure, management philosophy, reward systems, the design of work, mission, values, and culture. Total quality programs are transformational; so are programs to create high-performance organizations or high-performance work systems. Sociotechnical systems theory and open systems planning provide the basis for such activities.

Each of these families of interventions includes many activities. They involve both conceptual material and actual experience with the phenomenon being studied. Some families are directed toward specific targets, problems, or processes. For example, team-building activities are specific to work teams, while life-planning activities are directed to individuals, although these latter activities take place in group settings. Some interventions are *problem* specific: examples are the third-party peacemaking activities and the goal-setting activities. Some activities are *process* specific: an example is intergroup activities that explore the processes involved in managing interfaces.

Another way to classify OD interventions is by the *primary target* of the intervention, for example, individuals, dyads and triads, teams and groups, intergroup relations, and the total organization. Figure 8-1 shows this classification scheme. Some interventions have multiple targets and multiple uses, and thus appear in several places in the figure.

Target Group	*Interventions Designed to Improve Effectiveness*
Individuals	Life- and career-planning activities Coaching and counseling T-group (sensitivity training) Education and training to increase skills, knowledge in the areas of technical task needs, relationship skills, process skills, decision making, problem solving, planning, goal-setting skills Grid OD phase 1 Work redesign Gestalt OD Behavior modeling
Dyads/Triads	Process consultation Third-party peacemaking Role negotiation technique Gestalt OD
Teams and Groups	Team building — Task directed — Process directed Gestalt OD Grid OD phase 2 Interdependency exercise Appreciative inquiry Responsibility charting Process consultation Role negotiation Role analysis technique "Startup" team-building activities Education in decision making, problem solving, planning, goal setting in group settings Team MBO Appreciations and concerns exercise Sociotechnical systems (STS) Visioning Quality of work life (QWL) programs Quality circles Force-field analysis Self-managed teams
Intergroup Relations	Intergroup activities — Process directed — Task directed Organizational mirroring Partnering Process consultation Third-party peacemaking at group level Grid OD phase 3 Survey feedback
Total Organization	Sociotechnical systems (STS) Parallel learning structures MBO (participation forms) Cultural analysis Confrontation meetings Visioning Strategic planning/strategic management activities Real-time strategic change Grid OD phases 4, 5, 6 Interdependency exercise Survey feedback Appreciative inquiry Search conferences Quality of work life (QWL) programs Total quality management (TQM) Physical settings Large-scale systems change

FIGURE 8-1 Typology of OD Interventions Based on Target Groups

These classification schemes are intended to help you understand the range and uses of OD interventions. For those interested in exploring typologies further, Porras and Robertson offer a comprehensive discussion.[11]

CONCLUDING COMMENT

This overview of OD interventions—the action component of organization development—presents some of the thinking that goes into planning and implementing OD interventions. Leaders and practitioners are encouraged to learn the full range of interventions so that change efforts will be relevant, timely, properly structured, and ultimately successful.

Notes

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2. D. C. McClelland, J. W. Atkinson, R. A. Clark, and E. L. Lowell, *The Achievement Motive* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1953).
3. From Michael Beer, *Organization Change and Development* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1980). Copyright © 1980 by Scott, Foresman and Company. Reprinted by permission.
4. Robert R. Blake and Jane S. Mouton, *The Managerial Grid* (Houston: Gulf, 1964), pp. 281–283. There is also *The Managerial Grid III* (1985) and *The Managerial Grid IV* (1990).
5. Robert R. Blake and Jane S. Mouton, *Consultation* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1976). See also *Consultation*, 2d ed. (1983).
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8. E. H. Schein, *Process Consultation, Vol. I* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1988).
9. Robert R. Blake and Jane S. Mouton, *Building a Dynamic Corporation Through Grid Organization Development* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969). This book is a treatise showing how grid organization development programs operate. See also the excellent update on Grid OD: Robert R. Blake, Jane S. Mouton, and Anne A. McCanse, *Change by Design* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1989).
10. R. E. Walton, *Interpersonal Peacemaking: Confrontation and Third-Party Consultation* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969), p. 1. This entire book is devoted to a discussion of this specialized intervention technique. See also R. E. Walton, *Managing Conflict*, 2d ed. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1987).
11. Jerry I. Porras and Peter J. Robertson, "Organizational Development: Theory, Practice, and Research," in Marvin D. Dunnette and Leaetta M. Hough, eds., *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 2d ed., vol. 3. (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1992), pp. 719–822.