

BRINGING SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND RESPONSIBILITY BEYOND BUSINESS

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ABSTRACT:

This paper explores how Organization Development attempts to move beyond the business world. As a profession, Organization Development progressed into the business dominion for accountability. The values of Kurt Lewin, considered one of the key founders of Organization Development, included more than just the responsibility of business to its bottom line. To that end, OD values will be explored and a challenge initiated to the Organizational Consultant. I will present future research that exams a large scale social example involving the possibility of conflict reoccurring in nation with a history of conflict. The work will also focus on the “social responsibility” significance within the business community from which future OD initiatives can accompany to enhance the world beyond business.

Keywords: Kurt Lewin, Values, Culture, Organizational Change, Anxiety, and Conflict Resolution.

THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

In the past 60 years, OD has become a new field in the realm of behavioral science. According to the 10th edition of Thomas Cummings and Christopher Worley’s Organization Development and Change (2015), Organization Development has been defined by in different ways:

Organization development is a system- development, improvement, and reinforcement of the strategies, structures, and processes that lead to organization effectiveness. (Cummings and Worley)

Organization development is a planned process of change in an organization’s culture through the utilization of behavioral science technology, research, and theory. (Warner Burke)

Organization development refers to a long-range effort to improve an organization’s problem-solving capabilities and its ability to cope with changes in its external environment with the help of external or internal behavioral-scientist consultants, or change agents, as they are sometimes called. (Wendell French)

Organization development is a system-wide process of data collection, diagnosis, action planning, intervention, and evaluation aimed at 1) enhancing congruence among organizational structure, process, strategy, people, and culture; 2) developing new and creative organizational solutions; and 3) developing the organization's self-renewing capacity. It occurs through the collaboration of organizational members working with a change agent using behavioral science theory, research, and technology. (Michael Beer) (p. 2).

These scholar-practitioners highlighted the behavioral science foundation within Organization Development that has allowed this profession to flourish. The development of human potential along with creating organization-wide involvement expands opportunities to effectively create competitive advantage and cultivate a commitment to excellence for successful outcomes. The definitions used to describe Organization Development presume that OD is only employed within the business realm. Yet, Kurt Lewin believed that Organization Development served a greater purpose.

KURT LEWIN AND THEORY

Kurt Lewin is considered one of the founders that developed the profession of Organization Development (Weisbord, 2012). Lewin was a scholar-practitioner whose contributions included developing T-groups, survey feedback, and action research (Weisbord, 2012). Examples of these contributions included launching the Research Center for Group Dynamics and the Commission on Community Interrelations. He spent much of his career focusing on the human value of work which probably came about from his personal heritage and fleeing of Germany.

He had encountered the violent and increasingly barbaric anti-Semitism of Hitler Germany. This, combined with an intense commitment to the problems and values of science, sharpened his awareness of the relationships between knowledge and policy, of the need for attention to political issues if human life and culture were to grow and be renewed. He had a view of what kind of human community the democratic society should be, having seen at first hand the enemies of such society (Marrow, 1969, p 85).

Lewin had a deep-rooted interest in the psychology surrounding social issues and wanted desperately to bridge the gap between social theory and social action (Marrow, 1969).

Lewin believed that action research was vital for social science. A researcher should serve as a consultant and the work should be done by the citizens themselves. The self-diagnosis of a problem can only be remedied through treatment stemming from within. The understanding of self will allow for pride, trust, and feelings for the sustainable approach to attain self-growth to occur.

Lewin knew how inadequate society's ability was to reduce intergroup conflict. He was also deeply aware of how much more had to be known about the forces which produced conflict or harmony between different races or religions and how they could be controlled or directed. Action research offered a promising beginning (Marrow, 1969, p 185).

Action research also allows for the organization to choose which actions are successful and which actions require change. Therefore, the relationship between the researcher and the community is vital (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). The attitudes of the community need to proceed science at all times through-out a project. Social resistance will occur if the interests of the project stem towards evolving science over that of bettering the community (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT

Since Organization Development's conceptualization by Lewin, the profession has expanded and grown. The original six books from the Addison-Wesley Series helped define Organization Development by utilizing the founding father's ideas but also created individual topics within the field. The authors and topics included Beckhard (Strategies and Models), Bennis (Nature, Origin, and Prospects), Blake and Mouton (Managerial Grid), Lawrence and Lorsch (Diagnosis and Action), Schein (Process Consultation), and Walton (Managing Conflict). This article will expand on Richard Walton's views that describe how conflict can and should be handled in the workplace and that conflict resolution is vital for organizations to compete and to remain relevant in the marketplace. These concepts regarding conflict that are used within organizations are also found in dealing with societal conflict.

Walton believes that every organization will have interpersonal conflict because of the numerous interdependencies within organizations that exist (Walton, 1969). Interpersonal conflict can result in disagreements over substantive issues such as policy or structure, or interpersonal antagonisms that are regarded as personal and emotional differences amongst organizational members. To successfully deal with conflict, three factors need to be managed. First, inhibitions regarding anger, resentment, or envy need to be defined and dealt with accordingly because their existence is present either directly or indirectly. Next, emotional energy needs to be managed because it takes a great deal of emotion to suppress a conflict but even more energy to confront it. Lastly, the risk of conflict is an ingredient that shapes organizations because fear of personal or organizational success might be jeopardized if new policies or procedures are initiated (Walton, 1987).

When dealing with interpersonal relationships, ensuring mutual motivation can differ.

Conflict may be viewed as occurring along cognitive (perception), emotional (feeling), and behavioral (action) dimensions. This three-dimensional perspective can help us understand the complexities of conflict and why a conflict

sometimes seems to proceed in contradictory directions.
(Mayer, 2000, p.4)

Thus, identifying these three areas of concern should help a consultant minimize conflict. Yet, conflict usually transcends or impacts into other areas; thus, it is good to understand what triggers a response that ignites conflict. Interpersonal conflict often occurs in a recurring manner and according to Walton, the best way to control conflict involves a well-managed dialogue between parties (Walton, 1969).

POWER WITHIN CONFLICT

Can every conflict have a well-managed dialogue between parties? In the marketplace, we expect corporations to provide consumers with a quality product for a quality price while making a profit. During this process, human beings tend to utilize power that align with their self-interests. For example, a purchasing agent will utilize his/her buying power over a vendor to get a certain price. This agreement will allow the organization to price their product publicly which includes a healthy margin while repaying the purchasing agent a bonus for a successful task. Therefore, a definition of power includes “the ability to get things done the way one wants them to be done (Singh, 2009, p. 166).” Also, Dr. Singh describes many different types of power that include legitimate, reward, coercive, expert, reciprocal, and referent. An important element that stands out for this discussion includes:

Power is sought to control and determine the future of departments and organizations, the outcomes of interpersonal conflicts, and personal security and prosperity. The more the disorganization or conflict in an organization, the more the need for power will be felt and sought. When a person seeks not merely power, but control as well, conflicts tend to increase (Kahn 1964). In addition, the hunger for power sometimes leads to the exploitation of individual fears- a highly detrimental and abusive psychology- a negative trend for positive organizational development. It also transpires that those exploited may not be aware of their exploitation. In the face of fear, though, people react differently: some acquiesce, some flee (absenteeism and turnover), and some fight back. (Singh, 2009, p.166)

Power can cause conflict especially when the interests of the organization no longer align. When dealing with ‘interests,’ we refer to predispositions, embracing goals, values, desires, expectations, and other orientations and inclinations that lead a person to act in one way rather than another (Morgan, 2006).

Other key essentials that drive the utilization of power to gain a competitive advantage or competitive strategy within an organization are tactics and motives (Lewicki, Saunders, & Minton, 2001). Tactics and motives usually coincide with the person who has the power. In the case of a manager, the creation of a power difference is utilized to achieve personal goals. In the case

of a negotiator, power equalization is created to minimize the capacity of a level playing field for all parties in the conflict resolution process. Both examples utilize tactics for the creation of power over another or create a state of equal power for everyone involved. A motive always relates to why the tactics were initiated (Lewicki, Saunders, & Minton, 2001).

ANXIETY WITHIN CONFLICT AT THE GROUP LEVEL

At the group or public level, conflict resolution integrates with organization development by creating opportunities of bringing communities and government together into a co-creative relationship.

People cannot be changed from the outside as if they are pieces on a chess board. Indeed, to apply an external stimulus for change is more likely to provoke resistance or further passivity. If women in a community are stuck, seemingly passive and unable to break out of dependence and subservience to patriarchy, it is not because they are internally passive, but because their will and capacity to change is held back by a series of constraints both internal (psychological and cultural) and external. If they can be helped to remove or lower these constraints, they will be able to change themselves and their (power) relationship to the world. (Reeler, 2015, p.16)

One constraint that continues to exist with any transformational change is anxiety. A textbook definition of anxiety includes “distress or uneasiness caused by fear of danger or misfortune (Marshak, 2016).” This distress or uneasiness occurs in two different configurations: at the individual level and at the group level. For the individual, the instinctive defense mechanisms disembarking from anxiety includes denial, repression, projection, conversion, advantages, and damages, and so forth.

Individuals also import their own anxieties into a larger group. Wilfred Bion, a British psychoanalyst, describes how a group’s instinctive reaction towards anxiety occurs, a) Fight or flight where group members physically or psychologically flee the situation or fight the bearer of bad news or an authority figure; b) Dependency on the leader where people act as if they know nothing and only fantasized omnipotent leader can save them; c) Pairing where two individuals (or sub-groups) are left to interact in the hopes they will give birth to a saving idea or plan (Smith & Berg, 1987). These reactions are deducted from a rational problem solving approach but occur only when the group feels too much anxiety. In recognizing this, boundaries within a group allow for either unwanted parts to be pushed aside or having to confront issues that a group would chose not to encounter (Smith & Berg, 1987).

Anxiety affects the opportunity for an individual or a group to initiate change. For example, when an individual or a group is affiliated by an event that causes confusion related to their future well-being, psychological responses are initiated. If these responses are positive, enhanced aspects of motivation occur. If these responses are negative, fear and threat occur.

If they experience too much anxiety they will deny, deflect, distort, defend or be otherwise too fearful to change. Only when there is enough anxiety to motivate a search for new thoughts and behaviors, but not so much as to lead fearful debilitation, will change occur. Conceptually that sounds logical and is a useful maxim to keep in mind when dealing with change efforts. In practice, however, it becomes difficult to manage. How do we know when there is too little, too much, or just the right amount of anxiety to motivate change? Furthermore, what is too little for me might be too much for you. What is threatening to one group might be motivating to another. (Marshak, 2016, p11)

Thus, fear and heightened levels of anxiety could occur when an individual or a group cannot accurately predict the future regarding a structural change for a society. This perceived threat could also terrorize social well-being for both the individual and the group. Consultants can utilize existing models (i.e. SCARF) from which psychological threats and rewards pertaining from anxiety can be analyzed. This type of research would be valuable for Organization Development to move beyond the business realm for the long-term development of the profession.

TYPES OF ANXIETY

Edgar Schein, an expert on culture change, describes two different types of anxiety. First, survival anxiety relates to the process of learning new behaviors or continuous failure will occur. This type of anxiety is seen in both business and social groupings with the old phrase of “adapt or die.” The second anxiety described is of a learning nature. Learning anxiety relates to all of the potential difficulties that exist in order to create new behavior. In short, if learning anxiety is higher than survival anxiety, a group will resist change (Schein, 2013). These types of anxieties can lead to the understanding of the structural or the cultural nature of group dynamics relating to conflict. There is also evidence that conflict has different effects on the group performance when it occurs early in the group’s life (Bendersky & Hays, 2011). Conflicts that challenge an existing order create a more competitive nature within the group. In summary, defining and understanding the historical nature and culture of the group will become vital.

WHY DISCUSS CONFLICT, POWER, AND ANXIETY?

I have come to the awareness that there is a lack of research in the field of Organization Development that focuses on the evaluation of conflict outside of the business realm. My search of the literature included a review using Full Text Finder from the EBSCO host. An emerging posit that has risen to the surface from this literary search included that Organization Development significantly is categorized within the business and human resources realms. Yet, new research and experimentation in the topics surrounding conflict, power, and anxiety may lead to new ideas or new programs for breakthrough solutions including the betterment of society. Dr. Jonathan Silk from the University of North Texas states

When members of an organization have a conflict with each other, their values are on display. How they treat each other in that moment demonstrates their personal values. Shared values can be the basis for moving conflict forward to solution and can have additional positive benefits for the organization. (www.unthsc.edu/administrative)

I believe that studying Mayer’s three-dimensional approach to conflict (cognitive, emotional, and behavior) may lead the Organization Development profession to more knowledge in the conflict sector. I will discuss this more in depth in the future research section. Yet, being socially responsible is at our core values as Organization Development professionals.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY WITHIN OD

In the field of Organizational Development, consultants and researchers have focused much time and energy to bring social consciousness and responsibility into the business community. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has a long history that dates back centuries because the business community has had a long history of caring about society (Towns, 2017). The Center for Effective Organizations (CEO) at the University of Southern California’s Marshall School of Business was one of the first higher educational institutions to put this message into print. “We set the stage by discussing the mission of organizational researchers to do research that contributes to theory and practice. We believe that mission stems directly from the societal importance of organizations as well as from the role of professional schools (Mohrman & Lawler, 2011, p. 3).” With this sentiment in mind, academic leaders have ranked the importance of social issues in the management field. Dr. Carroll in an article from *Business & Society* conducted a survey asking academic leaders “what topics do you see as most important for research in the social issues in management field in balance of the 1990’s?” (Carroll, 1994, 14). The rankings included:

Topic/Issue	Percentage	Frequency
Business Ethics		21.5
Business and society/social issues	16.1	
Corporate social performance		10.7
Business and government/public policy		9.8
Environmental issues		8.9
Theory/research methods development		6.2
Issues within corporations	6.2	
Strategic issues		3.6
Corporate governance		2.7
Stakeholders		1.8
Other		1.8

(Towns, 2017, p.5)

One such academic leader is Dr. Sue Mohrman of the Center for Effective Organizations. In her work with CEO, she focused her studies on corporate stewardship in the business realm.

Global corporations need to operate in new and fundamentally different ways. They need to be simultaneously profitable, ethical, and socially and environmentally responsible. A growing number of corporations are demonstrating that they can be profitable while being effective stewards. They have shown that doing this requires that corporations make major changes in how they are organized, managed, and how they relate to their multiple stakeholders. At this point, most companies are not serving as stewards, but there is evidence that more are shifting toward this role. In order for most global corporations to act as stewards, numerous social, political, and environmental changes are needed. It is not certain that these changes will occur quickly, given the current threats to humanity and the Earth. (Mohrman, 2015, p 2)

Her message generates knowledge that would help accelerate progress toward a sustainable world. Dr. Mohrman's definition of progress is very similar to how action research is conducted, it needs to come from stakeholders, corporate leaders, corporate customers, employees, and citizens of the world (Mohrman, 2015). In short, the narrow view short term profit statements will be greatly impacted in future generations if changes to corporate philosophies do not change towards the environment. Thus, Organizational Development professionals can shape the corporate and societal direction of future leaders. This mission is at the core of what Kurt Lewin believed regarding Organization Development's future.

FUTURE RESEARCH

When assessing a global Organization Development project, cross-cultural issues remain critical. Defining the cultural framework is vital to fully understand how to initiate any change process. Thus, to create a transformative public conflict resolution, one must analyze the current state of the culture.

Public conflict resolution thinking encompasses more than a theory of resolving disputes. Such thinking is contributing to an evolution in the understanding of what conflict means, when conflict is valuable, where it is destructive, and how it can be transformed. It is leading to a reevaluation of who we are as human beings in relationship with one another. It is becoming part of the re-conception of how democratic institutions and communities may be sustained. (Dukes, 1996, p.7)

One country that is unique with culture and conflict is Northern Ireland. Joel Krieger stated in the second edition of the Introduction of Comparative Politics (2000) that "the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland reflected enduring political tensions flowing from antagonistic collective identities, as differences in political power and economic privilege enflamed cultural (in this case, religious) divisions

(p. 71).” Power relationships can create patterns of domination that favor one section of society over another and in Northern Ireland’s case religious groupings define it (Hatch, Cunliffe, 2006). Thus, Northern Ireland can be described as an organization with a structure that constantly feuds with power of identity. This conflict has the most basic struggle for those who want to see Northern Ireland remain part of the United Kingdom, those who want to see it as part of the Republic of Ireland, and those who chose to remain neutral and/or silent.

Future research will evaluate cognitive (perception of power), emotional (anxiety), and behavioral (action based off Hofstede’s newest cultural dimensions). These evaluations will come in the form of survey feedback. These surveys were generated pre-and post-Brexit. Brexit being the example of an extraordinary circumstance that could induce conflict into a society with a long history of fighting. A new appreciation regarding awareness will allow for the fine tuning of previous thinking and allow for considerable rethinking for the betterment for attaining a peace driven society. Thus, understanding the fears that Catholics/Republicans and Protestants/Unionists face within their community should hopefully help bring forgiveness from previous conflict, alleviate anxiety, and a build better society. This project references Lewin’s philosophies that Organization Development should be used to help bring about social reform (Lewin, 1997). In that same philosophy, Margaret Mead (a colleague and friend of Lewin) said “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has (www.interculturalstudies.org).” I think it’s time that we (as OD professionals) should seek a better understanding to the underlying causes of conflict. This knowledge can bring social consciousness and responsibility beyond business and the Organizational Development profession to address society as an organization.

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