

The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science


<http://jab.sagepub.com>

Assessing the Field of Organization Development

Jeana Wirtenberg, Lilian Abrams and Carolyn Ott
Journal of Applied Behavioral Science 2004; 40; 465
DOI: 10.1177/0021886304270246

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://jab.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/40/4/465>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



NTL Institute

Additional services and information for *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://jab.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://jab.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Assessing the Field of Organization Development

Jeana Wirtenberg

Jeana Wirtenberg & Associates, LLC

Lilian Abrams

Abrams & Associates

Carolyn Ott

Inspired Performance, LLC

This article describes Phase I of a larger organization development (OD) initiative. A survey was sent to more than 6,000 members of the Organization Development Network, Organization Development Institute, and International Organization Development Association to assess present weaknesses and potential strengths of the field. Respondents to this survey indicated that the field of OD (a) lacks a clear, distinct definition; (b) needs greater quality control/effectiveness and business acumen among OD practitioners; and (c) lacks clarity around its return on investment and perceived value of the work performed. At the same time, OD has significant strengths that can be leveraged. These include a systemic orientation in organizations, an ability to assist in change management, teamwork and leadership development, and the values OD brings to its practice. Building on these results, a literature review, and interviews with business leaders, six key integrated themes that have implications for the OD profession are described.

Keywords: organization development (OD); business challenges/business partner; OD future; OD SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats); organization effectiveness (OE)

Significant contributions to this article and overall initiative were made by Ted Nguyen, leader, Global Committee on the Future of OD; Elena Feliz, leader, Community Outreach, Global Committee on the Future of OD; and Howard Deutsch, CEO, Quantisoft, LLC.

Jeana Wirtenberg is president of Jeana Wirtenberg & Associates, LLC, a consulting firm specializing in organization effectiveness, leadership development, and learning within and across the diverse sectors of business, government, nonprofits, and academia.

THE JOURNAL OF APPLIED BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE, Vol. 40 No. 4, December 2004 465-479

DOI: 10.1177/0021886304270246

© 2004 NTL Institute

THE GLOBAL COMMITTEE ON THE FUTURE OF ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT (OD)—BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The field of organization development is at a crossroads. In *Organization Development at Work: Conversations on the Values, Applications, and Future of OD*, Billie Alban (2003) describes the present as follows:

We are going through some difficult times right now. Many external consultants are finding it hard to get work. Internal consultants are fearful of being laid off. With business working at the survival level in terms of the Maslow hierarchy, many things that we offer are put on the back burner. We are a superfluous service to organizations unless we can help them see the value we bring. (pp. 125-126)

Over the past several years, there has been a sharp increase in the number of OD practitioners “in transition” (i.e., whose jobs have been restructured or eliminated). Trends point to downward spirals for both internal and external practitioners, who find themselves constantly challenged to justify the value of OD. A number of internal practitioners have lost their jobs as organizations continue to “right size” their staffs, ostensibly to “enhance their productivity.” Furthermore, as these transitions occur, the OD work is not always outsourced to OD practitioners. Instead, some of the work is transferred to human resources (HR) generalists or HR business partners; sometimes it goes to traditional management consultant firms whose approaches are very different from traditional OD, whereas in other cases, it is eliminated altogether. At the same time, a number of external practitioners are finding it increasingly challenging to win new contracts as demand for traditional OD work appears to be decreasing.

The study reported here is a part of a larger initiative jointly sponsored by the Organization Development Institute (ODI), Organization Development Network (ODN), and International Organization Development Association (IODA) called the Global Committee on the Future of Organization Development. Comprised of more than 200 OD practitioners, the Global Committee initiative is guided by a coalition of advisory boards from business (consisting of heads of OD from 34 highly successful global corporations and nonprofit organizations), academia, and a government advisory board representing federal, state, and local governments in the United States.¹

METHODOLOGY

In Phase I of the initiative, research was conducted along the following four parallel tracks:

Lilian Abrams is president of Abrams & Associates, an organizational effectiveness consulting firm in New Jersey, and is an adjunct faculty member at New York University.

Carolyn Ott is the founder and president of Inspired Performance, a firm dedicated to helping organizations, teams, and individual executives define and achieve their goals.

- a. Literature review: An extensive analysis was conducted synthesizing business challenges and opportunities from more than 80 recent research documents.
- b. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT): A survey was sent to more than 6,000 OD practitioners with more than 900 responses.
- c. Business leader interviews: Business leaders from the companies represented by the advisory board members were interviewed one on one.
- d. Business and academic advisory board interviews: Business OD leaders represented on the business advisory board and academic advisory board members were interviewed one on one.

The next section focuses in detail on the findings and results specifically from the SWOT analysis. This is followed in the discussion section by the six key integrated themes that incorporate the synthesis of the inputs from all four of these sources.²

SWOT SURVEY

Procedures

The SWOT was developed by a survey subteam³ as part of the Global Committee's Phase I exploratory research process. The survey team prepared a questionnaire with six open-ended questions (the questionnaire is available on the portal) asking about the OD profession's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, value/impact, and other comments. The questionnaire was distributed by the Global Committee's leadership committee to more than 6,000 people, including the membership e-mail addresses from the rosters of ODN (4,000), ODI (300), IODA (300), the New Jersey Organization Development Network (NJODN; 1,200), and National Training Labs (NTL; 300) (some repetition may be expected). Recipients of the survey were encouraged to forward it to their personal networks. The survey was completed by 907 respondents.

The survey demographics measured self-reports of respondents' age, gender, education, and years practicing OD as well as primary geographic regions and industries of OD practice.

The survey results were gathered and reviewed by the four-person team for initial classifications. Based on this review, an extensive coding list was created to enter and track specific issues identified by respondents in the following major categories: profession (what we do, the areas we focus on, the types and categories of work we do, our orientation), practitioners (who we are; our personal qualities, characteristics, and capabilities; how we feel, act, and behave to ourselves and our clients), techniques/processes (how we work, the specific processes and tools we might use to assist our clients), customers (where we work, the environment in which we perform our work, types of clients, types of industries), and results (why we work, the measured and unmeasured outcomes of our work, qualitative and quantitative). Within these major categories, 100 subcategories were created based on the initial review. Team members read and coded each response on the 907 respondents' questionnaires and then reviewed the sorted data to extract the key learnings and themes. Initial findings were presented to the Global Committee in April 2004.

TABLE 1
Respondent Demographics and Key Characteristics

Survey sample	Survey sent to approximately 6,000 potential respondents, including rosters from Organization Development Institute (300), Organization Development Network (4,000), International Organization Development Association (300), New Jersey Organization Development Network (1,200), and National Training Labs (300)
Survey response rate	Total respondents: 907 (response rate is approximately 15%; survey respondents may or may not be representative of the entire organization development profession)
Survey time frame	The survey was conducted from mid-December 2003 to early January 2004
Respondent demographic characteristics	Survey responses were received from North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia, with more than 80% of responses from the United States and almost half of the U.S. responses from Northeastern United States
Respondents' ages	48% of respondents were age 50 or older; 80% were age 40 or older
Respondents' areas of practice	Respondents could provide more than one answer to the question regarding primary focus of practice; the most often listed areas of primary practice focus were corporate (69%), not for profit (35%), government (31%), education (25%), manufacturing (24%), health (24%), high tech (22%), financial (21%), and pharmaceutical (18%)
Respondents' years of practice	40% of respondents have been OD practitioners for 16 years or longer and 80% for 6 years or longer
Respondents' educational background	9% of respondents have a bachelor's degree, 62% have a master's degree, and 25% have a Ph.D.
Respondents' gender	56% of respondents were women and 43% were men
Respondents' primary work role	Respondent primary work role includes internal practitioner (52%), external practitioner (43%), and academic (3.7%)
Respondents' location of practice	Primary location of practice is virtually identical to where the responses were received from, with more than 80% of responses from the United States and almost half of the U.S. responses from Northeastern United States

Respondent Demographics and Key Characteristics

There were 907 survey respondents (with more than 6,000 people receiving the survey worldwide), for a 15% response rate (see Table 1). Because the survey targeted ODI, ODN, and IODA membership lists, the organizations' respondents are most often members of ODN (73%), Regional ODN/ODI (41%), American Society for Training and Development (ASTD; 34%), and Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM; 23%).

TABLE 2
Top Three Sources of Strengths of Organization Development (OD)

<i>Strength</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1. Arising within profession	74
Overall systemic orientation in organizations	22
Ability to assist in change management	20
2. Techniques and processes	21
Support in building teamwork	5
Leadership development	5
3. Practitioners themselves	15
Values OD brings to practice	4

Results

Strengths of OD

The SWOT survey questions were open ended, and respondents often provided more than one response to each question. These responses were often represented by more than one code and coding category, as appropriate, which allowed the total response percentages for the overall coding categories (profession, practitioners, techniques/processes, etc.) to exceed 100%.

As summarized in Table 2, the clear majority of the 907 survey respondents described the strengths of the OD profession as arising from within the profession (74%). Within the profession category, the two most frequent responses given by respondents were an “overall systemic orientation in organizations” (22%) and an “ability to assist in change management” (20%).

To a significantly lesser degree, responses that fell into the techniques and processes category were described as strengths by 21% of respondents. Within this category, support in building teamwork (5%) and leadership development (5%) were equally the most frequent responses. Finally, 15% of survey respondents indicated that strengths lie within OD practitioners themselves. The most frequently mentioned strength that practitioners were said to possess were the “values OD brings to practice” (4%).

Strength 1: Systemic orientation. Many respondents said that a distinct OD contribution was the systemic, or holistic, orientation to the organization. It is looking at the “big picture,” including an organization’s various stakeholders, constituents, organizational subentities, internal functions, and processes. All of these important elements are on behalf of the “human element” in organizations and directly or indirectly coach clients to hold this perspective as well. Many comments mentioned the advantages of combining the systemic approach with change management, although these two strengths were coded separately. Some representative quotes follow:

- “Ability to look at the system as a whole.”
- “The ability to stand back and see the whole system and within that context provide feedback to the client on change, teaming, whatever the organization[al] issue or situation is about.”
- “OD approaches the organization from a systemic/whole systems perspective. This approach [is] then used to influence the most senior level leaders in solving systemic business problems.”
- “[A] current strength is the courage to facilitate change using the entire system.”
- “OD’s strength is its system-wide perspective of the organization, and the impact of interventions on a variety of facets of the operation.”

Strength 2: Change management. Change management refers both to change in the overall organization in its entirety and to processes of change in smaller subsections of the organization or with the people and groups within it (e.g., divisions, specific work teams, key leaders, etc.). Respondents referred to OD practitioners’ expertise in specific change methodologies and techniques as well as a general orientation toward facilitating and managing effective organizational change. They also commented on OD practitioners’ ability to partner with managers and leaders to effect change in organizations.

Some representative quotes follow:

- “Provides the opportunity to implement constructive change interventions within organizations. If done well, these interventions can make a significant impact on the lives of individuals and the success of the organizations for which they work.”
- “OD stimulates knowledgeable practitioners to grasp the need for change, the process for change, the implications of the change, and the methodology for effective implementation. Practitioners understand and guide clients to understand the far reaches of change and that entry in itself is a change.”
- “Information about working with and applying change technologies.”
- “The OD perspective causes leaders to think more holistically and longer term about their approaches to change.”
- “OD incorporates a wide range of tools and techniques to involve people in change processes.”
- “OD partners well with line leaders to assess change needs and develop comprehensive, integrated change management plans. Once developed, OD adds value by actively facilitating and co-managing change implementation.”

Strength 3: Teamwork. The importance of teams and teamwork was one of the two most frequently mentioned responses under the OD techniques and processes category. Many respondents referred to teams as a particular area of focus in organizations, in particular when designing and guiding large change efforts. Other comments referred to teams simply as one element in the organization to which OD practitioners do and should pay attention. On its own, team building was said to be an activity where OD practitioners’ expertise is valuable. Some representative quotes follow:

- “Does well: Helps organizations, teams, and individuals work together to continuously increase their capabilities to innovate, improve, and perform in the service of their stakeholders.”
- “[OD] assist[s] teams with change management strategies.”
- “[OD] allows teams to develop and grow.”
- “Many of the tools of OD, when properly applied, also . . . add value: i.e., survey feedback, team development interventions, etc.”

- “Value is most often seen in change efforts, team building, and M&A transitions.”

Strength 4: Leadership development. Leadership development was mentioned by most respondents as a standalone topic, needing no further explication. It was most often mentioned as part of a list of the primary activities that OD practitioners facilitate successfully in organizations and that represents a distinct contribution of OD as a field. A few representative quotes follow:

- “Leadership Development, Facilitation, Large Group Interventions, Change Management.”
- “Strategic Planning; Visioning; Change Management; Conflict Management; Leadership Development.”

Strength 5: Values. In the category of responses that focused on qualities of OD practitioners themselves, the most frequently mentioned response was about OD practitioners’ values as a defining aspect of OD work. Although these values were generally not specifically delineated by respondents, one distinct value that OD practitioners were said to contribute was a “humanistic” value, that OD brings a focus on the “human element” to organizations. Values were said both to be a core tool and a platform from which both OD practitioners and the organizations they work with achieve results and effective change. Some representative quotes follow:

- “We honor a values-based approach to change which strengthens the organization’s culture in terms of trust and collaboration.”
- “OD still holds values as core to any change process, which can be critical to achieving real results.”
- “[One strength of OD is] . . . a clear set of professional values.”
- “Providing the voice for the human being part of the system within the organization.”
- “Treating people in organizations as human beings instead of as machines.”

Weaknesses of OD

As noted earlier, because the SWOT survey questions were open ended, respondents often provided more than one response to each question. These responses were often represented by more than one code and coding category, as appropriate, which allowed the total response percentages for the overall coding categories (profession, practitioners, results, etc.) to exceed 100%.

As summarized in Table 3, the clear majority of the 907 survey respondents described the weaknesses of the OD profession as arising from within the profession (58%). Within the profession category, the two most frequent responses given by respondents were “lack of definition of the field” (14%) and “lack of distinction of the field” (8%).

The most frequent responses that noted weaknesses of practitioners themselves (49%) focused on the following three areas: lack of quality control (20%), lack of business acumen (12%), and lack of attention to customer needs (5%).

Within the category results of our work, 35% of respondents noted weaknesses, the most frequent being insufficiently clear return on investment (ROI; 20%) and insufficiently clear value of the work (18%).

TABLE 3
Top Three Weaknesses of Organization Development (OD)

<i>Weakness</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1. Arising within profession	58
Lack of definition of the field of OD	14
Lack of distinction of the field of OD	8
2. Practitioners themselves	49
Lack of quality control of practitioners	20
Insufficient business acumen of practitioners	12
Insufficient emphasis on customer needs	5
3. Results of our work	35
Insufficiently clear return on investment	20
Insufficiently clear value of the work	18

Weakness 1: Lack of definition and distinctiveness of OD. Many respondents noted the broad set of tools, techniques, and solutions the field of OD encompasses and listed this breadth of knowledge as contributing to a key weakness: the lack of definition of the field. Presenting an unclear brand to our public, being seen as fragmented, lacking in focus, and without international standards were frequent concerns. Another key area of concern was the lack of rigor in defining the field and the specializations within OD as well as the qualifications and criteria for becoming a practitioner (the lack of qualifications and criteria for becoming a practitioner was also noted as a threat). Respondents noted that they are frequently defined by the specialization they work in (change management, leadership development, coaching) rather than by a broader mission for an industry.

In terms of the lack of distinctiveness of OD, concern was noted regarding the “merging” or “blending” of fields, particularly that of HR and OD. The general confusion over the definition of OD combined with the inability to present OD’s uniqueness and value proposition were noted as particular weaknesses in marketing the profession to the customer base. Some representative quotes follow:

- “We lack a shared vision, binding us together as a profession.”
- “We have a hard time defining OD to our clients because every practitioner has a different definition.”
- “There is a general lack of identity as a field of practice and increasingly as a field of academic study.”
- “The field needs clearer boundaries, differentiators from related fields such as training, and quality improvement, performance consulting and general management consulting. This blurred distinction makes it hard to attribute specific results to OD interventions.”
- “We lack a differentiation of OD practitioners and HR generalists and the clarity about how to best support the business from an OD and HR perspective.”

Weakness 2: Lack of quality control of practitioners. The lack of quality control of practitioners focused on the following key themes: the lack of an industry-wide program certifying or credentialing practitioners, protecting the reputation of the field by differentiating credentialed OD practitioners from all others, and the belief that practi-

tioners who enter this field without the necessary content knowledge and experience do work that ultimately diminishes the value of OD.

- “The field has virtually no qualifying credentials in order to practice. Virtually anyone can go into the OD consulting business—this lack of regulation hurts the image of the profession with our clients.”
- “The lack of a common, industry-wide program certifying high professional, moral, and ethical standards appears to be our biggest weakness—the absence of a certifying board is our greatest vulnerability.”
- “There is no international OD standard, no international unified course of study for licensing, no international code of ethics, extreme variances in the capability of practitioners, no international continuing education requirements to ensure customers are getting value.”
- “We are too unfocused as a body of knowledge, values and ethics, lacking a core structure as a profession.”
- “There are no certifications, qualifying degrees or formal requirements like those that legitimize other professions.”
- “Continued development of our field is dependent on quality OD services that are delivered consistently and effectively. Addressing the consistency of services is important to create a stable face and level of quality associated with OD.”

Weakness 3: Insufficient business acumen of practitioners/insufficient emphasis on customer needs. Many respondents to the survey noted that the reputation of OD practitioners is more in the “soft” or “touchy-feely” realm than that of a true business partner. A failure to learn the operational aspects of businesses they support and the lack of fluency with business language were often cited as weaknesses. Respondents noted that capable practitioners with content knowledge of a business or business expertise in finance, sales, or operations are better equipped to translate OD services into meaningful business results. Concern was expressed over the dual challenge to stay at the cutting edge of the OD field and be on the leading edge of business to maintain credibility as businesspeople. Understanding how the business runs and the business issues that are on the minds of executives needs to be a core capability for OD practitioners. Particular mention was made of the OD practitioners’ lack of economic or financial acumen. Some representative quotes follow:

- “People who do OD are not business focused, they cannot speak the same language as their clients.”
- “Many business executives see OD as ancillary to the core business strategy—OD practitioners need to be steeped in the business and be able to speak in business terms. If not executives will see OD as soft and academic.”
- “The OD community is typically very weak in understanding business and not good when the business issues are complex.”
- “We need to understand the needs of CEOs and provide immediate solutions.”
- “OD is still somewhat disconnected from the fundamental concerns of senior management—issues related to profitability, productivity, cost, quality, speed, etc. OD tends to limit its focus strictly to the human side of organizational life and thereby limits both its attractiveness to senior management and its effectiveness. OD should expand its sphere of contribution by integrating the concerns of senior management into its domain.”
- “OD practitioners need to have a clear understanding of how businesses operate and then support the core mission of the business they serve—otherwise they will become irrelevant.”

Weakness 4: Insufficiently clear ROI/value of the work. Many respondents noted that OD projects are not strongly connected to the business strategies of the clients they serve. They indicated concern that practitioners are not capable of asserting their value and impact on an organization's success. Many expressed the fear that organizations are focusing only on activities with a clear ROI and measurable business results, and the "soft" area of OD is not seen as delivering tangible business results, or worse yet, OD practitioners are not partnering well enough with executives to place the business issues in context with people issues. Without the ability to speak our client's language and indicate a cause and effect relationship between OD and the bottom line, concern was expressed that efforts and initiatives may be dropped due to perceived lack of impact. Some representative quotes follow:

- "Some OD practitioners are not practical and real world. They appear confused between asserting their own value structure and meeting/finding/accepting and assisting the value structure of the client organization. This has led to the demise of many OD functions—at least in U.S. businesses. They did not appear to add value and to be capable of responding appropriately to the business urgencies. They at times do not take the needs of the business seriously."
- "We have difficulty in explaining the ROI of OD. We need to show clear business reasons why OD works and saves companies money in order to survive as a field."
- "We have not sufficiently engaged the executive leaders in understanding the relevance, importance and value of OD in helping organizations achieve business goals and success—this is a critically important stakeholder group."
- "Not well understood by corporate leadership as value added. Usually brought in to fix problems rather than as a strategic business partner. OD practitioners do not position their value well—we're good at the work but not necessarily good at the sell."
- "Unable to understand the business, lack of ability to credibly articulate ROI. More of reacting to business events than behaving like a partner that can help drive change."

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In light of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the respondents, there are significant implications for the field of organization development and its future. Many OD practitioners thought that there could be a positive future for OD if acting in our role as change agents, we proactively seize key opportunities presented by current and future business challenges *and* if OD's weaknesses are addressed.

In terms of opportunities, more than half of respondents (58%) mentioned areas of opportunity for OD practitioners. This means that OD practitioners themselves may already hold some of the keys to how to cope with the necessary changes to expand OD's contribution.

As mentioned earlier, all of the research, including the literature review, SWOT findings and results, and executive interviews, was synthesized by the leadership team into six key integrated themes (KITs). Each of these key integrated themes is discussed here along with the implications of that theme for the future of the OD profession, OD practitioners, and value to business leaders and businesses (see Table 4).

TABLE 4
Key Integrated Themes

-
-
1. Globalization and multicultural and whole system perspective
 2. Building great workplace, productivity, and performance culture
 3. Leveraging technology and worldwide integration
 4. Corporate social responsibility is increasing
 5. Building leadership and organizational capabilities for the future
 6. Regulatory environment and new organizational forms
-

Key Integrated Themes

KIT 1: Globalization, multicultural and whole system perspective. In industry after industry, whether it is media, pharmaceuticals, energy, banking, or technology, we are seeing strong trends toward industry consolidation and more and more mergers and acquisitions, with a few giant companies spanning the world. When combined with simultaneous trends toward globalization of work and the workforce, businesses are challenged to meet the demands of the global economy, the marketplace, customers, employees, and shareholders.

Because a clear strength of OD is its whole system perspective, there are numerous possibilities for OD professionals to contribute and add value. OD professionals can leverage this strength in supporting business leaders in becoming “whole system thinkers;” in helping them identify best practices for industry consolidations, mergers, and acquisitions; in supporting businesses in achieving strategic alignment; and in addressing different phases of the business life cycle most appropriately from a people and systems perspective. Furthermore, OD practitioners can help to build skills and competencies of the workforce in multicultural sensitivity, fostering collaborative relationships across traditional organizational boundaries.

What is the value OD can add to business leaders and businesses in the context of this key integrated theme? We posit that

- OD can help businesses align strategies and execute them in a way that meets the firms’ financial goals and core values.
- If OD steps up to the challenge, we can ensure more positive results from organizational realignments, industry consolidations, and mergers and acquisitions by understanding and addressing the cultural dimensions that are so often overlooked and the cause of most M&A failures.
- We can contribute to increasing market share and shareholder value due to effective application of change management principles to business and product life cycles.

KIT 2: Building great workplace, productivity, and performance culture. Competitive pressures on margins, aggressive competition, and price wars are leading to demands for greater innovation, flexibility, and speed to market. Ever-shortening R&D cycles mean that those who are first to market dominate the competition, and ever-shortening product life cycles produce fleeting fame and then obsolescence. The consequence is intense scrutiny of core businesses, outsourcing of extraneous busi-

nesses, and ever-increasing demands on workers for higher levels of productivity—both quality and quantity of output.

The opportunities for OD professionals to demonstrate their contributions here are profoundly significant given our ability to facilitate organizational alignment and workforce engagement. The OD professional can help to foster employee engagement, enhance skills around innovation and flexibility, and help to build a performance culture in organizations (e.g., training in productivity and quality methods). OD practitioners can partner with business leaders to build workplaces that enhance productivity and ensure work is linked to business imperatives around speed, customers, and innovation.

What is the value to business leaders and businesses? If we meet these challenges, we can

- enhance productivity and profitability through organizational alignment,
- enhance commitment of the workforce for better overall performance,
- increase clarity of purpose and mission to inspire and engage the workforce,
- improve the ability to attract and retain top talent.

KIT 3: Leveraging technology and worldwide integration. We are witnessing simultaneously an explosion of technology (nanotechnology, biotech, life sciences, genetics, robotics, and other emerging technologies) combined with an inextricable dependence on technology. The need to leverage and align technology with business strategies to gain a competitive edge has never been greater. Pressures to balance technology costs and return on investment are intense. Globally, demands are ever increasing for worldwide integration and optimization of technology for increased global access and communications. Security threats to data security and to ensure business continuity in the event of a disaster further place technology front and center among the business imperatives.

In this context, OD professionals may be uniquely qualified to marry the capabilities of technology with individual and organizational needs, recognizing and addressing the challenges of technology from a people perspective. OD practitioners support business leaders in implementing new technologies and fostering continuous learning and knowledge sharing in organizations. At the same time, we need to stay current with technology advances and incorporate them into our own practice.

What is the value to business leaders and businesses? We posit that the value is

- leveraging and alignment of technology with business and people strategies,
- exploiting technology and readily adapting to the latest technological advances for competitive advantage,
- using technology to support learning and innovation for better results.

KIT 4: Corporate social responsibility is increasing. The public has witnessed disturbing trends around the world and in every sector of society. The spate of scandals rocking corporations requires greater accountability for business ethics and governance, especially among its leaders—the senior executives and board of directors.

This includes a demand for transparency and ethics in conducting business at every level. At the same time, the continuously widening economic gap between the have and have-not groups both within and between nations as well as increasing expectations for positively influencing human rights issues in countries where the company does business have resulted in a clamor for adopting socially responsible business practices. Moreover, concerns about the sustainability of our way of life and our natural resources are leading to demands for greater accountability for natural resources, including water, the environment, bioengineered products, and so forth.

What does this have to do with the OD profession and OD practitioners? OD can play a key role in identifying best practices in socially responsible business behavior, including ethics and governance, and developing skills and competencies that support these best practices, socially responsible values, and associated results in corporate drivers and key metrics (e.g., balanced scorecards, triple bottom line, etc.). Fundamentally, we can use our values-based practice to create a paradigm shift in the way business is perceived and conducted.

The OD practitioner can coach and support business leaders in shifting/enhancing their socially responsible orientation and actions (e.g., show them what's in it for them) and build expertise in skills, competencies, and understandings regarding ethics, governance, and socially responsible practices.

What is the value to business and business leaders? We posit that if OD steps up to these challenges, we support businesses in

- improving their reputation among citizenries, consumers, and investors;
- enhancing the commitment of employees as they find increased meaning in work through focus on corporate citizenship and contributions;
- mitigating/reducing costs and negatives associated with litigation;
- enhancing sustainability of enterprises through responsible use of natural resources.

KIT 5: Building leadership and organizational capabilities for the future. Building leadership depth and capability is a top priority for business leaders. Leadership talent identification, development, and retention are absolutely critical to an organization's ability to be successful. Leaders are challenged as never before given the increasing complexity of businesses with almost unimaginable global challenges, ever-changing marketplace challenges, an ever-changing workplace and workforce, and an increasingly diverse, multicultural, and multigenerational workforce. In this context, leaders are being asked to exhibit new levels of courage, decision-making abilities, and problem-solving capabilities.

OD professionals can be enormously helpful to business leaders as they try to step up to these formidable challenges. For example, OD professionals can ensure business leaders have a basic understanding of OD theory and practice and build competencies in leveraging diversity for business advantage. The OD profession can apply its conflict mediation and appreciative inquiry skills and competencies among OD professionals around the world. At the same time, OD practitioners can coach leaders to find meaning and purpose in their business endeavors, providing environments that sup-

port the whole person. OD practitioners themselves must walk the talk by modeling leadership courage, decision making, and problem solving.

What is the value to business leaders and businesses? If successful in this arena, OD can contribute to

- greater leadership bench strength to build long-term business success,
- enhanced ability to make difficult decisions and address paradoxes,
- access to wide array of choices around models for building organizations, careers, and learning.

KIT 6: Regulatory environment and new organizational forms. In a widening array of industries, businesses are navigating an increasingly difficult regulatory landscape. In the United States, increasing government regulations are posing significant competitive challenges. Regulations concerning products, ingredients, and safety as well as employment and employees are increasing; there are also more restrictions on materials being developed or shipped around the globe. Ultimately, global competition is significantly affected by government regulations.

At the same time, new organizational forms are emerging across traditional sectors, spanning the public-private domains, that pose both challenges and opportunities. In particular, business and government increasingly will find themselves working in partnership and collaborative relationships to successfully navigate the global economy.

In this context, OD professionals can contribute to the development of such partnerships by researching best practices and new models in public-private partnerships, stimulating interest and awareness about emergent organizational forms, and doing action research/action learning with pioneers in collaborative cross-sector emergent organizational forms.

To address these needs, OD practitioners can be open and opportunistic in identifying emerging organizational forms, explore new organizational forms through experimentation (e.g., high potential experiences on special projects), and use OD's win-win values to shift the paradigm from adversarial to partnerships across traditional boundaries (organizations, sectors, industries).

What is the value to business leaders and businesses? If OD makes the contributions we are proposing, some of the results we hypothesize would be

- ameliorating "intractable problems" that can only be addressed at the "systems level;"
- producing better results through enhanced win-win collaborative relationships and partnerships among public, private, and nonprofit sectors;
- reducing costs and faster speed to market for critical products (e.g., drugs) as shared commitments and values become a priority.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The six key integrated themes point to critical areas for the OD profession to address along with important skills and competencies for OD professionals to demon-

strate. Although many OD practitioners currently exhibit some of these skills and competencies, they need to be more clearly demonstrated in terms of what business leaders recognize and value (e.g., ROI). Furthermore, there still is no clear definition that distinguishes the OD profession (e.g., from HR). Clearly, there is a higher need to focus on productivity, profitability, and ROI; expand business acumen to a greater extent than what OD practitioners currently demonstrate; and establish credible partnerships between OD professionals and business leaders. We have seen the need for practical applications of OD, new models, research, and theory for OD practitioners to succeed in all sectors. Academic and business partnerships are a potential solution to be developed and explored in this regard.

The work described throughout this article is a call to action for greater demonstration by OD practitioners of the ways in which we already use our values and tools to create positive work environments. The need in organizations to manifest socially responsible values and create win-win business results has never been greater. OD is in an excellent position to seize the opportunity to build bridges, find common ground, and address organizational and cultural divides.

Notes

1. The members of the Leadership Team for the Global Committee on the Future of OD as well as advisory board members; research summaries; bibliographies; complete strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) results; and other information can be found on the Global Committee on the Future of OD Knowledge Management Portal at <http://orgdev.programshop.com/public/>.

2. Results for each of the other three sources as well as the overall synthesis are available on the Global Committee on the Future of OD Knowledge Management Portal (<http://orgdev.programshop.com/public/>).

3. The SWOT research team members include Howard Deutsch, CEO, Quantisoft, LLC, and Carolyn Tal, Ph.D., team leader, SWOT research team. Based on requirements by the Leadership Team, Quantisoft, LLC provided Web survey services and created survey reports. Special acknowledgment goes to Elliott Greene, CTO, Quantisoft, LLC, for creating and running the SWOT survey reports.

REFERENCE

- Alban, B. (2003). The future. In M. Wheatley, R. Tannenbaum, P. Y. Griffin, & K. Quade, (Eds.), *Organization development at work: Conversations on the values, applications and future of OD* (pp. 113-136). San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer.