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# OD Practitioner

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# The Future of Organizations, Organization Development, and OD Education

## Call for Articles

In order to thrive in the current and be ready to engage the future global economy, organizations need to be agile and resilient, which can include:

- » addressing the challenges of globalization;
- » rethinking how work gets done within the changing employer-employee compact, e.g., virtual and contingent workers;
- » leveraging technology;
- » implementing new organizational structures that are more agile and responsive to the business environment;
- » encouraging intrapreneurialism;
- » embracing multi-culturalism in order to recruit and retain a diverse staff;
- » learning how to quickly respond to changes; and
- » changing how they change.

**We welcome articles that address:**

### The Future of Organizations

- What are the evolving organizational designs that are fostering agility and resilience?
- How are macro trends such as technology, rate of change, and global scale shaping how organizations evolve and need to operate?
- How is the employer-employee compact changing, and how is that impacting how work gets done?
- What are the processes of leading that are needed?
- How are change methods and processes changing?

### The Future of OD and OD Education

- How can OD be positioned as a major, value-added contribution in this future?
- What are new and emerging OD practices that are needed in this new environment?
- How does OD education need to change to prepare OD practitioners to deal with changing organizations, changing environments, and changing employees?

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**Submission deadline is  
October 21, 2016**

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Send articles to the three Special Issue Editors, David Jamieson ([djamieson@stthomas.edu](mailto:djamieson@stthomas.edu)), Marjorie Derven ([mderven@hudsonrc.com](mailto:mderven@hudsonrc.com)), and Don Warrick ([ddwarrick@aol.com](mailto:ddwarrick@aol.com)), and the Editor of the *OD Practitioner*, John Vogelsang ([jvogelsang@earthlink.net](mailto:jvogelsang@earthlink.net)). Submissions should follow the Guidelines for Authors, which appear on page 80 of this issue of the *ODP*.

### Special Issue Editors

**David W. Jamieson, PhD**, is Professor and Department Chair, Organization Learning & Development at the University of St. Thomas. He is also President of the Jamieson Consulting Group, Inc. and a Distinguished Visiting Scholar in other OD programs. He has 45 years of experience consulting to organizations on leadership, change, strategy, design and human resource issues. He is a Past National President of the American Society for Training and Development (now Association for Talent

Development) and Past Chair of the Management Consultation Division and Practice Theme Committee of the Academy of Management. He was the recent recipient of the 2015 Distinguished Scholar-Practitioner Career Achievement Award from the Academy of Management and The Lifetime Achievement Award from the Organization Development Network. He currently chairs the Organization Development Education Association. Jamieson is author or co-author of 8 books, 16 chapters and dozens of articles in journals and newsletters. He serves as Associate Editor for the Reflections on Experience Section of the *Journal of Management Inquiry* and on the Editorial Boards for the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *Journal of Organization Change Management* and *OD Practitioner*. He can be reached at [djamieson@stthomas.edu](mailto:djamieson@stthomas.edu).

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on the boards of several professional associations, including the NY Human Resource Society and *T+D* Editorial Board. A frequent presenter at global and national conferences, Marjorie has written over 20 articles on organizational change and human capital-related issues. She can be reached at [mderven@hudsonrc.com](mailto:mderven@hudsonrc.com).

**Don Warrick, PhD**, specializes in developing and coaching leaders, developing high performance teams and organizations, and managing organization development, change, and transformation. His latest books are *Lessons In Leadership* (2011), *Lessons In Leading Change* (2012), and *Lessons In Changing Culture* (2013). Warrick is Professor of Management and Organization Change at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs where he holds the life time title of President's Teaching Scholar and has received the Chancellor's Award, the university's highest award, the Outstanding Teacher Award for the University, and has also received the Outstanding Faculty Award and many Outstanding Teaching Awards in the College of Business. In addition, Warrick is on the faculty of the University of Colorado Executive MBA program. He also serves as the President of the Warrick Agency Training and Development Company and has been a consultant or trainer for many Fortune 500 and international companies such as Allied Signal, British Petroleum, Dow Corning, Harley-Davidson, Hewlett Packard, IBM, MCI, and Unilever as

well as smaller and mid-size companies, public agencies, and colleges and universities. Warrick has received a number of awards for his contributions to his areas of expertise, including being named the Outstanding Organization Development Practitioner of the Year and the Outstanding Human Resources Professional of the Year. In 2011, he was named the Best Professor in Organizational Development by the World HRD Congress. He can be reached at [ddwarrick@aol.com](mailto:ddwarrick@aol.com).

# The Difference We Make: Demonstrating the Impact of Organization Development

## Call for Articles

How do we identify the results and impact of our OD work? How do we correlate interventions with business results? Given there are many tools and techniques—pre and post surveys, case methods, indepth interviews, appreciative inquiry approaches, participatory action research, participant journals, among many others—how do we choose what we will use?

The purpose of this special issue is to help demystify how we can demonstrate the results and impact of our OD work. How can we clarify what we are doing, measure what matters, and make this inquiry part of an ongoing learning process? What are some practical, theory-based, values-based, and evidence-based approaches and practices. We also want to help practitioners understand what is doable and reasonable, and what is not.

We welcome articles that help OD practitioners address:

- What are approaches that have proven to be helpful in identifying the results and impact of OD work?
- What are the limits and potential unintended consequences of misguided measuring initiatives?
- How can measurement be incorporated into an ongoing learning process?
- How do the various OD theories and approaches (e.g., Diagnostic, Dialogic, Humanistic, Complexity) influence how we assess results?

- How can focusing on the process, results, and outcomes be an integral part of OD approaches, e.g., culture change, strategy formulation, process consultation, large system change, increasing collaboration?

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**Submission deadline is  
January 18, 2017**

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Submit articles to the two Special Issue Editors, Ross Tartell ([rtartell@optonline.net](mailto:rtartell@optonline.net)) and Judy Vogel ([judy@vogelglaser.com](mailto:judy@vogelglaser.com)), and the Editor of the *OD Practitioner*, John Vogelsang ([jvogelsang@earthlink.net](mailto:jvogelsang@earthlink.net)). Submissions should follow the Guidelines for Authors, which appear on page 80 of this issue of the *ODP*.

### Special Issue Editors

**Ross Tartell, PhD**, specializes in learning and development, executive coaching, and change management. Tartell is a Senior Associate with the Organizational Performance Group (OPG) and Principal at Ross Tartell, PhD, Consulting LLC. Earlier, Tartell was North American Learning Leader for GE Capital Real Estate. He spent 18 years at Pfizer Inc. where he held positions of increasing responsibility as a member of Corporate Human Resources and the Global Pharmaceutical Group. He has been an Adjunct Associate Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University since 1996. He has published articles in a wide range of journals and serves on the editorial boards for *Training Magazine* and the *OD Practitioner*. Tartell currently serves

as President of ATD SCC. He received his BA in Social Science from Hofstra University, and his MBA in Management and his PhD in Social Psychology from Columbia University. He can be reached at [rtartell@optonline.net](mailto:rtartell@optonline.net).

**Judy Vogel, MA**, of Vogel Glaser & Associates, has been an external OD consultant since 1987 in partnership with David Glaser, before which she was Director of OD and HRD for several corporations and large nonprofit organizations. Her practice specializes in executive coaching, organization design, and assisting HR professionals to perform as successful internal consultants. Her master's degree is from Johns Hopkins University. Vogel is on the instructional team for American University's MSOD and is Coordinator of Learning Community Time's facilitators. Since 1988 she has been a member of the NTL Institute, including being a trainer in its esteemed Human Interaction Labs; and she served on the Board of Directors. She has been granted Emerita Status in NTL. She also has been active in the Chesapeake Bay Organization Development Network and the South Florida Organization Development Network, where she has presented frequent workshops. She has published many articles in the *OD Practitioner* and has been on the Editorial Review Board for many years. She can be reached at [Judy@VogelGlaser.com](mailto:Judy@VogelGlaser.com).

**Note:** This is a revised version of the call for articles that appeared in the summer issue of the *ODP*.

## Strategies for Thriving

Welcome to the fall issue of the *OD Practitioner*. This issue contains articles about what to do when something unanticipated happens in your consulting work; the challenges of succeeding with coaching initiatives at the most senior levels of an organization; an evidence based executive coaching model; creating an effective container in which innovation can flourish; using OD to respond to natural disasters; transforming the HR function in a global organization; a case study of developing a strategy for contingent workers; and two *Practicing OD* articles about diversity.

**Robert Marshak** considers what to do when you are in a meeting or session with one to hundreds of people and there is sustained pushback; a request or demand to move in a completely new direction; some unanticipated emotional outbursts; or some difficult interactions amongst some of the people present. Marshak offers eight maxims for what to do derived from his own experiences and interactions with important mentors and close colleagues.

**Ingo Susing** describes the challenges of successfully deploying coaching initiatives at the most senior leadership levels of an organization. Based on twelve interviews with senior human resources directors of Australian organizations from a variety of industries and utilizing a grounded theory approach to investigating a gap in the empirical literature, Susing proposes that coaching at senior levels is more impactful when evidence-based approaches to coaching are combined with

carefully targeted learning content and selective advice.

**Kathleen Iverson** seeks to provide a theoretical foundation with valid outcome measures for coaching. She introduces the Thrive Model of Evidence Based Executive Coaching, an approach designed to increase psychological capital and workplace thriving, leading to positive outcomes at the individual and organizational level. She also offers specific strategies for practice and implications for research.

Drawing upon complexity theory, **Peter Dickens** describes a framework for creating an effective container within which innovation can flourish. According to Dickens, when organizations develop a culture of innovation and a fail-safe environment, two key factors that have been shown to facilitate emergence, tremendous opportunity exists to unleash potential innovation. To support such innovation, organizational leaders need to shed their obsession with control and allow the system to self-organize. As a result, they might see results beyond what they had previously imagined. He illustrates the framework with a case study of a Hospital endeavoring to reduce the time an admitted patient in the hospital's emergency department waits until they are in a bed on the medical floor.

With the massive floods that occurred in Louisiana this past August, **Susan Duff** and **Dena Dishman's** 2014 *ODP* article deserves a second look. On May 22, 2011, a tornado cut a 7-mile path through the heart of Joplin, Missouri, injuring 1,000 people, killing 161 others, and destroying St. John's Regional Medical Center. Duff and Dishman describe a twenty-one-month intervention using a blended Dialogic OD and Diagnostic OD approach to create a sustainable culture change in order to help hospital leaders and their staff deal with the challenges of replacing the regional hospital.

**Ronald Recardo** describes a data driven, fast track approach that can be

used to assess and transform a company's Human Resources function. Using a case study of an international organization, Recardo presents how his change model can contribute to the HR function becoming a strategic partner or internal consultant that is much more focused on bottom-line results.

**Therese Yaeger** and **Peter Sorensen** present a case study of an organization that experienced a significant reduction in its workforce and is now considering new hiring alternatives. One of the new alternatives is to move to an increased use of a contingent workforce. The Director of OD has been asked to address:

- » Under what kinds of conditions is the increased use of contingent workers most appropriate?
- » What would be the role of the OD department in implementing this new strategy?
- » How would OD change, and would the traditional tools of team building and engagement surveys continue to be major interventions, or would a new set of interventions be required?

The three respondents are **Lisa Machtemes**, PhD candidate in OD at Benedictine University; **Josette Goldberg Klopfer**, Founder and CEO of Goldberg Executive Coaching; and **Henry Williams**, Associate Dean of Graduate Programs for the College of Business at Purdue University Northwest.

## Practicing OD

**Yvette Angeliqe Hyater-Adams** and **Deborah Howard** share their inner thoughts and discoveries about their cross-race relationship as professionals and friends. **Rianna Moore** and **Rick Huntley** explain how they were able to make NTL's Diversity Work Conference relevant for a diverse, international group of participants who were mature and competent in their own fields of endeavor, including group work.

*John Vogelsang*

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Larry Porter	1973-1981
Raymond Weil	1982-1984
Don & Dixie Van Eynde	1985-1988
David Noer	1989-1992
Celeste Coruzzi	1993-1995
David Nicoll	1996-2000
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# When in Doubt

By Robert J. Marshak

Here is the situation:

You are in a meeting or a session with one, a dozen, or maybe even hundreds of people. Things have been going the way they usually do for you when something you don't routinely experience happens; something that your usual responses or actions don't successfully address. Maybe it's a stronger or more sustained push-back; maybe a request or demand to move in a completely new direction; maybe some unanticipated emotional outbursts; or maybe some difficult interactions amongst some of the people present. Whatever the specifics, you are suddenly unsure what to say or do next. You've tried your usual responses and they have not worked. Perhaps some fight (“What's wrong with them?”) or flight (“How do I get out of this situation?”) impulses start to come up for you. You find yourself a bit off-balance. You might even for a moment start to doubt your abilities.

This article is about those moments. Everyone who has been an OD practitioner has had them at one time or another in one situation or another. I've had more than a few in my more than forty years as an internal and external consultant, trainer, educator, and executive. What to do in those moments is not found in OD textbooks, or at least the ones I am familiar with. This has led me to compile a list of what I have learned to do for myself in those moments with the hope that they might provide some ideas or insights

for others about what they might do. My list has evolved overtime and is a mix of maxims derived from my interactions with important mentors and close colleagues as well as responses derived from my own thinking and experiences. *Table 1* lists in no specific order eight maxims to consider for what to do “when in doubt.”

Table 1. *What to Do When in Doubt*

1. Tell the truth.
2. Take a break.
3. Reframe your experience.
4. Invoke the prime directive: Safety first.
5. Channel a trusted colleague.
6. Change levels.
7. Think symbolically.
8. Remember: Good enough is good enough.

## Tell the Truth

I start with this one because it was the first in my collection of personal maxims and has continued to be a powerful one for me more than 35 years later. It emerged in a situation when I was in an executive position as the Deputy Director for Policy Analysis and Coordination in a US government scientific agency. I was in an intense afternoon meeting with my boss, Ernie Corley, the Director, trying to figure out how to respond to a Congressional inquiry with serious budgetary and

policy implications for one of our research programs. There were multiple angles and constituencies involved and we were trying to put the most advantageous face we could on our response.

Round and round we went as every response we could think of had one or more serious downsides. If we replied in one way that might be good for the House Appropriations Committee because it emphasized funding in members' districts, but would create problems with the Executive Office of Management and Budget because it did not advocate large budget cuts. A different response might please the Secretary's office because it highlighted one of the Secretary's initiatives, but would offend hundreds of agency

**Finally, after a very frustrating grind of an afternoon Ernie turned to me and said, "You know Bob, when in doubt tell the truth." We looked at each other and it was as if a great weight had been lifted off what we could say in our response. How simple: what was the basic truth of the situation; the basic facts without worry about how to "spin the answer." We quickly came up with what the response needed to be and, importantly, one we and our agency could stand behind regardless of the range of reactions sure to come our way from our multiple constituencies.**

scientists because it did not recognize sufficiently their research achievements, not to mention multiple interest groups each wanting their priorities highlighted. And so it went for all our potential responses. Each was unsatisfactory for one or more stakeholder group.

My boss, a former scientist, was a very experienced, savvy player who had acquired enormous power in the agency through his loyal, hard work and ability to handle just these kinds of situations. I was new to my position having been an internal consultant for a number of years, much less experienced, but good at coming up with organizational and political policy options and angles for his consideration. However, no matter how many options we generated and how many angles we considered, none seemed satisfactory.

Finally, after a very frustrating grind of an afternoon Ernie turned to me and said, "You know Bob, when in doubt tell the truth." We looked at each other and it was as if a great weight had been lifted off what we could say in our response. How simple: what was the basic truth of the situation; the basic facts without worry about how to "spin the answer." We quickly came up with what the response needed to be and, importantly, one we and our agency could stand behind regardless of the range of reactions sure to come our way from our multiple constituencies. That moment has remained with me ever since as in some ways its own obvious truth but also as an important reminder of what to do when I am in doubt.

### **Take a Break**

For many years one of my mentors and close colleague Edie Seashore and I co-trained conflict facilitation courses at Johns Hopkins University and the NTL Institute. People were always surprised that we worked together, for so long and, with due modesty, so well. I always thought we got along so well because although quite different in most ways we both respected each other's talents and insights. Over the years of co-training together there were more than one incident when things did not go as planned and we would glance at each other with our silent co-trainer, "so what should we do next?" looks. Typically, in those days I would rapidly run through my mind every group dynamics, conflict management, or adult learning, theory,

concept, or model I could think of, searching for an insight about what might be going on and therefore, what we should do. Frequently, Edie would just say, "let's take a break." Invariably things would be different when we reconvened some 15–20 minutes later.

As with all things Edie, the "take a break" maxim was more than it initially seemed; it was based on received theory as well as years of experience. If we believe in Lewin's ideas about force fields, then taking a break is an intended intervention that allows the force field to "unfreeze," while individual and group reflections and interactions over the break might move things in new directions. Thus we frequently returned to a different and more manageable situation than the one we had just left.

Before working with Edie I would of course take scheduled breaks, but not in response to uncertainty about what to do next. Instead, I would keep trying things to address or change the situation; sometimes unwilling to break away, because I implicitly considered it to be an admission that I didn't know what to do.

Another example of the "take a break" maxim occurred when I was co-facilitating an intervention with a colleague. It was her client and she was greatly invested in doing a good job and continuing to look highly competent in their eyes. Shortly before lunch on the first day things erupted in a small rebellion to what we were doing. My colleague wanted to "fix" what was happening in some way or another and insisted we couldn't break for lunch until everything was set right. I just counseled that we should break for lunch and assured her that everything would settle down and be different when we returned.

Not sure what to do and trusting me to some degree, she said OK and we all went to lunch. Over lunch I explained what I had learned while working with Edie plus my sense that the group had strong values around being responsible and that there would be interactions among peers and peer leaders that would get us all back on track when we reconvened. Things did turn out to be better. The participants were ready to work and whatever was problematic before lunch was no longer



getting in the way after lunch. I got one of those “How did you know?” looks from my colleague, and simply reiterated later that sometimes taking a break can be a good idea, and not necessarily a sign of weakness.

### Reframe Your Experience

Most, or perhaps all, OD consultants are familiar with the concept and process of reframing: suggesting an alternative way to frame or perceive something in order to open up new possibilities and options. Usually the reframing is aimed at a client or client system during coaching, training, or intervention events, for example:

- » It’s not that what is wanted is impossible to achieve, it’s just that we haven’t figured out how to do it yet.
- » It’s not that we are on a sinking ship, it’s that we are transitioning to another phase of our journey.
- » Instead of looking at the problematic aspects of our situation, can we focus on accentuating our strengths or the positive aspects?

In terms of what to do when in doubt, the reframing becomes self-directed as a way to become unstuck by creating alternative possibilities and experiences for yourself. A vivid example of this comes from a workshop I was co-training with Don Klein, one of my valued mentors and colleagues. There was one participant who managed to consistently push just about all my hot buttons to the point where I found myself biting my tongue during the sessions and going off on harangues to Don during our planning and debriefing sessions. Through it all Don just smiled and nodded his head until he finally said to me: “Have you considered what a genius this person is?” Needless to say I almost went apoplectic at this idea. Don just smiled and went on to say:

You are a very smart and talented consultant and this person is such a genius they can turn you into a raving maniac in less than five minutes. That takes real talent. Not only that, but think about what a gift this person

is giving you to learn about yourself, your hot buttons and how to manage difficult people and situations.

Initially I was speechless at considering this outlandish reframing, but it took hold and I began to perceive things differently, which changed my experience of the person and opened up for me new ways of doing and being that have served me well for all the years since. I have more than a few times found myself reflecting on the genius of some “difficult” clients, participants, or situations, and what I could learn from them about myself and new ways of thinking and acting.

I might also briefly add another favorite reframing that Don would mention when he or I or both of us got stuck. That was to have a “cosmic chuckle” about the situation. Having a cosmic chuckle was simply to look at the situation from a far out in the universe, cosmic perspective, and reflect on just how important, how urgent, how ego defining, etc., this situation really was. Invariably having a brief cosmic chuckle created a new perspective that opened up different and often “calmer” ways of experiencing the situation and led to previously unconsidered options.

### Invoke the Prime Directive: Safety First

For more than a decade my close colleague Judith Katz and I collaborated on designing and facilitating a seven-day intensive residential workshop we called Dealing with Covert Processes. The workshop was based on ideas and models we co-created and offered through the NTL Institute in Bethel, Maine (Marshak & Katz, 2001).

One of the central ideas was how to make overt things that might be blocking a person or group. Early in our work together in the workshops we would witness participants individually and in small groups shutting down or unable to express something apparently important to them or the situation they were in. We went through a number of the usual facilitation methods to try and open things up for discussion of difficult issues. For example, putting people in small groups where discussions might be easier and more open than in a

large group or asking people to write things on anonymous pieces of paper to be read aloud by another participant or us. In the workshop these never really worked well and we were unsure what might work better or what to do. Then one day we crystallized what we both came to realize might be going on. People would not share or open up if they did not feel safe. In fact, lack of tangible or psychological safety was one of the primary reasons why interactions might shut down or topics become “undiscussable.” Put simply, unless or until people felt safe, more open interactions or trying out new behaviors would not be possible. This led us to formulate, with a tip of the hat to *Star Trek*, the Prime Directive of covert processes work: Safety First. Thereafter, if we ran into a situation where things seemed blocked or participants shut down in some way and we were unsure what to do next, we would invoke the prime directive and ask ourselves: “What about this situation might be unsafe for a particular person or group and how might greater safety be created?”

Importantly we also learned that tangible and psychological safety was in the eyes of the participants and not what we as experienced consultants and trainers thought would be safe. We also learned that when working with safety what was important was creating conditions that were “safe enough” to move forward and not to try to achieve “perfect safety” that might keep people immobilized in a comfort zone. I still invoke the prime directive in my consulting and training work especially when dealing with covert processes, but also in almost any situation where things seem stuck and I am not sure what to do next. I have found it never is a bad idea to reflect on whether or not things are safe enough for people to bring their full selves to work on change efforts.

### Channel a Trusted Colleague

As should be clear from the discussion to this point some of my most vivid maxims came from insights gained from working with my mentors and trusted colleagues. These have become lessons learned that I have carried with me for decades and

that I find pop into my mind when doubts about what to do next come up for me. Related to these insights are also my observations of how these trusted colleagues and role models handled themselves and the situations we were in. When a group or client system pushed back in seemingly strange or intractable ways how did others who I had worked with and respected deal with it? What did they do?

These observations became part of my reservoir of ideas of what to do when in doubt. The fact that these colleagues were in many cases quite different from me in age, gender, race, experience, theory bases, style, and so forth and had ways of being and doing quite different from mine was not necessarily an impediment but could be a source of inspiration for trying alternative approaches that were a little or a lot outside of my normal ways of doing things. “How would my close colleague Darya (Funches) handle this?” “How about Edie or Don or Judith or Ernie?” Very importantly, however, when channeling respected colleagues, I never tried to mimic or become any of them. I early on knew I had to be myself and all that I learned from my mentors and colleagues had to be authentic to me. What I could do was use the insights gained from observing trusted others to learn to expand what I could see and how I could respond, and in that way have more options for what to do when I was in doubt.

To this day, when unsure or searching for what to do, I will wonder what so and so would do in this situation and see if that opens up some new ideas or options for me. I also believe we all have people we admire or have learned from whom we could channel in a difficult situation to help us step outside of ourselves to discover a range of different and potentially effective actions.

### Change Levels

In the social sciences there are multiple levels of behavior to consider. Among these are: the personal level, the interpersonal level, the group level, the organization level, the sector or community level, and so on. Each has professional

disciplines and theories devoted to it to help interpret what is going on and guide the practitioner working at that level. For example, psychological theories might be especially helpful when working at the personal level such as in coaching, whereas social-psychological theories about group dynamics might be more helpful when doing team building, or sociological open systems theories when working on organizational structures or strategy.

While in consulting assignments practitioners may be cognizant of multiple levels all impacting a situation, it is also often true that one or another level tends to get the most focused attention. This makes sense, but there is also the risk of focusing so much on one level, usually implicitly or by personal preference, that how dynamics at other levels may be impacting the situation are not fully considered. Thus one might be stuck as to what might be done when working at one level, while other insights and options are obvious when looking from a different level.

One example is when I was hired to do some third party conflict consultation with two executives who needed to work better together. The presenting issue was they couldn't get along with each other, perhaps due to their personalities, egos, competition, and the like. These presenting issues invited initial exploration and facilitated work dealing with their personal and interpersonal dynamics: appreciating differences, understanding each other's style preferences, conflict management skills, and so on. While helpful in some ways these actions did not really make things that much better. It was only when I started considering the context created by the organizational structure and style of their common boss that a new set of options for interventions came into clearer focus. Looking at that level it became clear that they were operating in overlapping role responsibilities with conflict inducing messages from their boss. While I had begun to run out of what to do at the personal and interpersonal levels, I now had a range of options as to what to do at a more organizational level. This led to directly working with their boss to better align responsibilities and goals, and with meetings of all

three individuals to work on how all three of them needed to collaborate.

These experiences have led me to have a personal rule to “always look one level up and one level down from wherever I have been initially engaged.” If I am doing team building, I will wonder how individual personalities rather than team dynamics might be impacting the situation. I will also consider things at the organizational level; for example: reward systems, structures, culture, and how they may be impacting what is happening at the team level. The main message of course is: if stuck about what to do when looking primarily at one level, change levels and see what might now come into focus.

### Think Symbolically

If changing levels can be thought of as thinking vertically, thinking symbolically might be considered to be thinking laterally into an additional dimension of knowing beyond the purely literal. While changing levels and thinking symbolically are different as to what dimensions they focus on, they are similar in intent in that they both invite stepping out of one way of looking at a situation in order to perhaps see something differently enough to suggest previously unconsidered options.

Over the years my work with covert processes has convinced me of the power of symbolic thinking as a doorway into additional ways of seeing and knowing, especially unspoken or even subconscious dynamics (Marshak, 2006; Marshak & Katz, 1992). Once again, what might be perplexing when considered by what is conveyed literally might often times be illuminated when viewed symbolically. Consider for a moment four different symbolic modalities and how when stuck they might suggest additional options or ways of working.

» **One is thinking metaphorically or in terms of implicit storylines.** What clues to additional dynamics might be contained in the word imagery being used by an individual or group? I once worked with an internal OD consultant who was blocked in thinking about how to work on an important organizational

change process. My shadow consulting was going nowhere in the face of one “Yes, but” after another until I started to listen to what was being said symbolically. Images that conveyed being alone on a volunteer suicide mission were repeatedly used. Changing focus from working on initiatives and actions as an individual internal consultant to how to gain greater support and resources while involving others opened new possibilities for how to more successfully move forward. While that emphasis might have emerged in our literal conversations, it became clearer and more obvious once the symbolic imagery was recognized and taken seriously.

**I once worked with a group of executives who were going nowhere in addressing their organization’s needs for fundamental change until I overheard one of the executives humming the theme song to the movie *Gone with the Wind*. Recalling that the movie opens with a line about “an entire way of life gone with the wind,” I suddenly had a new possibility to pursue and asked the group to talk about their feelings about fundamentally changing the organization.**

» **Another symbolic modality is music.** What might be being conveyed by the rhythm, tone, pace, harmony, volume, and so on in what the individuals involved are saying? Additionally, as you listen to what an individual or group is saying what song or melody comes to mind? Perhaps your unconscious knowing is suggesting a song or a musical interlude that symbolically suggests what’s going on or is a clue to what you might do differently. I once worked with a group of executives who were going nowhere in addressing their organization’s needs for fundamental change until I overheard one of the executives humming the theme song to the movie *Gone with the Wind*. Recalling that the movie opens with a line about “an entire way of life gone with the wind,” I suddenly had a new possibility to pursue and asked the group to

talk about their feelings about fundamentally changing the organization. This led to a very emotional discussion about feelings of loss and betrayal that then allowed them to move on to “what needed to be done.”

» **A third symbolic modality is movement, physicality, or body language.** Most of us of course are familiar with the concept of body language as well as the dangers of reading too much into someone’s folded arms. At the same time how a person or people are sitting, in what configuration, or exhibiting what kinds of physical motions may also be a symbolic modality to notice to see if it invites new ideas that might

open up new possibilities for what to do next. Observing during a coaching session that when describing a difficult work situation, the person keeps using what seem to be “pushing away” hand gestures any time a particular person or office is mentioned might suggest a particular relationship that might need attention even if the person is not identifying that as their primary issue. This would also be true if when certain possibilities are raised the person uses the same pushing away gestures towards you and your ideas.

» **The fourth symbolic modality is different forms of media.** This includes pictures, charts, graphics, and other visual representations. Considering these in terms of what is literally represented as well as symbolically suggested may trigger previously unconsidered lines of inquiry or work. Organization charts

for example are primarily intended to convey how responsibilities are grouped and official reporting lines. At the same time, they can suggest symbolically who or what is on top or bottom, in or out, solidly or loosely connected, lined up in opposition, figural or peripheral, large or small, and so. And, while these may have no meaning at all, I am quite used to managers rejecting the idea of a new organization design if the organization chart symbolically looks like they have been pushed down in importance or now have to go through more levels to get to the top. These symbolic reactions potentially open up the need for explicit discussions of unspoken concerns about status as much as discussing the literal responsibilities in the organization. Of course, a more direct way of thinking and working symbolically through media is if stuck or in doubt about what to do asking the person or group to stop talking about things and draw a pictorial representation of the situation, or create a collage or sculpture, or some other analogical representation that may then suggest new lines of inquiry.

Again, it is important to emphasize that thinking symbolically in this context is for the purposes of helping you step out of a current way of seeing and thinking where the possibilities of what to do are limited or not working in order to step into a new vantage point that may suggest new possibilities.

#### **Remember: Good Enough is Good Enough**

My major professor for my graduate studies in OD and mentor Morley Segal was quite the character. He was smart, ambitious, and both daring and innovative in what he wished to achieve. He also was clumsy and in many ways the embodiment of the absent minded professor, which led people to consistently underestimate him. He also managed to accomplish remarkable things in a conservative university setting. How he did it was a mystery to me because what he did was never at first completely thought through, nor did he

have everything and everyone lined up, and invariably the i's were not dotted and the t's not crossed. These (and more) were all things I had learned to do to get things done in the government bureaucracy where I worked at the time, so his success was perplexing until one day he helpfully shared with me an old aphorism. "Bob you have to be careful. The perfect is the enemy of the good."

Aside from perhaps a comment on my drives for excellence, it also explained to me his philosophy for getting things done. Good enough was, in fact, good enough to get things started and moving along. Trying to get everything perfectly in place took too long and was probably not possible in the first place.

He used this philosophy to good advantage when he created with Edie Seashore, then President of the NTL Institute, a joint program in organization development between American University and the NTL Institute. Morley, and Edie too for that matter, knew that trying to get everything lined up initially would not be possible given the rules, regulations, committees, and technicalities involved in such a revolutionary idea in higher education. Consequently, emphasis was placed on getting something launched and then improving it over time. So for example, the first cohort of students did not get a degree in OD. They got a Master of Public Administration (MPA) degree, because Morley and the program were housed in the School of Government and Public Administration and getting a new degree in OD launched would have taken countless faculty committees and years to accomplish, and even then might not have been successful. Better to launch something and then amend it later.

That's also why the initial students had courses in OD subjects taught mainly by NTL faculty, but also half the courses drawn from the MPA curriculum and faculty, including a course in "Legal Issues in Public Administration" taught by Neil Kerwin who is now President of American University. Launched in 1980 the program continues to this day with an all OD curriculum and faculty, and graduates are awarded a MSOD degree.

Good enough was indeed good enough and to this day when I am not sure what to do I remind myself that what I do next does not have to be completely thought through or perfect, just good enough to move things along.

### Closing Comments

My ambitions for this discussion are twofold. First is to point to an important but I believe neglected aspect of OD practice while providing some potentially useful insights and ideas. Second, and more important, is to stimulate readers to do their own thinking about what they do and what works for them. Ultimately, what to do when in doubt is an important aspect of use of self in OD practice and needs to fit with the style, personality, and competencies of individual practitioners. I have shared a number of my experiences and the insights I learned from them. Now, what are yours?

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“Nearly every large organization dedicates resources to the deliberate development of its employees. There are significantly fewer, however, who do so at the most senior executive levels . . . This is despite extensive research that makes it clear, beyond doubt, that targeted and proactive leadership development of the most senior leaders supports organizational performance”

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# Coaching at the Top

## Optimizing the Impact of Senior Leaders

By Ingo Susing

One-on-one coaching is one of the most popular initiatives through which organizations support the development of their most senior leaders. Anecdotal evidence suggests however that outcomes are frequently inconsistent and do not always justify their significant investment. This paper describes the challenges of successfully deploying coaching initiatives at the most senior levels of leadership of an organization, and how these challenges can be addressed to achieve more optimal and consistent outcomes. The findings are based on twelve interviews with senior human resources directors of Australian organizations from a variety of industries, including engineering, construction, transport, technology, and professional services. The research methodology utilized a grounded theory approach to investigating a gap in the empirical literature. Amongst other variables, the findings highlight the importance of focusing on the business impact of leaders' behaviors, and that these can be optimized by introducing relevant learning content as well as ensuring the best possible clarity and alignment with expectations of relevant stakeholders. It also suggests a requirement for executive coaches to have the experience and credibility to effectively engage with a senior leader to enable the sharing of context and, when appropriate, provide advice.

### Development at the “Top”

Nearly every large organization dedicates resources to the deliberate development of its employees. There are significantly

fewer, however, who do so at the most senior executive levels (Laff, 2007). This is despite extensive research that makes it clear, beyond doubt, that targeted and proactive leadership development of the most senior leaders supports organizational performance (e.g., Avolio, Reichard, Hannah, Walumbwa, & Chan, 2009). Specifically, research evidence suggests that the development of an internal pool of potential successors, including preparation for critical management positions, is central to minimizing the risk associated with leadership succession (e.g., Rothwell, 2010). Further, empirical benefits extend beyond managing succession risk to supporting the effectiveness and impact of a senior executive in their current role, still the most important criteria for further promotion. Research also shows that a learning culture and growth mindset led from the top (down) results in a multitude of other benefits. These include retaining valued high-potential talent at a number of levels within the organization, creating environments where individuals will contribute with extra discretionary effort, and accelerating the successful implementation of strategic and business change objectives (Fulmer, Stumpf, & Bleak, 2009). In contrast, where development excludes the most senior leaders and is deployed at the middle levels of management and below, it is often regarded as imposed “training” and something removed from the practical relevance and success of the organization and the individual. At its worst, it is something provided in lieu of compensation as a “feel good” or “box ticking” exercise. The

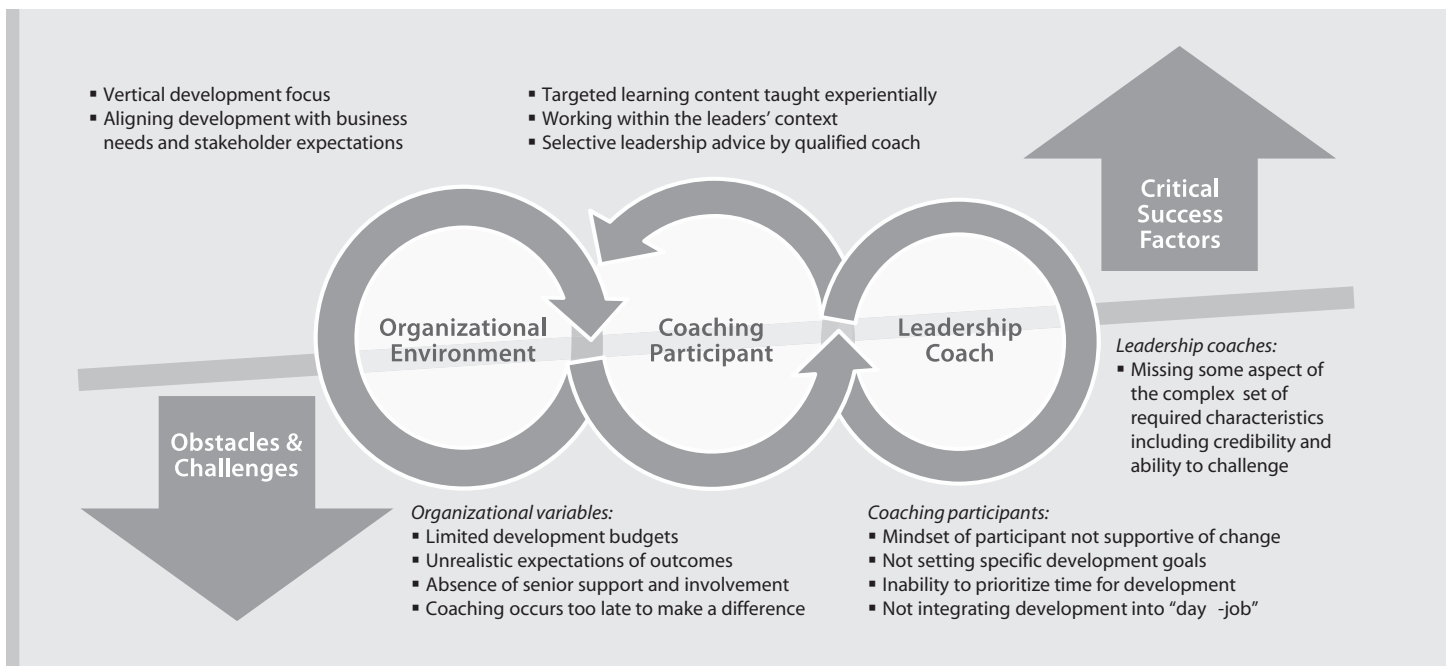


Figure 1. Overview of Key Variables Impacting Senior Leader Coaching

underlying message is that development, and by inference continuous business improvement, is not really valued by the organization. Looking at development through this lens, it is hardly surprising that the vast majority of organizational change efforts fail.

### Coaching at the "Top"

In addition to other forms, individual one-on-one executive coaching represents a significant portion of the budgets and activities supporting senior leadership development. Recent research suggests that approximately 33% of all organizations utilize external coaches and identifies this as more relevant at the most senior levels (DDI & The Conference Board, 2014). Research supporting the general efficacy of coaching interventions has grown exponentially during the last 15 years and has demonstrated a variety of benefits that coaching is generally able to provide (for an overview of the outcome research to date, please refer to Sonesh et al., 2015). These include a positive impact on business outcomes and a generally compelling return on the coaching investment (beyond a purely financial sense) (International Coach Federation, 2012). Simultaneously, there appears to be a general lack of high-quality empirical studies that have investigated outcomes in relation to coaching senior leaders with some limited exceptions (e.g.,

Goldsmith, 2005; Kiel, Rimmer, Williams, & Doyle, 2007). Feedback obtained as part of the present qualitative study suggests that outcomes involving this particular target population are often considered inconsistent, particularly in light of the premium paid for these services. With such a strong case in support of coaching generally, but not necessarily "at the top," why is there such an apparent gap? And why are one-on-one coaching outcomes frequently considered as not justifying their significant investment?

### Organizational Views on Coaching

The twelve organizations interviewed for this research nearly all stress that coaching is not the panacea to achieving development objectives, and that the extent to which coaching is used as supporting development is often too wide. Indeed, a number of organizations suggest that coaching should only make up less than 10% of the overall development budget. Although it is argued here that coaching has the potential to achieve more than it currently does in most organizational contexts, it is accepted that effective leadership development requires a multitude of diverse approaches. These typically include a combination of on-the-job learning; coaching and mentoring from a variety of individuals, including the manager, peers, and in addition to external or internal

coaches, sometimes even clients; and finally, some formalized classroom learning. Leading organizations are increasingly creating specific learning environments such as assessment and development centers, and also initiate special projects or business units with stand-alone outcomes reporting as a reliable option to test and progress the further potential of a senior leader. Irrespective of whether utilized in combination with other initiatives or on a stand-alone basis, individual leadership coaching represents an important solution and significant funds are invested in this activity. One organisation interviewed reportedly spends \$5m (AUD) per annum on the development of their 40 most senior high potential leaders, with coaching representing a significant part of this. Fees at these senior levels can range between \$35-100k (AUD) per person for a 12-month individual coaching program alone. At CEO level, this can be even higher, particularly when this involves celebrity coaches. At the same time, nearly all organizations talk about the reality of limited budgets and the pressure of being asked to do more with less as one of a number of variables that impact coaching outcomes. These are summarised in Figure 1 and discussed below.

### Organizational Variables

Notwithstanding the premium fees associated with coaching at senior leadership

levels, nearly every organization points to the limited funds available for training and development. Funding is typically less of an issue at senior levels and where leader development is linked to raising the organization's succession readiness. At the same time, organizations see a benefit in positioning coaching as a scarce resource reserved for the organization's most valued leadership talent. Whereas in the past performance problems were frequently outsourced to coaches, responses indicated that nowadays fewer and fewer organizations seem to invest in initiatives that target a turnaround in performance from unacceptable levels.

It may be this positive positioning of coaching that contributes to senior leaders' unrealistic expectations about what coaching can achieve. One respondent commented that "coaching is too often considered as the silver bullet that will result in a magical transformation of an individual in a short time frame." Another stated that "there is a perception that once you get a coach, all the issues that detract from being an effective leader go away." Based on these and other comments, however, coaching initiatives are frequently introduced too late to effect meaningful change within targeted time frames, particularly in the context of leadership succession. The reality is that although some behavioral change can be effected almost immediately, much of the development that translates into more effective leadership, including in anticipation of a more senior role, will take many months. This is because much of this change is developmental and involves behavioral change as a result of gaining clarity of limiting beliefs and assumptions, as well as establishing a greater capacity to integrate complexity.

In addition to the positive positioning of coaching with realistic expectations and time frames, interview responses indicate that it also requires senior support, and ideally involvement, to maximize its impact. This is consistent with research which suggests that development initiatives benefit from top-down support whether it is at mid-level or above (Corporate Leadership Council, 2003). In the case of supporting the ongoing development of the CEO, this

support is best voiced by the board and/or chairperson and is particularly relevant in setting the cultural tone towards continuous improvement and successful change. Where development is considered to be beneficial but not essential, it is reported to quickly fall down the list of critical priorities and typically does not happen or, if it does, occurs too late or slowly to make a material difference. Alternatively, where the CEO and the executive team actively engage in development, supported by visible support of the board and its objective of ensuring succession readiness, this sends a powerful 'pro-development' signal down the organizational hierarchy.

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#### **Coaching Participants**

Where the organizational culture captures a collective dynamic, at the individual level it is the attitude and mindset of the person that impacts development. Research has shown that there are individual differences in mindset ranging from fixed ("people don't change") to growth mindsets ("every person can change") and that these typically enable or constrain development initiatives, including leadership coaching (Eagleson & Susing, 2014). In addition to global assumptions, more recent research indicates there are also very specific individual beliefs regarding the ability to change certain behaviors or learn particular skills, for example, that strategic thinking cannot be learned or that every person can learn this to a significant extent. The good news is that such specific mindsets can be shifted through targeted initiatives, and that this translates into superior

development outcomes. This is consistent with research findings from other domains, including brain functioning and neuroplasticity (Doidge, 2010).

Irrespective of the mindset, interview responses recognize the principle that "input equals output" in that the coaching process can only be effective to the extent that the coaching participant invests time and effort in the process. Observations suggest that senior leaders who benefit most from coaching are those who find time outside of scheduled sessions and informal interactions to reflect on and engage with their development plan and content. They achieve this by setting specific goals

and targets, and prioritize and focus on these over and above many of the pressing work issues. Responses also suggest that where the coaching follows an action learning approach and integrates as much of the development into daily situations, events and practice, this typically results in a greater impact. Suitable opportunities often arise in the context of situations that involve interactions, including team initiatives, stakeholder communication, annual planning or review processes, and conversations with direct reports.

#### **Leadership Coaches**

In a market that is flooded with a plethora of offerings, organizations seeking to source coaches for their senior executive population first and foremost look at long and established track records of successfully working with enterprise leaders. In commenting on the type of coaches

typically utilized, none of the senior HR leaders interviewed here were able to refer to clearly defined criteria and many talked about the challenge of making sense of available coaches, including capturing intangible qualities referred to as having an “X-Factor.” Stylistically, it seems that the typical coach – even though there is no such thing based on the variability of responses – combines a mixture of humility and confidence, high cognitive ability and deep listening skills. Somewhat surprisingly, they generally do not demand a formal coaching qualification, which is not necessarily reflective of existing coaching standards, including those in Australia (SAI Global, 2011). Respondents all identify the ability of the coach to quickly establish rapport, trust, and credibility with the often-demanding senior leadership population as a significant challenge. More than half the respondents emphasize, above all else, that effective coaches demonstrated a strong ability to appropriately challenge the coaching participant. This quality is considered to be in relatively short supply and reportedly limits the pool of available coaches who can operate with consistent effectiveness. Comments indicate that those who are proven in this aspect are much more extensively utilized by their respective organization.

### Contingent Success Factors

The variety of interview responses indicates that there is no uniformly accepted approach to coaching senior leaders. This is consistent with research evidence suggesting many different approaches to, and models of, coaching (Carey, Philippon, & Cummings, 2011). Definitions associated with evidence-based approaches to coaching, however, indicate that it generally involves a process of change which is facilitated by the coach but largely self-directed by the coaching participant (Grant, 2006). Where nearly all approaches to executive coaching are based on a process that fundamentally facilitates the goal attainment of the executives being coached, coaching senior leaders appears to center on two distinct priorities. First is the optimal functioning and sustained high-performance of

the individual, including their self-awareness, self-management, decision-making ability, and capacity to cope with pressures. Second is their impact in the context of key relationships and business needs, often a direct function of operational and strategic priorities. It is the latter, which, according to interview responses, represent an area where coaching and development initiatives appear to be associated with less consistent impact. They comment, for example, that “direct reports often point to the fact that individual x has not really changed,” that “repeated 360-degree feed-

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back instruments don’t necessarily show an improvement in critical areas,” or that “informal feedback from team members suggest that after an initial effort to address behavior ‘y’ they seem to have fallen back to their default.” Therefore, although coaching participants will frequently walk away from the coaching engagements with strong positive feedback and clearly articulated benefits, other observers frequently lament a lack of materially different behaviors that address key development areas, and ultimately, lack translation into changed business outcomes. Overcoming this challenge appears to require focusing on a number of success factors which are set out below.

**Vertical development focus.** The responses of nearly all of the organizations interviewed for this research indicate a wide level of agreement that leadership coaching is less about learning particular skills or competencies and more about developing a broader, more relevant understanding that results in more optimal leadership

impact. This is referred to as vertical development and describes the process of changing one’s beliefs and assumptions to enable more optimal decision making and behavior. In this context, a number of respondents stress the relevance of constructive development theory and its established empirical linkages to leadership effectiveness (Kegan & Lahey, 2010). Much of this reportedly has to do with the leader’s ability to deal with the demands of VUCA, a trendy acronym that originated in the US military but is now used to describe the nature of leading in organi-

zational contexts, which are characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Developmental approaches to coaching (which also encompass systems thinking and cognitive psychology) seem to be one area that is increasingly considered to be relevant to effecting lasting behavioral change of enterprise leaders. Feedback indicates that developing more optimal functioning at this level involves a focus on establishing a broader, more integrated perspective-taking capacity, appreciation of leadership tasks in the context of complex adaptive systems, effective relationship building and influencing, and greater self-regulatory capacity to accommodate these different variables. Consequently, coaches need to understand what is involved in working with a senior leader to develop greater ability in these areas.

**Aligning development with business needs and stakeholder expectations.** Whether it is in the context of optimizing current role impact or preparing for succession readiness (or both), respondents



comment on the importance of setting clear and relevant development objectives. They highlight the risk of setting coaching goals that are not truly representative of those areas that optimize the individual's leadership impact. They observe a tendency to "jump to action" by solely relying on the coaching participant's view of perceived needs, which does not always reflect rigorous and up-to-date stakeholder feedback. In overcoming this challenge, they suggest that development objectives need to be linked to relevant leadership capabilities that are most critical in achieving targeted business outcomes. In addition, they comment that best-practice approaches derive development objectives from a combination of current performance feedback, extensive up-to-date 360-degree feedback, and a consultative process between the individual being coached, their manager (or in the case of CEOs, the chairperson), and input from the human resources function as an internal subject matter expert. The above suggests that valued leadership coaching outcomes are able to demonstrate a strong link between these aligned coaching goals and identify corresponding specific actions and outcomes within the coaching time frame.

**Targeted learning content taught experientially.** According to respondents, the content of coaching sessions can vary significantly; some tend to focus more on the psychological and behavioral aspects of leadership while others take more of a consulting approach to sharing learning resources. These can straddle a variety of domains including organization development, change management, leadership, and corporate strategy. Making leadership knowledge explicit, including in the form of tools, models, and approaches, often seems to be a revelation to individuals undergoing coaching in senior leadership roles. An example of using content as part of the coaching process to increase self-awareness of the coaching participant's leadership approach could be a simple model derived from Yukl, Gordon, and Taber's (2002) work that outlines leadership style as contingent on a combination of task, relationship, and situational

dynamics. More specifically, one respondent highlighted that coaching participants were able to use this model to gain insight and develop more flexibility with respect to applying a developing, consulting, supporting, recognizing, or guiding leadership style depending on whether the particular situation or context as well as the ability of the followers allowed this. According to the HR leaders interviewed for this research, effective coaching at the top requires careful selection and integration of this learning content, particularly as the capacity of a senior executive to dedicate time and resources to explicit learning is severely restricted. They suggest that, at the highest levels of organizational leadership, coaching content needs to address the challenges that arise from the complexity experienced in these environments and, ultimately, reflect the link between development objectives, behavior change, leadership capabilities, and business outcomes.

**Working within the leaders' context.** Many respondents referred to the challenge of aligning development objectives with critical business needs and commented that this appears to be a reflection of the inability of many coaches to work effectively in the business and organizational context of the senior leader, despite its established importance (Saporito, 1996). Additionally, responses indicate that this may also be a reflection of not dedicating sufficient time at the outset of the coaching process to create the explicit and tangible linkages between the two. Furthermore, respondents also highlight the importance of the coach's ability to design deliberate learning experiences out of the context, situations, and events of the individual to ensure coaching objectives are more likely to translate into sustained change. This is consistent with research that demonstrates experiential learning is generally superior to other forms of learning (Kolb, 1984). It suggests a requirement for coaches needing to have the capability to utilize the context of the senior executive and have the credibility to enable the individual being coached to feel confident to share relevant context.

**Selective leadership advice by qualified coach.** The experience of a number of respondents shows that coaching senior leaders frequently extends beyond the traditional purist approach of the coaching process of facilitating the self-directed learning and goal-attainment of the individual. Senior leadership roles are nearly always subject to intense pressures and high expectations of relevant stakeholders, and this translates into an apparent requirement to provide guidance and advice to allow timely reaction in challenging situations. This is not intended to argue that there are not a variety of different approaches that have merit, including those purely focused on the psychology of leadership and high performance, as well as supporting the goal attainment of the individual. However, in the context of optimizing individuals' current as well as future leadership impact, responses suggest that it is necessary to go beyond relying on the internal resources of the coaching participant and provide advice on the explicit linkages between the individual's psychology, their behavior, and their impact on business outcomes. The majority of senior HR leaders interviewed for this research suggest that their most successful coaches are able to combine strong commercial and strategic acumen with an effective coaching style. In the words of one respondent "there are plenty of qualified coaches but very few are able to demonstrate that they can simultaneously function as an effective change agent and trusted confidante who adds value to today's outcomes." It is noteworthy that this aspect of the coach's experience does not appear to have been examined in any of the formal academic research.

### Implications for OD Practitioners

The commentary of senior human resources directors interviewed for this research suggests that coaching at the top comes with significant challenges for many organizations. This is due to a number of factors, including the:

- » Significant cost involved;
- » Relative scarcity of coaches who can produce reliable results;

- » Culture of the organization, especially the attitude of its most senior leaders; and
- » Mindset, motivation, and ability of the coaching participant to successfully change.

Despite the challenges, many organizations provide coaching support at this level with mostly positive and valued experiences for the individuals being coached and a general perception that it benefits organizational performance. At the same time, they comment on the frequent lack

**A basic question arises out of the findings in that there may sometimes be a material disconnect between the goals that are specified by the individual as priorities for the coaching process and those that are truly relevant in producing tangible outcomes relevant to the business and visible to important stakeholders. Although, undoubtedly, a complex combination of numerous variables described in this paper, interview responses seem to suggest that this is primarily due to a lack of focusing on the link between coaching objectives, the relevant leader's behaviors, and how these enhance or diminish business outcomes.**

of significant change and impact observed by relevant stakeholders, including direct reports, peers, and more senior reporting relationships. A basic question arises out of the findings in that there may sometimes be a material disconnect between the goals that are specified by the individual as priorities for the coaching process and those that are truly relevant in producing tangible outcomes relevant to the business and visible to important stakeholders. Although, undoubtedly, a complex combination of numerous variables described in this paper, interview responses seem to suggest that this is primarily due to a lack of focusing on the link between coaching objectives, the relevant leader's behaviors, and how these enhance or diminish business outcomes. This appears particularly relevant in the context of successfully preparing candidates for future succession events, which represents a tension

in balancing the challenge of delivering outcomes today compared to developing specific capabilities for success in a future role.

In exploring how to best overcome challenges, findings suggest a number of implications for OD Practitioners:

- » A focus on setting up leadership coaching with realistic expectations and linking coaching goals to business outcomes and stakeholder expectations;
- » A focus on the capability of the coach who needs to be highly credible and able to balance support with an ability

to challenge and motivate the coaching participant; and

- » A focus on the content of coaching sessions independent from the modality of coaching as an effective mechanism of purposeful change of individuals.

Whereas it is justly recognized as important to focus on evidence-based approaches to executive coaching, there is, with the notional exception of vertical developmental approaches, a definite lack of consistency and uniformity in how change is effected in the coaching context. Notwithstanding this, those in charge of senior leader development support and coaching relationships stress that the primary objective of coaching is generally to improve business performance. At the same time, their responses imply that there are parallel objectives that are generally not mutually exclusive and can, therefore, co-exist in the

context of coaching senior leaders. Examples include a focus on the individual's sustainable approach to high performance, their parallel focus on driving performance outcomes whilst also progressing the changes that follow from strategic objectives, and their need to balance building and maintaining relationships whilst also ensuring tangible outcomes are achieved.

## Conclusion

Interview responses lead to the conclusion that coaching at senior levels is more impactful when evidence-based approaches to coaching are combined with carefully targeted learning content and selective advice. Responses further suggest that this requires experienced and credible coaches who can effectively operate in the organizational context to ensure relevance to the leadership required for consistently delivering high-level business outcomes. Apart from more carefully managing expectations of stakeholders, one cannot help but wonder whether the widely voiced comment that coaching is not the panacea also indicates that coaching has not yet reached its full potential, and can provide significantly greater benefits to organizations and senior leaders when it is integrated with organizational objectives and culture. This also suggests that rather than a means to an end, perhaps coaching would be better viewed as a superior modality for effective change.

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“As individuals and organizations seek new ways to deal with the increasing complexity and expectations of workplace performance, and want answers that are proven and measurable, a positive coaching model based on theory and research is a first step toward enlightening and augmenting the practice of coaching.”

# Measuring the Magic

## The Thrive Model of Evidence-based Executive Coaching

By Kathleen Iverson

Coaching is an important vehicle for talent development and personal growth. As individuals and organizations seek new ways to balance well-being with success, coaching has emerged as a popular solution. With annual expenditures at nearly \$2 billion globally (Total Revenue from Coaching, 2012), coaching is a major player in the talent development arena. Rapid growth, coupled with low entrance barriers, led Sherman (2004) to characterize the “wild west of executive coaching” as a chaotic terrain, fraught with risk and largely unpoliced, yet with tremendous potential. Since then, coaching scholarship has grown into an eclectic array of publications spanning disciplines from psychiatry to business.

Despite this prolificacy, the “holy grail” of coaching questions, “How and why does coaching work?” remains essentially unanswered (de Haan, Duckworth, Birch, & Jones, 2013). Consequently, the promises that coaching makes—that it will add a fresh perspective on personal challenges, enhance decision-making, develop interpersonal skills, increase confidence, improve productivity, increase life and work satisfaction, and goal achievement (Benefits of using a coach, 2016)—may remain unproven without the science of theory and measurement. Coaching practice is characterized by an arsenal of techniques, some developed independently of theory, making it difficult to garner empirical support for effective outcomes. Coaching requires uniform criteria for implementation and evaluation (Smith, Borneman, Brummel, & Connelly, 2009). To a significant extent, we can only know

the value of coaching based on the measurable and sustainable outcomes it produces. Given this need, my objective is to present an evidence-based model of coaching that links two exciting frameworks from the field of positive psychology, psychological capital, and workplace thriving, to create a model for coaching that merges theory and assessment with practice.

### Thrive Model

The Thrive Model of Evidence-based Executive Coaching (*Figure 1*) proposes an approach designed to increase psychological capital and thriving, which has been linked to many desirable outcomes, including increased performance, commitment, empowerment, creativity, innovation, health, self-development, and goal achievement. In the remainder of this article, I describe the theoretical foundations of the Thrive Model and the instruments used to measure psychological capital and thriving. Finally, I offer specific strategies for practice and implications for research.

### Theoretical Foundations

The discipline of positive psychology emerged when Martin Seligman, as the incoming president of the American Psychology Association, delivered his inaugural address challenging his constituents to shift their preoccupation from what is wrong and dysfunctional to what is right and good about people by focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses, and health and vitality rather than illness and

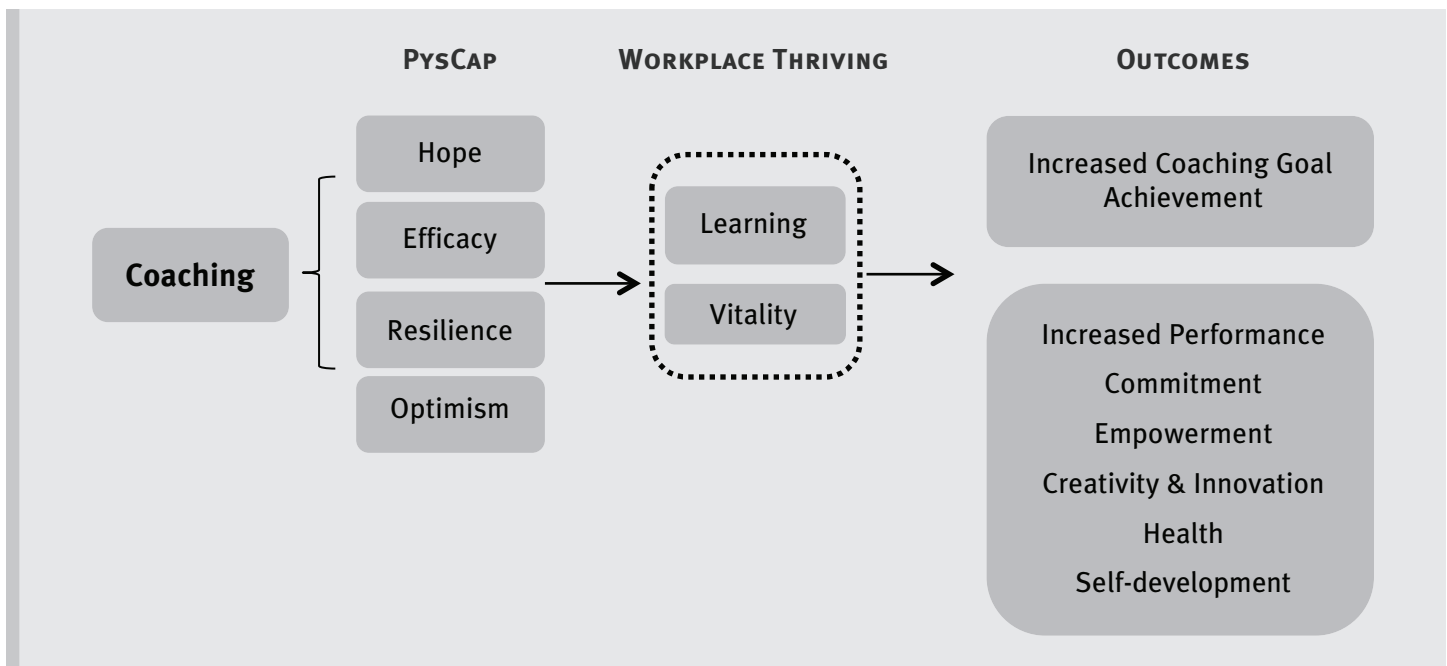


Figure 1. Thrive Model of Executive Coaching

pathology (Seligman, 1998; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). He proposed a positive approach to study the conditions and processes that lead to flourishing and optimum performance. The link between positive psychology and coaching is well documented, given their shared emphasis on self-development, change, and well-being (Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh, & Parker, 2010), with coaching identified as a vehicle to apply the principals of positive psychology at an individual level. In turn, positive psychology serves as the science at the heart of coaching (Kaufmann, Boniwell, & Silberman, 2010) by supplying a coherent framework, empirical validation, and reliable assessment (Kauffman, 2006; Seligman, 2007). Two frameworks that bring the focus of positive psychology to organizations and their members, making them particularly appropriate as foundations for coaching for work performance, are psychological capital and workplace thriving. Both offer empirically validated constructs and measures that lead to a variety of positive and desirable outcomes and serve as the foundation of the Thrive Model.

### Psychological Capital

Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio (2007) expanded the application of positive psychology to the workplace with the development of the psychological capital

framework, integrating Becker's (1993) economic theory of human capital with positive psychology. Psychological capital (PsyCap) is defined as an individual's strength, perceptions, attitudes toward work, and general outlook on life (Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007). PsyCap is a higher order construct that consists of four well documented state-like capacities (HERO): hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, that when combined, impact worker attitude, behavior, and performance (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011). Many positive outcomes are related to PsyCap. Research has shown that individuals high in PsyCap are also high performers (Luthans, Avolio, et al., 2007), committed to the mission of their organization (Luthans & Jensen, 2005), and empowered (Hughes, Norman, & Luthans, 2008). The PsyCap construct is supported by sound theory, evidence-based impact on practice, and valid measurement (Friend et al., 2016). In the subsections, I describe how each capacity of PsyCap relates to coaching.

**Hope.** Individuals with hope are able to set goals, self-motivate to achieve goals, and to change course as needed to determine alternate strategies for goal achievement (Snyder, 2000). In an organizational setting, those higher in hope can use contingency planning to predict obstacles and identify multiple pathways to achieve their targeted goals. Critical skills are the ability

to set goals, predict potential obstacles, and adjust their strategy as needed to continue toward goal achievement. According to Grant (2012), all coaching conversations are either explicitly or implicitly about goals, and since hope directly impacts goal achievement, facilitating clients in hope enhancing strategies will lead to successful goal achievement.

**Efficacy.** Based on Bandura's social cognitive theory (1997), efficacy refers to a worker's conviction or confidence in the ability to get things done using motivation, cognitive resources, or specific courses of action. Those high in efficacy are confident and persistent, and when faced with challenges, willing to put forth the needed effort to achieve their goals (Luthans et al., 2007). Coaching offers promise as a way to increase self-efficacy (Evers et al., 2006; Grant 2014), so the addition of efficacy-increasing practices to the coaching process, particularly during goal setting and monitoring, may strengthen positive outcomes.

**Resilience.** When faced with adversity, resilient individuals are able to bounce back quickly and effectively (Masten, 2001). In organizational settings, resilient individuals have the psychological capacity to recover from change, regardless of whether it is positive or negative in nature. They bounce back when faced with negative

Table 1: *Thrive Model Applications*

PSYCAP COMPONENT	COACHING APPLICATIONS SUPPORTED BY LITERATURE
<b>Hope</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and clarify goals, develop multiple pathways to achievement, reframe obstacles as challenges (Synder, 2000).</li> <li>• Help clients identify obstacles to goals, brainstorm a large number of solutions, and examine the costs and benefits presented by each solution to facilitate selection of best course of action (Snyder, 1994).</li> <li>• Clients identify their goals and action plans, use positive self-talk to facilitate goal striving, and use solution-focused techniques to determine possible routes to their goals (Green, Grant, &amp; Rynsaardt, 2007).</li> <li>• Help clients who struggle with hope to first identify and then achieve a small and reasonable goal to increase hope about future goals (de Shazer, 1985).</li> </ul>
<b>Efficacy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coach serves as a role model by modeling desired behavior or helps client find role models outside coaching relationship (Bandura, 1997).</li> <li>• Ask clients to think of a skill they developed over time, where they once had low ability and can now perform well, and then apply past skill development strategies to a new goal (Helsen, Latham, &amp; Vandewall, 2005).</li> <li>• Coaches facilitate efficacy by giving feedback that leads to a growth mindset by focusing on hard work rather than intelligence (Dweck, 2006).</li> <li>• Break difficult tasks into small steps that are relatively easy at first to ensure a high level of initial success, progressively increasing task difficulty (Bandura, 1997).</li> </ul>
<b>Resilience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce risk by identifying behaviors and situations that hinder goal achievement and work to reduce or eliminate their effect. (Masten, 2009).</li> <li>• Increase resources and assets (Masten, 2009) by facilitating the development of positive relationships and networks (Jackson, Firtko, &amp; Edenborough, 2007).</li> <li>• Mobilize and facilitate powerful protective systems (Masten, 2009) to address risks, i.e. if client goals are blocked by a lack of organization, develop a system for time management.</li> <li>• Create a supportive coaching relationship that gives individuals space and time to reflect on performance (Jackson et al., 2007). Identify and develop core strengths, facilitate self-acceptance, and help clients maintain perspective when frustrated (Neenan, 2009).</li> <li>• Facilitate overcoming barriers to performance through positive self-talk, exploring self-defeating behaviors, and addressing focus on goals (Gyllensten &amp; Palmer, 2005).</li> </ul>
<b>Optimism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate examination of self-talk or internal dialog when facing problems, and teach client to change from a negative explanatory style to a more positive style using Ellis' ABCDE method (Seligman, 2011).</li> <li>• Ask clients to use a journal to write down beliefs when adversity strikes (Seligman, 2011).</li> <li>• Shift the orientation of coaching to the positive by asking clients to talk about themselves at their best and tell stories that display their highest abilities. Listen for positive motivations, strengths, and virtues (Seligman, 2004).</li> <li>• Focus on gratitude by asking clients to thank those who have helped them in the past (Seligman, 2004).</li> </ul>
<b>Thriving</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate the development of a purpose and mission related to work and career (Sprietzer, Porath, &amp; Gibson, 2012).</li> <li>• Address work relationships and collaboration by coaching client on verbal and nonverbal communication, cooperative work behavior, and problem solving (Sprietzer &amp; Porath, 2012)</li> <li>• Coach for work life balance, encouraging clients to take short breaks from work to maintain energy and vitality (Sprietzer &amp; Porath, 2012).</li> <li>• Help clients find meaning in their work or to find more meaningful tasks or engaging work (Paterson et al., 2014).</li> <li>• Encourage clients to participate in training to address skill deficits and to also develop a plan to transfer or use training in the workplace (Paterson et al., 2014).</li> <li>• If meaningful opportunities are limited in the client's current organization, consider opportunities to do community service projects to generate learning and vitality (Paterson et al., 2014).</li> </ul>

outcomes like adversity, uncertainty, conflict, or failure, and even positive ones like promotion or increased responsibility (Luthans, 2002a). Masten (2009) identified three ways to promote resilience: 1) reduce risk exposure by identifying factors that create adversity that can be eliminated or changed, 2) increase resources and assets to counterbalance risk, and 3) mobilize and facilitate powerful protective systems. Resilience increases with practice, and individuals become more resilient each time they effectively recover from a setback, creating a positive cycle of improvement (Fredrickson & Joiner 2002). Coaching offers a supportive environment where situations are analyzed for risk reduction, resources and assets are maximized, and strategies to develop protective systems are put in place.

**Optimism.** Optimism refers to the positive expectancy or belief that a desirable outcome will result from increased effort. Optimists continue to put forth effort even when faced with increasing adversity, leading them to perform better than pessimists (Luthans, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2005; Luthans, Avery, Avolio & Peterson, 2010). Optimism is the foundation of Seligman's approach to positive psychology, and he supports the development of an optimistic orientation as a requirement for a meaningful life (Seligman, 2002). In Seligman's view, optimism is a singular, temporary interpretation of events rather than permanent and unchanging. To prevent optimism from clouding judgment, Seligman proposed "flexible optimism" where consideration is given to the costs as well as the benefits of pursuing a goal. Coaching, along with mentoring, modeling, peer support, and even participation in social groups, can facilitate the development of optimism (Avolio, Youssef and Luthans, 2015).

**Workplace Thriving.** Defined as "a sense of progress or forward movement in one's development" (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005:538), thriving is a positive psychological state that consists of both vitality and learning, characterized by a sense of energy directed at continuous learning. Thriving requires a combination

of learning, defined as the acquisition of new skills, and vitality, defined as the drive that propels learners to transfer learning or apply new knowledge (Paterson, Luthans, & Jeung, 2014), and is most evident when vitality and learning are combined to drive performance (Porath, Spreitzer, Gibbons, & Garnett et al., 2012). Like PsyCap, thriving

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is related to many positive workplace outcomes and has been found to predict job performance (Porath et al., 2012; Spreitzer, Porath, & Gibson, 2012), facilitate creativity and innovation (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens, & Smith, 2013), contribute to overall health (Porath et al., 2012), reduce burnout and strain (Porath et al., 2012; Spreitzer et al., 2012), and facilitate self-development (Paterson, et al., 2014). As a state-like construct concerned with how workers learn, grow, and develop into the future, thriving offers strong potential as a second area of guidance for coaching practice.

In the Thrive Model (*Figure 1*) I propose that coaching interventions directed toward the development of PsyCap will facilitate the development of workplace thriving, generating positive outcomes at the individual and organizational level. I also propose that the achievement of specific, mutually agreed upon coaching goals, will be more effective when it includes strategies that enhance PsyCap and thriving (*Table 1*). Prior research validates the relationship between PsyCap and thriving, with PsyCap acting as a catalyst for thriving behavior, with higher levels of

PsyCap leading to increases in thriving. Thus a coaching model that combines the contributions of each construct could offer practitioners a theoretical and empirical basis for highly effective practices that go beyond the individual effect of each construct (Spreitzer, et al., 2005; Paterson, Luthans, & Jeung, 2013).

#### **The Thrive Model in Coaching Practice**

To identify linkages between theory and practice, *Table 1* contains specific strategies to increase each component of PsyCap and workplace thriving. Coaches may currently use many of the recommended strategies. In a survey of practicing coaches, Vandaveer et al. (2016) listed communication techniques, goal setting, self-reflective activities, brainstorming, and feedback as the top five most frequently used coaching techniques. All five techniques are included in the recommended implementation of the Thrive Model. What makes this approach unique to coaching practice is that the strategies are linked to desired constructs with valid measures, adding an overlay of theory to accepted methods of practice.

To implement the Thrive Model, it is useful to consider its components in terms of the popular GROW framework for coaching sessions (Whitmore, 1992). Using this framework, coaching begins with goal setting, next, the coach and coachee explore the current reality, develop options for action, and conclude with specific action steps that help define the way

forward. An outline of the GROW process mapped to the Thrive Model is provided in *Table 2*.

### Measuring Outcomes

Based on the results of prior research, interventions that lead to increased PsyCap and thriving are expected to lead to a variety of positive and desirable workplace performance indicators (see Outcomes in *Figure 1*). One of the benefits of the Thrive Model is the availability of valid and reliable tools for measurement. The PsyCap Questionnaire (PCQ), developed and validated by Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio (2007) measures the four constructs of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Sample items include: I feel confident helping to set targets/goals in my work area, I feel confident presenting information to a group of colleagues, and I can think of many ways to reach my current work goals. The PCQ is available at Mind Garden. A 12-item reduced version of the PCQ is also available, along with an implicit measure (I-PCQ) developed and validated by Harms and Luthans (2012).

Thriving is evaluated with a 10-item scale that has proved valid and reliable to assess both learning and vitality in relation to work performance (Porath et al., 2012). Sample items that measure learning include: I find myself learning often, I continue to learn more and more as time goes by, and I have developed a lot as a person. Sample items that measure vitality include: I feel alive and vital, I have energy and spirit, and I am looking forward to each new day.

In addition to measurements of PsyCap and thriving, other tools can be utilized to measure specific coaching goals. For example, if the client and coach agree on a coaching goal of reduced job stress and exhaustion, measurement tools like the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996) can be added to the assessment and compared to measures of PsyCap and thriving.

Table 2: Thrive Model Integrated in the Coaching Process

GROW FRAMEWORK	THRIVE MODEL APPLICATION
<p><b>Goals</b></p> <p>Clarify what the client wants to achieve and determine the focus of coaching.</p>	<p>Initiate the coaching session with a discussion of goals. Administer appropriate tools to assess baseline measures in goal areas and include the PCQ and Workplace Thriving inventories.</p>
<p><b>Establish Current Reality</b></p> <p>Raise awareness of present realities; how problems are handled, what works, what doesn't work.</p>	<p>Discuss the results of assessments with a focus on strengths and identify areas to address in coaching related to specific goals, incorporating strategies to increase hope, efficacy, resilience, optimism, and thriving (<i>Table 1</i>). For example, facilitate the development of a purpose and mission related to career (thriving), facilitate stories about past wins and success that demonstrate highest abilities (optimism).</p>
<p><b>Explore the Options</b></p> <p>Identify and assess options using solution-focused thinking and brainstorming.</p>	<p>Brainstorm possible solutions, using practices from <i>Table 1</i> to address areas of focus. For example, serve as a role model, discuss strengths and past success, and break tasks into small steps, starting with easier actions to increase efficacy. Identify and clarify goals, develop multiple pathways to achievement, reframe obstacles as challenges (hope).</p>
<p><b>Wrap Up</b></p> <p>Develop action plans, build motivation,</p>	<p>Help clients find meaning in their work (thrive). Ask clients to think of a skill they developed over time, where they once had low ability and can now perform well, and then apply past skill development strategies to a new goal (efficacy). Discuss strategies for measuring results and include measurement of PsyCap and thriving.</p>

### Implications for Research

The Thrive Model of Coaching lends itself to empirical testing to assess the viability of the application of PsyCap and thriving to coaching practice. In addition, it offers the opportunity to continue to explore and substantiate outcomes related to increased PsyCap and thriving at work, by investigating them in terms of specific coaching goals like increased productivity, job burnout, or time management. There may be relationships between the constructs of PsyCap and workplace thriving that previous research did not prove. Another area of focus for future investigation is the distinction between various types of coaching and the development of PsyCap and workplace thriving. This model focuses on executive coaching, but it may be applicable to life coaching. Research demonstrated that thriving at work was positively related to thriving outside of work (Porath et al., 2012). Additionally, my focus on coaching

applications that address workplace thriving constructs collectively overlooks the potential for interactive effects in learning and vitality. Finally, it would be interesting to explore the effects of environmental factors and workplace thriving. Patterson & Luthans (2014) found that when supervisors create a supportive work climate, there is an increase in agentic work behaviors linked to thriving. It is feasible that the effectiveness of the model will be advanced or limited by factors like leader member exchange, organizational climate, and culture.

### Conclusion

Coaching has grown rapidly, gaining wide acceptance as a reputable strategy for increased workplace performance and career development. With its focus on improved performance in functioning individuals, positive psychology offers a sound theoretical home for practice. Although



interest in positive psychology coaching is not new, the primary focus to date has been from the practitioner's perspective. As individuals and organizations seek new ways to deal with the increasing complexity and expectations of workplace performance, and want answers that are proven and measurable, a positive coaching model based on theory and research is a first step toward enlightening and augmenting the practice of coaching.

**The Thrive Model of Coaching lends itself to empirical testing to assess the viability of the application of PsyCap and thriving development to coaching practice. In addition, it offers the opportunity to continue to explore and substantiate outcomes related to increased PsyCap and thriving at work, by investigating them in terms of specific coaching goals like increased productivity, job burnout, or time management.**

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“New perspectives from complexity theory are providing organizational leaders and OD practitioners with new insights and approaches that allow innovation to emerge from a wide variety of sources rather than the formal processes such as research and development.”

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# Tight–Loose–Tight

## A Complexity Approach to Innovation

By Peter Dickens

Organizations everywhere seem to be under enormous pressure to innovate, often without clear guidelines or defined outcomes. Some have been very successful and are heralded in the press. Sadly, many more seem to innovate for their own sake and achieve at best, ephemeral results. Still others put strict limitations on innovation and then micromanage the process to the point where nothing new can emerge. New perspectives from complexity theory are providing organizational leaders and OD practitioners with new insights and approaches that allow innovation to emerge from a wide variety of sources rather than the formal processes such as research and development. One of these, dubbed “Tight–Loose–Tight,” is a particularly useful framework for creating an effective container within which innovation can flourish.

### Complex Adaptive Systems

Complex adaptive systems (CASs), as the name would suggest, are difficult to pin down. However, there are several characteristics of complex adaptive systems that are proving useful to OD practitioners.

Some of the characteristics of complex adaptive systems include:

1. they are made up of many agents who act and interact with each other in unpredictable ways,
2. they are sensitive to initial conditions,
3. they adjust their behavior in the aggregate in unpredictable ways,
4. they oscillate between stability and instability, and

5. they produce emergent actions when approaching disequilibrium (Plowman, Solansky, Beck, Baker, Kulkarni, & Travis, 2007).

For the sake of this article, I want to focus on the CAS’s ability to generate patterns of emergence: changes in the whole that could not be predicted by the characteristics of the subordinate elements. In discussing the work of Chris Langton, Waldrop (1992) proposed that, “instead of being designed from the top down, the way a human engineer would do it, living systems always seem to emerge from the bottom up, from a population of much simpler systems.” Emergent properties are ones that “exist at one level of the organization that cannot be explained by understanding properties at other levels of the organization” (Lanham, McDaniel, Crabtree, Miller, Stange, Tallia, et al., 2009). One of the characteristics of CASs that leads to this emergent behavior is referred to as self-organization, which many researchers have suggested is, in fact, the key concept to be drawn from complexity theory (Lanham, McDaniel, Crabtree, Miller, Stange, Tallia, et al., 2009). Self-organization is a process whereby the organization or coherence of a system increases, without this increase being controlled by the environment, formal directive, or an external system. It is a process of evolution where the effect of the external environment is minimal, i.e. where the development of new, complex structures takes place primarily in and through the system itself. Zimmerman et al. (1998) described self-organization as

a process whereby new structures, patterns, and properties emerge in the system without them being imposed externally. In other words, order does not come about as a result of careful planning and effective execution but rather there seems to be an inherent capacity of living systems to find new forms of order.

In complex adaptive systems, one way coherence could emerge is through the application of minimum specifications or “min specs” to the system. These are the simple rules that guide self-organization. Craig Reynolds (Waldrop, 1992) describes the behavior of a flock of birds, or a school of fish, when they demonstrate extraordinary patterns of coherence and order. He referred to them as “boids,” which is apparently an evocation of his Brooklyn accent. He suggested that boids are intrinsically guided by three simple rules: maintain minimum distance from other boids in your neighborhood; match velocity with other boids in your neighborhood; and move to the perceived center of mass of the boids in your neighborhood. Unquestioned acceptance of these simple rules meant that there is an immediate, though adaptive order apparent in the flocking behavior of these simple boids.

Social systems, of course, are seldom so compliant and tend to push back against rules that are imposed on them. They simply are not as blindly compliant as boids. In my experience, far better results ensue when people have input into the min specs that will guide their work. Clients who also work with Lean methodologies for quality improvement have suggested that this follows the same path. Together they distill the essential question: What are the least number of specifications possible to facilitate the desired end result? Far too often, managers take the opposite approach and opt for “max specs” that then limit their people to such a degree that there is little or no room for innovation.

The leader’s role is not to impose min specs but to support their development and clarity and then engage in the process of sensemaking, a term made popular by Karl Weick and is taken to mean the individual leader’s meaning making in a change environment, and the behavior that results

from this sensemaking process (Weick, Stuchliffe, & Obstfeld 2005). In other words, it becomes the role of leaders, wherever they are in the organization, to identify, share, and promulgate illustrative stories that help shape collective understanding of the min specs in a way that is neither coercive nor manipulative. By simply sharing with people how others have used min specs to develop innovative solutions, leaders can deepen people’s understanding of possibilities without dictating outcomes.

An adaption of the concept of min specs is the construct of “Tight–Loose–Tight,” which is a novel approach to the

**Ideally, there should be no more than 3–5 min specs and they have to be clearly understood by all concerned. Simply put, the team needs the least number of rules possible to produce the desired end result behavior. The team challenged with developing effective solutions should have input into the formulation of the min specs so they feel a sense of ownership. Wergin (2003) has shown that when people are given the opportunity to have input into their quality standards, they actually set higher standards, so their engagement is essential.**

solving of complex problems that we first encountered working with a large community teaching hospital in Toronto, ON. The provenance of the term is unclear, but to the best of our understanding it was self-generated by staff working on Lean initiatives at the hospital.

It may be useful at this point to clarify what I mean by “complex problems.” Zimmerman (1998) provides the best explanation when she proposes the following three-stage metaphor. Simple problems are analogous to baking a cake. To be successful, you need a recipe and a belief that the recipe is tested and accurate. I do not bake, but my understanding is that it is all about the chemistry, so it is vital that you follow the recipe precisely to produce the desired outcome. Many before have addressed this simple problem; the outcome is known *a priori*, and the results are predictable if you follow the recipe. Sending a rocket to the moon is a complicated problem. It involves multiple “recipes,”

formulae, and procedures that must be specified and followed in exact order. However, if you follow the procedures, over time there is an increased predictability of success. Each rocket increases the likelihood of the next being just as successful. However, raising a child is not predictable; it’s complex. Raising two or more children is even more so. Following rigid protocols in child rearing may have limited application and may, in fact, be counterproductive. The challenge, of course, is that every child is unique and so raising one child provides experience but provides no guarantees for use with the next child. You remain

uncertain of the outcomes throughout the process. Why is that? Well, you can’t separate the parts from the whole; the child from its environments. The essence of what it means to raise a child lies not in systems, structures, and protocols but in the relationship between people, experiences, and moments in time. While any child can be a challenge at some point, few parents would describe their children as a problem to be solved. They are in fact a possibility that emerges into something wholly unpredictable – and usually delightful. In many ways, this is similar to Heifetz’s (2009) concept of technical versus adaptive challenges. Simple and even complicated problems are technical in nature but complex challenges are highly adaptive by nature, resulting as they often do in challenging people’s assumptions and mental models.

Rather than defaulting to our natural tendency to create maximum specs, to over proscribe, we need to release complex

problems to the innovation possible by applying the least number of rules possible to produce the desired end result patterns of behavior. Tight–Loose–Tight allows us to do that.

### The Challenges to Turn Loose–Tight–Loose into Tight–Loose–Tight

**Loose–Tight–Loose.** Picture a typical hourglass. Wide at the top and bottom, tight in the middle: brilliant if you want an accurate way of measuring time, as has been the case since its invention in Alexandria over 2,000 years ago. Sadly, it is also the way that many managers want to manage their teams. Consider this:

- » *Loose at the top.* A manager is given a new assignment and promptly turns it over to his team. He is short on rationale because he really has been given none himself, other than some vague connection to organizational priorities. He prepares the team by giving them a vague goal and impossible timelines, and then moves on to other business.
- » *Tight at the middle.* The team moves into the “forming” stage (Tuckman, 1965), trying to figure out what it is exactly they are doing. They make some few tentative steps forward but, at the first sign of trouble, the manager swoops in and a familiar pattern of blame, micromanagement, and missed “deadlines” sets in.
- » *Loose at the bottom.* When the project is finally, miraculously, delivered there is little response from management and few, if any, commitments to implementation and monitoring the outcomes. The team is left dispirited and disconnected.

I wish this were just a satiric and somewhat cynical view of what happens in most offices, but sadly I have worked with too many individuals and teams who find this sort of approach far too common. They feel no connection to the rationale for their work but then are basically told exactly what to do and how to do it. When it’s done, they see little or nothing in the way of follow through and implementation. The specifications up front are loose;

the process is tightly managed; and the outcomes are loosely tracked.

**Tight–Tight–Tight.** This describes an all too typical approach to problem solving. The manager defines the problem, defines the steps to reaching a resolution, and then manages the process in a very prescriptive way that leaves no room for innovation. This approach comes from the early days of “management” when the focus was on manufacturing outputs and the employees were considered little more than an extension of the assembly line process.

### Tight–Loose–Tight

What would happen if you re-designed this hourglass? What if it was very tight at the top, bellowed wide in the middle and then was tight again at the bottom? It may not serve its original intent of telling time, but it would be a much more useful metaphor for the way that we can approach projects when innovation and creativity are needed. Here’s how Tight–Loose–Tight works in practice.

**Tight.** Going into any initiative, individuals and teams need to have very clear, concise min specs. These are the absolute must do and must not do in any project. Ideally, there should be no more than 3–5 min specs and they have to be clearly understood by all concerned. Simply put, the team needs the least number of rules possible to produce the desired end result behavior. The team challenged with developing effective solutions should have input into the formulation of the min specs so they feel a sense of ownership. Wergin (2003) has shown that when people are given the opportunity to have input into their quality standards, they actually set higher standards, so their engagement is essential.

For example, in one health care improvement initiative I studied (Dickens, 2015b), the Tight–Loose–Tight approach was used consistently across a number of process improvement projects (PIP). I had an opportunity to interview project team members and senior management regarding one specific challenge (Dickens,

2015b). The following is a summary of that research. The PIP initiative brought together a team of front line staff, physicians, porters, pharmacists, and others from two departments to solve a chronic problem: find process improvements that would reduce wait times in the Emergency Department (ED) and improve the flow of admitted patients from the ED to the Medicine floor. The shift towards systems thinking occurred because it became clear that the challenges in the ED could not be resolved if there was not a concurrent effort to improve bed capacity on medical units. A key measure in the ED is the number of patients who have been admitted for care but for whom there is not an available bed on a medical unit. They end up waiting, sometimes for several hours, in the ED on a gurney, thus limiting the capacity of the ED to care for new, incoming patients.

In this project the requirements were clear: 1) reduce the time an admitted patient in the hospital’s emergency department waits until they are in a bed on the medicine floor by 25%, 2) enhance the patients’ experience of care, and 3) without increasing operating costs. This was designed to address a chronic problem in hospitals, patients who have come to the ER and require at least an overnight stay, but there are no available beds.

Regardless of the organization or the issue, it is vital that time is spent up front clarifying the min specs. They will guide everything that happens from there on. For some, it might be similar to the concept of a “team charter” in terms of defining the mandate.

**Loose.** Frankly, this is the tricky bit for many managers and senior leaders. When I interviewed them, several spoke of their desire to leap into the process based on prior knowledge or perceived wisdom. They were initially unwilling to really let go of the reins and trust that the people closest to the problem will have the solutions. Ultimately, however, the executive team saw their role as one of sponsorship. They formed a steering committee and they met with the PIP teams weekly, but only for updates and to find ways to remove barriers and provide resources as required.

In part, this included providing backfill for all the team members for two days per week over the eight months. Both they and the teams were clear in the interviews that the executive team was not to be involved in the specifics. As one member of the executive team said, “I knew the current outcomes and they were unacceptable. What I didn’t, and couldn’t know, were the problems that led to those outcomes. That had to come from the people much closer to the problem. I wanted the outcomes to change, so that meant letting the people close to the processes identify and fix the problems.” The executive team participated in the development of the min specs, but the ultimate definition was left to the team. It was, however, very important to the project team to know that they had support.

It is also worth noting that most members of the team did not go into it unskilled. In addition to their clinical or operational experience, most had completed an in-house leadership program, had training in Lean process improvement methodology, and they had all been to emotional intelligence workshops. In other words, they knew how to work together. They used a rapid-cycle quality improvement methodology that meant they tried many ideas, several at the same time, and collected “good enough” data to allow them to adjust or change course. The power of data was contrasted with the potentially destructive power of myths and assumptions. One person noted that, “For years, hospitals have lived on the basis of urban myths, assumptions, and distorted mental models. Key decisions were made based on someone’s gut feeling or well-worn assumptions that were taken as truth. The data challenged and changed all that.” Another participant described this as creating a level playing field, which was seen as important in a setting where clinical expertise is generally held in very high esteem. In the same way, physicians and others were willing to engage in process change when the data was clear and when they had a clear indication of what one interviewee called “off ramps.” They needed to know what data was required to indicate that a change was not working as anticipated and

that people would be willing to rethink the approach.

In the end, it was not one specific initiative or brilliant idea that solved the problem. It was several different ideas, adapted over time, and integrated. During my research, I found that it might have actually been the level of communication and collaboration between different departments that was really the key, rather

Director of the ED commented, “Today, data and the transparency of that data drive power. The CEO is very much driven by real time data, especially when it comes to the ED. I know that, good or bad, I will get a call between 7:15 AM and 7:30 AM every day, so I need to be prepared to explain the data and think about who the people are that need to be engaged in driving any change.”

**As one member of the executive team said, “I knew the current outcomes and they were unacceptable. What I didn’t, and couldn’t know, were the problems that led to those outcomes. That had to come from the people much closer to the problem. I wanted the outcomes to change, so that meant letting the people close to the processes identify and fix the problems.” The executive team participated in the development of the min specs, but the ultimate definition was left to the team. It was, however, very important to the project team to know that they had support.**

than a specific intervention. The result? In the end they reduced the wait time by almost double the intended target, and that improvement continues. They actually achieved improved operational efficiency, thus reducing costs, and increasing patient satisfaction.

**Tight.** Even when the project is initially successful, continued monitoring and accountability continues to be key. To this day, the number of admitted patients is monitored daily and if there is a variance, there are mechanisms in place to reengage some or all parts of the original team to identify new strategies. Good work can easily get lost if there is not tight, clear vigilance in making sure the benefits become embedded in the way things get done.

#### **Lessons Learned**

I ended up most of the interviews asking participants to reflect on the key lessons learned from the PIP initiative. There were four themes that immediately emerged. The first was clearly the power of data. The

The second theme was the importance of clarity of focus and of roles. One member of the executive team suggested that, “You need every one to be very clear about what it is you want to achieve – these are the min specs we were so careful to craft. We needed to be clear and consistent in defining what needed to be done, why it needed to be done now, and who needed to be involved. What we didn’t do – and can’t do – is define how something was to get done.”

The third theme was that Lean methodology works. As one interviewee commented, “it is not ‘voodoo management’ and, while it was first developed for the automotive industry, the same approach to looking at simplifying processes can work in a health care setting.” However, it requires a fundamental change in the culture of an organization. This begins with getting people across the system to work together in a highly collaborative way across departments, all focused on the same outcomes. Through the application of Lean and the consistent referencing of the min specs, the teams felt they had the

freedom to engage in rapid cycle improvement, building on what was working and quickly adapting or jettisoning ideas that served no value

The final theme related to the power of collaborative learning. As one interviewee suggested,

New knowledge was being created at the front end of the process, with the PIP teams. Learning by doing can exclude some in the hierarchy and they may not have the knowledge that front line staff are developing but then the question is, do they need it or is this an example of wanting knowledge for the power it may provide? When you invert the knowledge pyramid, really interesting things happen. There can be comfort in the bubble, thinking that you know what is going on and that things are getting done your way, but the inversion process forces formal leaders to go out and see what's actually happening.

“We have learned the collective power of working and learning across systems” commented one interviewee. “We have taken huge steps forward in the relationship between ED and Medicine. We have a better understanding of each other’s challenges, people are much more respectful, and people have clear accountabilities for their piece of the process. The results tell the tale.” In the end, the teams not only achieved but exceeded their min specs in terms of outcomes and, perhaps more importantly, set in motion a new way of thinking within the organization.

## Conclusions

When organizations develop a culture of innovation and develop a fail-safe environment, two key factors shown to facilitate emergence (Dickens, 2015a), tremendous opportunity exists to unleash the potential innovation that is in such demand today. If organizational leaders could shed their obsession with control and allow the system to self-organize, they might see results beyond what they had previously imagined.

Redesign your own hourglass and see what happens. You may not be working in a system as complex as health care, but every organization could benefit from strategies that really unleash the innovative power of the people who are face-to-face with the work every day.

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“The goal was to create sustainable culture change in order to face overwhelming challenges after the hospital’s destruction and prepare leaders for future challenges of health care reform in the industry. Rebuilding as life had been was not an option both structurally for the building as well as the way care would be delivered with coming reform.”

# Transforming Joplin Leaders with Blended OD Design Post Tornado

By Susan Duff and  
Dena Dishman

## Overview

“On May 22, 2011, an EF5 tornado cut a 7-mile path through the heart of Joplin, Missouri, injuring 1,000 people and killing 161 others, making it the deadliest single tornado since the United States began keeping official records in 1950... Some 7,500 homes were damaged or destroyed, as were 553 businesses” (Hendricks, 2013). On duty that day at 5:41 pm at St. John’s Regional Medical Center were 117 co-workers who rescued 183 patients. Five patients and one visitor did not survive. Amid the destruction stood what remained of the hospital, which had become part of Mercy Health in late 2009, not quite two years before the tornado. In only a matter of days, the organization’s leaders promised to re-build and stay with the battered community.

As co-workers of the Talent Development & Optimization department at Mercy, a Catholic health care nonprofit organization, we engaged in a twenty-one month intervention that occurred between September 2011 and May 2013 at the request of the regional President. More than eighty leaders participated. The goal was to create sustainable culture change in order to face overwhelming challenges after the hospital’s destruction and prepare leaders for future challenges of health care reform in the industry. Rebuilding as life had been was not an option both structurally for the building as well as the way care would be delivered with coming reform.

Gilpin-Jackson (2013) suggests that there is a “grey area” of blended Diagnostic

and Dialogic OD. For OD practitioners wanting to embrace a blended model, we will outline our twenty-one month intervention that could be adapted to other organizations depending on the context. We will present examples of how the principles of Dialogic OD practice that have been described in theory by a variety of experts in the field were at play in this situation, and why they are important to a blended model of OD.

We postulate that as the pace of change accelerates in our world, a shift in mental model for OD practitioners is needed regarding the practice of purely Diagnostic or Dialogic OD. There are some considerations for practitioners wanting to move toward practicing a blended methodology. We will close with some benefits for both practitioners and clients, and why a blended OD model is needed.

## Consciously Choosing a Dialogic Approach to Begin this Intervention

Principal Dialogic experts in the field agree that the primary method of change in an organization is to alter the nature of the conversations happening in and among networks, teams, and communities of people within it (Holman, 2013; Bushe & Marshak, 2013). There were several reasons we chose to lead with Dialogic OD.

First, the storyline of *victimhood* had been there long before the tornado, and was only reinforced by the storm. A new narrative that leaders are not only empowered but expected to make decisions, lead their group, and deliberately create

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conditions for culture change using the tools they were learning was always our guiding intent for the client, and the desire of the regional President.

Second, none of us had answers in a situation like this. We knew there was no other way than to learn as we go, right along with our client, and to have tremendous humility. It seemed best to work with this “natural pattern of emergence” (Holman, 2013) rather than introducing what would have felt like artificial structures at a time when everything was so fluid. The hospital was operating out of a “M.A.S.H.” type tent, with plans to build a modular

**We saw ourselves as interveners as much as facilitators or designers, trusting in complexity theory that something greater than the sum of the parts would be born simply by putting people together in a room on a regular basis with loose guidelines, new topics of conversation, and experiential learning opportunities. The regional President had the wisdom to seize the moment by engaging us to intervene deliberately and influence positively the self-organization that would have happened anyway.**

structure until a permanent structure would re-open. Members of the community were displaced from their homes. Everything was in a constant state of flux. The OD design process also emerged from one session to the next, based on what had occurred in the session before. For instance, if the group ended wrestling with a particular question, we designed the next session to include deeper exploration. If the group came to a natural consensus, we summarized, encouraged them to come to a decision to put into action, and debriefed the results of implementing this action when we met the next month.

Third, by applying the Cynefin model, we recognized this was a chaotic situation moving toward complexity (Snowden & Boone, 2007; Bushe & Marshak, 2013; Gilpin-Jackson, 2013). Given the recent acquisition and the circumstances prior, resistance to change was high. Because this was an internal client to our organization, members of our team had inside

knowledge of organizational stories from a year and a half prior when the Joplin community was integrated into its new organization, Mercy Health, by way of acquisition.

Complexity theory suggests organizations create order out of chaos themselves (Stacey, 1996). As the pace of change in our world creates chaos from disruptive innovation in technology and business, to global climate change with storms such as the one experienced in Joplin, it seemed a more common sense approach to us to embrace the messiness of the chaos, allowing what will surface naturally to emerge, and work with self-organization as trans-

formation, rather than introducing linear step-by-step approaches that feel forced in such a situation.

Previous OD writings suggest that when a combination of diagnostic and dialogic OD are used, this usually begins with a diagnostic approach of gathering data and assessing the situation, and is followed by a dialogic intervention, whose outcome is less prescribed and more unknown (Bushe & Marshak, 2013; Gilpin-Jackson, 2013). We have used this approach in other interventions and found it very effective. In this particular situation, we started with a dialogic design, and as the client’s situation stabilized and progressed, moved to more diagnostic interventions.

We saw ourselves as interveners as much as facilitators or designers, trusting in complexity theory that something greater than the sum of the parts would be born simply by putting people together in a room on a regular basis with loose guidelines, new topics of conversation,

and experiential learning opportunities. The regional President had the wisdom to seize the moment by engaging us to intervene deliberately and influence positively the self-organization that would have happened anyway.

### **Overview of Our Blended Dialogic and Diagnostic Design**

We worked with our sponsor (Bushe, 2013) of the change effort, the regional President, to identify a four-hour block of time to work with the leaders every month for at least the next year, and possibly beyond. He sponsored our team completely trusting the process to see what would emerge from the group, and what the needs would be post tornado, as we proceeded.

We started by hosting a large group discussion about the meaning of culture. We invited the leaders to write three words to describe their current culture and form small groups to draw a rendition of their current culture. We repeated the process with their desired future culture. During report outs, we invited the participants to identify the themes they were hearing. Someone named their state of being, both current and past, as victimhood. This was a poignant moment in which the group acknowledged the truth in that concept, and recognized they had an opportunity to learn a different way. Emotional states varied from anger to grief to fear of failing in the first session. This opening session, intended to begin an ongoing conversation and to acknowledge their current state four months past one of the most devastating tornadoes in history, also allowed us to diagnose on our feet their current state, and use that to design future sessions.

As a result of the first session, we decided to focus the first several months on self-awareness and self-observation, with the goal of allowing the participants the opportunity to notice their own stories of victimhood and have the chance to make new choices. We used a variety of tools of the trade to achieve this, including a pre and post leadership 360 assessment, observations of self and others, the circle of influence and circle of concern (Covey, 1989), and identifying their own strengths.

We invited them to reflect on what was important to them, and dialogue about how their own values aligned with the organization's values. After four months, we surveyed the group anonymously to assess what the group was learning and putting into practice. We learned from that survey that one concept we had introduced in particular, the Ladder of Inference (Argyris, 2002) was highly rated as "eye-opening" by our participants, and so we decided to use it throughout the remainder of the intervention.

We gradually expanded attention to how each person's individual stories make up the collective organizational narrative. We invited speakers to talk about various aspects of health care reform that would affect their business and clinical practice, and then invited dialogue in small groups about what they had heard.

Once the hospital had moved into its modular structure in April 2012, where it will be until the permanent building opens in 2015, the leaders had a more formal department to manage again. As the organization gained more stability and the situation was less chaotic, we worked with subject matter experts within the leadership team to design diagnostic action research projects in rapid succession to address needs as they emerged. For example, we assessed the current and desired productivity measures, which involved using a process to manage a balance between staffing ratios and number of patients on each unit. We shared the data with the participants, and offered an intervention of training on understanding the ratios and managing to them as they fluctuate. We also included use of the Ladder of Inference (Argyris, 2002; Senge, 1990) as a tool to explore, reveal, and open the possibility of shifting mental models about this task before covering the prescriptive processes. This occurred over a period of three months. When we evaluated the intervention, we learned that the participants' productivity measures had improved. We used this same action research design to address purchase order compliance, and four months later, the Joplin hospital had the highest purchase order compliance in the entire four-state Mercy system.

Table 1. *Three Words Most Often Cited to Describe Current Culture in Rank Order*

September 2011	September 2012	May 2013
1. Scattered/Chaos 2. Tired/Exhausted 3. Thankful	1. Resilient 2. Hopeful 3. Exciting * 3. Challenged *	1. Pride 2. Excitement 3. Changing * 3. Collaborative *

\* indicates tie

In between some of these AR projects on more operational topics, we took a month to address a softer topic. We hosted sessions on change and coaching, and created time to re-visit and reflect on their personal action plan, which each participant had developed based on their 360 assessment results and their natural strengths.

At the last session in May, 2013, we repeated the process of listing three words that describe the participants' current culture and dream for the future using cultural drawings. This comparison of the first words and drawings and the metaphors that emerged (qualitative data) allowed not only for a diagnosis of greater organizational health and vitality, but also a recognition and acknowledgement of the transformation that had occurred both individually and collectively (see *Table 1*).

There was much discussion of not only the changes that had occurred but of making meaning of the journey itself as a path to healing from the tornado.

### **The Dissection of Interplay between Diagnostic and Dialogic OD in this Intervention**

The culture drawing activity, as an example, allowed us to assess current state in the first session and to measure pre and post culture change (diagnostic) and simultaneously to intervene by changing the conversation (dialogic). Our overall blended approach consisted of some sessions that were mainly dialogic and some that were mainly diagnostic. The diagnostic sessions always included a dialogic component, such as the productivity example provided above.

There were several commonalities in our approach with Peter Reason's Co-operative Inquiry (Reason, 1999), an approach

which focuses on a systematic action research methodology, but one in which participants are both "co-researchers and co-subjects" (Reason, 1999). Our design had in common what Reason describes as "a whole family of approaches to inquiry which are participative, experiential, emancipatory, and action-oriented" (Reason, 1999). One of the ways we achieved this was to end each session, which often covered several topics, with a set of inquiries for reflection based on Kolb's experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984).

Where we differed from Reason and other Participative Action Research models is that the Joplin leaders did not participate in the design of the sessions, decide on answering any particular question, or draw conclusions about a question or hypothesis as a group. Rather, each participant made a personal choice to focus on what was most important to them to help shift the culture, make meaning from their experience, learn, and dialogue with one another.

To Gilpin-Jackson's point, despite labeling specific methods such as action research first generation or World Café third generation, "it is the nature of the practice and the intention behind the use of the methodology that would ultimately make it diagnostic versus a dialogic practice" (Gilpin-Jackson, 2013).

We suggest Reason, Torbitt, and others in the Participative Action Research domain offer a blend throughout an entire project of diagnostic action research with many dialogic elements included. The ultimate intention of the PAR methodology though, is to find answers to a research question. Our intention was primarily to create culture change and new empowering organizational narratives (dialogic), and secondarily to help the Mercy Joplin hospital reach its operational goals (diagnostic).

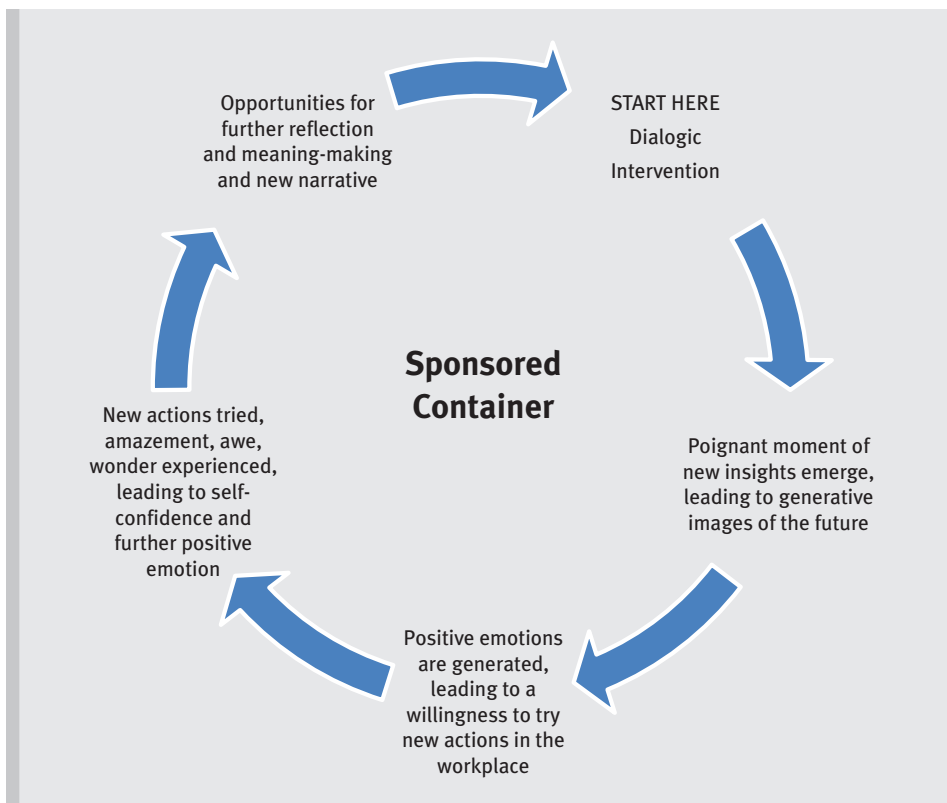


Figure 1. Dialogic OD Transformational Process

Either of these approaches is noble and offers a blended methodology.

### Dialogic Discussion— Why All the Popularity?

Figure 1 illustrates how the elements of Dialogic OD used in our work created change through the emergence of previously not experienced thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. When this happens for many who experience it as part of a group, the change witnessed is termed transformational. Whether we used purely dialogic methods in a particular four-hour session, or a blend of both diagnostic with some dialogic elements, the cycle in Figure 1 is what we encountered over and over again. We will illustrate with an example.

As a regular practice, we provided a set of coaching questions the leaders used with each other to debrief whatever action they had committed to from the previous monthly session. This served as both an opportunity for further reflection as well as a dialogic intervention, helping to change the narrative. From that experience, insights were often shared with the larger group, fostering a growing willingness to engage in the practices. Here is a quote

from a survey we conducted asking the question, “What have you put into practice from the monthly sessions and what results have you seen?” A Joplin leader reported,

I decided to use some of the techniques I have learned... I began asking specific questions to help think through the process more clearly and define her goals a little better. She had put up a wall and couldn't see past it. When I asked her coaching questions, her face actually lit up. She was able to formulate a plan and move forward. I couldn't believe how the coaching worked so fast. This was something we had spoken about for weeks and after the coaching conversation, she had a plan in about 15 minutes.

Continuing around the cycle in Figure 1, action was tried, amazement at the outcome resulted, and then an opportunity to reflect with a partner or small group by the next month reinforced the behavior, made further meaning of experience, and created a virtuous cycle (Senge, 1990).

Next we will describe particular dialogic elements included in our

overall intervention. We propose this is an important discussion even though we are advocating for a blended approach because weaving dialogic principles into diagnostic work is what creates the positive momentum described in Figure 1.

Important to dialogic interventions are opportunities for individual expression and connection (Holman, 2013; Block, 2009) and listening deeply (Marshak, 2013; Bushe & Marshak, 2013; Holman, 2013). In the chaos of day to day life trying to achieve simple things from chores at home in extreme circumstances, to obtaining medical supplies in a new way at work, the opportunity to stop and be with one another in a different way was powerful, cathartic and healing.

Changing language and narrative was interwoven through the entire intervention. From choosing words like “we,” rather than “us and them,” to inquiring of co-workers rather than telling, were just some of the many ways this was accomplished. “Alteration in linguistic practices... hold profound implications for changes in social practice” (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003).

Meaning-making (Holman, 2013) and using generative images (Bushe, 2013; Cooperrider, 2000) were important concepts used often with our clients. The leaders came to see the importance of sharing the greater vision of the recovery and building of the new facility as a way to fulfill the organization's mission, and share this with their co-workers. The act of drawing pictures of an imagined and desired future based on each individual's expression created a vivid view of where they wanted to go as a group and acknowledgement of their current state. Metaphors emerged naturally as words and themes were translated into drawings. The importance of metaphors is referenced often in OD literature (Marshak, 2013; Morgan, 1998; Srivastva & Barrett, 1988). This was especially important to give voice to what was so unfathomable and difficult to describe. For example, “Our community is like puzzle pieces, scattered around and disconnected.” “We are digging out of a hole.” By the end of the twenty-one months, metaphors included “a community of people together” and “a pregnant

woman-expectant, growing, and excited for the arrival of the new hospital.”

Inviting diversity (Holman, 2013; Bushe 2013) was accomplished by inviting both managers in the physician clinics and hospital leaders to the sessions. This was the first time they had worked together, which provided an opportunity for diversity of viewpoints from different stakeholders in the organization.

The last three elements of Dialogic OD we think are important to mention are connected with the structure of the intervention rather than techniques that we have discussed thus far. Creating a container (Holman, 2013; Bushe, 2013), sponsorship (Bushe, 2013), and providing opportunities for dialogue in small groups (Block, 2009) give invisible form to OD work that contains any of the other dialogic techniques previously described. Creating a safe space for experimenting and dialogue, having our executive sponsor present at nearly every session, and creating the opportunity for small group dialogue in each session were key constructs of our design.

### Implications and Benefits with Blended OD Methods in a Fast Changing World

Practicing a blend of Dialogic and Diagnostic OD has definite implications for the OD practitioner. Trust in people, including one self, is important. Trust in the processes and methodologies being used and knowledge of the theory behind them, while at the same time being willing to innovate in the moment, is critical. A quality of humility and willingness to be in the background is imperative. By designing each session ahead of time, yet staying open to what emerged in the moment, the focus stayed on the participants, created their container, and allowed for deep listening. It is all about them. Afterwards, for the practitioner it is more about reflection and meaning-making to determine where to proceed next, rather than analysis of hard data and a clear path forward. Comfort with ambiguity is essential for the OD practitioner using a blended method that includes dialogic elements. Flexibility, thinking on one's feet, and the ability to make connections among people, data, and opportunities are the

qualities we found most useful to practice a blend of Diagnostic and Dialogic OD.

These skills and talents can help to avoid the trap Bushe and Marshak (2013) discuss of only engaging at the level of a dialogic event with a specific technique, rather than working strategically with the client.

Benefits for both the OD practitioner and the client abound with blended OD approaches. The client is met where they are, rather than attempting to be molded into a prescribed plan. Transformational change that is lasting is created when individuals, as part of a group, are given the freedom to focus on what they find most valuable from their time together (Bushe,

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2013). For the OD professional, this is a fresh approach that more easily balances the power as equals between client and practitioner who both hold the same intention, rather than the “expert” consultant holding the power in the eyes of the client. As the client embraces new ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving, the organization sustains change and is empowered to carry on without the OD practitioner (Holman, 2013).

Dialogic OD allows creativity to emerge in practice, creates space for addressing questions as they arise, and matches the speed and pace of change to the client, rather than slowing the client down while data is collected and analyzed. Diagnostic OD, added in as the practitioner goes, shows the value OD brings and also measures the client's progress, creating causes for celebrating success and further generativity.

### A Case for Embracing a Blended Approach

Is second generation OD, using a combination of the best from both first and third generations, really the ideal? We postulate it is. It enabled the use of diagnostic tools through a new lens, as well as a measurement of results. Perhaps the OD field needed to experiment in “pure” conditions to develop such powerful third generation techniques; we have yet to discover as a field that the best of both worlds combined is the most powerful.

A “one size fits all” OD methodology for every situation does not work. In this situation, had we begun with an

action research or diagnostic approach, our audience would not have been in a mental or emotional state to participate fully. If we had stayed with a purely dialogic approach once they were encountering operational issues, we might have provided an enriching experience, but would have failed in helping our client meet their daily work goals. And we would have missed the opportunity to influence the conversations wrapped around that daily work.

We suggest the Dialogic OD elements that touch our humanity at work are an important part of what makes organizational change sustainable. Dialogic elements allow participants to work with new ideas and narratives, which influences actions taken and outcomes achieved.

However, based on previous experience, without the continued involvement

of the internal OD practitioner to help drive the work groups proposed and decided upon at dialogic events, many of them would have petered out. More traditional diagnostic approaches allow us to integrate those designed dreams and plans into the daily systems, processes, and interactions of organizational life. It gives us the opportunity to speak the same language of our clients, the language called “business acumen.”

We propose that a blended approach is the most powerful in the majority of cases. How much of one methodology over the other is needed is situational. Surely a blended approach, drawing on the best from both methodologies, gains the best outcomes for our clients.

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# A Blueprint for Transforming the HR Function

By Ronald J. Recardo

What do IT, Finance, Human Resources, and Procurement all have in common? In recent years most staff functions have come under fire to: 1) add more value to the enterprise by rethinking their strategy and the products/services they offer to their customers; 2) streamline their business/service delivery model, structure, and processes to become more efficient; and 3) reskill their staff to be able to deliver higher value offerings.

This case study discusses a data driven, fast track approach that can be used to assess and transform the Human Resources function in 6 months or less. The approach can be further customized for application to most staff functions.

## Background on Case Company

Research 1 is a pseudonym for a global company that employs over 3,000 employees and operates in the publishing and media market space. The CEO of the business sector had multiple operating companies reporting to him and was increasingly frustrated with the HR function. Specifically, he was concerned that the function was too compliance, tactical, and administratively focused, and too many of the HR staff did not balance being a “business advocate” versus an “employee advocate.” The HR function did not have credibility with the line management.

The CEO along with the SVP HR commissioned an assessment of the HR function to identify capabilities and performance gaps and to ultimately evolve the HR function to a strategic partnership

role. During one of the planning meetings with the consulting company, the CEO summed up his concerns as follows, “We have to reposition this function because many organizational/people issues underlie the successful execution of our business strategy.”

## The Evolution of The HR Function

For the last several years many HR functions in the United States have reached a crossroads where they are fundamentally rethinking how they add value to the overall business. Historically, in most organizations, the HR function tended to be tactical. Professionals in HR tended to have strong functional expertise in such areas as benefits, compensation, talent management, and employee development, and because of the administrative nature of much of HR, the function was activity focused. Although this met the needs of line management for some time, stereotypical perceptions began to emerge that were less than complimentary. HR in some organizations was perceived as “touchy feely,” “social workish,” and “paper pushers.”

Today world-class HR functions are comprised of individuals who have strong industry, cross-functional, and HR expertise. The function is more proactive and strategic in nature. It has evolved to become a strategic partner or internal consultant that is much more focused on bottom-line results.

Leading edge HR functions are adding value to the business in a myriad of new ways. The functions:

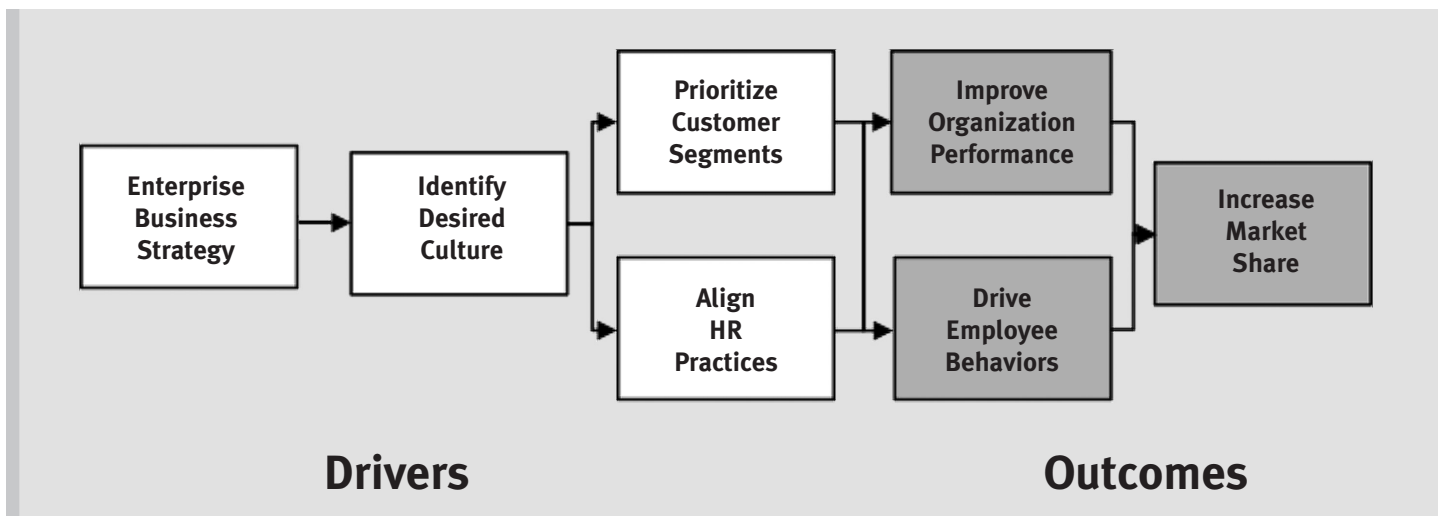


Figure 1. The HR Value Model

1. **Strategically prioritize their resource allocation.** If you ask any other function they acknowledge that not all parts of an organization are equally strategically important. With that said, they consciously allocate resources based on the impact to organizational performance. This flies in the face of traditional HR which has had an open door policy. With 100% availability comes sub-optimization of resource allocation.
2. **Do not just provide Baseline HR.** The minimum expectations of HR are you get your check on time, benefits are being processed, and all of the administrative is being addressed. Too often the Baseline HR ends up being all HR does. World class HR functions provide a menu of strategic services, starting with talent management and succession planning. The best HR functions realize that talent management is much more than just completing a 9 box model and putting names in each

respective quadrant. Too many organizations end up with a leadership pipeline of “empty suits” who reached the top of the list by having the right pedigree (i.e. they went to the right schools), managed up the best (they were outstanding at upward management and building relationships with executives who pulled them up by their coat tails), or had the right socio-demographics. The best HR functions provide internal consulting that does not overly focus on the soft side (team building, conflict management, MBTI, and meeting facilitation) but provide more strategic consulting offerings (e.g., organization restructuring, business transformation, and M&A acquisition integration)

3. **Get more involved in strategy development/execution by identifying the people issues that underlie the strategy, aligning culture to support the strategy, and alleviating gaps between the current and needed HR systems.**

Organization alignment is the purview of HR and they must provide thought leadership around how to align all facets of an organization to closely support the business strategy.

### The HR Value Model

Line management is placing demands on HR that it never made before. They want HR to provide change management leadership, demonstrate their ROI, successfully implement organizational interventions, and provide actionable counsel in helping line managers address key people issues.

We have developed a model (see Figure 1) which we use to illustrate the conceptual relationship between good HR and strong organizational performance.

Our model starts with the assumption that strategy is the primary driver of the business and one of HR’s key roles is to identify what type of culture is needed to successfully execute the enterprise-wide strategy. By conducting periodic gap analysis, HR should identify which HR systems are not aligned and modify them accordingly. HR’s next key role is to allocate their resources strategically. In many leading HR functions there is a conscious effort to allocate a certain percentage of their resources according to the organization level (executives), function (R&D), brand, or even geography or customer segment. An oversight that is commonly made is to allocate Human Resource capacity based on “whoever walks in the door first.” Once prioritization has been completed, HR should then assess the value each of the

Historically, in most organizations, the HR function tended to be tactical. Professionals in HR tended to have strong functional expertise in such areas as benefits, compensation, talent management, and employee development, and because of the administrative nature of much of HR, the function was activity focused. Although this met the needs of line management for some time, stereotypical perceptions began to emerge that were less than complimentary. HR in some organizations was perceived as “touchy feely,” “social workish,” and “paper pushers.”

Table 1. HR Audit Dimensions

- 1. HR competencies**
  - HR functional knowledge
  - Industry/business knowledge
  - Cross functional knowledge
- 2. Strategic alignment**
  - Formalized HR business plan
  - Strategic customer segmentation
  - HR metrics
- 3. HR infrastructure**
  - Intellectual capital
  - Technology enablers
- 4. HR policy development**
  - Formalization of policies
  - Amount of standardization
- 5. HR service offerings**
  - Services offered
  - Percentage of HR capacity allocated to each quadrant of the HR model
- 6. HR structure**
  - Reporting levels
  - Spans of control
  - Staffing levels/ratios
  - Clarity of roles
- 7. HR process efficiency**
  - Process efficiency (cycle times, cost)
  - Functionality centralized, decentralized, insourced/outsourced, on-shored/off shored
  - Process effectiveness
- 8. HR systems design**
  - Comparisons of HR systems to best practices
- 9. HR management effectiveness**
  - Strategic partner
  - Quality of HR leadership
  - Depth of talent/bench strength

services they provide to their customer groups. New services may need to be developed and capacity shifted to provide more value to the business.

The outcomes of our model consist of the last three segments that are highlighted in grey. The drivers will tend to cause the desired employee behaviors to emerge and undesired ones to reduce over time (ensuring cultural alignment). This will in turn improve organizational performance and finally increase market value.

**Using The HR Model with Research 1**

**Step 1: Assess the Current Capability of the HR Function**

In an effort to identify a baseline of Research 1's HR's current capability and develop a case for action, a data based process was used to collect data across nine Human Resource dimensions (see Table 1). Our approach used a variety of data collection methods that included observation, a review of appropriate documentation (e.g., business strategy, HR budgets, HR structure charts, a review of existing HR processes/systems), and interviews with a vertical cross section of HR 's internal customers. A cornerstone of the data collection process was a short, targeted intranet survey to key customer segments of Research 1's HR that identified the importance/level of satisfaction of current services HR provided, identified new HR products/services, and assessed how much capacity HR was allocating to each service/customer segment. Customers were also queried regarding their perceptions of HR's competency levels, HR's strengths/weaknesses, and specific opportunities for improvement.

An administrative task analysis was conducted of Research 1's HR to identify the number of forms used and time HR staff allocated to each activity. The HR staff

was also asked to provide their perceptions of their core competencies, their customers level of satisfaction for each HR service, and lastly the amount of their capacity they spend with each customer segment and product/service. This was used to gauge how connected the HR staff was to the needs of their client groups.

**Step 2: Identify and Prioritize Capability Gaps**

The anchors used to identify capability gaps included Research 1's enterprise business plan, the summary of HR's internal customer assessment, and comparison of internal capabilities to our proprietary HR best practices data base. From this strengths, weaknesses, root causes, and opportunities for improvement were noted for the overall HR function and for each operating company's HR function.

A structured meeting was held that included the senior executive team to present findings, understand cause and effect relationships, and prioritize the most strategic performance capability gaps within the HR function. Since this information is highly proprietary we have included a generic example of the tool we used to facilitate the gap analysis decision process (Figure 2).

Based on our work with many HR organizations we have developed a

	HR Best Practice 1	HR Best Practice 2	HR Best Practice 3	HR Best Practice 4	CRITICAL GAP
<b>HR Strategic Alignment</b>	L	M	L	L	YES
XXXXXX					
<b>Competencies of HR staff</b>	M	M	M	H	
XXXXXX					
<b>HR business model/structure</b>	M	L	L	L	YES
XXXXXX					
<b>HR usage of enabling technology</b>	H	H	H	M	
XXXXXX					

Figure 2: Gap Analysis Decision Tool



## Strategic Partner

## Baseline HR

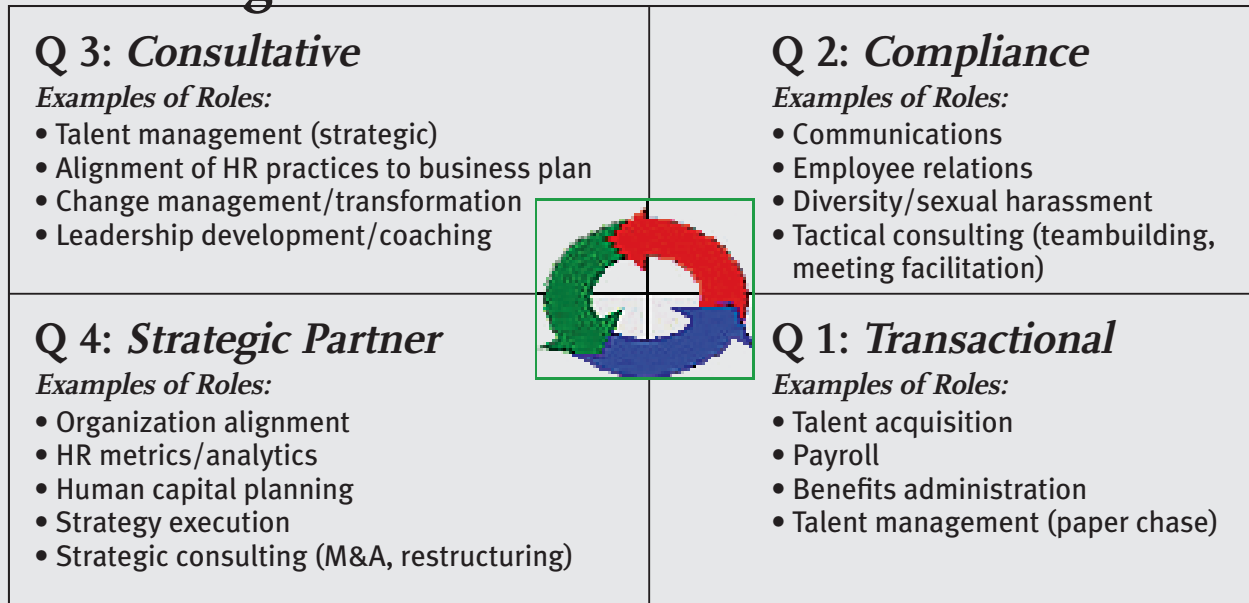


Figure 3. HR Quadrants of Evolution

4-quadrant model that can be used to visually depict the capability of any HR function (see Figure 3). The quadrants do not represent good, better, and best. The model is based on the underlying concepts of balance and strategic value creation.

The model is used to create dialogue around whether an HR function is allocating enough capacity and capability to provide support in each quadrant. The allocation of capability across the four quadrants is company specific based on a myriad of variables such as external environmental demands, their business plan, the size of the company, and the complexity of the operations.

For example, a small emerging company’s business plan might require 90% of HR’s focus to be in quadrants one and two. Conversely a mid-cap global company in all likelihood might require only 30% of its focus on quadrants one and two opting for a much more strategic set of offerings and a very different service delivery model.

The model can be best understood by breaking the quadrants into a right and left side. The right side or quadrants 1 and 2, represent the baseline or minimum

threshold of HR functionality. The focus of these activities are on administration and compliance – you have to do these activities and do them right. Examples of services commonly delivered include staffing, benefits administration, litigation prevention, and employee relations. The key is to make sure HR is spending their time doing the right things. We had another client in the Life Sciences industry that went through HR transformation and one of their key findings was their HR Directors were spending 50% of their time on employee relations. The average total compensation (base, bonus, equity) of HR Directors was over \$300K. The President of the division was quite upset to find out this high priced talent was spending so much time on these activities at the expense of doing such things as providing change management support for their ERP project, leading a major right sizing initiative, and ensuring the organization had a robust pipeline of “ready now” successors for key positions.

The left side of the model represents roles and services that are much more representative of a strategic partner role. These include such things as leading change

management/business transformation initiatives, strategic consulting (e.g., M&A integration), organization restructuring, and other organization alignment efforts. Think of the quadrants as a pie. The key question then is what percentage of HR’s overall capacity is spent delivering each service. Since some of these services are targeted at a vertical cross section of management and others targeted more at the employee level, it can also be used to gauge strategic prioritization of effort.

Each of Research 1’s HR functions operated almost exclusively in quadrants one and two. The strengths of the HR functions varied across each operating company but at an aggregate level the key strengths included a strong employee relations capability, capability to develop/maintain business relationships, the staff was well liked and empathetic, strong litigation prevention, and HR policy development/interpretation skills.

The key performance gaps clustered around three distinct themes;

1. **Too much administration:** An analysis of HR’s time by activity revealed that nearly 50% of their time was spent on

Key: High=3; Medium=2; Low=1	OPERATING COMPANY 1				OPERATING COMPANY 2			
	HR		Line Exec		HR		Line Exec	
	Importance	Satisfaction	Importance	Satisfaction	Importance	Satisfaction	Importance	Satisfaction
1. Recruiting	2.8	2.3	3.0	1.2	3.0	1.5	3.0	2.0
2. Compensation	3.0	1.0	3.0	1.7	3.0	3.0	3.0	1.0
3. Benefits Admin	2.0	2.3	2.8	2.2	3.0	1.5	3.0	2.0
4. Payroll Problem Resolution	2.5	1.2	2.2	2.0	3.0	1.5	2.0	2.0
5. Training	2.5	2.0	3.0	1.4	3.0	1.0	2.0	1.0
6. Succession Planning	2.5	1.5	3.0	1.2	2.0	2.0	3.0	1.0
7. Employee Relations	3.0	2.8	2.7	2.1	3.0	2.0	3.0	1.0
8. HRIS Admin	1.0	1.0	2.2	1.5	1.0	2.0	3.0	1.0
9. HR policy dev/ interpretation	3.0	3.0	2.4	1.9	3.0	2.0	3.0	2.0
10. OD	3.0	2.0	2.7	1.2	3.0	2.0	3.0	1.0

Figure 4. HR Service Gap Matrix

administrative related activities. This encompassed a wide range of administrative activities ranging from making changes to employee benefits files to inputting data to SAP and collecting time sheets.

2. **Lack of alignment between HR and the business:** There was no formal HR strategy (their HR strategy was just a list of projects they were supporting) in place and the metrics that were used were tactical and not aligned to the business strategy. Additionally, there were opportunities to redefine the current HR product/service offerings and rethink how these services were delivered. HR was delivering lower level products and services (quadrants 1 & 2) while their line customers wanted higher-level HR services (internal consulting, strategic talent management, new HR processes). HR also lacked a competency model to identify knowledge, skills, and abilities their staff would need in the future. This complicated the development efforts of the Human Resources function. Lastly, the current staff did not have a sense of urgency and were

not results focused. They were unable to be thought leaders because they lacked cutting edge intellectual capital their line customers would value. They were experts in the specializations of HR but were very weak with regards to business knowledge (they could not read a financial statement, they did not really understand how the business made money and how HR impacted that outcome).

3. **Core HR processes are inefficient:** HR's key systems varied markedly across each operating company and were not

state of the art. Customer requirements were not formalized and there was little opportunity for focusing effort or holding the HR staff accountable for delivery. Since HR was utilizing old legacy systems there was limited HRIS data integrity, creating frustration in line managers being able to access people data to make timely business decisions.

One of the most enlightening meetings we facilitated revolved around the differing perceptions between what the HR staff delivered and what the line management

**The revised employee development strategy included a much more balanced set of development channels that included self-paced learning, a formal mentoring/coaching program, on-the-job training, and a much more targeted curriculum of classroom based training. Instead of using trainers with exceptional platform skills and academics from the local universities, much of the new classroom training was designed and facilitated by consultants who had considerable practitioner experience and toolkits that were based on real world experience.**

		No strategic customer segmentation	Too much administrative burden	HR staff has weak business skills	Cost/headcount outside of benchmarks
1.0	<b>Develop HR business plan</b>				
1.1	Develop planning process with supporting templates				
1.2	Develop 3 year BP				
1.3	Develop HR scorecard				
2.0	<b>Upskill HR staff</b>				
2.1	Develop curriculum tied to career ladder				
2.2	Design/purchase/deliver education				
3.0	<b>Modify service delivery model</b>				
3.1	Establish COE's				
3.2	Reengineer HR core processes				

Figure 5: HR Change Roadmap Matrix

wanted from their HR colleagues. We created a number of data arrays to summarize key findings. Figure 4 illustrates an excerpt of a service gap analysis matrix. Services that had high importance but were evaluated as low satisfaction were a gap area. The dark highlighted services represent gaps that HR staff perceived as being mission critical, while the lighter shaded areas summarized the perceptions of the line leaders. One of the most insightful findings was the disconnect HR had from what the true needs of the business. These learning's were incorporated into a detailed HR transformation roadmap and transformation plan we developed later in the project.

### Step 3: Design & Implement Approved Solutions

The recommended changes were mapped to the performance gaps and centered around several themes not the least of which was that HR was not tightly aligned to the business strategy. (See Figure 5). The initial redesign work centered around developing a process with supporting data collection/analysis tools for developing a much more robust HR strategic planning process. This process was then pressure tested to develop their HR business plan, including an HR balanced scorecard. As

you would expect, a component of the HR business plan was a segmentation and strategic prioritization of HR's customers, proactive allocation of resources to each customer segment, and over time new HR service offerings that focused on quadrants 3 and 4.

Quite a bit of work went into rethinking the HR business model. Administrative functionality was both centralized and outsourced where it made sense. Shared services and Centers of Excellence were established to leverage specialized skills and realize efficiencies. Certain HR functionality such as employee development was centralized and aligned with updated career ladders. In the past too much of the employee development utilized expensive classroom instruction. The revised employee development strategy included a much more balanced set of development channels that included self-paced learning, a formal mentoring/coaching program, on-the-job training, and a much more targeted curriculum of classroom based training. Instead of using trainers with exceptional platform skills and academics from the local universities, much of the new classroom training was designed and facilitated by consultants who had considerable practitioner experience and toolkits that were based on real world experience.

The alignment of the HR function is centered around the creation of a formal HR strategy with a balanced scorecard of measures. The intent of the HR scorecard is to align related HR systems like resource allocation, performance management, and compensation to focus efforts. Service level agreements were developed to clarify the expectations between HR service providers and each key customer segment. In an effort to clarify the roles, responsibilities, and limits of decision-making authority of the transformed HR function role/responsibility matrices were created to reduce role ambiguity.

A competency model was developed along with a curriculum of education that provides the current HR staff with a number of development opportunities to enhance their skill sets. HR staff who can't or are not interested in the new HR role will be transitioned out of the organization. HR is also in the process of codifying key learning's within the organization and purchasing tools, instruments, and methodology that will be used to facilitate knowledge transfer with line employees.

Historically the average time to redesign an HR process was 6–9 months. Since Research 1 needed to redesign their most strategic HR processes/practices, we used a fast track design process. An HR design team was established to develop a standardized approach for human capital planning, succession planning, talent acquisition, and performance management. The team began its efforts by thoroughly understanding each current HR system, carefully noting its strengths/weaknesses (to not lose the strengths but design out the weaknesses). Data was collected from HR's customers that identified the customer likes/dislikes of each existing HR system, desired functionality, and proposed changes. This input was augmented by best practices that were used to guide the high level design of each system. These were again shared with key customers to solicit their feedback. The detailed design was then completed, which consisted of the detailed policy, future state processes, guidelines, instructions, forms, and instruments to support each system. These were once again shared with HR's customers

and their feedback was incorporated to finalize the design. The above four major HR processes were designed in three months using this process.

## Benefits

The benefits that accrued from this transformation are both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Many occurred almost immediately after changes were executed while others will most likely occur in later stages.

The development and communication of HR's robust business plan struck a chord with line management and almost immediately their perceived value add increased dramatically. This plan strategically prioritized HR's customer segments, including a plan for continuing to up-skill the HR staff, allocated HR's resources based on impact (no longer would HR be allowed to spend so much of their capacity on Employee Relation issues)

Qualitative benefits start with implementation of several initiatives designed at providing better direction to the HR staff and strong alignment to the business strategy. The creation of a formal HR strategy that is translated into a scorecard of metrics will allow the HR function to strategically allocate their resources and more importantly measure value creation. More of their capacity will be directed toward meeting the needs of management and new, more value adding services will be provided to the customers they serve. Service level agreements and role/responsibility matrices will focus and hold the accountability of the HR staff. This is expected to considerable increase customer satisfaction levels.

The administrative burden of the HR function was reduced in two stages. Short-term, self service delivery platforms were being used so that managers and employees have access to selected data to update themselves, shortening cycle times and the touch time of the HR staff. Additionally, much of the remaining HR administrative burden has either been outsourced or centralized into a COE to reduce costs and obtain economy of scales. This will reduce

both headcount and the overhead HR allocates to the line.

The net effect of this is the number of documents used in core HR processes is expected to be reduced by 40-75% and the amount of overall HR capacity directed at administration is expected to decrease by 80%. Centralization will provide better economies of scale and improve response time.

A major part of the transformation is the redesign of key HR business model. The talent acquisition process will be centralized via a COE. Instead of utilizing external executive search firms, all recruiting will be brought in house, and through the adoption of an enabling technology, average time to hire cycle time is expected to decrease by 20-40%. Candidate sourcing costs are also expected to decrease by 20%.

The performance management system has also been redesigned and utilizes a forced distribution model and is intended to promote behaviors that are tightly aligned with the business strategy. This objective of the performance management system is to raise the bar of performance expectations by 10% per year.

All of the changes are expected to considerably enhance the image and perceived value added of the HR function over time. When all of the transformation efforts have been completely assimilated the expectation is that HR will be viewed as providing consultative support around organizational/people issues, be extremely customer focused, and very responsive to the needs of the business.

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“Although the use of contingent workers has increased significantly over the years in corporations in general, and there has been considerable research and writing on the changing workforce, the management at ABC wants to approach the possibility of this new strategy in a careful, systematic and well thought through manner.”

## Case Study

# The Contingent Worker and Organization Development at ABC Corporation

By Therese Yaeger  
and Peter Sorensen

Jan Burns is the Director of Organization Development for ABC Corporation. The corporation has had over 50 years of continuous growth and expansion. Over the last several years, because of a declining market and weakening economy, the organization experienced a significant reduction in workforce. But now, due to the improving economy, the company is in the process of rebuilding its workforce. However, although the reduction in workforce was handled in a way consistent with the best principles of OD, it was nevertheless, a traumatic experience for the organization. As the economy continues to improve, the company is preparing longer term strategies for rebuilding its workforce. One of the priorities in the development of its revised employment outlook includes a strategy for avoiding a recurrence of the traumatic experience related to the reduction in workforce.

Part of the development of this new strategy is to review and develop new hiring alternatives. One of the new alternatives being considered is to move to an increased use of a contingent workforce. One of the perceived major advantages of a greater use of a contingent workforce is greater flexibility, which is perceived as helping to prevent the traumatic experience of downsizing, if the necessity for downsizing should reoccur. Although the use of contingent workers has increased significantly over the years in corporations in general, and there has been considerable research and writing on the

changing workforce, the management at ABC wants to approach the possibility of this new strategy in a careful, systematic and well thought through manner. ABC has a history and tradition of maintaining a high commitment organization through established commitment to its employees and the employment of OD principles.

As Director of OD at ABC, Jan Burns and the OD operation in general is held in very high regard and has an established reputation of making significant contributions to the company in terms of its OD practices. Jan and the OD department are seen as a major contributor and architect of any new policy or strategy that would affect employees. Consequently, Jan has been asked to identify and present a proposed strategy for OD and the contingent workforce. In her initial review of the literature, she found considerable readings on the contingent workers but limited literature on the role of Organization Development.

The executives at ABC Corporation have emphasized the importance of this new workforce effort. They have raised some issues for Jan to address. Some concerns include:

- » Under what kinds of conditions is the increased use of contingent workers most appropriate?
- » What would be the role of the OD department in implementing this new strategy?
- » How would OD change, and would the traditional tools of team building and

engagement surveys continue to be major interventions, or would a new set of interventions be required?

We consulted three OD practitioners experienced in working with contingent workers to address the issues presented to Jan. We welcome the responses from Lisa Machtemes, PhD candidate in OD at Benedictine University; Josette Goldberg, Founder and CEO of Goldberg Executive Coaching; and Henry Williams, Associate Dean of Graduate Programs for the College of Business at Purdue University Northwest.

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### Lisa Machtemes

Regardless of its political, economic, social, and technological environment, an organization will often have ongoing contingent workforce needs, whether it is for part-time workers or subject matter experts. However, when economic turbulence increases, these needs cannot be met by a traditional staffing plan. So, an organization meets these needs differently depending on whether it is reactive or proactive.

A **reactive organization** will reduce its workforce, but it cannot reduce its workload. As its productivity falls, it will be forced to hire contingent workers, often former core employees and outsourced third-party agencies. In the short term, its productivity will rise – its profits will appear to have improved because the reduction in workforce savings will overshadow the contingent worker costs. However, eventually, the savings will fade and the costs will surface. Then, it will find itself back where it started.

A **proactive organization** will create a strategic staffing plan. Here the plan requires multi-level, cross-functional, and intra-departmental support and as such is most successfully led by an Organization Development department. For Jan Burns, the OD Department, and ABC Corporation, the planned steps may include the following:

1. **Set goals.** Contingent workers have a lot to offer. Take advantage of their flexibility, special skills, on-the-job candidate screening, and cost savings opportunities. But manage their training costs, knowledge transfer, reliability, turnover, safety, and legality. And, protect your corporate culture and employee morale.
2. **Review job descriptions.** Consider all your options, manual and technological. Redesign as necessary.
3. **Review resources.** Evaluate all your staff, core employees and contingent workers. Reorganize as necessary.
9. **Hire contingent workers.** Know who you are hiring, what they are offering, and how to compensate them. For example, interns are students who have little if any skills and experience, but they are also willing to work for little if any compensation. Temporary-to-permanent agency workers are recent graduates who are seeking permanent positions and are unskilled and inexperienced, but they are eager to learn. Agency-provided contractors are mid-career professionals who command at or above market-level compensation, but they offer special skills and experience.

**Contingent workers have a lot to offer. Take advantage of their flexibility, special skills, on-the-job candidate screening, and cost savings opportunities. But manage their training costs, knowledge transfer, reliability, turnover, safety, and legality. And, protect your corporate culture and employee morale.**

4. **Identify gaps.** Look for the difference between the staff you have and the staff you need. Plan for promotions, turnover, attrition, and rising costs.
5. **Communicate with Human Resources.** Share your plan. Ask them for implementation support.
6. **Develop policies.** Redesign manager roles to include responsibility for contingent workers. Define contingent worker employment paths.
7. **Communicate with managers; communicate with staff.** With managers, share your plan and their job redesign. With staff, share your plan and prepare for questions and concerns.
8. **Build a network.** Establish relationships with multiple third-party agencies. Partner with agencies to build a talent pipeline for your recurrent needs. Notify agencies in advance of your special staffing needs, i.e. seasonal, off-site, etc.
10. **Establish a system.** Evaluate performance. Track time, attendance, and costs. Centralize record-keeping.
11. **Maintain compliance.** Understand liability. Routinely communicate with managers and third-party agencies. Keep accurate, up-to-date records.
12. **Continuously review the plan.** Analyze and improve the plan on an on-going basis.

When implemented correctly, Jan's strategic staffing plan may offer ABC Corporation the best chance, if not the only chance, for economic survival.

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### Josette Goldberg Klopfer

As a former CHRO of several Fortune 500 companies for over 20 years, and now running my OD practice for the last decade, I have seen many changes in the workforce. In the past, temporary

workers were used to allow companies the ability to be more flexible when handling workload and headcount. Today, companies are hiring contingent workers to augment their staffs. Contingent staff can include consultants, freelancers, temps, and independent contractors. The best conditions and most appropriate advantages to this type of workforce are flexibility in response to the economy and market conditions; benefit cost savings, and supplementing skills that are not possessed by full-time workers.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, these workers account for about 26% of the workforce and are expected to grow 23% through 2020 – that is about 631,000 jobs. Also, according to the Bureau, more than 80% of large corporations plan substantially to increase their use of a flexible workforce in coming years.

The role of the OD department is significant in implementing this strategy. They must identify the gaps between the organization's current competencies and needs to determine whether they should build (through employee development), borrow (through contingency workers), or buy (through talent acquisition). They also need to look at how the organization is designed to determine if the right people are in the right roles. There is a need to determine the organization structure's effectiveness and if there are the right number of individuals in each functional area and in the organization as a whole. Finally, OD is instrumental in the change management needed to implement this strategy, ensuring that there is an awareness, understanding, and buy-in to this new approach.

Many of OD's tools would remain the same, with some variations. Team building will be more important than ever, and things such as collaborative workspace and social media tools may be new interventions currently not used in more traditional workforces. Flexible work schedules, job sharing, and remote work environments may be used more frequently with contingent workers but are being seen as a significant motivator

for traditional employees, as well. OD can determine some of these cultural and motivational aspects through employee engagement surveys and contractor satisfaction surveys.

Performance reviews for contractors are helpful but need to be handled carefully for legal and compliance reasons, so an organization is not at risk from being seen as having employees categorized as contingent workers who are in fact, full-time employees. However, if evaluated properly,

**Flexible work schedules, job sharing, and remote work environments may be used more frequently with contingent workers but are being seen as a significant motivator for traditional employees, as well. OD can determine some of these cultural and motivational aspects through employee engagement surveys and contractor satisfaction surveys.**

skill gaps can be determined and development designed to get the most out of the entire workforce. One recent trend that I see is to utilize current full-time employees who are looking to scale back their hours as contracted, contingent employees. This allows highly talented and knowledgeable workers to stay within an organization in a job framework that works for both them and the organization. Ultimately, although I have not seen it yet, succession planning processes should look at this option when looking at critical, essential, and high-level roles.

These trends make the current environment and the future an exciting time for the OD practitioner. The more

that this role understands the internal needs and external pressures that an organization is under and the more strategically they think, the greater their impact will be on the future of flexible workforces, including workers at ABC Corporation.

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### Henry Williams

The main advantage of using contingency workers is to maximize flexibility for the employer and lower labor cost. For ABC Corporation, using contingent workers helps to avoid some overhead and unnecessary expenses and can help maintain flexibility as workloads vary.

ABC's potential growth is a perfect opportunity to capitalize on the strength and opportunities of the contingent worker. Also, the role of Jan Burns and the OD Department can be critical here. Jan has been charged with presenting a strategy for a contingent workforce.

It appears that the OD Department has two primary tasks, namely: 1) helping to identify appropriate jobs for appropriate contingent workers and 2) working closely with current HR and staff to avoid any trauma like previous downsizing efforts. Specific to contingent worker hiring, Jan and the OD department can be instrumental in assisting the leadership in making sure the organization is hiring contingency workers for the right reasons in conjunction with the organizational mission. It is important that this is done with a professional (OD staff members) trained in how to assess and understand organization culture shifts and human behavior change.

But a current employee's sense of loyalty and commitment to an organization can be jeopardized if the use of contingent workers is not handled properly. Here, Jan and the OD team can be especially helpful in communicating and working with present ABC employees.

As Jan and the OD team is held in high regard, this team should be able to successfully implement a strategy for

**But a current employee's sense of loyalty and commitment to an organization can be jeopardized if the use of contingent workers is not handled properly. Here, Jan and the OD team can be especially helpful in communicating and working with present ABC employees.**

contingent workers which will allow for more successful buy-in with current staff regarding future contingent workers. Some elements to create success here include:

- » Hiring, at the right time, the right contingent worker for the right job – this is not a one size fits all situation;
- » Over-communicating the Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How for contractual workers to the full-time ABC staff;
- » Scheduling regular meetings to address potential anxieties or concerns from current full-time ABC employees.

**Yaeger and Sorensen Respond**

Thanks to Lisa, Josette, and Henry for three different helpful responses. Lisa reminds us that OD should be proactive, and she provides 12 helpful steps. Josette provides the real data and knowledge that contingent work force numbers are growing. She perfectly links the contingent worker issue to OD, which is much needed information for Jan's OD team.

Finally, Henry focuses on communication which is most helpful for the current ABC employees who fear the downsizing issue. Again, each respondent provided helpful but unique thoughts.

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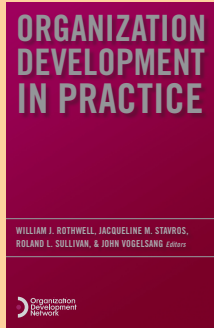
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## A New e-Book Resource for Practitioners



# Organization Development in Practice

Editors

William J. Rothwell, Jacqueline M. Stavros,  
Roland L. Sullivan, and John Vogelsang

Available from the Organization Development Network

*OD Network*

**Organization Development in Practice** brings together experienced OD professionals who share their methods for developing more effective and resilient organizations, enabling organizational and social change, and being responsive to continuous change.

Some of the chapters include:

### **The Ebb and Flow of OD Methods**

**Billie T. Alban** and **Barbara Benedict Bunker** describe the first and second wave of OD methods and their perspective on what is happening in the 21st century. When OD methods first emerged in the 1960s, they were considered innovative and exciting. OD practitioners have shifted their methods with time and adapted to current situations. However, Alban and Bunker question which of the current methods are new and which are just a repackaging of already existing practices. As the pace of change has accelerated, they also wonder whether the turbulent external environment has driven many to think they need new methods when what they may need is more creative adaptation of existing methods.

### **How the Mind-Brain Revolution Supports the Evolution of OD Practice**

**Teri Eagan**, **Julie Chesley**, and **Suzanne Lahl** believe that the early promise of OD was inspired by a desire to influence human systems towards greater levels of justice, participation, and excellence. They propose that a critical and integrative neurobiological perspective holds the potential to advance OD in two ways: what we do—the nature and quality of our ability to assess and intervene in service of more effective organizations and a better world; and who we are—our competencies, resilience, and agility as practitioners.

### **Culture of Opportunity: Building Resilient Organizations in a Time of Great Transition**

**Mark Monchek**, **Lynnea Brinkerhoff**, and **Michael Pergola** explore how to foster *resiliency*, the ability to respond effectively to change or challenges. They examine the inherent potential of resilient organizations to reinvent themselves by understanding their social networks, using design thinking, and utilizing

the fundamentals of action research in a process called the Culture of Opportunity that leverages the talent, relationships, knowledge, capital, and communications that are largely fragmented and disconnected in most organizations. They outline the process of instilling a Culture of Opportunity within three distinct organizations that hit crisis points in response to changing environments and difficult circumstances.

### **At the Crossroads of Organization Development and Knowledge Management**

**Denise Easton** describes what emerges at the intersection of OD and Enterprise Knowledge Management, where a collaborative partnership accelerates the understanding, development, and transformation of dynamic, techno-centric systems of knowledge, information, learning, and networks found in 21st century organizations. When OD is part of developing knowledge management processes, systems, and structures the organization not only survives but thrives.

### **Accelerating Change: New Ways of Thinking about Engaging the Whole System**

**Paul D. Tolchinsky** offers new ways of developing, nurturing, and leveraging intrapreneurialship in organizations. Most organizations underutilize the capabilities and the entrepreneurial spirit of employees. Tolchinsky describes how to unleash the entrepreneurial energy that exists in most companies. In addition, he offers five suggestions organizations can implement, drawing on several examples from corporations such as Zappos, FedEx, HCL Technologies, and companies developing internal Kick Starters and crowd sourcing platforms.

# PracticingOD

- » OD Consultants and Friends: A Narrative About Women and Race  
By Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams and Deborah Howard
- » Designing a Better Box for Gallese, Italy: Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Power in a Global Context  
By Rianna Moore and Rick Huntley

**Welcome to *Practicing OD***, a collection of short articles (900–1200 words) on useful ideas, lessons learned, and practical suggestions for managing the day to day challenges of doing OD. We welcome brief case studies; guidelines and tips for applying proven or cutting-edge methods, principles, processes, practices, interventions, and tools; and thought-provoking essays on practice-related challenges, questions that emerged from a client engagement, or new trends and technologies that will influence the practice of OD.

We are interested in short articles on a wide range of topics such as and not limited to:

- » OD and Gender
- » Somatic/body work
- » Dialogic OD methods
- » Transformational Consulting
- » Racial Justice and Racial Healing
- » Polarity Thinking
- » Sector-focused articles from Labor, Nonprofits, INGOs, Multinationals, and Health Care.

Submit Microsoft Word electronic copies only to:  
Beth Applegate ([beth@applegateonline.com](mailto:beth@applegateonline.com)) and  
Tim Lannan ([tim@timlannan.com](mailto:tim@timlannan.com)).

We look forward to hearing from you.

## Submission Guidelines

- » Articles should be practical and short (900–1200 words; 3–4 pages single-spaced)
  - Write in your own (first-person) voice using simple, direct, conversational language.
  - Focus on **what** you are discussing, **how** it works, or can be used, and **why** it works (what you believe or how theory supports it).
  - Use bulleted lists and short sections with subheads to make it easier to read.
  - Include everything in the text. No sidebars. No or very limited graphics.
  - Do not use footnotes or citations if at all possible. Citations, if essential, should be included in the text with a short list of references at the end of the article.
- » Articles can be written from various perspectives, including but not limited to:
  - Brief case studies that highlight useful concepts, applied theories, lessons learned, and implications for future practice.
  - Guidelines and tips for applying proven or cutting-edge methods, principles, processes, practices, interventions, and tools.
  - Thought-provoking essays on practice-related challenges, questions that emerged from a client engagement, or new trends and technologies that will influence the practice of OD.
- » Include a short (25–50 word) author bio with your email so readers can contact you.
- » **Submit Microsoft Word electronic copies *only* to: Beth Applegate ([beth@applegateonline.com](mailto:beth@applegateonline.com)) and Tim Lannan ([tim@timlannan.com](mailto:tim@timlannan.com)).**
  - Include your name, phone number, and email address.
  - If your article is accepted for publication, you will be notified via email.

“Our connection grew out of the significance we place on authenticity, lifelong personal growth, and self-determination. Key to building our relationship was owning and working with personal awareness and choice.”

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## OD Consultants and Friends

### A Narrative About Women and Race

By Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams and Deborah Howard

When little girls gather, brown or beige palms, ivory or olive fingers scoop up a handful of jacks and catch a quarter-size rubber ball. Cheers easily erupt among our little sisterhood while playing a competitive-friendly sport. Girls then grow up into a society of biased media images, disparaging voices, and prejudiced institutions that paint a different meaning, defining the worthiness of the shades of hands once embraced in friendship. We, Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams, a heterosexual African American woman, and Deborah Howard, a White Jewish heterosexual woman, come from this experience. Our story is one of unlearning old societal narratives and embarking upon a journey of trust as colleagues, that bloomed into a deep friendship and love.

In this article, we share our inner thoughts and discoveries about our cross-race relationship as professionals and friends. Our connection grew out of the significance we place on authenticity, lifelong personal growth, and self-determination. Key to building our relationship was owning and working with personal awareness and choice. We used ourselves to explore the role of race and other differences at the individual, group, and systemic levels, and uncovered three critical factors in the ways we use ourselves that led to our strong work and personal relationship:

1. We explore race: It is integral to our work and relationship;
  2. We are courageous and trust each other; and
  3. We support each other.
- And, we discovered that it is the heart, soul, and spirit that nourish our relationship.
- In our desire to work together, we discovered our mutual disenchantment with traditional “diversity work.” Traditional diversity work tends to focus either on a didactic examination of systemic racism and oppression or on superficially increasing awareness of and sensitivity to differences, using limiting binary views of race and social identity. We balked at those either/or approaches, wanting to find ways to surface and unravel intertwined social identities in ways that create both individual and systemic awareness. Both of us use narrative and metaphors in our personal growth, leadership development, and executive coaching work. We chose, therefore, to explore creative and heartfelt ways of engaging people in cross-race dialogue that would lead to personal and societal change, using expressive arts. We wanted to design a holistic, comprehensive learning program that would:
- » Lead to a deep intellectual and emotional understanding of self, others, and systems;
  - » Take people out of their heads and into their hearts, souls, and spirits; and

- » Incorporate issues of power and privilege, dominance and subordination, and an analysis of the individual, group, and systemic levels.

This led to the idea of developing a multi-disciplinary, multi-level community leadership development program in which individuals could acknowledge and heal from the psychic traumas of racism and other isms and engage in group level dialogues across differences that would enable them to co-develop strategies for creating and sustaining healthy teams, organizations, and communities. Below are our stories:

### Yvette's Story

My main interest is using narrative and expressive writing, while Deb uses metaphor and story. I created a model and approach called *transformative narratives* that uses written and verbal stories to create a foundation to unearth the multiple perspectives and intersectionality of group identities such as race, gender, etc. With a history as a long time artist, musician, and writer, I found it difficult to publicly embrace my social identity of "artist" in my corporate life. But Deb welcomed this part of me. What drew me close to her was her excitement and how she "got" the way art and creativity activate the right side of brain, allowing access to emotions, the unconscious, and the whole person. She readily joined me in integrating the arts (narrative writing, textile arts, etc.) as a vehicle for exploring differences and developing and sustaining authentic relationships across race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other social identities. We created a learning platform where poetry and creative writing, mixed-media, and textile arts would become manifestations of individual and group identity; powerful, transformative storytelling would follow the art-making. Deb's steadfast joining and support of my work indicated she saw all of me, and that meant everything to me.

Connecting at the individual level with Deb lay a warm ground for building trust. A meaningful experience for me was when

Deb and I wrote e-letters to each other. These letters were mixed with what we were learning as applied behavioral science practitioners, and grew even more complex with more personal topics and group level conversations about race. I then had to work on my ghosts—the realities of my cumulative experiences of negative impact from "colorblind" practicing White women. Deb and I were race conscious, curious, and eager to explore our histories, behaviors, and actions. There were no "untouchable" topics. This helped me see White women as more complex, and I peeled away the lines that framed boxes where I sometimes placed them. How I enter in relationship with and authentically support White women today has profoundly changed as a result of my relationship with Deb.

### Deb's Story

For my relationship with Yvette to be based on authenticity and openness, race had to be an on-the-table topic. If it were a taboo topic for us, our relationship would likely have remained superficial. I have to see and acknowledge my whiteness, and the unearned privilege, internalized racism, and White racial lens that accompany it. As a White woman, what I bring to our friendship is not having some expertise in being a White ally. I claim no such expertise. I bring a heartfelt desire to personally and professionally support Yvette, and an understanding that I will never reach the end of my learning journey. My relationship with Yvette is not about being her White ally – it's about being a fellow traveler on a spiritual journey.

When we talk about race, I feel seen and heard. If I say something that doesn't resonate with her, she asks questions to understand my perspective, rather than try to convince me that I'm wrong. Once, when we were talking about racial identity, I shared that I'm not comfortable with the idea that because I am White, I should "own White people." As a writer, words carry enormous significance for me and the word "own" didn't sit right with me. Yvette didn't insist that I accept specific terminology or jump to conclusions about

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**Deborah Howard, Esq., M.S.O.D., P.C.C.**, President of Guiding Change Consulting, Inc., is a leading organizational consultant, professional certified coach, and author who previously worked as a public interest lawyer. She helps leaders and their teams transform themselves and the world by tapping into their wisdom and creative potential. She can be reached at: [debhoward@guidingchange.com](mailto:debhoward@guidingchange.com).

what I meant. Curious about how that phrase impacted me, she asked me to tell her why I felt that way. I explained that while I don't feel I own White people, I do "own my whiteness." I claim it as my racial identity, own the unearned privileges and internalized racism that come with it, and acknowledge the lived reality of the social construct of race. I choose not to buy into the social construct of race by claiming a group of individuals as "my people" simply because we share the same skin color. My people are those whom I consider my closest friends with whom I identify a kindred spirit and heart-to-heart connection.

### Conclusion

Our work in personal and social change, and our support of each other, is about nurturing our own and each other's personal and spiritual growth, something author, feminist, and social activist bell hooks speaks to in her book, *All About Love*. We are about being open to dialogue and holding each other in loving-kindness and good faith—and that is all about love.

“We knew that it would be a mistake to begin with a specific dimension of diversity; for example, race and skin color, as if we – American consultants – had something to teach professionals from outside the US about specific issues of diversity that might be seen as most relevant in the US context.”

# Designing a Better Box for Gallese, Italy

## Diversity-Inclusion and Social Power in a Global Context

By Rianna Moore and Rick Huntley

When sleep proved elusive on the overnight flight to Rome, we thought about the task ahead. We were on our way to staff a Diversity Work Conference (DWC) for NTL Institute ([www.ntl.org](http://www.ntl.org)) and The Lincoln Workshop Series ([www.appreciative-inquiry.com](http://www.appreciative-inquiry.com)). Old hands at leading the DWC in the US, we were on a different edge when it came to delivering that lab in a global context. How to make it relevant for a diverse, international group of participants who were mature and competent in their own fields of endeavor, including group work?

The DWC is an intensive, experiential, weeklong diversity-inclusion learning and competency development “conference” based on NTL Institute’s signature T-Group<sup>1</sup> technology. The DWC develops

1. A T-Group (or training group) develops one’s interpersonal effectiveness in both one-on-one and group-level encounters. As participants work together over an extended period of time, they learn by analyzing their experience in the group, including the feelings, emotions, reactions, and perceptions that emerge as the group works, as well as behavior (theirs and others’) and its impact (see Cooke, 1999). T-Group technology was innovated in the late 1940s by the founders of NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science.

awareness, skills, and use of self<sup>2</sup> in relation to the myriad social identities present in any group of participants, with a particular focus on power, equity, access, and inclusion. It was created to assure quality in the delivery and facilitation of NTL’s laboratory education programs. Successful completion of the DWC is required of NTL members in order to staff the Human Interaction and other core labs.

The DWC had never been offered outside the US. Given NTL’s presence around the world and commitment to its global membership, we wanted to provide access to NTL’s qualifying process for non-US members and expand critical competencies in the membership by offering a DWC outside the US.<sup>3</sup>

The lab was held in a 15th century Benedictine monastery remade into a 21st century retreat and conference center, just outside the medieval walled city of Gallese, Italy. Participants came from Europe

2. A competency has three parts: knowledge, skill (behavior), and use of self (Moore & Huntley, 2011).

3. The authors acknowledge Mette Jacobsgaard, a member of NTL Institute, and Scott McVicker, then-COO of NTL Institute, for ensuring that DWC Italy took place. It would not have happened without their efforts.

(Denmark, London, The Netherlands, and Scotland), India, Israel, and the US. They were professionals trained in various fields involving group work, from OD to psychotherapy, international human rights law, and social work. About half were NTL members.<sup>4</sup>

The design of the DWC allows for any diversities present in the T Group to emerge organically in response to the continuous and complex interplay of social power dynamics among members as the group develops over time. Many social identities and dimensions of difference

**The program may be pushing us too far beyond the limits of our competency or our psyche, into our personal danger zone. It is a job for each of us to critically examine the reasons for our discomfort, and to be as honest with ourselves as we can be so that we don't, for instance, blame an agent outside ourselves when we really need to be holding ourselves accountable for being challenged in our cultural dominance.**

beyond nationality and geography were named in the Gallese T-Group as the week unfolded. These included (but were not limited to) race and skin color, sex/gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, class, and age/generation.

The design also provides for various conceptual inputs to be presented by faculty. In terms of topics, the primary conceptual inputs typically include social power dynamics (e.g., cultural dominant-group-and-subordinated group system [i.e. in-group/out-group, up/down] dynamics), race and skin color, sex/gender, sexual orientation, and class. The conceptual components also include an experiential activity and reflection time in learning pairs or trios as well as in plenary.

The primary responsibility of faculty is to create a safe container for learning, risk-taking, and self-development, in addition to creating a solid design that can flex in response to emergent social phenomena in the T-Group. The operative word in that statement is *safe*. We work to create a

container for learning in which participants can take risks toward developing themselves at their own personal/professional learning and growing edges.

However, we do not seek to keep participants *comfortable* because comfort in social space is often about social power. In an oppressive system, status is determined by whether you belong to the culturally dominant group or the culturally subordinated group on the dimension of diversity that is figural in that context. Cultural dominants expect to be kept comfortable by the culturally subordinated group. Having

others exert themselves to maintain one's comfort is one of the (usually unexamined) privileges of cultural dominance, which is why comfort can be a diversity issue.

As group or program participants, there are many reasons why we might feel uncomfortable. The program may be pushing us too far beyond the limits of our competency or our psyche, into our personal danger zone. It is a job for each of us to critically examine the reasons for our discomfort, and to be as honest with ourselves as we can be so that we do not, for instance, blame an agent outside ourselves when we really need to be holding ourselves accountable for being challenged in our cultural dominance. No easy task but a necessary one at the individual level for systemic oppression to be undone.

NTL Institute is committed in its mission statement to undoing systems of oppression; therefore, program faculty need to 1) be aware of inequitable power dynamics playing out in a T Group on various dimensions of diversity and 2) be skillful at intervening in a way that neither blames nor shames but opens a pathway to

learning and restores equity to human relations and the larger system. This is what we train people for in the DWC.

Contemplation of these verities fostered the genesis of a design for the international group gathering in Gallese. We realized that the beginning of the lab needed to be focused on *power* per se. Power is universal; the impacts of its inequitable distribution on various dimensions of diversity a concern in social systems around the world.

To keep it solidly grounded in the here-and-now of the Gallese lab, we began with the participants' knowledge from their own lived experience in the wide variety of social contexts embedded in their cultural origins. This proved to be an auspicious design decision that made the lab relevant and powerful for their learning as the week unfolded and the T Group developed.

Once we had locked onto power as the starting point, the concept was startling in its clarity and simplicity. We knew that it would be a mistake to begin with a specific dimension of diversity; for example, race and skin color, as if we – American consultants – had something to teach professionals from outside the US about specific issues of diversity that might be seen as most relevant in the US context. Indeed, one participant reflected on the second day that he had been worried about this being a “70s-style American” diversity workshop and thus a waste of his professional development Euros. He was pleased that it was not that, and that he was having the opportunity to examine his own cultural dominance and its impact on his intervention practice, presence in the group, and use of self.

As we reflected on the whole lab experience in the days to follow, we were able to see – given the wisdom and clarity of hindsight – that we had both designed and facilitated “outside the box” that had been built from all the assumptions, learnings, and insights from our collective experience prior to the Italy experience. It was a good and sturdy box that supported us well in the past but going to Europe to work with an international group illuminated its limitations. The work in Gallese would need a better box.

4. The DWC is open to non-NTL members.

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#### Stylistic

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- » Presents ideas logically and with clear transitions
- » Includes section headings to help guide the reader
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*(continued next page)*



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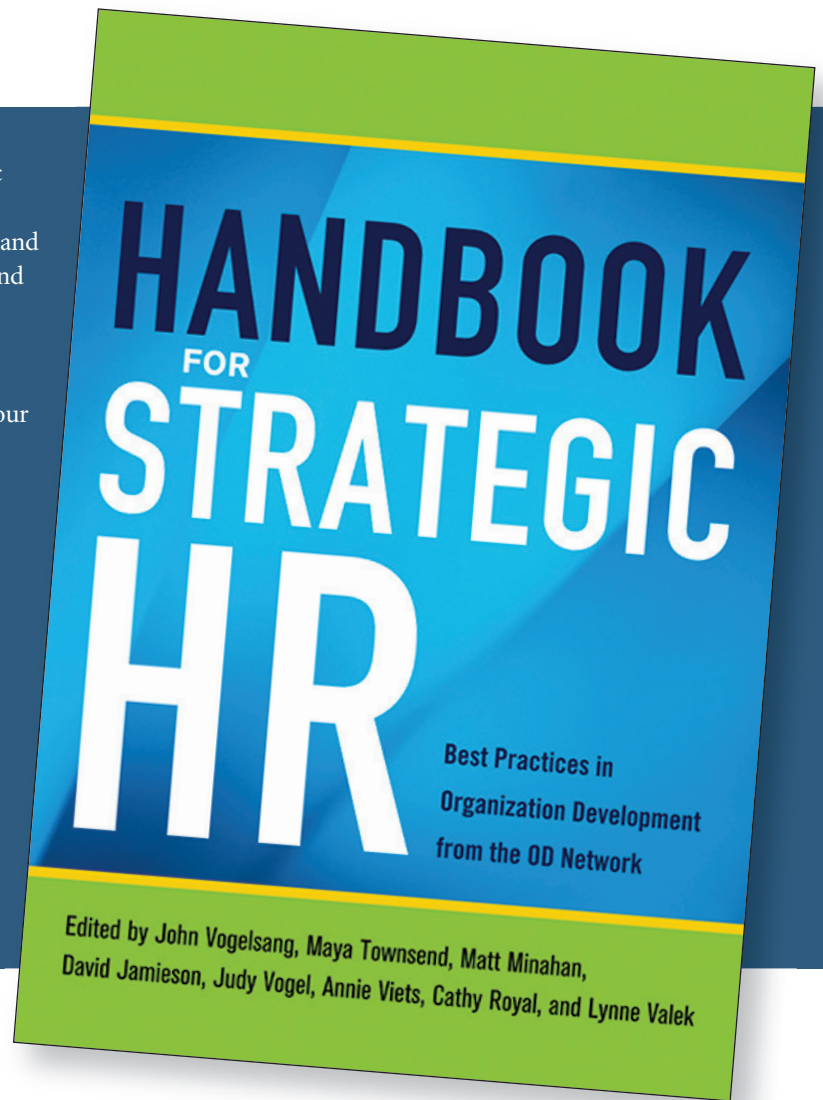
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