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Different Perspectives on the Future of Organization Development

Voices from the Baltimore Conference

Assembled by
Gervase Bushe
and Anne Litwin

An unusual conference was held in Baltimore this past December 5–7. An invitation only event, "From the Founders to the Future: A Gathering to Build OD for Tomorrow's World," was organized by Bob Marshak, Bridget O'Brien, Frederick A. Miller, Judith H. Katz, Ilene C. Wasserman, Matt Minahan, and Norm Jones. The purpose of the conference was to gather an international cross-section of people with some connection to the practice of OD, whether formal or informal, to explore the current state of the field from different perspectives and to consider whether OD has a role to play in the future. One hundred and twenty-five people participated in two days of sessions spread over three days. There were very few presentations, most of the time was spent in small group discussions.

On the first day, the conference focused on the past, naming and discussing key individuals who had inspired those present and then invited people to join in generational groups for more discussion. The second day had two presentations intended to provoke conversations about where the field is and where it is heading. Jens Hansen, futurist, offered provocative propositions about the future of work, especially the coming artificial intelligence revolution and deep learning. Gervase Bushe, OD professor, offered provocative propositions about the field, especially that "OD is about change" is a depleted generative image for the field and the suggestion that "OD is about creating great teams and organizations" would be more generative. The rest of the conference used small group and large group processes for discussion, guided by two questions: What do we want the future of the field to be? How do we want to contribute to the future in the world?

Before the conference we had agreed, as two of the editors of the *OD Practitioner*, to look for opportunities to capture something from the conference for the ODP. What we did was to ask people if they would represent a point of view and write 500–1,000 words about how they see the future of OD. We didn't ask them to write about their experience of the conference. Instead we asked them to write, soon after the conference was over, what their views about the future of OD were. We tried to get a balance of views; for example, from practitioners at the beginning of their career to those nearing the end; from those attached to institutional structures in our field to those with no OD affiliation; from those with primarily a social justice orientation to those with primarily a business effectiveness orientation. What follows are the voices of those who followed through and generously offered their thoughts.

A Perspective from a New Practitioner

Julian Chender

I have been hearing about the impending death of OD since I first came to the field five years ago, and OD has been "dying" for a lot longer than that. Why is it that a field so young, so inherently interdisciplinary, has been facing its own demise for so long? The OD Gathering in Baltimore answered this poignant question, showing me that

what I had conceptualized as a solid field of study and practice was in fact illusory. The sense of belonging to something larger than me, to the world of OD, crumbled on the first day. Instead of a large, solid field at the end of its life, I saw fragments of practice, theory, and use of self, combining and recombining to form little pockets of emergent possibility. Death was not the proper metaphor. There had never been a field as I had imagined it, so it could not be dying. Over those three days I came instead to see OD as a source of power, energy, and nurturance spreading itself, in millions of fragmentations, as widely as it could. This new experience of OD showed me that our driving question should not be one of "saving" OD, as there is nothing solid to save, but rather one of helping what is in transition to a new, unknown, and ultimately uncontrollable existence.

If we think of the field as a system, we can see the ways in which OD has adapted to its internal and external environments over the years, responding to shifts in work culture, sociopolitical forces, academia, and spirituality. Rather than taking on new and clearly distinguishable forms, however, the field is becoming increasingly diffuse, fragmented, and interwoven with the larger "non-OD" world. This is a good sign. It means the field is growing, maturing, and reaching further. It also means that our time thinking about OD as a single field is nearing its end. The OD Gathering in Baltimore revealed that the deep tribal affinity that has bound us is no longer our core connector; our lineage, once so precious, is waning in importance; and OD's core values are deeply debated. OD as we know it has broken open, entering a powerfully generative space of emergent possibility beyond our control.

There are three key changes in OD that have led to this state: its professionalization, popularization, and commodification. The original guild system of developing OD practitioners has professionalized with the advent of the information age. OD training used to emphasize the direct transmission from master to apprentice, centralizing "true" OD in the hands of a few and erecting rather lofty barriers to entry. Now, training

has democratized, moving to graduate institutions and self-study, thus leading to the current debate about the necessity of developing a single OD competency assessment or certification. The professionalization of OD has led to a focus on breadth of knowledge rather than depth of skill. While mentorship remains a key part of OD training, the guild model no longer applies, and OD is available to more people than ever before.

This increased availability, combined with OD's success over the years, has led to significant growth in the field's popularity. What started as a fringe practice is now deeply embedded in the essential workings of organizations around the world. Like a drop of food coloring in a glass of water, however, OD has diluted as it has spread. The "true" OD of the guild system no longer exists, replaced instead with countless interpretations and reinterpretations, coupled with new approaches, tools, methodologies, and technologies. While some of these have been summative, others have led to a fragmentation of the field. Though we stand together on the shoulders of giants, our focus has moved toward our individual fiefdoms.

This shifting focus, the result of the field's popularization and accompanying dilution, has led to its commodification. As practitioners have looked for ways to differentiate themselves in an increasingly crowded marketplace, many have chosen to align with specific methodologies, tools, or technologies. This has deemphasized OD's holistic nature, replacing it with a balkanized approach to service delivery. As brand recognition has become increasingly important, OD has missed its opportunity to brand holistically, going from being a values-based practice to a series of techniques. The focus on individual approaches and interventions has weakened OD's conception of itself, the public's conception of the field, and called into question our identity as OD practitioners.

As the field responds to changes in its internal and external environments, moving through professionalization, popularization, and commodification, it is important that we practitioners acknowledge our individual relationships to the

field and work from there. Rather than fighting the field's natural progression, we can work with the feelings of loss, disappointment, and fear that these changes raise. We do not have to be so scared of OD dying. We can attend to the end of what we have known and loved, enter the groundless space of not knowing where we are headed, and help the powerful energy of OD transition to its next manifestation. We can rest in the in-between place where we are not quite sure who we are and who we are going to be, if anyone. It is necessary to focus on our own experiences of change and work with our emotions. There is nothing to save; what we called a field is not a solid entity, but the richness of our collective experience. Moving forward means turning outward and sharing that richness while letting go of any particular outcome.

A Perspective from a Long-Time Change Agent, Now Studying OD

Nadia Bello

Like many an OD practitioner, I have come to OD mid-career, after twenty-five years of doing the work of "change." Always, I believed in change from the inside out, working in institutions; colouring within the lines, as it were. OD made sense to me—a natural progression from community-based change to adult education, from human resources to organization development. In some ways I thought OD would have "the answers" and could house the many varied elements of my various careers. That's on me. I was trying to understand what was happening to me in organizations as much as I was trying to understand what was happening around me.

Reflecting on OD as a field of scholarship and practice, I feel more fragmented than ever, and full of questions:

» How do OD theories and models specifically help or hinder equity, diversity, and inclusion?

» Why is OD, apart from dialogic and a few other theories, unable to break out of mid-20th century structuralism in theory and practice?

- » How has this limited the growth and evolution of OD as a discipline?
- » What are the consequences of OD cherry-picking and adapting work, theories, and themes of other disciplines in uncritical ways?
- » Why is a behavioral science so obsessed with Jungian and other archetypes?
- » Is OD reluctant to address power in its work and within the organization to whom it offers its services?
- » How can OD be more inclusive of neurodiversity and not just to neuroscience?
- » What does how people in the field talk about the field tell us about the field?
- » What does it matter how OD positions itself—or what it calls itself—if the fundamental systems (and the institutions that represent those systems) OD was born out of are broken?
- » And most saliently: Whether as an academic discipline or field of practice, does OD have a higher calling anymore, beyond its espoused values?

Kurt Lewin believed in a higher calling for many reasons, albeit in an abstract way; he absolutely saw the tools and methodology of action research as a technology with the capability to change the world for the better.

I hear two things from the field, over and over again: we (as in OD) are needed more than ever, and, secondly, people are going around doing the work of OD without crediting OD. But credit requires access, and an insular, inward-looking discipline that is aggrieved about lack of recognition needs to see past itself to build bridges with disparate global movements and communities, and indeed organizations. It is in the way experienced practitioners talk about their teachers and founders in the field, whether "learning at the feet of" or in lionizing theorists or theories frozen in time through a methodology that is unwilling to examine its own biases. As an outsider and a newcomer (generation, culture, citizenship, race, and a myriad other identities) how can I relate? Why am I expected to carry on a legacy that I do not have a relationship to, other than to see how it furthers colonizes me as racialized

person working within systems that are not set up to serve me, my communities, or even the clients I work with? I want to be clear that being an MSOD student has taught me so much, but in the same way OD champions use of self as a core principle—and challenges practitioners to uphold use of self, I find myself asking questions about OD's use of itself. I realize that I am framing a nebulous, diverse, multi-dimensional field as an entity, but OD does that to itself sometimes. At its heart, OD's very identity and self-concept lies with post-WWII liberalism, rooted in Western democratic principles, intellectual and scientific Enlightenment ideals, and capitalist practices. This has been both its greatest asset and inspiration, and now, I would argue, its greatest limitation. As for why we are needed more than ever, could it be because those very institutions that created OD are on fire in this brave new world.

All of this brings to mind the intellectual, discursive, and pragmatic provocation that Audre Lorde (also a giant) offered in her 1984 essay. In her admonishment of white feminist academe, she spoke and then wrote, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (Sister Outsider, 1984). Lorde's words are often taken as literal and essentialist, meaning that we can never use the tools or methods of the West, for example, to challenge or dismantle systems that are unequitable, unjust, and inaccessible. Her words haunt me when it comes to OD. In what ways does OD do the work of the Master, with whose tools, and to what end? I think her words serve as a caution and an aspiration. This is where two white hot truths collide: Lorde's writing about the master's tools meeting one of OD fundamental lessons; by virtue of who we are and where we stand, we impact any system by our very presence. Sorting out what it is about OD that offers possibility for real transformation is what I have to square for myself within myself and within this field in order to practice OD with any kind of integrity.

My questions are about OD as a system of thought and practice, a methodology and a set of espoused values. They are not about individual practitioners, the institutions of OD, or the like (although we need to face these questions at every level of system). Indeed, in Baltimore I found connection, community, curiosity, caring, and kindness. Overwhelmingly, there was empathy and willingness to dialogue. I found myself truly within a community, and found myself a community, and I was not alone in my questions about OD.

A Perspective from a Third-Generation Practitioner

Becca Klein Bartholomew

Flip charts abounded in our living room and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the MBTI were in my vocabulary before I'd had my first kiss.

I knew OD practitioners before I knew there was such a thing as "OD." I didn't know their roles or their work, instead I knew a community of people—my grandparents' friends. Child-me would weave among crowds of "old" people at my grandparents' parties and at gatherings in Bethel where the NTL Institute held summer programming for decades. As I meandered the dance floor or paused near dinner tables, I could feel that these people were fun-loving, deeply committed to each other and to their work. They asked me interesting questions and wanted to know how I understood the world.

As I spent time with this community, I saw no separation between their work and their personal lives—and I'd venture to guess that this was true for many of them (maybe a little too true for some during those summers in Bethel, but those are stories for another time). I later came to know some of these interesting grown-ups by name—but still didn't know anything about their work: Edie and Charlie Seashore were people whom my dad would help with computer issues. Michael Broom was someone with whom Grandpa was writing a book. Lennox Joseph was in charge of NTL, which as far as I knew existed so that each summer we'd go to

Bethel to swim in lakes and slide down waterfalls at Sunday River.

Over the years, the ethos and values of OD started to seep into my skin and bones. By the time I got to college, I knew I wanted to do this work. I was drawn to the field because of the stories I heard growing up—efforts to advance social justice, profound group transformations, deep personal growth of those served by the work *and* those engaging in it—and the community of colleagues.

I've been slowly entering this field more fully over the past five years. And, as I've sought to find my footing, I've been feeling some lack of clarity about OD—is it about making money or is it about social justice? Is it about mastering and repeating tried-and-true models or is it about innovation and discovery? At the Gathering, it became clear to me that depending on whom I talked to, the answers were different and often fell around generational lines. People of my grandfather's generation presented a sense of delight and discovery in their association with the work. People of my father's generation on the other hand, had a different energy, a "just doing the work" or slogging-through sort of attitude. I found those in my generation (GenX) at the Gathering wondering when we could find permission—from those ahead of us in years and perhaps from ourselves—to say we are experts and leaders; while the millennials appeared pretty content to let the structural institutions that historically supported this field whither and fade away because they were ready to engage in what was working for them in this moment. Of course, these are blanket statements and not everyone in each of these generations showed up this way at the Gathering. But, looking at the energy and attitudes about our collective work from a generational perspective has helped me gain some clarity and renewed enthusiasm about OD.

Some of the questions that came up during the Gathering no longer feel as heavy to me as they might have before those three days together. Questions like: What is OD? Are people who use the methods and models of OD in their work OD practitioners? Should we permit folks like that to join our gatherings? Publish in our journals? I think we do ourselves a disservice getting stuck in these questions. There is no one right answer. Instead, what makes OD unique are the values upon which this work is based such as learning, justice, equity—at its core, supporting the humans who, in effect, are the organizations we seek to support. The values feed the fertile soil of our work—whether your motive is profit or social justice (or both). If we can operate from a deep set of core values, the work can take many shapes. My hope is that by acknowledging that there likely will never be one clear answer to any one of the above questions—especially given the nature of our work and those of us drawn to it (you know the type, perpetually asking questions and striving to learn)—why don't we get out of our own way and do the work. Then, we can still be "in the question(s)" without being paralyzed by them, and we may even find we have more answers because we've been in action. It is the doing, discussing, learning, and doing again that keeps this field alive and will allow us to adapt to support the changes ahead.

And, changes are ahead. The Gathering made it clear that the technological advances of our time and those of the future are fundamentally changing work places—and thus our trade. Maybe the millennials are right; maybe we don't need the historical structures that have supported us in the past—at least not as they existed in the past—but we do need each other. If we are to have a thriving robust cadre of practitioners innovating into the future, we need a strong community among ourselves. We need to create opportunities for networking, apprenticing, and mentoring, for sharing ideas and workshopping challenges. We need to know and trust each other. And, while I'm excited to see how we will use emerging technologies to find deeper connections and learning among each other—may I suggest we also need to spend some time together on the dance floor.

A Perspective from a Young Black Man

Olu Burrell

My immersion into Organization Development began on February 2, 2013. It was at that time I participated in "Launch," the experiential learning module that is a staple of American University's Master of Science in Organization Development program. I was a newly-minted member of cohort 67, which would prove to be among one of the most racially-diverse cohorts in recent memory of the program; twenty-one individuals beginning in the bastion of OD.

As we sat in that circle (the first of a great many), I couldn't help but beam at the fact that there were five other faces kissed by the sun like mine- four black men and one black woman. A respectful, knowing nod and smile was shared by us all. In graduate spaces our faces were not all that common and we knew it. We had an unspoken reverence and camaraderie from the beginning.

As a neophyte to the OD world, it seemed like a good sign. The following weekend we experienced a disruption to our regularly-scheduled class weekend of Introduction to Organization Development. We were told that we would have the opportunity to hear Edie Seashore, one of the founders of our program, speak at a memorial service for her husband (and equal giant of OD) Charlie, when she came to the Washington, DC area.

Fate had it another way, however, as Edie succumbed to Charlie's calls from beyond and joined him in the ever after.

As a result of this unexpected development, the memorial service we attended was dedicated to the forces of nature (and nurture) that were both Charlie and Edie Seashore.

Cohort 67 attended what had become a joint memorial service and doing so found themselves in the midst of a multicultural tableau of OD Practitioners who had come from near and far and all over the world to pay their respects, to laugh, to cry, to connect, and to re-commit themselves to the sacred work of OD as they recounted story after story about the indelible and irresistible paradox of the Charlie and Edie

Seashore effect. This was the promise of OD: diverse, inclusive, in touch, human, caring, feeling, knowing, and being. I had found my tribe.

I've learned that--in many cases-- the questions are the answers. I am continually confronted by this truth as I challenge the assumptions that I hold –as well as the assumptions of others.

My mother loves me and is always trying to protect me. Even as a man in his late 30s she tries to shield me from the consequences of my existence as a black man with a "different" first name who seeks not to work in IT or Engineering in organizations—where there are plenty of folks with "different" names but front and center in people operations. "Olu," she says. "Do you know of many people who do the work you do who look like you?" My thoughts go back to the Memorial Service of Charlie and Edie Seashore—the ebbing crowd, a veritable tapestry of colors, creeds, cultural and sexual identities, and I say, "Yes, yes I do." She then asks me if I know anyone with a name such as mine thriving in the work that I do. I suppress the urge to lay the responsibility for my name at the feet of her and my dad. I say no, but I can be the first.

She looks at me lovingly, if not sympathetically. "Aren't those spaces usually reserved for white men?" she asks. "Aren't all on this side of the Atlantic?" I reply. I reach down and conjure up many tomes I've read, and theory and model I've memorized that has served me in this space: Taylor, Lewin, Beckhard, Bridges, Argyris & Schon, McGregor, Kolb, Kilmann, Cooperrider, Seashore, Kotter, --and the pattern was clear.

I thought (and think) about the values we hold dear as OD Practitioners, values of participation; of helping; of diversity and inclusion; of "use of self"; of data-driven interventions; of collaboration and relationship building- and I wondered--to borrow from Argyris & Schon "Espoused Theory vs. Theory in Use"—if OD was living its truth.

From December 5th through 7th I was a participant in the OD Gathering, after having received an invite from Fred Miller, one of the conveners. Like me,

Fred is a black male. At some instinctual level, that was comforting and, had he been in my cohort at AU that chilly day in February of 2013, I'd think we would have shared a knowing, respectful nod of acknowledgement.

Fast-forward to December 2017, nearly five years since that Memorial Service I attended as a fledgling OD practitioner. Many of those faces and names I saw as luminaries were now my colleagues. Over the course of the OD Gathering, however, I felt--on a limbic-system level—that my OD tribe struggled to espouse the values we purport to hold dear. In this, an age of polarization and of political turmoil, we avoided those tough questions about race, gender, and power even within our own ranks. Said tough questions would undoubtedly beget tough answers. Unspoken but readily-understood dynamics were in full display (as was evidenced by the varied adherence to time depending on who wielded the microphone coupled with strict adherence to the schedule). We sought to hold on to the foundation the founders laid before us, even as we—to borrow from W.B. Yeats, "turn[ed] and turn[ed] in a widening gyre." There were clear distinctions between those in the room who knew the founders and those of us who read about them or only got to attend memorial services. Those distinctions proved to be emblematic of the conversations held in open and designated sessions—as well as those spoke in hushed tones and knowing glances amongst those for whom marginalization seemed a familiar thorn.

As we sought to design the future I am left with those same questions that stand also as answers:

» "Where is my place in OD?"
» "How will I know what success in this field looks like?"
» "What more needs to be done to make someone like me feel welcome?"
» "How can I work to ensure that someone who looks like me (and has a name as different as mine) will be afforded the same opportunities as a cisgender white man?"
» And I end as I began-- with Charlie: "How's that working out for you?"

Only time (and I) will tell. And I hope you will be listening.

A Perspective of Someone Grieving the Loss of OD Connections

Betsy Hostetler, PhD

Letting the field inform us

At the conference, a small group of OD professionals gathered in a circle to talk about spirit. Female and male, younger and older, dark skinned and light, we noticed the energy field that held us together and the information it held for us. Sitting in the hotel hallway, we had to keep moving to accommodate the needs of others. We found it curious that our Spirit Circle was in continual motion, between the officially condoned spaces. In this in-between space, we focused on the center of the circle, the space that held us together. "If I moved across the hall, I wouldn't have access to the information that is contained here," I said. "What information are you getting?" someone asked. I tuned in and started to cry. "I feel sadness here, for loss of connection." Another tuned in and said, "I hear the phrase, 'I'm waiting.'" Everyone recognized it. We were touched by the experience. Spontaneously, without intention, a new way of knowing emerged in our circle. Surprised that it was available to us, we were excited to tap into this information that came from a deeper ground. I wondered, what is the unfinished grief that waits?

Going underground

It may be that the OD field is sitting on a mountain of grief, our own and that of others. Maybe our methods do not tap deeply enough into the reality of our client systems, so their grief waits. Or maybe we collude with them in avoiding it.

If we look closer to home, we might see unspoken grief within us and between us, for what we are losing and what we have already lost- our diminished hope that our values will transform organizations; or the realization that doing it alone will not work, while noticing that competition often sits where support and collaboration belong. We have not yet truly recognized

our connection to one another, when we desperately need one another. Perhaps there is even an understanding that only by moving through the grief will we ever move beyond it. And we are stuck, because we do not know how.

It takes energy to bury grief, and the cost is loss of vitality, creativity, and joy. Yet the terrain of grief is something people move away from instead of toward. Because of that, we have not developed the skills we need in order to acknowledge, be with, and process grief in ourselves and with others. So it waits.

Seeing the pattern

"If it looks chaotic, you're too close or too far away to see the pattern," said a leading chaos theorist. Seeing the patterns, or at least knowing how to look for them, is essential to the work of organizational development. It is a skill that requires openness and asks that we look each time with open eyes. It asks that we surrender. We have to let go of our assumptions about the way we think it will go, the way we are afraid it will go, and the way we want it to go. Only then do we have the freedom to notice how it is actually going. To look with open eyes means to look without expectation, fear, or hope.

Discovering who we are

My mother was thirteen when women gained the right to vote in 1920. At the mirror neuron level, I learned about life, and how to live it from her. The distance between the reality she faced and the one I do is vast, and both live in me. Epigenetics, the study of how environmental factors influence descendants of those who experienced them, teaches us another lesson about the task of knowing self. We need to know where we stand now, in order to find the grounding we need to move forward. The past knows who we are, and it is waiting for us to listen.

Discovering our connection to others

We know intuitively that we are connected to others in powerful ways. Over the last decades I have learned the systemic constellation method, which shows us the underground rules we operate by. By accessing a "knowing field," people can witness underground connections, see what has been buried, and identify the hidden dynamics that hold underlying patterns of behavior in place. In this field, people transform grief they have carried for others, and in the process, transform themselves and their organizations. The systemic constellation method, which includes organizational constellations, is a sea change in change methodologies. Perhaps the most powerful change technology, it is a leading edge for the field of OD.

Finding the root, solving the real problem

The field of OD has worked through facilitation of thoughts and feelings. All the thinking and feeling that OD professionals know how to facilitate emerges from a deeper, shared field. We have not found language yet to describe this field and the deeper connections that inform groups and hold them together. When we do, our work will change exponentially, maybe even keeping pace with the rate of change in other technologies. The shift from a diagnostic to a dialogic mindset prepares us for this movement that requires greater openness and surrender. It is time for the field of OD to discover this field that we are all grounded in. The future of OD is to learn to access to this field. It is time for the field of OD and the "knowing field" to meet.

Forming the circle

We are the people who know how to form circles. Maybe it is time to pay attention to what is circling us. If we allow ourselves to be more fully aware, we can complete unfinished business. Only then will we be free to get a glimpse of the future.

A Perspective of Someone Returning to OD After Being Away

Holly Brittingham

"OD?" I asked, "What's that?" It was 1998, I was five years into a PR and marketing career and searching for deeper meaning. Facing personal demons that were surfacing at work and agonizing about what path my young adult life should take, I had begun working with a therapist who, as it turned out, also consulted to organizations. A revelation! I wanted more. He suggested I learn about OD.

Reading the description of AU/NTL's MSOD program was like hearing a snippet of beautiful music, and between my enrollment in 1999 and my graduation in 2001, I lived a full symphony of deep personal growth, mind-expanding intellectual concepts, and a lifelong connection with classmates. I developed and honed a philosophy for my work and my life. OD was my calling, and I was home.

Fast forward after nearly 20 years in the "corporate America" I once feared, and I am still figuring out how to explain with appropriate conciseness to family and friends what it is I do for a living. I toss out phrases like "I run leadership development programs," or "I coach executives about how to navigate the challenges they face." I might say that I am responsible for my organization's Diversity & Inclusion strategy or that I run a process designed to align executive talent with strategy and ensure adequate succession planning is in place. I might share a story about facilitating a team building retreat or explain how my team and I measure and seek to improve employee engagement through an annual survey. Sometimes I take the easy way out and simply say "I get to do the fun parts of HR." But none of it seems to adequately capture the deeper essence of my work and why I love it.

In the years soon after graduate school, I had remained connected to the OD profession, serving on the board of the AU/NTL Alumni Association, attending ODN conferences, and trying my hand at independent consulting, thanks to an assignment that fell into my lap. Because of my graduate work, I had the intellectual chops, a deeper understanding of myself as an agent of change, and the right philosophical stance to do the work and do it well. But I was inexperienced and had virtually zero credibility with potential clients. I needed to learn and develop from the inside.

As my professional journey unfolded through positions of increasing responsibility in industries as varied as telecommunications, entertainment, financial services, enterprise IT, and advertising, I knew that

my success was due to my grounding in OD theory and practice; it served as an important reference point always. But with each step, I felt farther away from OD. Rather than ODN, I attended Talent Management or Leadership and Change conferences. Recruiters were not so interested in my OD background. The only people who seemed able to truly claim the title of OD practitioner were external consultants who had written books and built consulting firms. Their careers looked nothing like mine.

So, when I was invited (by a friend who had an "in" with an organizer) to attend "A Gathering to Build OD for Tomorrow's World," I was flattered, excited and nervous. A few of my favorite professors from graduate school were on the list to attend. Would they remember me? Would most other attendees know each other? I assumed that the participants were mostly independent practitioners who collaborated with each other on complex and exciting interventions and did "pure" OD. Would I fit in?

About mid-way through the gathering, my fears of not fitting in had vanished and I was reveling in a warm, collegial spirit of inquiry and exploration with my fellow participants. "I really appreciate your outsider perspective," one of them said to me during a break. "What do you mean?" I asked, truly curious. The word "outsider" was so intriguing. For a second, I saw him worry that he had offended me. "You wear your organizational identity with pride, and that's refreshing," he said. "Your perspective is important. We need more of it."

And so there I was, in a conference room in a Baltimore hotel, finding my way home again to OD, but this time arriving like a long-lost relative, bringing tales of my travels to other lands. There are a lot of us out there doing the important work of OD, even if it doesn't always look like the traditional model of external practitioner. Going forward, I'm hopeful that a new and clearer picture of our field will enable all of us to have more impact. The work we do is too critical for us not to make progress in this direction. It has been so wonderful to come home again to OD. But to be honest, I don't think I ever really left.

A Perspective from Someone Mentored by the Founders (And Now Mentoring Others)

Ilene Wasserman, PhD

It was not long ago that I noticed that I was no longer the youngest person in the room. It was inevitable. Yet, the older I get, the more drawn I am to learn and grow from intergenerational conversations. My reflections about From the Founders to the Future: A Gathering to Build OD for Tomorrow's World in early December 2017 take the perspective of a generational boundary spanner. I was mentored by wonderful people from the last generation. As I am working with and teaching a new generation, I am witnessing and valuing how they shape and apply what they learn. So, what might we discover from attending to what we are doing and making together?

Decades ago, I entered a field that seemed to have been formed well before me. It's been a privilege to have known, worked with, and been mentored by the great minds and souls I encountered through my consulting engagements, staffing and attending NTL programs, and pursuing many theoretical and methodological perspectives such as the Oshrys with the Power Lab (Power & Systems), Marv Weisbord and Sandra Janoff with Future Search, David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney with Appreciative Inquiry, Dialogue, Otto Scharmer and the U Theory, as well as Gestalt (Maryanne Rainey, Brenda Jones, and others) and Adult learning and mentorship (Victoria Marsick, Bob Kegan, Lisa Lahey, and Kathy Kram). I learned through being with Edie and Charlie Seashore, studying with Barnett Pearce, and working with Fred Miller and Judith Katz and ongoing conversations with Ed Schein. I feel a strong commitment to passing on the stories of those who came before me, quoting them often in my consulting, teaching, and writing. Through my mentors, I learned that some of the most effective change comes from people sitting face to face in conversations, listening to what and how they personally and collectively know, and in the process, determining how to move forward together.

And, I pass along simple pithy phrases that have impact. For example, when people talk about feeling the challenges of change, i.e. "This won't change," I often quote Edie Seashore attaching the tagline, "Up until now" (i.e. This wouldn't change. *up until now*. I have always had a difficult time with *up until now*. Those three words are the best example of enactments that move people. Every time I share that with people, they experience a magical shift.

As I sat in the room during the December gathering, I saw a sea of familiar and not so familiar faces. I also felt the presence of many who were not there, either because they were unable to travel, or because they are no longer walking with us. And I saw my ODL students, who are also my mentors. The feeling of being an intentional bridge between generations was palpable. A new insight I had was that some of the things that are precious to me may not be to others, particularly the next generation. In that gathering of young and old, I was reminded that the way we impart wisdom is as important and critical as the wisdom itself.

Like many of us, I am mindful that HOW we know is not just about transmitting information; it is about co-constructing meaning. How do we make the relevant aspects of the past come alive for these future leaders? Often, we put the emphasis on what we are saying. Yet as we co-construct meaning, the construct of transmitting information, is different from noticing how we are coordinating meaning with each other in each turn of what we do and make together. The specific example that comes to mind is the different responses I heard to the panel of key theorists. Some enjoyed it while others, many from the younger generations, felt it was not as important or relevant. One might quickly conclude that those who did not find value in the panel were not interested in our roots. Another possibility is that the presentational and linear style was not engaging.

As we consider learning and growing together we may consider other ways of engaging people with the voices of the past, as well as widening who we validate as contributors to the field. Kurt Lewin and

Edgar Schein promoted the creation of learning spaces they called *cultural islands*, places where people had the time, space, and focus to explore and create cultures together. As we continue to explore who we are as a field, as practitioners and scholars, taking the time and space to create inclusive bridges across the generations—bridges that include the voices and leadership of people of different cultures and hues, across the gender spectrum—is critical.

I have learned the value of looking backward, inward, and forward—and to do so with others who don't look like me. As we look at the constructs and values of models of the past, there is a great opportunity to our field that is relevant to our future enactments together.

I look forward to continuing to build bridges that foster conversations about what was, what is, and what is becoming. I remember the day a student said of my mentors: "You quote them; We quote you." That was the day I fully experienced myself in a sea of life. I may be in the room today, but tomorrow the room will look quite different, and it may not even be a room.

A Perspective from Someone on the Journey from *od* to *OD*

Lauren Statman

I will be very transparent about where I stand: I am currently in a master's program in organizational psychology and have a stake in making sure there is a field for me to work in when I graduate, and long after. I want to make my education worthwhile and apply the skills I've been building to help people and organizations succeed in their missions.

Yet, there is a feeling that OD is under existential threat as the world transforms. We are hearing that organizations as we know them are falling away and morphing into networks. How could we not perceive this as a major threat to the O of OD? Further, we are feeling a greater sense of pressure to demonstrate the short-term, bottom-line impact of an OD effort in order to deliver it. This must be a threat to the

D of OD, which we know often takes time and a more emergent path to be effective.

Despite these forces, or perhaps because of them, I am optimistic. My winding path to the formal world of OD has shown me that there are ample opportunities to practice OD skills and values outside of the confines of the traditional field. I view finding and creating these opportunities as my goal as the field and world change.

Since embarking on my graduate studies, I have come to consider much of what I have done in the first eight years of my career as lower-case od. It looks a lot like OD. I just did not have the full framing to understand it from that perspective.

In my current role consulting to donors and family foundations who seek to make a positive social impact through their philanthropy, I have engaged in many practices that I now understand fall squarely within OD. Yet no one in my organization has a background in OD or uses the language I am studying at school. For example, when we help set up new boards, we focus on maximizing involvement through using participatory decision-making models. And when we design the process for reviewing grants, we apply a lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion from the get-go to reduce biases that could potentially emerge against smaller, newer, and minority-led nonprofits. Moreover, when we help our clients understand the issues they care about to identify opportunities for giving--a landscape scan--we are conducting a stakeholder analysis of a field.

There is OD-like work happening all over. I think of my friend's personal development work that he did through his acting degree. It sounds oddly similar to many leadership development approaches I have been introduced to; it was premised on the idea that if one does not understand oneself first, one cannot take on another role. Then, I think of the team effectiveness work another friend has been part of in her surgical unit of a hospital. Her leader has worked tirelessly across the surgical team so that nurses, residents, and attending physicians can all speak up equally, toward the goal of better patient outcomes. These are not OD programs, but they are

based on OD values like the use of self and the importance of psychological safety in team settings.

As I look to the future, I am still seeking to understand the field of OD as I assess my professional opportunities and chart my path ahead. In doing so, I will need to decide how porous of a definition to give to the field. Do I look at traditional OD, or do I look for the hybrid spaces where *od* is happening? Based on my experience, I know that OD practices, values, and people are hiding in plain sight in non-OD roles and organizations. As the world becomes more interconnected across fields and OD responsibilities and values become integrated into other organizational roles, I vow to keep my mind open to finding and creating OD opportunities where we least expect them.

A Perspective from an OD Consultant with a Thriving Practice

Michael Ciszewski

Sixteen years ago, when I started my graduate studies, I joked that the main reason I was pursuing the degree was that I could explain to my kids what it is I do for a living. No such definition emerged at the end of that program, and indeed, all these years later, I continue to be amazed at the myriad ways we try to pin down a concise description of organization development.

Whenever a group of us behavioral scientists gets together, someone will start a conversation about how we define our field. Why does this seem so important? One likely reason is that we humans like to label things, so that we know what we're looking at and are talking about. Another is that as practitioners we are seeking validation and acceptance. More practically, we want to offer something that someone (anyone!) else wants.

My practice has been built over the years by not talking about "OD" to clients. I talk instead about how to be reflective about what we are doing and to pay attention to what is happening around us, especially things that are new and different and surprising. Self awareness becomes the first and most effective step

toward success, however we might want to define success. These aspects of the practice help to increase the range of choice available, and that is at the heart of the work, greater awareness of the possibilities around us so that we can make more purposeful decisions.

So, what about the future? We see and hear lots about how human brains are being supplanted by machines. Ever more powerful computers. Algorithms. Artificial intelligence. The challenge is how to include machine-based human augmentation into our work. We have to stop insisting that people put their computers away and close their mobile devices and instead figure out how to incorporate these extensions of ourselves into what we do. How do these "machines" help us to become more effective, more whole, more integrated, more human? I don't know how to answer these questions right now, but they feel important.

Is a new way of thinking and being needed? Probably. The good news is that figuring out new and effective ways of thinking and being has always been at the heart of successful OD practice. It is where we began, going all the way back to the foundational experiments by Lewin and Lippitt in the 1930s on the impact of democratic leader behavior. What is this new way for us now?

I cannot help but feel that all the interesting and useful things I am learning about complexity and about the centrality of conversation will help us reckon with where our work with organizations is going. For example, organizations really are little more than conversations: nothing happens unless and until there is interaction between collections of human beings. Layer onto that the notion that the intent and ultimate direction of any conversation is unknowable in advance and that helps us begin to appreciate emergence, which is a core feature of complexity.

Though I am greatly oversimplifying these concepts, complexity demands that we focus on ongoing relationships in the living present. These relationships are informed by the past, move us toward a desired future, and are beholden to neither. That is to say, adaptability, development,

and anticipatory awareness become guiding principles. If we are focused on the present moment, we never know with certainty what will happen next. We increase our potential for effectiveness and possibility for development if we decide what to do right now, watch what happens, and on the basis of those results decide what to do in that next "right now."

The latest *Star Wars* release, "The Last Jedi," contains a great lesson for us OD practitioners. Toward the end of the movie there is a scene with Luke Skywalker and Yoda outside the tree-temple that houses the great books of the Jedi religion. Skywalker shows up at the site full of frustration and rage with the intention to incinerate everything. But, being Skywalker, he is full of ambiguity and conflict, and so he stops short of carrying out his intention. Yoda, watching from a distance, dramatically completes the job for him and torches everything.

Skywalker, now horrified at the destruction he has just been witness to, turns to Yoda and wants to know, "Why?" Yoda responds with something truly meaningful for Skywalker, for the Resistance, and for our field (I'm paraphrasing): They were only books, and mighty boring ones at that. You know everything you need. Everything you need is right here, right now. And, the burden of a master is that his pupils grow beyond him.

Maybe this doesn't happen among all behavioral scientists, but the ones I tend to congregate with (me included) spend lots of time venerating our elders. I am enamored of them and (justifiably) proud of where we have come from and how we have got here. There is little I enjoy more than rubbing elbows with the great and the good in our field. And, when I reflect honestly about it, it can feel like a stuck place. Maybe it is time to burn the old books and trust that we have what we need to grow beyond our masters.

A final thought that informs my view of the future is that our work is not about having answers, although we do have a point of view. This point of view is grounded in a set of shared values, values embedded in: the fundamental worth of each human being we come into contact

with, democratic principles, participatory decision making, and being connected to the scientific, technological, and sociological trends of our time. Beyond that, we are about the questions. Successful practice is built on engagement and inquiry.

A Perspective from a Member of Generation X

James B. Smith

During the From the Founders to the Future: A Gathering to Build OD for Tomorrow's World, a group of academicians, scholar-practitioners, and practitioners from this (and other) generational faction had the opportunity to engage and discuss our role in the future of the field. Our initial engagement began on the first day of the meeting with a roundtable discussion about our experiences, excitement, and concerns about the discipline. Born between 1965 and 1980, Generation X is comprised of self-reliant, task-oriented, work-life balanced, sensitive individuals who value and appreciate healthy connections to both Baby Boomers and Millennials. Our group was so large that we decided to break into two smaller groups of 10 to be more intimate in our engagement.

The group which I joined quickly formed and we immediately connected with each other. We engaged as if we were the best of friends in high school and were spending time together during a reunion weekend. Our "tribe" felt safe, supportive, and inclusive There was a genuine, authentic energy that set the tone for the group to freely express their thoughts and to have their voices genuinely be included within the newly-forming community.

We shared our concerns about always feeling overlooked yet wanting to be accepted by the Baby Boomer generation. We believe that Generation X is often forgotten or made to feel we still have "not arrived." We are constantly challenged to prove ourselves as contributors of the field and frequently are told we "need further mentoring and development." Despite that the fact that many of us have well over 20 years of experience, in some cases it does not seem to matter, especially to the

generation that precedes us. Those feelings lead us to a great sense of frustration and isolation. Ironically, as latch-key children, we learned how to cope with separation at a very early age. Instead of embracing that sense of solitude as a negative trait, we learned how to use it to our advantage to become resilient in our personal and professional growth and development.

We left the Gathering encouraged on many levels. We decided to seize this opportunity to build our community for the purposes of staying connected with each other, inviting other GenXers to join us, and working together to make a significant contribution to the longevity of the field. We walked away embracing our role as the bridge of the generations. The Silent Generation represents our grandparents, the Baby Boomers reflect our parents, and the millennials typify our children. We uniquely understand the different languages that we all speak and decided to take our rightful place in the broader community of Organization Development.

As technological advancements continue to influence and impact communities and culture, the need for people to maintain inter-personal communications skills will become a critical element that the stewards of Organization Development must champion. Artificial intelligence will change our world in ways that we cannot even begin to imagine. Organization development academicians, scholars, and practitioners must pay close attention to the impact of change and its effects on our collective humanism. Those who lead the field must pay close attention to the potential implications that technological advancements will have on all dimensions of interpersonal relationships. Organization development must stay in-step with and attuned to changes that are occurring at systems levels and be able to help people to navigate through the dynamics of innovation.

A Perspective from an OD Practitioner Who Directs a Non-OD Program

Julie Benesh

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet."
—Juliet, in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

Back in the 1980s I saw a flyer for George Williams College's organizational behavior program that made reference to Mac-Gregor's notion of "the human side of enterprise." My much younger self said, yes, please I need that! Thus, began my love affair with OD evolving from a courtship of stealth, to a legitimate union as an internal OD consultant, to fangirl-advocate as a professor, administrator, researcher, and volunteer. The conference reaffirmed my commitment to the cause.

Currently I teach and am a department chair in the "business psychology" area (includes business psychology, organizational leadership, and industrial-organizational psychology), at a professional psychology school. In our school, outside these programs, other faculty and administrators generally refer to us, for short as "business." We provide no OD degree, nor even any OD-labeled courses, per se. Yet several faculty and a likely majority of students would identify as OD practitioners. For us "everything (good) is OD." I first got to know these programs and this school when, as a practitioner and director of an OD department at an academic medical center I supervised interns among their students. My current role complements my volunteer work for my regional OD Network that meets for programs on our Chicago campus, as well as my small consulting practice.

The conference reinforced for me that OD's varying definitions are reflective of a range of practitioner and client worldviews and backgrounds. Organizations are human creations existing in tension between managerialist economic aims and human social needs. Outdated definitions have been challenged over the past few decades by a view of organizations as

complex systems of collective knowledge, decentralized power, and fragmented discourse. Yet, at the same time, the quaint old ways and the managerialist traditions that prompted them also live on in imagination, discourse, and practice. This has resulted in a bunch of contested norms like: Mainstream vs. Marginal, Elitist vs. Grassroots, Theoretical vs. Practical, Legitimate vs. Subversive, Strategic vs. Tactical, Set of Tools vs. Way of Being, Visible vs. Invisible.

Some might say our branding problem is that of not taking a stand as a profession, and, in the aggregate, at least, trying to be all things to all people. But this could be our strength. In the Gestalt approach to consulting, consultants embody the "missing presence" in the client system, manifesting various resources at different times depending on what is needed, consistent with the approach of the field-dependent "contextualist" worldview. The challenge of assuming this position of that which is missing is likely not so easily embraced or even accepted, or it wouldn't be missing in the first place. Moreover, what we OD practitioners might emanate deliberately and in good faith, false prophets and con artists may emulate cynically.

And our own reach may indeed exceed our grasp. This possibility is exemplified in a deliberately mixed metaphor often quoted by a mentor of mine, Dr. Peter Sorensen, "OD: where rubber hits the (pie in the) sky," and people's typical reactions to it. Peter is alluding to OD as the boundary between dreams and results and says this in a tone of admiration and conviction. Yet many people chuckle ruefully in response, considering the downside of lacking results and dashed dreams; OD as Icarus.

Yet to risk one's life, professional life, or profession, for a noble cause is an honorable endeavor. A final literary metaphor, this one with a social justice theme, comes to my mind: Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. At the end activist migrant worker Tom is about to flee, likely to be murdered and is saying good-bye to his mother:

> TOM JOAD: ... as long as I'm an outlaw anyways... maybe I can do somethin'... maybe I can just find out somethin',

just scrounge around and maybe find out what it is that's wrong and see if they ain't somethin' that can be done about it... I ain't thought it out all clear... I don't know enough.

MA JOAD: How am I gonna know about ya, Tommy? Why they could kill ya and I'd never know. They could hurt ya. How am I gonna know?

TOM JOAD: ... A fellow ain't got a soul of his own, just little piece of a big soul, the one big soul that belongs to every-body, then...

MA JOAD: Then what, Tom?

TOM JOAD: Then it don't matter. I'll be all around in the dark—I'll be every-where. Wherever you can look—wher-ever there's a fight, so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever there's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad. I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry and they know supper's ready, and when the people are eatin' the stuff they raise and livin' in the houses they build—I'll be there, too.

MA JOAD: I don't understand it, Tom.

Tom Joad: Me, neither, Ma, but—just somethin' I been thinkin' about.

All that has the potential for good, in soci-ety, systems, and organizations is OD. Fear-lessness, omnipresence and selflessness is one vision, my preferred vision of the future of OD, by any name, and I dedicate my career to supporting it.

A Perspective from a Program Director of a Newer OD Program

Tim Goodly

As an OD Practitioner and Director of an OD Doctorate Program, I left the OD Gath-ering in Baltimore with deep appreciation and gratitude for the session organizers, enthusiastic and passionate participants, and the wonderful legacy of the OD field. While looking toward the future with more questions than answers, six key themes emerged from the session that I believe OD Educators must address moving forward.

1. How do we teach OD history and make it relevant to new members of the field? The Baltimore gathering honorably paid homage to the first two waves of OD founders and trailblazers. While I was familiar with most of these names and some of their work, I heard stories of incredible people who were new to me. How do we keep our history fresh and relevant to newcomers? Should educators commit to teaching OD evolution?

2. How can emerging technology be used to enhance OD education and practice? The presentations in Baltimore clearly made the case that OD must acknowl-edge the potential and continual disrup-tion of emerging technology. On the plus side, nearly all instruction today can be enhanced by online platforms and innovative applications. On the other and potentially darker side, tech-nological singularity advocates suggest a dystopian future where the role of OD might involve developing theories and practices to help human systems interface with artificial ones. Should OD Education include a study of future and emergent trends in technology and their potential impact on our field?

3. How can OD educators embrace other fields and programs that are doing similar or actual OD work? Outside the corridors of the cozy Baltimore gather-ing, the "real world" includes a grow-ing number of professionals who call themselves change managers, change consultants, organization effective con-sultants, organizational strategists, and a host of other titles under which they perform duties and services tradition-ally thought to be OD. How can OD communities lure these professionals into the function and integrate their knowledge and experiences into our field?

4. What additional steps can OD educa-tors take to bridge the theory-practice divide? The current approach taken by most OD educators at the doctorate level is to emphasize practice in their curriculum and use select Visiting Scholars who are committed to both theory and practice. How do we create forums for traditional academics and OD practitioners to share ideas and commit to partnerships in service of our function?

5. How do OD educators further teach and promote the humanistic values upon which our field is founded? What is the role of OD theory and practice in leading values-based approaches to address issues at the local, national, and international level? For example, how can OD education and practice be leveraged to address the current climate of incivility in the US and the growing Corporate Social Responsibility move-ment across the globe?

6. What changes are needed in OD Educa-tion to attract and integrate Gen Xers and Millennials? The organizers of the Baltimore OD Gathering intention-ally created a mix of OD professionals across all generations in the workplace. The diversity of thought that emerged from this generational blend was both exciting and provocative. How can we leverage voices and ideas from these newer groups to review and modify our current and past practices to better prepare the field for future challenges?

A Perspective of a Program Director from a Long-Running OD Program

Deborah A. O'Neil

I had several observations during the conference that raised questions that I will continue to ponder. Below I describe these observations, my lingering ques-tions, and my thoughts, feelings and desires for and about the OD field. I share these from the perspective of an academic and OD educator.

First, OD is a big tent! There are so many people doing diverse types of work that are calling themselves OD practitio-ners (or maybe not calling themselves that, but doing the work nonetheless), i.e. diversity and inclusion, social justice, executive coaching, leadership develop-ment, team building, community organiz-ing, community development, nonprofit engagement, board development, strategic planning, organization design, etc. As a

field, this makes it difficult to describe the fundamental nature of the work, leading to a fragmented picture of exactly what OD encompasses. While it is an interdisciplinary field by its very nature, which yields positive results in terms of a multiplicity of ideas, can it be everything? And by trying to be everything is the impact of the field diluted, diffused, and diminished? Bushe's exhortation at the conference to "own our touchy-feelyness," and acknowledge that we are about "inquiry, engagement, and relationships"; that we should focus OD programs on developing humans who can create great organizations. I believe many are doing just that in these diverse ways and multiple arenas, which perhaps while it makes the field more difficult to describe, makes its impact more widespread.

Second, it seemed many attendees were looking for answers: Answers to: What is OD? What is the future of OD? How can OD become more highly valued in the world? Where do I fit in this field? What is my contribution to this work? I wondered if we were all looking for certainty in an uncertain world. We in the OD field surely are not immune to the anxieties caused by our inability to predict and control our worlds any more than are the organizations with which we work. Can we let go and be present with all the angst that accompanies such a stance in order to inquire openly into ourselves and our organizational systems in service of creating better societal conditions? What if we did not seek the answers but sought the questions instead? What might we collectively discover and/or create from that standpoint?

Third, I was struck by the palpable need for community, inclusion, and belonging exhibited by so many participants. Given that OD is fundamentally about relationships, that may not be surprising, but it seemed like people were hungry for others of like minds to acknowledge and affirm their value and their place in the world. In fact, during the generational break-out sessions, the millennial group asked that the field "make space for us." It seemed to be a plea for access and inclusion. Since I think of the field as a big tent as referenced above, it had not

occurred to me that some individuals may not feel as welcomed. Are we as a field preaching inclusion while somehow practicing exclusion? Are we also behaving in North American-centric ways while preaching a global perspective? Perhaps my big tent is smaller and has more impenetrable boundaries than I initially thought.

Finally, it seemed that some participants had less familiarity with the founders of the field and the foundational theories upon which the field was built. What does this mean for academics whose purpose is to educate this and the next generation of OD leaders, and add to the scholarship of the field? We must balance the need for techniques and methods with the behavioral sciences that form the basis for our work and the humanistic values that shape the why and the way of our work. As an OD graduate program director, I am resolved to continue to situate our instruction firmly in the fundamentals of the field, and to explicitly connect practice to those fundamentals in service of educating skilled, knowledgeable scholar-practitioners.

What I wish for the field of OD is that we:

» Free ourselves from the need to legitimize and explain what we do,
» Own our place in and our value to the world, and
» Become a generative force for good.

I do not know that the conference changed my thoughts, feelings, or desires about the field of OD as I have always been a steadfast OD advocate; these are ideas I have been contemplating for the last decade in my role as a faculty member in one of the first and still thriving graduate OD programs in the US. These are questions I will continue to explore. Perhaps the best way to describe what the conference did for me, is that it encouraged me to proselytize even more volubly and more extensively than I have previously done about the importance of developing human potential and unleashing human innovation and empowerment. This is the fundamental value proposition of OD, and I am a true believer determined to welcome all who are willing to join into the tent.

From a Long Time OD Scholar-Practitioner

David W. Jamieson

This is not the first time we have discussed what is OD and what is the future. So, there is déjà vu and while there are some things we need to adapt and improve, the main message from me is to truly understand what OD is and does, fundamentally, and why that is still useful (with some adaptations) in the future we seem to be embedded in.

As we look to our future, there are many foundations that need to be re-energized and carried forward and there are some aspects of our work I hope can be adapted to our current contexts. A full understanding of OD includes *OD as a mindset* that involves a different way of seeing organizations, organization life, and individual and organization change:

» Includes all types of organized collectives and places where humans gather to conduct some purpose;
» Organizations are multi-disciplinary collaboratives across both technical and social dimensions (e.g., finance, human resources, engineering, information systems, operations and strategic leadership);
» With an open socio-technical systems perspective: context counts; technology and people get work done; strategy, design, and culture drive/guide behavior, etc.;
» Valuing both organization productivity and results and people's welfare and development;
» Bringing learning and capability improvements into the processes of development and change;
» A humanistic philosophic stance supporting how people can make a huge difference in outcomes when included, engaged, and rewarded;
» A cyclical, inclusive approach to understand "what is," "what can be," and determining action-taking for development/change that can succeed in each system; and

» Integration across many disciplines is necessary to understand and change organizations.

Within this mindset, there are numerous avenues for creating great organizations with different tools, types of interventions, and ways of working with system participants. Rather than act like all the differences and specialties are separate fields, we need to see them as sharing similar goals, values, and desired outcomes, just using different methods within the same mindset.

However, at a minimum, this mindset attends to the "whole system" scope and dynamics. It also strongly suggests that there is always a *learning component* in developing and changing organizations. People have to deal with new complexities and unknowns and every system has unique dynamics to understand. "One size fits all" never worked and it will not in the future! Learning involves both the initial acts of understanding any system and the subsequent aspects of how actions impact that system.

Some adaptations that seem highly useful in our present contexts:

» Bring learning cycles front and center in the increased complexity coupled with increased speed of actions. Use more inquiry-oriented methods since much of what we know from the past will not help a lot in a new future.

» Hold on to the values, practices, and processes that bring the appropriate perspectives into the change work, allow for creating needed ownership within the people implementing or most affected, and enhance motivations and engagement that don't destroy pride, worth, or fairness.

» Address the speed issue. Some is necessary and some is driven by the wrong goals. OD was never seen as speedy, however, we must understand the purposes and reasons for many of our foundations. Skipping important steps is not the answer! Remember there are some things that take some time and are worthwhile in the long run. If you are baking bread, the dough still has to rise. Too much change today is driven by panic and survival and is being done very poorly.

» Kurt Lewin did not know what would work in real field settings and developed action research as a way to use shorter cycles of jointly engaged data, action, assessment, and reflection. The same makes sense in our new world. Learn faster, experiment with action-taking in these complex socio-tech systems, revise faster and try again. Keep more in the hands of the people directly involved and they will get smarter, more creative, and more capable to lead and change their system.

» We need more education and practice in the *design* aspects of organization change and stop just relying on packaged programs, one size fits all or trendy activities. More creative, customized designs for change will be needed and that means studying the fundamentals, not just the specifics of techniques.

» One of our most important concepts, use of Self has the least documentation or literature to help new entrants to the field. In the work of change, how we show up and execute our roles has a large influence on how our impact on others either helps or hinders in their development and the organization's ability to change. Working in today's higher dimensions of diversity and complexity will challenge us all to continue to learn about ourselves throughout our lives so we can relate well, manage our habitual, flawed and shadow behaviors, and be more effective in our roles.

If enough people in this shattered field could get on the same page about the field and its value today, we might have a chance to re-energize and bring the field into the unique challenges and grand issues of our day. We will also need to re-vitalize how OD learning takes place in management programs and those designed for OD and Change professionals. We need to start pitching the same BIG MESSAGE while using our variety of methods under the same mindset tent. Too much individuation has nearly destroyed this field. I'm proud of how the founders operated and created much of what we still use. Let's give them some credit, stand on their shoulders, and take the field forward into new contexts!

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