Organization
Development
Review

JOURNAL OF THE ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

Organization Development Network

Inspirations for the Future of OD & the Reality of Our Work

Organization Development Review

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From the Editor

Inspirations for the Future of OD & the Reality of Our Work

Welcome to 2021. We all hope that getting past 2020 will bring better health, business, and life improvements for all! We are lining up a year of very interesting publications.

Overview of This Issue

Much of this issue has been in the works for most of last year. Our first set of articles were curated by **Matt Minahan**, one of the leaders of the **OD Gathering** that met and worked from 2017–2019. This set captures the collective outcomes of hundreds of people working together during and in-between the three gatherings in December of each of those years and focused on our field in the future.

The second set was managed by **Marc Sokol**, *ODR* Associate Editor. The main article proposes some research-based aspects of why culture is so hard to change. The commentaries provide a wide range of perspectives on the article and different ways of thinking about the topic.

In this issue, the first set of contributions are about us as a profession, while the second set are a set of perspectives on a substantial area of our work with organizations, the culture!

New Associate Editor for Blind Reviews

Dr. Anton Shufutinsky has joined our team to organize and develop this option for the *ODR*. This has been an option for a couple of years, but processes and management were never fully developed. As this type of request has been increasing, we wish to accommodate them as well as we have long managed our open, peer-review processes.

Coming in the Future

Following this issue, our Special Issues, *In an Era of Transformative and Traumatic Disruptions… What can OD Bring?*, will follow in Issues 2 & 3. The response to the Call in early 2020 was fantastic and has produced enough final articles for two issues of the journal.

This amount of "special" types of content limits the normal number of regular issues created from new submissions. So, we are planning an added issue later this year which can accommodate accepted submissions during this year. This will allow for two mixed-content, regular issues in 2021.

Please consider what you can write for the *OD Review*. Submissions can come in anytime and will be reviewed, revised as needed and slotted into next open issues. Look for new processes being created for submission and review process management.

Practicing OD
Editors: Stacey Heath, Deb Peters, and Rosalind Spigel

The article in this issue is by **Susanna Katsman**, on "Are performance development processes developmental?", tying adult development with employee development to raise the system capacities for the future.

David W. Jamieson, PhD
Editor-in-Chief
editor@odnetwork.org

Former Editors

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
Marilyn E. Blair	2000–2008
John D. Vogelsang	2009–2019

Introducing New *OD Review* Associate Editor

In our efforts to improve structures, processes, and operations of the OD Review, *we recently restructured our editorial team by adding Associate Editors. They assist the Editor in the review and revision processes, provide ongoing input to our decisions, guide some of our further development work to improve the* ODR *and its standing, and help in soliciting/outreach to enhance our submissions. We are pleased to welcome Anton Shufutinsky to our editorial team as an Associate Editor.*
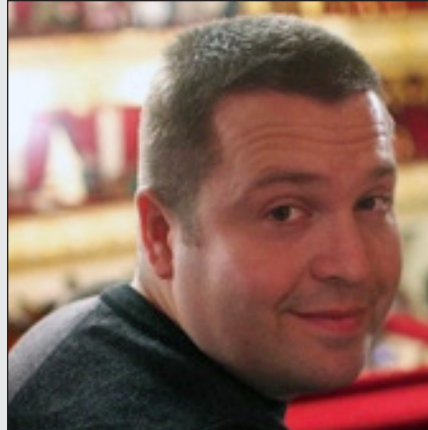
Anton Shufutinsky, PhD, DHSc, MSPH, has over 25 years of leadership, management, and organizational science experience in the military, corporate industry, consulting, and academia. He has worked extensively in a diversity of industries and organization types, internally and as a consultant. Currently, Anton is a faculty member in the School of Business, Arts, and Media at Cabrini University, where he teaches in the PhD program in organization development and change and coordinates the MS in leadership program.

Anton is an experienced researcher with over 20 years of experience in science, health science, behavioral science, management, and OD field research and he has authored over 40 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters. Anton is a member and is actively involved in numerous ODN, NTL, ISODC, ILA, and AOM projects, committees, and activities. He has been on numerous editorial boards for professional journals and magazines and is currently serving as Associate Editor, Assistant Editor, or Peer-Reviewer for *Organization Development Review, International Journal of Organizational Innovation, Organization Development Journal, Journal of Veterans Studies,* and for special issues in other journals.

His research and practice foci include leadership development; organization design; diversity, equity, & inclusion; sociotechnical systems; organizational research methods; neuroscience & leadership; and organizational safety culture. He holds masters and doctoral degrees in public health, and a second doctorate— a PhD in Organizational Development from Cabrini University.

Anton consults internationally in Italy, Russia, Spain, Israel, and England. He lives with his family in the Greater Philadelphia Area and can be reached at *as4363@cabrini.edu*.

With regards to his appointment to the Editorial Board of *ODR*, Anton remarked:

> "I feel honored to have the opportunity to serve as the Blind Review Editor and look forward to working with the editorial team to further develop and streamline the submission, review, and feedback process for improved experience, efficiency, and effectiveness."

Guidelines for Authors

Our Purpose

The *Organization Development Review* is a journal bringing together scholarly and practitioner perspectives to foster greater understanding, improved practice, new research, and innovations for critical issues in our fields. We focus on all processes of human organizing, such as small groups, organizations, networks & communities. Our scope is wide within the broad range of:

1) How human organizing systems develop, adapt, change and transform.
2) How we lead more effectively and develop effective organizations.
3) How we create healthy workplaces and cultures that get the work done and leave people engaged, proud, and satisfied.
4) How we support all forms of diversity, equality, and inclusion in organizing and operating organizations, communities, and societies.
5) How we develop greater individual and organizational capabilities for our VUCA world.
6) How we develop greater creativity, innovation, and collaborative processes.
7) How we create a more humane and just society.
8) How we develop and innovate in the profession.
9) How we educate leaders and change agents, of all types, in the science and practices of values-based change and masterful practice.
10) Case studies that demonstrate the impact of OD and OD in collaboration with other fields of inquiry and practice.

We publish evidence-based practice, applied research, innovative ways to do this work, new developments in the fields, as well as, thought pieces, invitational pieces, cases, and relevant book reviews. We hope for wide participation across our fields, around the globe, across sectors & industries, and inclusive of all forms of diversities. We wish to generate more conversations and dialogues among our fields. We ask that all submissions reflect the OD Network values to the extent possible and as applicable to your topic and type of submission as follows:

Humanity First
» **We are stewards** of OD principles to shepherd us through the fourth industrial revolution; elevating humanity by focusing on the human side of the organizing enterprise.

Service Focused
» **We are advocates** of the advancement and embedding of the thought processes and practices of OD by doing no harm and leaving the world better than how we met it.

Courage to Act
» **We are catalysts** for development leading to transformation, leveraging a balanced and positive voice, even in times of adversity.

Integrity
» **We are activists for acting with honesty** and transparency in our internal and external interactions to generate trust and confidence among all.

Collaborative and Inclusive
» **We are co-creators, hosting the space** to welcome novel contributions, connecting adjacent disciplines, thereby making our strategic partnerships and member engagement stronger.

Expectations of Authors

All articles should:
» Be submitted with names on articles and on e-docs
» Clearly state the purpose of the article and its content
» Present ideas logically, with clear transitions
» Include section headings to help guide readers
» Use language that reflects inclusivity and is non-discriminatory in the context of the article
» Avoid jargon and overly formal expressions
» Reference sources used and provide source references for any theories, ideas, methods, models and practices not created by the author(s)
» Conform to English (US version) standards and be edited for spelling and grammar rules
» Avoid self-promotion
» Be useful in practice or provide implications for practitioners (leaders, change agents, etc.)
» For formatting guidelines, citations, and references, follow the *American Psychological Association Publication Manual, 7th Edition* (2020)
» Submit as Word document, not pdf or email form; the document should contain short title and author name
» Always have title and name on documents
» Include an abstract and key words

Guidelines for Authors (contd.)

» Contain short author bios including contact email(s) (up to 250 words)

» Graphics that enhance an article are encouraged. The *ODR* reserves the right to resize graphics when necessary. The graphics should be in a program that allows editing. We prefer graphics to match the *ODR*'s three-, two-, or one-column, half-page, or full-page formats. If authors have questions or concerns about graphics or computer art, please contact the Editor.

We consider articles of varying lengths between 2000–5000 words. Contact the Editor with any questions, ideas, or explorations (*editor@odnetwork.org*).

If the article is accepted for publication, the author will receive a PDF proof of the article for final approval before publication. At this stage the author may only fix errors in typesetting or minor changes to the text. After publication, the author will be sent a PDF of the final article and of the complete issue of *ODR* in which the article appears.

Submission Deadlines

Authors should email articles to the editor at *editor@odnetwork.org*. **Articles can be submitted at any time** and if accepted, will be included in an appropriate upcoming issue. General deadlines for articles being targeted for quarterly issues are as follows:

Winter Issue (Jan–Mar): **October 1**
Spring Issue (Apr–June): **January 1**
Summer Issue (July–Sept): **April 1**
Fall Issue (Oct–Dec): **July 1**

The Review Processes

The *ODR* is a peer reviewed journal. Authors can choose between two review processes and should *notify the Editor which they prefer when they submit a manuscript:*

Process 1 (open peer review): Submit with cover page including title, all authors, any acknowledgements, and a short abstract. Usually, two members of the *ODR* Editorial Board will review the article. They will recommend accepting the article for publication, pursuing publication after suggested changes, or rejecting the article. If they decide the article is publishable with changes, one or both of the editorial board members will email or call the primary author to discuss the suggested changes and serve as coaches in helping the author(s) prepare it for publication. Once the author(s) has made the changes to the satisfaction of the two editorial board members, it will be sent to the Editor for final determination. If it is now accepted, the *ODR* Editor will work with the authors to finalize the article for publication.

Process 2 (double blind peer review): This option is offered to meet the standards of many academic institutions. Submit articles with a separate cover page with the article's title, all authors' identifying and contact information, and brief biographies (100–250 words) for each of the authors with emails; also include any acknowledgements. On a new page, provide an abbreviated title running head for the article. Do not include any author identifying information in the body of the article, other than on the separate title page. Two members of the editorial board will independently receive the article without the author's information and without knowing the identity of the other reviewer. Each reviewer will recommend accepting the article for publication, rejecting the article with explanation, or sending the article back to the author for revision and resubmittal. Recommendations for revision and resubmittal will include detailed feedback on what is required to make the article publishable.

Each *ODR* Board member will send their recommendation to the *ODR* Editor. If the Editor asks the author to revise and resubmit, the Editor will send the article to both reviewers after the author has made the suggested changes. The two members of the editorial board will work with the author on any further changes, then send it to the *ODR* Editor for preparation for publication. The *ODR* Editor makes the final decision about whether the articles will be published.

Timing Considerations

» When initially submitted, one should expect four weeks for review time, reviewer collaboration, and author feedback

» If reviewers/editor suggest revisions and resubmit, the article should be returned *within 4 weeks* (unless it is slated for an immediate issue in which case it should be returned *within 1–2 weeks*)

Other Publications

The *ODR* publishes **original articles**, not reprints from other publications or journals. Authors may re-publish materials first published in the *ODR* in another publication or webpage, as long as the publication gives credit to the *Organization Development Review* as the original place of publication.

Policy on Self-Promotion

Although publication in the *ODR* is a way of letting the OD community know about an author's work, and is therefore good publicity, the purpose of the *ODR* is to exchange ideas and information. Consequently, it is the policy of the OD Network to not accept articles that are primarily for the purpose of marketing or advertising an author's practice or promoting or selling anything.

Organization Development Network

Advancing the Science, Practice & Impact of OD
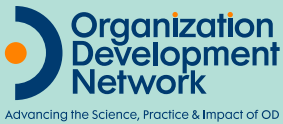
THE OD
GATHERING
2017–2019

"When multiple people feel the same itch at the same time, you have the makings of a movement."

From the Founders to the Future

A Gathering to Build OD for Tomorrow's World

By Matt Minahan

Author's Note: As this and the following articles were being written, thousands of people around the world are dying of the coronavirus, the US is starting to address its legacy of racism and white supremacy, a seditious mob has occupied the Capitol, and a political transition is underway. We acknowledge that, given the urgency and importance of these national and international issues, a long and deep dive into the future of organization development might seem irrelevant and tone deaf. Our challenge is to faithfully represent work that has occurred over the three years prior to the recent turmoils. We believe that by being clear and honest about ourselves and our field in the following special section on The Gathering, we will all better be able to respond and take action on the current and future challenges that face our world.

It is hard to know precisely when an itch starts. Once it reaches into our consciousness, we often realize the same spot has been itching for a while. Sometimes a long time. Sometimes that itch draws attention to a larger problem.

Most itches are felt in just one person's body. When multiple people feel the same itch at the same time, you have the makings of a movement.

That's a lot of what was behind the creation of The Gathering, a series of three three-day face-to-face meetings in 2017–2019. That was the best way to scratch this itch which many of us in OD were feeling, especially in 2016.

Fred Miller, Bob Marshak, and I had been attending in 2016 what we thought was going to be an OD conference that instead felt much more like the roll out of an HR initiative.

The event was so bad that I paid the airline change fee and left early. Others coped differently: longer days in downtown Atlanta, more tours of Ebenezer Baptist Church and CNN, more walks along Peachtree Street. The more we spoke with people attending the conference, the more we realized that it was not just our itch, but that of many others as well.

Other than, "This isn't what we came for, this isn't what OD is all about, and let's not ever do this again," we didn't really know what was itching. But we knew it needed to be scratched, it had been itching for a long time, and there was probably something deeper going on.

As I arrived at the airport to fly home, Fred Miller called and said, "We need to do something different. Better. Will you join me and Bob Marshak in that?" Me: "In what?" Fred: "Let's create it." Me: "What's it?" Fred: "Let's do OD. Get some like-minded, good-hearted people together and figure it out." How to say no to that?

Rounding Up Fellow Travelers to Co-Create

We reached out to a diverse group of creative fellow travelers to form The Convening Group to help figure out what was itching and how to scratch it.

The first thing we knew is that the field of OD wasn't having deep, intense, long form conversations about itself and our role in the world that we longed for. Yes, there were fragments and bits and pieces and articles and books but nothing that offered coherence or a vision of the field. There was no place for the long form, deeply personal interactions that we know are the centerpiece of concerted action.

There was no place for all of the fragments of the field to come together to find common ground. There were lots of people doing coaching, diversity and inclusion, organization design, team building, community organizing, strategic planning, culture change, communications, training, talent management and other disciplines all busily working in our own silos, convinced that we held the real keys to what OD really is. But there wasn't much conversation or understanding across the disciplines.

Each discipline has connections to OD, but as the field has broadened and diversified, the connections have become more tenuous. In many ways, we have created the silos in our field that we work in our client systems to overcome.

We were also aware that we didn't have a way to hear from the broad diversity of OD practitioners, by race, gender, identity, nationality, and culture.

Not only was the itch commonly shared, but it was taking us deeper into larger systemic problems.

A Gathering?

What if we could bring together a diverse group of people across disciplines, identities, locations, and ages for deeper, more concentrated conversations about who we are as OD people to find common ground and create a future for ourselves and the field that others could take forward? How could we share the fundamental, foundational wisdom of the founders of the field with these newer generations that had never sat rocking with Edie and Charlie Seashore, or sat in a circle with Bob Tannenbaum, or watched Elsie Cross speak her truth about being a black woman in the US?

We realized that the founding generation of OD had passed along principles and values and beliefs about the field that now lived within us and that needed to be heard today. We also wanted to turn the futuring over to the young people who would be taking the field forward. That brought us to **From the Founders to the Future: A Gathering to Build OD for Tomorrow's World**.

Quickly, some design parameters emerged. This effort needed to be a bottoms-up, inductive, inclusive process. It needed to build momentum and be sustained over time; three three-day gatherings would be needed. Somewhere between 100–125 participants at each event seemed large enough for critical mass but small enough for real work to get done. Managing the invitations was the only way to assure that we had enough of the various disciplines and demographics to assure that representation and power were fairly and evenly distributed among the participants. Selecting an east coast city would enable affordable airfares from Africa, Europe, and the Americas. (We also had at least two participants attend from Asia.) The design needed to have structure but loads of space for pairs and small groups and topics to arise in real time out of the work in the room.

We agreed that the series of Gatherings was about:

» Creating compelling content and interaction…
» That is interesting and appealing to a widely diverse group of 125 people…
» Designed in a way that is highly engaging…
» Releasing the wisdom in the room…
» Connecting our past and our history…
» To influence the future of the field… in order to shape the future of the world.

The 2017 Gathering

The first-year efforts in the 2017 Gathering were about building community, finding common ground across our disciplines and demographic diversity, bringing forth from the community the lessons of the founders, and looking forward into the world of work and OD in the future. After a spirited activity to get all voices into the room, we invited a diverse panel of participants to share their personal knowledge and experiences with our most senior OD founders and teachers in a session called **The Founders: What I Have Learned and Do as a Result**. Looking forward, The Clearing brought us Jens Hansen on **The Future of Work** with some shocking truths about artificial intelligence and automation and the

Figure 1: Word cloud reactions from participants after the 2017 Gathering.

implications for organizational leadership, strategy, culture, and the workforce. Then Gervase Bushe addressed **New Directions for OD: Implications for Our Role, Identity, and Impact Beyond Diagnostic, Dialogic OD.**

We had found an itch felt by many and had begun to get beneath it. Having accomplished our modest goals for the 2017 Gathering, we started to think big picture. How could we best serve the field of OD with six more days over the next two years and another hundred or so invited volunteers? Could we put these prodigious talents to work on generating knowledge? On tackling the challenges that have faced the field for decades? On producing a document to share with the world? On what topics? We decided to open the Gathering with exactly that question.

The 2018 Gathering

The 2018 Gathering began with community building to reach out inclusively to the new participants who had not attended in 2017, followed by a presentation from Darshi Modi, Adi Brown, Nadia Bello, Joel Brown, Holly Brittingham, and Chris Young of the Gen X group, challenging us to hold our *roots* more lightly in order to see what *routes* might emerge:

"*If you think of culture always as a return to roots—R-O-O-T-S—you're missing the point. I think of culture as routes—R-O-U-T-E-S—the various routes by which people travel, culture travels, culture moves, culture develops, culture changes, cultures migrate, etc.*"
—*Stuart Hall*
Culture is always a translation

Futurist Margaret Regan brought a strong message about the future of diversity along with her voice-activated robot Jibo about the future of brain chips, virtual worlds, gene editing, 3D printed pills and food, writing, and even group facilitation. Her message was both compelling and frightening, and she shared with us
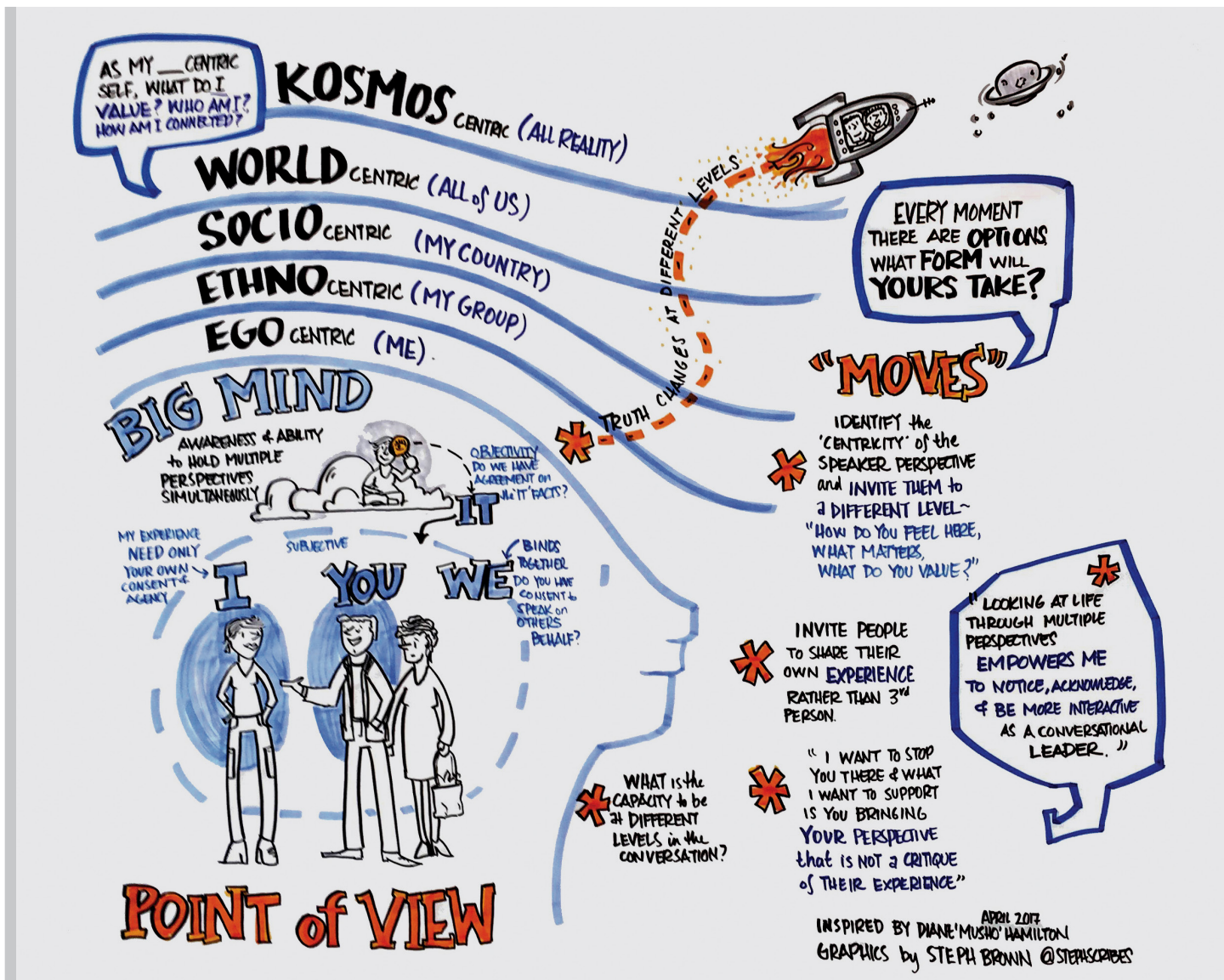
the *Future Trend Cards* created for the DEI Futures Project.

Synthesizing the results of several concurrent sessions, we identified four topics to be explored by Circles of Work:

» What is the Definition of OD?
» What is the essence of OD, the vision for the field, and the critical needs to be addressed?
» What values are needed to sustain the field and the world for the future
» What competencies does the field need, which morphed into capabilities for the future?

Having a common statement on the unique value that OD provides to society, organizations, and individuals can further unite OD professionals regardless of their individual role or focus in the field and allow us all to collectively pull in the same direction as we strive to have a positive impact on the world. It can help to define the loose, permeable boundaries which delineate the field of OD from adjacent fields, shape our identity, and offer a light by which to guide the practice of OD as we move into the future.

Volunteers gathered around the topics of their interest. selected leaders for each of the Circles, began to define their task, and develop a plan for their next several meetings.

Most Circles met 6–8 times in the first part of 2019, though there were many more meetings among Circle leaders, including in September when all of the Circles presented their work to each other for feedback and alignment.

In October, they presented their work to The Gathering Convening Group so we could finalize the design for the last of our three Gatherings.

Our first Gathering took 9 months to plan, 14 drafts to design, and 10 pages to outline. By now, we were so clear about the Circles of Work and the way forward that our third Gathering took 6 weeks to plan, just two drafts, and the design fit onto one page.

The 2019 Gathering

There was no doubt that the purpose of the 2019 Gathering was to honor and build on the work of the four Circles, to bring each to the full community, to consider and integrate common points across all four, and to leave with a 90% version of each of four topics.

After community building to integrate new members who had not participated in the previous Gatherings, each group presented its work to the full community, followed by small group conversations and feedback. Overnight, the design team pored over the notes and flipcharts to identify cross cutting themes which the Circles then considered and integrated. Members were invited to visit other Circles to listen for themes and to cross fertilize.

The four Circles left with the commitment to integrate the feedback and consider multiple views in creating their 95% solutions. In the spring of 2020, the Convening Group met to integrate and align the work of the four Circles into a "final draft" for broad consultation.

And Then…

And then life happened. The country expanded its reckoning on race, now taking more seriously the challenges of white domination of power structures and wealth, creating huge work demands especially among the staff at Kaleel Jamieson Consulting Group, which has been providing the organizational and logistical support to The Gathering. The virus happened to all of us, blowing up our plans for face-to-face working and editing sessions and further slowing down our progress.

As this goes to press, we are receiving endorsements and letters of praise and support from individuals and organizations around the world. We are collating the work of the four Circles into a document for publishing to the web and in hard copy. We are planning to publish it in 2021, with an invitation to consultants, teachers, scholars, and researchers to use it as a starting point for their own personal and professional work From the Founders to the Future.

The Itch, Scratched. The Future Clearer. The OD Body Stronger

The output of the four Circles of Work was developed by OD scholars and practitioners. We used our OD tools and knowledge to create a statement about OD's vision for a better world and what OD can and must do to achieve it. We have used solid and well-established research methods to generate a list of OD values based on the input from hundreds of people. We have used an open and collaborative process by a diverse group of scholars and practitioners to create a consensus definition of what OD is, including several authors who have developed their own definitions. And we have put a stake in the ground about what capabilities OD practitioners and the field as a whole will need to achieve all of this.

Taken together, this work is intended to advance a shared understanding of the field's intrinsic core—its heart and soul. Having a common statement on the unique value that OD provides to society, organizations, and individuals can further unite OD professionals regardless of their individual role or focus in the field and allow us all to collectively pull in the same direction as we strive to have a positive impact on the world. It can help to define the loose, permeable boundaries which delineate the field of OD from adjacent fields, shape our identity, and offer a light by which to guide the practice of OD as we move into the future.

This new focus is essential to build excitement and energy for the vital work performed by OD scholars and practitioners and attract individuals to enter and study the field. Bringing in new, diverse talent to the OD field, whether students starting out their careers or individuals transitioning from other professions, ensures we can continue to positively impact the people we serve now and in the future.

Specifically, we hope that this work would encourage you to:

» reflect on the outputs in relation to your own practice to determine the extent to which your work aligns with these concepts.
» discuss the outputs with your colleagues and clients to create your unique instances of contact with others.
» integrate the outputs into frameworks, documents and curricula maintained by key OD networks and institutions.
» share your thoughts, ideas, and feedback with the authors of these articles and the Conveners.

Through conversation, engagement, and contact around these outputs, we hope that both current professionals and future generations may align around the concept that we are guided by the same north star as we all strive, each in our unique way, and contribute toward the achievement of a unified vision for the world, societies, organizations, and the individuals within them.

What follows here are articles written by the four Circles of Work. Each represents three years of thinking, writing, talking, consulting, revising. Each contributes to the larger whole that The Gathering constructed in 9 days of face-to-face meeting over 3 years and countless hours of work in between.

Matt Minahan is one of the organizers of The Gathering. He is President of MM & Associates, an international consulting firm specializing in strategy, structure, leadership development, and communications. Matt's clients are in the private and public sectors, implementing enterprise-wide change programs, including business strategy, mission, business process simplification, new structures, and communications. He worked as an internal for the first 15 years of his OD career, starting the OD function at The World Bank in 1990. Since 1997, he has been President of The Minahan Group. Along with several colleagues gathered at an OD Network conference on Large Group Systems in Dallas in 1995, he founded and ran the OD Network's list serve, called ODNet, with 12 specialized lists and over 3500 members at its height. He attended and blogged about each of the OD Network conferences from 2001 through 2014; his reports can be found on the Network's website. He is a former Chair of the Board of Trustees of the OD Network and the 2020 recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the OD Network. He is former board member and an active member and volunteer for NTL Institute. He teaches in the MSOD program at American University, and is a guest lecturer at Benedictine University, George Washington University, and several other universities. He presents at regional, national, and international conferences, has published numerous articles in OD Network publications, including the *OD Practitioner*, the *OD Review*, *Practicing*, and *Seasonings*. He is a contributing editor to the *OD Network's Handbook for Strategic HR*, and has contributed chapters to several OD books. He can be reached at *matt@minahangroup.com*.

No one Circle can possibly represent all of OD; however, taken together, the four Circles create a portrait of a field that is at its essence optimistic in the face of daunting changes in global economics, humanistic in the face of machines and artificial intelligence that encroach on the boundaries of humanity, emphatic about demanding a more just and equitable world for all people in all places, and equally emphatic in our commitment to advancing organizational performance and individual development in a more just and resilient world.

A three-year effort like this happens with the support of many hands. Thanks to the members of The Convening Group for your sustained commitment and engagement, including Bob Marshak, Bridget O'Brien, Fred Miller, Ilene Wasserman, Judith Katz, and Norm Jones. Thanks to all of the volunteers who supported our work in planning and onsite. Many thanks to the leadership and staff of the Kaleel Jamieson Consulting Group for providing all of the logistical support in planning, printing, producing, shipping, budgeting, hotel negotiating, credit card processing, and web site creation and maintenance. Thanks also to The Clearing for publishing the integrated report from The Gathering. Mostly, though, thanks to the almost 300 people who gave of their time and energy to join us in **From the Founders to the Future: A Gathering to Build OD for Tomorrow's World**.

Organization
Development
Network

Advancing the Science, Practice & Impact of OD

THE OD
GATHERING
2017–2019

What is the Definition of OD?

Report on the *Definition of Organization Development (OD)* Circle of Work

By Julie Smendzuik-O'Brien,
Yabome Gilpin-Jackson

What is the definition of Organization Development (OD)? This seemingly basic and foundational question of the OD field is one that emerging and seasoned scholars and practitioners continue to ask and indeed may not be an unfamiliar question to readers of this article.

The Result

The response, crafted by the representative working group of scholars and practitioners in the field of OD who were part of the OD Gathering, was as follows:

> **Organization Development** (OD) *refers to the interdisciplinary field of scholars and practitioners who work collaboratively with organizations and communities to develop their system-wide capacity for effectiveness and vitality. It is grounded in the organization and social sciences.*

The Definition Circle arrived here, after a review of 38 variations of OD definitions in the literature (see *Table 1*).

When the Circle groups were formed at the Gathering, 18 participants elected to work with the Definition Circle. A leadership team of four individuals was then identified from the Circle. Because of the thematic idea of building for the future and because of the claim to the future by the Generation X participants during the 2017 OD Gathering, the leadership team was consciously composed of one Gen X, one boomer, and two millennials. The roles of these four were facilitator, co-facilitator, recorder, and a co-designer who also kept

the group honest. The members of the Circle are noted at the end of this article. This initial Circle of four leaders and others who subsequently joined the leadership group are asterisked.

Circle members launched into the work, well aware of the challenges to be faced. The definition and viability of OD has long been debated. The long-standing definition by Dick Beckhard described OD as: an effort (1) planned, (2) organization-wide, and (3) managed from the top, to (4) increase organization effectiveness and health through (5) planned interventions in the organization's "processes," using behavioral-science knowledge (Beckhard, 2006). This definition opens every textbook and handbook of OD. While this definition is foundational and widely accepted, many in the Circle considered it to now be incomplete. The core inquiry questions included:

1. What type of applied science is OD—behavioral, social, organizational, interdisciplinary?
2. How does OD apply to scholars and practitioners working in emergent, complex, collaborative (rather than top-down) and generative change contexts?
3. What are the desired outcomes of our OD practice—effectiveness and health? Resilience? Development? Transformation? Other?
4. Who is the target audience for OD work—individual leaders, groups, teams, communities?
5. What is the best descriptor of the scope of OD—a field, a discipline, an applied social science, a discipline, a profession?

Table 1. *Definitions Collected by the Definition Circle, 2019*

	Author	Year	Definition
1	Beckhard	1969	Organization development is an effort (1) planned, (2) organization-wide, and (3) managed from the top, to (4) increase organizational effectiveness and health through (5) planned interventions in the organization's "processes," using behavior science knowledge.
2	Bennis	1969	Organization development (OD) is a response to change, a complex educational strategy intended to change the beliefs, attitudes, values, and structure of organizations so that they can better adapt to new technologies, markets, and challenges, and the dizzying rate of change itself.
3	Blake & Mouton	1969	Organization development emphasizes the "O" in every sense of the word. It means development of the entire organization or self-sustaining parts of an organization from top to bottom and throughout. True OD is theory based, team-focused and undertaken by means of self-help approaches which place a maximum reliance upon internal skills and leadership for development activities. It is top lead, line managed and staff supported. Development activities focus on the "system," those traditions, precedents, and past practices which have become the culture of the organization. Therefore, development must include individual, team and other organization units rather than concentrating on any one to the exclusion of others. OD is thus this comprehensive approach which integrates the management sciences, business logic, and behavioral systems of an organization into an organic, interdependent whole.
4	French	1969	Organization development refers to a long range effort to improve an organization's problem-solving capabilities and its ability to cope with changes in its external environment with the help of external or internal behavioral scientist consultants, or change agents, as they are sometimes called.
5	Golembiewski	1969	Organizational development implies a normative, re-education strategy intended to affect systems of beliefs, values, and attitudes within the organization so that it can adapt better to the accelerated rate of change in technology, in our industrial environment and society in general. It also includes formal organizational restructuring which is frequently initiated, facilitated and reinforced by the normative and behavioral changes.
6	Lippitt	1969	Organization development is the strengthening of those human processes in organizations which improve the functioning of the organic system so as to achieve its objectives. Organization renewal is the process of initiating, creating, and confronting needed changes so as to make it possible for organizations to become or remain viable, to adapt to new conditions, to solve problems, to learn from experiences, and to move toward greater organizational maturity.
7	Schmuck & Miles	1971	Organizational Development can be defined as a planned and sustained effort to apply behavior science for system improvement, using reflexive, self-analytic methods.
8	Burke & Hornstein	1972	Organization development is a process of planned change—change of an organization's culture from one which avoids an examination of social process (especially decision making, planning, and communication) to one which institutionalizes and legitimizes this examination.

Continues next page

	Author	Year	Definition
9	Hall	1977	Organizational development refers to a long-range effort to improve an organization's problem-solving capabilities and its ability to cope with changes in its external environment with the help of external or internal behavior-scientist consultants or change agents.
10	French & Bell	1978	Organization development is a long-range effort to improve an organization's problem-solving and renewal processes, particularly through a more effective and collaborative management of organization culture—with special emphasis on the culture of formal work teams—with the assistance of a change agent, or catalyst, and the use of the theory and technology of applied behavioral science, including action research.
11	Beer	1980	Organization development is a system-wide process of data collection, diagnosis, action, planning, intervention, and evaluation aimed at (1) enhancing congruence between organizational structure, process, strategy, people, and culture; (2) developing new and creative organizational solutions; and (3) developing the organization's renewing capacity. It occurs through collaboration of organizational members working with a change agent using behavioral science theory, research, and technology.
12	Beer	1980	Organizational development is a process for diagnosing organizational problems by looking for incongruencies between environment, structures, processes, and people.
13	Burke	1982	Organization development is a planned process of change in an organization's culture through the utilization of behavioral science technology, research, and theory.
14	Davis	1983	Organization development consists of a series of theory-based workshops, techniques, programs, systematic approaches, and individual consulting interventions designed to assist people in organizations in their day- to-day organizational life and the complex processes this involves. All of this is backed up with beliefs, biases, and values held by the organization development practitioner.
15	Nielsen	1984	Organization Development is the attempt to influence the members of an organization to expand their candidness with each other about their views of the organization and their experience in it, and to take greater responsibility for their own actions as organization members. The assumption behind OD is that when people pursue both of these objectives simultaneously, they are likely to discover new ways of working together that they experience as more effective for achieving their own and their shared (organizational) goals. And that when this does not happen, such activity helps them to understand why and to make meaningful choices about what to do in light of this.
16	Warrick	1984	Organization development is a planned, long-range systems, and primarily behavioral science strategy for understanding, developing, and changing organizations to improve their present and future effectiveness and health.
17	Burke & Schmidt	1985	Organizational development is a process which attempts to increase organizational effectiveness by integrating individual desires for growth and development with organizational goals. Typically, this process is planned change effort, which involves a total system over a period of time, and these change efforts are related to the organization's mission.
18	Beer & Walton	1987	Organization Development comprises a set of actions undertaken to improve organizational effectiveness and employees' wellbeing.

Continues next page

	Author	Year	Definition
19	French, Bell & Zawacki	1989	Organizational development is a process of planned system change that attempts to make organizations better able to attain their short- and long-term objectives.
20	Vaill	1989	Organization development is an organizational process for understanding and improving any and all substantive processes an organization may develop for performing any task and pursuing any objective. A "process for improving process"— that is what OD has basically sought to be for approximately 25 years.
21	McLagan	1989	Organization Development: Assuring healthy inter- and intra-unit relationships and helping groups initiate and manage change. Organization development's primary emphasis is on relationships and processes between and among individuals and groups. Its primary intervention is influence on the relationship of individuals and groups to effect and impact on the organization as a system.
22	Porras & Robertson	1992	Organizational development is a set of behavioral science-based theories, values, strategies, and techniques aimed at the planned change of the organizational work setting for the purpose of enhancing individual development and improving organizational performance, through the alteration of organizational members' on-the-job behavior.
23	Burke	1994	Organization development is a planned process of change in an organization's culture through the utilization of behavioral science technologies, research, and theory.
24	Church, Waclawski & Siegal	1996	Organization development is a field based on values-promoting positive human-istically oriented large-system change in organizations—plain and simple.... if they are not morally bound to the core values of the field then they simply are not doing OD. OD is about humanistic change on a system-wide level.... It is about improving the conditions of people's lives in organizations.... OD is about helping people in organizations.
25	Dyer	1997	Organization Development is a process whereby actions are taken to release the creative and productive efforts of human beings at the same time achieving certain legitimate organizational goals such as being profitable, competitive, and sustainable.
26	French & Bell	1999	Organization development is a long-term effort, led and supported by top management, to improve an organization's visioning, empowerment, learning, and problem-solving processes, through an ongoing, collaborative management of organization culture—with special emphasis on the culture of intact work teams and other team configurations—using the consultant-facilitator role and the theory and technology of applied behavioral science, including action research.
27	Cummings & Worley	2001	Organization development is a systemwide application of behavioral science knowledge to the planned development and reinforcement of organizational strategies, structures, and processes that lead to organization effectiveness.
28	D. Anderson		Organization development is the process of increasing organizational effectiveness and facilitating personal and organizational change through the use of interventions driven by social and behavioral science knowledge.
29	Minahan		Organization development is a body of knowledge and practice that builds capacity by enhancing organizational performance and individual development, by increasing alignment among the various systems within the overall system. OD interventions are inclusive methodologies and approaches to strategic planning, organization design, and culture change, including leadership development, change management, performance management, coaching, diversity, team building, work/life balance, etc.

Continues next page

	Author	Year	Definition
30	Kessler		Systemic engagement with organizations, networks, individuals, and groups to create spaces where success can thrive.
31	B. Cooke		OD is about management of change for a better world through organization USING sociology, psychology, socio-psychology, etc. UNDERPINNED BY action research as a collaborative/participatory principle DELIVERED BY trained, reflexive, values-led change agents.
32	Society for Human Resource Development (SHRM)		Process of enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of an organization and the well-being of its members through planned interventions.
33	Gilpin-Jackson	2018	OD is the application of the behavioral and social sciences to develop groups of people from where they are to where they want to go through high-engagement and high-inquiry methodologies.
34	Jamieson	2019	OD is a process of planned intervention(s) utilizing behavioral and organizational science principles to change a system and improve its effectiveness, conducted in accordance with values of humanism, participation, choice, and development so that the organization and its members learn and develop.
35	Goldman Schuyler		OD is an interactive process of development using behavioral and organizational science to help a system evolve in ways that improve its effectiveness and health, usually involving members of the organization in seeing itself, reflecting, and then making changes. A skilled OD practitioner can see/understand systems and their dynamics; develop open, trusting relationships; and facilitate deep, transformational conversations as needed for such development. Such practitioners work with others from a foundation of self-awareness grounded in reflection and inquiry; they work skillfully to generate and analyze many kinds of data—all in service of designing systemic transformational processes for and with organizations.
36	Nickols	2019	Organization Development (OD) is an emerging, evolving area of professional practice that rests on an extensive body of proven behavioral and social science knowledge. OD practitioners possess numerous tools and techniques for effecting change in and to organizations. The primary focus of OD practitioners is one of facilitating improvement efforts initiated by and led from the top of the organization. These efforts aim at improving various aspects of the organization, including its culture, and especially the performance of its people, its processes, and the organization itself. The term "organization" might refer to a team, a department or division, a subsidiary, or an entire company.
37	Norlin		Organization development involves the design and facilitation of processes, conversations, relationships, and structures that enable people at work to learn, change, achieve their goals, and fulfill their purpose.
38	Bushe	2019	OD is a disciplined process of engaging the people affected in processes of inquiry and innovation that lead to better teams and organizations.

NOTE: The definitions numbered 1–27 in this table were excerpted from Egan, T. M. (2002). "Organization development: An examination of definitions and dependent variables." *Organization Development Journal 20*(2): 59–70, Table 1.

The Circle leaders and group launched into the process with these challenges and questions in mind, taking an action research approach.

The work began with a review of Egan (2002) who boldly published the result of a "search of the literature" for definitions nearly two decades ago. At the time, Egan was looking for independent and dependent variables. His summary included 27 definitions he found covering the range of OD defined in terms of independent variables such as improvement, effectiveness, health, technology, problem solving, adaptation, learning, renewal, culture change, and goal achievement, to name a few.

Egan's article was available to all OD Gathering participants in December 2018 when the Circles formed. Those present at the Gathering that year were invited to add any definitions they knew, which expanded the list to 38 after duplicates were ultimately deleted. These 38 definitions are by no means exhaustive of all published or known definitions of OD, but the group decided it was enough of a representative sampling with which to proceed.

The Process:
An Action Research Project

The Gathering had asked each of the four groups to convene as soon as possible in January 2019 and to work quickly and in a disciplined way to produce an outcome for further review by the community. The Definition Circle took this to heart. The work took on the form of a participative action research process with ideas that emerged at each meeting being considered and evaluated during the week and returned to the next session for further refinement. The description of action research used by the Circle was "a democratic and participative orientation to knowledge creation. It brings together action and reflection, theory and practice, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern" (Bradbury-Huang, 2015).

Four meetings to be held during the last week of the month were scheduled from January to April. The leadership

group met prior to those sessions to design the agendas and committed to a process of 60- to 90-minute meetings with assignments between the meetings for small groups to further consider and develop ideas about the definition. The leadership group developed and proposed to the Circle that its purpose was **to review and synthesize a shared definition of OD**. This parameter was linked to a reminder from the Gathering that the Circle's work could stand at 85–90% complete because it would be debated further in future. The Circle leaders also recommended these Rules of Engagement to Circle members:

» Circle leaders have authority to facilitate and move the group forward
» Circle Leaders are charged to work through the tension between dialogue and generativity
» There will be group and individual assignments between meetings
» The group will engage in collaborative assessment of emerging outcomes— all data belongs to the group
» Trust the process and disciplined approach

At the first meeting, the Circle considered criteria that the definition should meet; some of the ideas voiced were *short, inspiring, minimal jargon, have purpose and outcome elements, pithy, concise, human centric, scientific, easily understood*. It was a challenge to sift the 38 starting points through these lenses. As might be expected of an OD group, the Circle had as much discussion about its process as about the content of the definition: when to meet, how long to meet, how to start the meeting, how to end the meeting. *Figure 1* shows responses of Circle members at the end of the first meeting.

Each meeting began with a quick check in by Circle members, an introduction to the task of the week, a discussion of ideas in break out groups, a plenary, an assignment of a task for the week between sessions, and then a closing word. Small groups were randomly assigned at the first meeting and then worked together during the meetings and between meetings. The meetings were hosted by the leadership

group using Zoom virtual meeting software and a spreadsheet in Google docs became the common repository for the meeting notes and products. See *Figure 1* for the check-out after the first meeting; this momentum carried, even when the work became more difficult.

This process cycle was repeated for each meeting, thus having the Circle engaged in an action research spiral in the Lewinian tradition with each step entailing planning, action, and reflection (including fact-finding) about the result of the action to inform the next steps (Lewin, 1946)

The content side of the work became sticky quickly. Circle members were challenged to select parts of the List of 38 that they thought described the field for the present and for the future. The first assignment between meetings was to complete the sentence

"Organization Development is a _____ (field, profession, science, discipline, pick one of these or choose your own word) that _____(does something, fill in the blank.)"

The Excel worksheet on Google docs was filled with individuals' ideas. At the second meeting, the questions of "What do we do?" "How do we do it?" and "Why do we do it?" was suggested by a member, and fruitful consideration was given to these over the next week. The assignment was for each small group to independently

Figure 1: Initial check-out after Meeting 1.

come up with its definition using the "fill in the blank" method along with the three questions. This effort brought the number down to eight definitions.

At the meeting in March, the group was bogged down. Coghlan (2013) has called action research a process of "messy, iterative groping in the swampy lowlands," which to some extent, this work had become. The group began to lament words that were being left behind, such as *communities, holistic, systems, human, research-based, thriving world, inclusive, behavioral science*. And ideas swirled.

» Is it an "approach," a "discipline." a "field," or something else?
» Need to include both theory and practice
» It is rooted in "science"—which ones? Behavioral, organizational, multiple social sciences?
» Can we define it in one sentence— to give an intelligible explanation "to my mother" (in the words of one participant)?
» Word challenges: "systems" now sounded like "information technology," "health" or "organization health" had too many meanings, even "organization" was problematic for some

A Group of Four, which grew to a group of eight (almost half the entire Circle) but maintained the same name, agreed to meet before the last scheduled meeting to weigh the various ideas to date. One member generated a list of the Circle's tension points for discussion and did a basic web search for definitions of the field of Organization Development and sister fields for comparison, including Human Resource Management, Management Consulting, and Change Management. The Group of Four noted that this compilation acknowledged the difference between these connected fields, but the popular Organization Development definitions were still problematic, not fully representing the experiences of Circle members and the scholars and practitioners represented by the Circle. The Group of Four wrestled with the ideas of the Circle to date and returned to the April meeting with the following recommendation:

Organization Development is a field, grounded in the organizational, behavioral, and social sciences, that engages organizations and their members to develop system-wide capacity, effectiveness, and resilience.

(April 2019 Definition)

The Circle felt this was a good set of ideas that reflected the conversations, and that met the 85–90% criterion—just shy of perfect! After April, some members chose to depart the Circle due to other commitments, personal closure with the project, or because the goal was to end in April and they were finished contributing. Two leadership members left the Circle, and two others were asked to serve in their stead because there was more work to be done.

The 2019 Gathering

En route to the third gathering of the entire OD Gathering community, the four Circles reported their progress to each other in October 2019 and to a town hall of the broader community in November 2019. After these sessions, Definition Circle leaders compiled a list of comments to present at the Gathering in December 2019. The comments were gathered under these headings:

» Likes
» Can we simplify "organization," "social," "behavioral?"
» Does "organization" adequately capture where we work?
» Might we qualify "field?"
» How might we convey movement in the definition—evolving, emerging, generative?
» And the proverbial, Other.

Each Circle presented its work on the second morning of the 2019 Gathering, and all listened for where there were connections, synergies, and common language. That afternoon, a World Café was held to generate more opinions on how to craft the definition and contribute to the work of the other three Circles. The Definition Circle was interested in maintaining the discipline that had characterized its work for months, and so bade Café

participants to hold their comments to these three areas:

» What is missing in the offered definition that would make a real difference? What would you add? What would you take out?
» What is your response to the feedback from participants in the Town Hall Meeting?
» From your discussion, what is the most critical revision you would propose to the offered definition?

Six groups at the World Café worked on and submitted responses to these questions. That evening, Circle members worked feverishly with the input from the World Café. How much of it was new? How much of it should be considered? How did this new wave of information affect the journey of the Circle and the product it had nurtured? That evening, the Definition Circle's presentation PowerPoint was again amended. Words affirmed or added from the World Café were *members, basic science and arts, interdisciplinary, capacity, human element, resilience, social sciences, human sciences, collaboratively, community, human sciences, system-wide, movement/action*. Of these, the Circle integrated *capacity, community, interdisciplinary, members, resilience, social sciences*, and *system-wide*. The plenary session pushed back on *members* and *resilience*, and the Definition Circle members proposed this 95% definition, excited by the emergence of a hitherto unspoken word, "VITALITY," in lieu of "resilience."

Organization Development is a field that works with organizations and communities to develop their system-wide capacity for effectiveness and vitality.

We are grounded in the interdisciplinary social sciences.

There was, however, one more evening to pass, and sentiment was intense. Furtive whispers were exchanged, furrowed eyebrows were seen, one of the Circle leaders roamed the room with an open laptop, polling community members about the words on the screen. Lobbying for *collaboratively* was heavy. After this additional

data-gathering step in the action research process, heads of the Definition Circle leaders were again put together to make final adjustments. Presented the following morning was the definition below. The lead Definition Circle facilitator solemnly explained the importance of the definition, noting that it is about the identity of OD professionals. The co-facilitator of the Definition Circle cautioned in an equally solemn tone that there was "blood on every word," so Gathering participants should be careful about further recommendations.

Organization Development (OD) is an interdisciplinary field of scholars and practitioners who work collaboratively with organizations and communities to develop their system-wide capacity for effectiveness and vitality. OD is grounded in the organization and social sciences.

At the meeting in March, the group was bogged down. Coghlan (2013) has called action research a process of "messy, iterative groping in the swampy lowlands," which to some extent, this work had become. The group began to lament words that were being left behind, such as *communities, holistic, systems, human, research-based, thriving world, inclusive, behavioral science.* And ideas swirled.

» **Is it an "approach," a "discipline." a "field," or something else?**

» **It is rooted in "science"—which ones? Behavioral, organizational, multiple social sciences?**

This definition takes for granted that the essence of OD is to elevate humanity amidst the megatrends impacting organizations and society; that OD scholars and practitioners align with the values and ethics of the field; and that OD scholars and practitioners continually develop, grow and model the capabilities required in the field. [NOTE: This second paragraph shows the connection between the Definition and the work of the other three Circles but is not part of the definition.]

The Definition Circle ended this part of the journey as did the other Circles, because the Gathering ended. The Circles were to contribute to a document that would be circulated through organization development organizations, university programs, and other professional groups for further contributions.

Done, But Not Over

The lead author of this article has since further participated in two major presentations on the entire package of work from the OD Gathering during 2020. The first was a professional development workshop in August at the 2020 Academy of Management annual meeting in which leaders from all four Circles participated. The second was a presentation at the Minnesota Organization Development Network virtual monthly meeting in September 2020, in which this author and another participant from the Gathering were sole presenters. Response to the definition, and in fact to the whole body of work from all four Circles, was favorable. Those who heard the word were excited about "vitality" and looked forward to working with it. In all instances, Definition Circle members have encouraged OD professionals and scholars to work with the definition and see how their clients, customers, and they themselves fare in using it.

The second author, who was also the lead facilitator, was invited to present the definition work by one of the OD Gathering conveners at a professional practice circle of emerging and experienced OD practitioners. She has introduced the definition into two internal OD practice groups who as they stepped in and out of complex situations continued to ask: What is our definition of OD? She has also used the definition and full body of the OD Gathering work as input for strategic planning within the OD Network and in executive leadership work. In all instances this body of work has helped clarify and move people forward and has been favorably received. Circle leaders believe there is merit to this evidence informed definition, co-created by scholars and practitioners and internal and external consultants in OD. This process of the Definition Circle represented the very ethos and praxis of the OD field.

So maybe Definition #39 will stick.

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"The Essence and the Critical Needs both inform the Vision for OD's impact on the world. The Vision and the Critical Needs may evolve over time, given that the Critical Needs are themselves informed by the impact that OD professionals are able to have upon the world."

What is the Essence of OD, Our Vision of the Field, and Critical Needs to be Addressed?

Report on the *Essence, Critical Needs, and Vision* Circle of Work

By Olga Blouch, Christopher Cotten

In the last two decades, the needs of organizations have changed significantly due to economic, social, political, technological, and cultural pressures impacting them (Fourie, 2014). OD practitioners and academics must react, and if possible, anticipate how they will ensure the highest quality of service to meet these needs. These requirements bring to mind several questions for OD professionals, such as: how do we articulate the intrinsic core of OD? What are OD scholars and practitioners working to achieve? And what various organizational and individual needs are OD professionals well-positioned to help address?

Emerging from the 2018 OD Gathering, attendees were energized to take on the task of answering such questions, and a Circle of Work, titled Essence, Critical Needs, and Vision (ECNV) formed to address three topics: describe the essence of OD, articulate a vision for OD, and identify critical needs in the world which OD professionals may be well-positioned to address.

The Circle's mission was to explore the three topics, including their definitions and how they related to each other, and to develop a clear, concise explanation of each topic that would clarify the work of OD and unify and invigorate OD practitioners and academics. The Circle leaders and members' subsequent work included nine months of coordinated efforts to define key concepts and leverage OD approaches to build upon the wisdom documented from the 2018 OD Gathering. This article

outlines the process used by this Circle of Work, shares its outputs, and proposes applications for its outputs which may prove useful to OD scholars and practitioners as we collectively strive to excel in our service to others.

Conceptual Framework
With its three primary topics to explore, the ECNV Circle of Work quickly realized the need to define not only the topics themselves, but also their relationships to one another. To help guide its efforts, the first task the Circle undertook was to develop a conceptual framework (Miles et al., 2014) to clearly define the topics, relationships, and concepts within the Circle's scope (see *Figure 1*). In this conceptual framework, the Essence of OD remains relatively static. The Essence and the Critical Needs both inform the Vision for OD's impact on the world. The Vision and the Critical Needs may evolve over time, given that the Critical Needs are themselves informed by the impact that OD professionals are able to have upon the world.

Once the ECNV Circle of Work's conceptual framework was agreed upon, it allowed Circle members to explore the three topics as standalone discussions while keeping in mind a given topic's relationship to the other two. The conceptual framework also helped to set boundaries for the Circle's discussions and ensured topics outside the scope of the Circle's work did not become the focus of group conversations (e.g., whether OD should be considered a field or a profession).
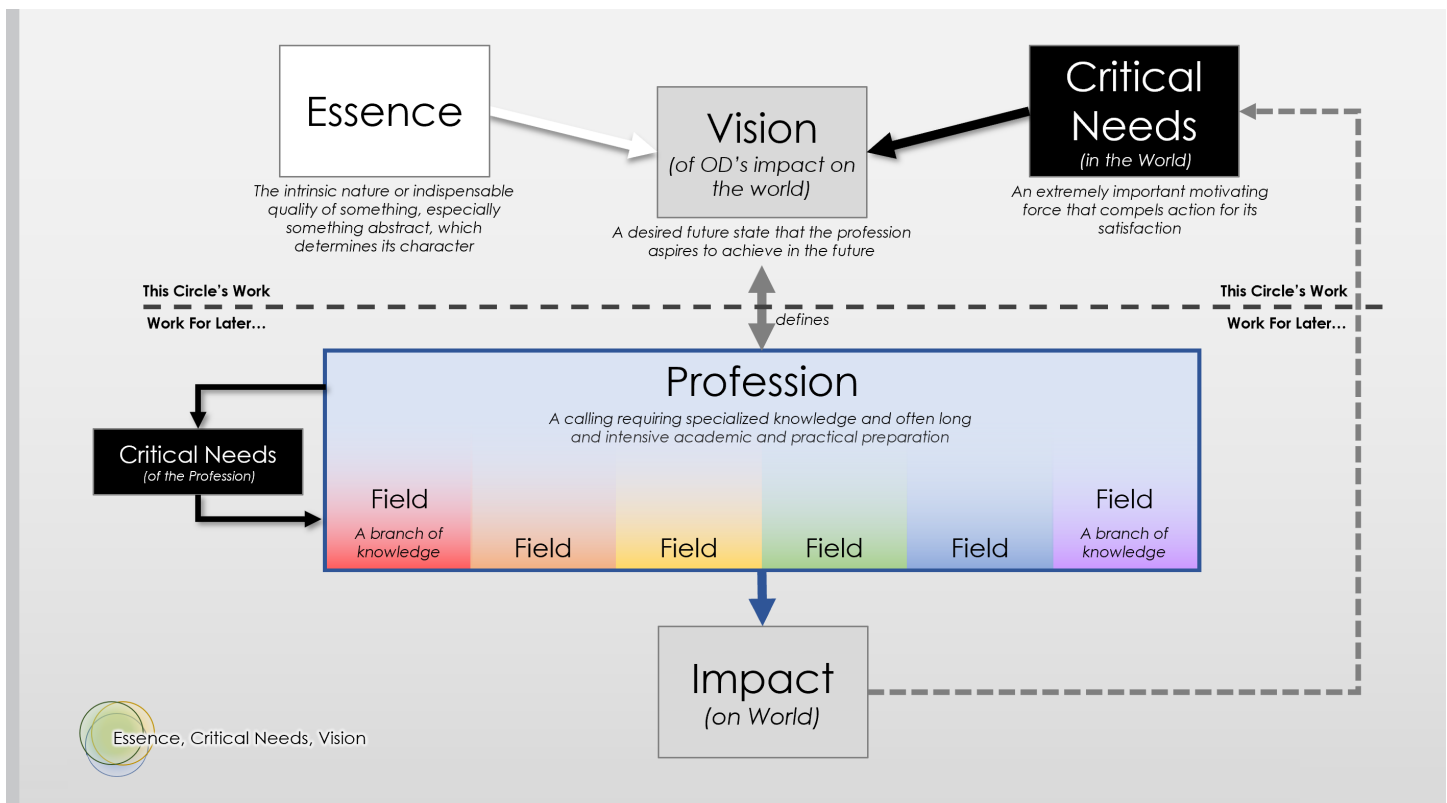
Figure 1: ECNV Circle of Work Conceptual Framework. NOTE: This figure demonstrates the ECNV Circle of Work's understanding of the relationship among its topics: essence, critical needs, and vision.

The Results

Vision of OD

For its purposes, the ECNV Circle defined **vision** as a desired future state which an individual or a group aspires to achieve.

The Circle members saw the vision of "the world, organizations, human systems" and the vision of "the future of OD" as directly influencing each other to the point where they were inextricable. As a result, the Circle crafted vision statements for both. The first vision focused primarily on OD's potential impact on individuals, organizations, and human systems:

All individuals and organizations are thriving, adaptable and resilient in an ever-changing and increasingly complex and diverse world. People create and lead healthy, meaningful lives through effective, sustainable human systems. Effective leaders boldly and intentionally foster inclusive environments in which people connect with one another, see themselves and their organizations in new ways, and co-create their shared future.

The second vision focused on the collaboration among people who study and practice OD:

We, as organization development scholars and practitioners, support the realization of this vision by collaborating in a holistic ecosystem which inspires convergence across numerous specialties in cohesive, evolving dialogue about human systems. As an OD community, we exist in a virtuous circle of continuous learning and growth based on research, practice, and experience. We live our values and model concepts we espouse to others as we move into the future together.

Essence of OD

In developing its conceptual framework, the Circle adopted the following definition of **essence**: "the intrinsic nature or indispensable quality of something, especially something abstract, which determines its character" (Oxford University Press, n.d.). In subsequent discussions, Circle members elaborated on this definition

to describe essence as something's timeless core—its soul. Essence encapsulates what matters the most about something, described at the highest-possible level.

As it worked through extensive conversations on this complex topic, the Circle determined that three elements compose the essence of OD: the **why**, the **what**, and the **how** of OD.

The Why of OD: People who practice and study OD aim to elevate humanity. The passion that motivates individuals toward OD work is the desire to improve the lives of others, to create healthier organizations, to develop leaders who create work cultures that provide meaningful work for employees, to help organizations thrive and realize their missions, and ultimately to positively impact society.

The What of OD: OD practitioners provide a presence to human systems. As a result of that presence, those systems are better able to function effectively and optimally. They can intentionally grow and adapt to shifting circumstances, living and thriving through all types of change (e.g., planned,

emergent). They can better collaborate, make decisions, and foster contact, understanding, and shared perspective across differences. The systems are better able to cultivate and benefit from effective, aware, and intentional leaders and to unlock creativity and innovation. They can overcome challenges which, to the people in the system, might seem impossible. Lastly, they can better work in ways that are sustainable and healthy for the system, its people and society.

Through the Circle's discussions, it became clear that all three components (why, what, and how) were necessary to describe the essence of OD. Taking away any one component left the essence—the soul—lacking. While the result is complex, it highlights the inherent complexity and nuance in OD work as OD scholars and practitioners constantly manage across three components in their engagements with individuals and systems.

The How of OD: How we do the work, how we act, and how we show up in service of the systems we support is just as important as what we do and why, especially in challenging moments. We support and elevate the human element in everything we do and bring intentionality, discernment, and patience to whether, when, and how we engage. We navigate the complexity of being both in the system and maintaining boundaries. We consciously use our full selves and our presence and show up as whole humans (e.g., with emotion, feeling, values). We build equal partnerships with the people and systems we support, co-creating and discovering with people in the system. We advocate for diversity, inclusion, justice, and fairness. We bring the courage to hold up the mirror and help people in the system see the whole system and themselves in new ways to better move forward. Lastly, we mutually learn and develop with the people in the system and develop and enhance the capabilities within the system so we leave it better than when we arrived.

Through the Circle's discussions, it became clear that all three components (why, what, and how) were necessary to describe the essence of OD. Taking away any one component left the essence—the soul—lacking. While the result is complex, it highlights the inherent complexity and nuance in OD work as OD scholars and practitioners constantly manage across the three components in their engagements with individuals and systems.

Critical Needs (and Opportunities)
In its conceptual framework, the ECNV Circle defined **critical need** as an extremely important motivating force that compels action for its satisfaction. Looking through the lens of a deficit-oriented approach by focusing solely on needs, however, limits the conversation and excludes a more appreciative focus (Cooperrider et al., 2008) which encourages the exploration of strengths and opportunities to build on what is working well. For the purposes of reflection upon how OD scholars and practitioners can have the greatest impact on the world, the Circle expanded the term "critical needs" to encompass both critical needs and opportunities.

The world, societies, organizations, and individuals therein are evolving rapidly, creating a diverse range of critical needs and opportunities upon which OD scholars and practitioners can make a significant impact. The following list is by no means exhaustive, but instead represents the needs and opportunities which were most readily apparent to the ECNV Circle

members. The needs and opportunities are listed below in order of their perceived priority (based on an anonymous survey of Circle members, starting with the highest priority or most important):

1. Maintaining or increasing **health and agility at all levels of system**
2. Navigating the **increasing rapidity of change**
3. Exploring, identifying, and living into **principles, values,** and **culture**
4. Maintaining **individual and/or group identity amid change**
5. Fostering **knowledge management** and **learning and development**
6. Supporting and promoting **sustainability**
7. Connecting with and adapting to advances in **technology**
8. Adapting to and influencing **shifting power dynamics**
9. Evolving and aligning **operating model(s)**
10. Maintaining **legal and regulatory compliance**

Through conversation in the Circle's process, the realization emerged that these critical needs manifest at all levels of system, from society (at a global or national level) through the organization and group levels to the two-person system, and finally, the individual level. For example, "adapting to and influencing shifting power dynamics" could emerge at the societal level in the form of perceived challenges to group identity in relation to a larger context or in transitions in political administrations. At the organization level, mergers and acquisitions or rapid growth or decline in an organization might amplify and alter existing power dynamics. At a group or a two-person level, the need could manifest during restructuring or consolidation or in changing roles and responsibilities. Finally, at the individual level, the need could occur during any transition with perceived status implications. (See *Figure 2* for examples.)

Circle members also highlighted that responses to these needs and opportunities can include optimizing what already exists and/or creating something entirely new or different.

Through examining how the critical needs manifest at each level of system, an unintended benefit of the Circle's discussion was that OD scholars and practitioners who operate at different levels of the system—whether coaches who work with individuals, scholars who study group dynamics, or community developers who tackle societal issues—all saw themselves and their work manifest in the field of OD. Some members described feeling more connected to one another as a result.

Process

Leveraging the Wisdom of the Group
Throughout its process, the ECNV Circle of Work relied upon the wisdom and experience of both its members and the broader OD Gathering collective to guide its efforts. For each topic, the Circle used the ideas, concepts, and discussion from the 2018 OD Gathering as its foundation. The Circle, consisting of 20 members, then further informed and refined these ideas as we moved through the Circle's process. Each member brought varied perspectives. The Circle included individuals from academia and internal and external OD practitioners with a range of years of experience. The Circle leaders created numerous opportunities for members to contribute their perspectives and engage with one another in service of dialogue and contact.

Building on member recommendations, the Circle leaders used Gestalt theory (e.g., the Cycle of Experience and the creation of a new, shared figure) as a guide for the group's process. That process included a high degree of interaction and sharing among people in the system to foster contact and encourage curiosity about others' thoughts and feelings regarding the topic in question (Nevis, 2001). The Circle leaders developed a highly interactive, participative process (see *Figure 3*) featuring a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous collaboration (Justice & Jamieson, 2012). The Circle leaders applied this process to each of the three topics, with each topic representing a unit of work.

In the synchronous conversations (e.g., the Refining Call, the Brainstorming Call), intentional reflection provided

Level of System	Principles, Values & Culture	Shifting Power Dynamics
Society (Global, National)	• Evolving predominant beliefs around societal issues (e.g., civil rights, religion) • Dissonance between lived and espoused values at a societal level	• Shifting global power dynamics (e.g., rising influence of China relative to the U.S. and Europe) • Perceived challenges to group identity in relation to the larger context • New political administrations • Globalization and nationalist reactions to it
Organization	• Developing and adhering to a set of principles and values of the organization and to guide behavior • Promoting and maintaining accountability for behaviors which collectively define an organizational culture supportive of the organization's mission	• Shifting internal power dynamics (e.g., new leaders) • Maintaining and adapting a sense of organizational identity • Mergers and acquisitions or, alternately, divestitures or shrinkage in response to contextual demands (e.g., the competitive landscape)
Group	• Defining group cultures and norms to guide behavior, foster effectiveness and mitigate interpersonal conflict • Aligning the group with the larger system and the individual members	• Group restructuring, consolidation, or shake-up • New leaders
Two-person System	• Reflecting on one's own personal values and those of the other person to create a relationship that benefits both individuals, is healthy, and can sustain external demands	• Managing change in roles, responsibilities, and work identities between two individuals • Identifying and working through biases and power dynamics in interpersonal interactions
Individual	• Reflecting on one's own values and ensuring integrity between those principles and values and individual actions	• Promotions, transitions to leadership roles, or other changs in status • Maintaining a sense of identity in evolving circumstances • Evolving demands of leadership development

NOTE. This figure shows how critical needs can be applied to all levels of a system.

Figure 2: Manifestations of Critical Needs & Opportunities at Different Levels of System

opportunities for members to evaluate the statements and draft outputs contributed asynchronously into a shared Google Document. Circle members examined the draft content based on how well those statements represented both practitioner and academic roles within OD; whether the statements were written in clear, concise language from a variety of perspectives; and finally whether the statements generated feelings of enthusiasm and excitement for members to motivate, energize,

ECNV Circle of Work Process

Dec. 2018 — OD Gathering
Jan. 2019 — Leaders Sync
Feb. 2019 — Circle Kick-off, Development of Conceptual Framework
Mar-Apr. 2019 — Essence of OD
Apr.-May 2019 — Critical Needs
June 2019 — Vision
Aug. 2019 — Final Alignment, Compilation of Work

OD Gathering Outputs → Shared Brainstorming Document → Brainstorming Call → Refining Call → Prioritization Survey *(Critical Needs ONLY)* → Synthesis Document

Figure 3: ECNV Circle of Work Process. NOTE: This figure shows the ECNV Circle of Work's timeline and process.

or inspire them. Each call inspired robust exchanges among members in response to the brainstormed ideas and to new insights generated through the dialogue in the call itself. The Circle leaders documented the key outputs, decisions, and revised language, especially in the Refining Call, and captured the new, synthesized figure as it emerged from the group's engagement with each other.

Once the units of work for all three topics were complete, the Circle leaders led one further engagement with the Circle members. The ECNV Circle of Work came together to step back and look at all three areas to ensure that the outputs for each topic aligned with one another as originally envisioned in the conceptual framework. No significant edits were made as a result of this process; however, the Circle members identified additional relationships among the topics beyond what had previously been envisioned.

The ECNV Circle of Work leaders presented the group's work at the 2019 OD Gathering. The presentation included a review of the extensive process/steps used to complete the work over the last year, recognition of Circle members, and the unveiling of the "final" output. A brief discussion/Q&A followed with attendees offering both support and general feedback on the content. The ECNV Circle

reconvened in-person while at the 2019 OD Gathering to discuss the feedback and engage in a detailed fine-tuning of the Circle's work. Modifications were made only with full support of the Circle members.

Applications of ECNV Circle of Work Outputs

The first benefit or application of the ECNV work relates to the Circle's illustration of the essence of OD. The detailed explanation of the essence developed by both OD scholars and practitioners contributes to the establishment of a shared understanding of the field's intrinsic core—its soul.

A second application relates to the question, "What are the most critical needs and opportunities in the world which OD can help address?" Having clarity around the critical needs and opportunities for which OD can offer support provides a powerful imperative for individuals working in and studying OD. Clarity about the needs and opportunities, specifically as they exist at each level of a system, provides people who work in OD with a more definable target and/or a picture of what we are striving to improve.

As a third application, OD professionals can use the identified critical needs and opportunities as a foundation for monitoring needs and opportunities in the future.

The critical needs and opportunities will continue to evolve. In a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world, some needs will remain consistent, but others will ebb and flow.

It is our hope that the application of the ECNV Circle of Work outputs will energize and inspire OD professionals, and confirm how valuable and meaningful OD can be at all levels of system. In coming together to develop a shared understanding of our intent, delineating a shared purpose, and moving towards coordinated action, we give ourselves not only meaning, but we give ourselves power (McGoff, 2011). Through conversation, engagement, and contact around these outputs, we hope that both current professionals and future generations may align around the concept that we are guided by the same north star as we all strive, each in our unique way, and contribute toward the achievement of a unified vision for the world, societies, organizations, and the individuals within them.

Conclusion

As the ECNV Circle of Work completes its responsibility towards the OD Gathering's collective work, we look forward to continuing to explore the extent to which this content resonates with OD scholars and practitioners who represent diverse

cultures and perspectives. We are excited to see how this work grows and touches the lives of our fellow OD professionals and how it authentically impacts organizations, individuals, and communities which we are humbled to serve.

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Organization Development Network

Advancing the Science, Practice & Impact of OD

THE OD

GATHERING

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"Given the foundational nature of values in the OD field, the impact of values on both our behavior and outcomes, we sought to explore our historical OD values and what our OD values could be, looking towards the future."

What Values Will Define and Guide OD in the Future?

Report on the *Organization Development Values to Guide Our Practice* Circle of Work

By Sasha B. Farley,
Hyung Joon Yoon,
and César Padilla

Introduction

Organization Development (OD) is a values-based field, which means our values drive how we engage with, and provide support to, our clients (Anderson, 2017). In OD literature, a commonly used definition is Rokeach's (1973): Values are "enduring beliefs that a specific mode of conduct is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (p. 5). By this definition, a value is not just a driving force that steers behavior and guides decision making but a value also defines a desired outcome. Given the foundational nature of values in the OD field, the impact of values on both our behavior and outcomes, we sought to explore our historical OD values and what our OD values could be, looking towards the future.

This article will describe a process of identifying OD values that began as part of the OD Gathering, which was a series of three meetings held over three years with approximately 300 OD practitioners and researchers from around the globe. The OD gathering resulted in circles of work that addressed four main aspects of interest: (1) OD competencies; (2) essence, vision, and critical needs of OD; (3) definition of OD; and (4) OD values. This article will describe the OD Values Circle final outputs, the process of exploring OD values, the creation of the OD value Circle of Work, the key principles that drove our exploration, and ways to use the results.

The Results

The OD Values Circle's goal was to answer the question of "What values will define and guide OD in the future?" The specific process used to identify the final list of values, value descriptions, and associated behavioral indicators are described in subsequent sections. At a high-level, the process included a series of meetings, phone calls, and a three-round Delphi research study. The Delphi study resulted in the identification of nine core OD values, value descriptions, and associated behavioral indicators. *Table 1* displays the nine core OD values and their descriptions.

Each value has several associated behavioral indicators that demonstrate the value in action and help guide the application and use of the values in practice. *Table 2* displays the associated behavioral indicators for the nine values.

The Process

OD Gathering 2018
The OD values work began during the second OD Gathering in December 2018. During this meeting, breakout sessions were held to explore various aspects of the OD field, including OD values. The prompting question for the OD values breakout session was, "What values are needed for the practice of OD that will make a difference to the world in the future?" The first breakout session was comprised of four participants with varying levels of experience in the OD field and who represented

Table 1: *Nine OD Value Labels and Descriptions*

Value Label	Value Description
Awareness of Self & System	_____ is to be conscious of all levels of a system. It involves recognizing the self and the client from a systems perspective while treating each human system as a whole.
Integrity	_____ is to align actions with ethical codes, relevant cultures, and guiding principles and theories. It involves managing conflicts of interest and encouraging justice.
Continuous Learning & Innovation	_____ is to seek knowledge; acquire new skills; and use new approaches, methods, and techniques. It involves taking a data-driven approach.
Courageous Leadership	_____ is to exemplify bold and effective conduct when necessary. It involves voicing truth directly to power and challenging the status quo.
Diversity	_____ is to accept and promote the unique presence and contributions of everyone. It involves emphasizing the importance of marginalized perspectives and identities.
Collaborative Engagement	_____ is to champion the inclusion and empowerment of all stakeholders, both internal and external. It involves encouraging and fostering open participation across the system(s).
Trust & Respect	_____ is to create a psychologically safe environment through demonstrating empathy. It involves exhibiting deep admiration for all humans and understanding their emotions and situations.
Client Growth & Development	_____ is to develop the capacity of our clients to maintain and continue the work on their own. It involves recognizing stages of development and fostering the ability of a human system to continually progress.
Strategic Practicality	_____ is to enable clients to identify and achieve desired outcomes. It involves recognizing that identified solutions need to support the needs of the organization as well as the individuals. It also involves adapting to changing situations, identifying alternatives, and thinking strategically.

NOTE: Adapted from "Organization Development Values From a Future-Oriented Perspective: An International Delphi Study," by H. J. Yoon, S. Farley, and C. Padilla, 2020, *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, pp. 19. Copyright 2020 by Sage.

Table 2: *Behavioral Indicators of the Nine OD Values*

Value Label	Behavioral Indicators
Awareness of Self & System	• Is self-aware, conscious of own identity formation—choices, biases, values, beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, roles, personal history, and personal impact. • Clearly understands & differentiates personal and client aspirations, goals, and ego needs. • Recognizes paradoxes and competing demands and values within a client system. • Understands and interprets elements of organizational culture and communicates its impact on and implications for the work at hand. • Recognizes the value of all perspectives and seeks to expand perspective and deepen systemic and interpersonal understanding. • Explicitly identifies the interconnections and causal linkages between parts of an organization. • Considers the work to be performed, the formal organization requirements, the informal organization conditions, and the individual needs and knowledge. • Monitors and responds appropriately to constant micro- and macro-environmental change and its impact throughout the duration of the work. • Actively monitors and manages own holistic integration of mind, body, soul/spirit, and feelings. • Treats each human being as a person with a complete set of needs important for life and work. • Facilitates awareness and acceptance of the present situation in order to create change.

Continues next page

Value Label	Behavioral Indicators
Integrity	• Exhibits congruency between what they say and do. • Accepts assignments they can competently perform and does not promise work that cannot be performed. • Works from the premise that the ends do not justify the means. • Promotes ethics and is impartial, fair, and encourages justice. • Is fair when negotiating and working with clients and is willing to terminate a relationship with clients if relationship would violate values. • Seeks common understanding about what confidentiality means and what can and cannot be held in confidence. • Keeps clients' records secured and takes steps to prevent misuse of client information. • Avoids conflicts of interest by working collaboratively to resolve existing and potential issues. • Commits to ethical codes and principles. • Ensures interventions provided are aligned with one another and grounded in relevant cultures and coherent principles.
Continuous Learning & Innovation	• Seeks feedback to learn and improve. • Seeks out new knowledge related to environmental factors and trends and how they may affect organizations. • Keeps abreast of new developments in the OD field and beyond. • Seeks continuous education to upgrade their skills and knowledge. • Retires or updates outdated approaches, methods, and techniques. • Investigates and tries new approaches, ways of working, ideas, and methods. • Encourages responsible innovation that addresses the needs of oneself and clients. • Uses applied behavioral science theory, concept, and method to support the work.
Courageous Leadership	• Has the courage to call out injustice. • Speaks truth to power and discusses difficult topic directly. • Challenges the status quo and assumptions especially about workplace norms, particularly if goals are negatively affected. • Demonstrates decisiveness, confidence, and clear, graceful action. • Raises and investigates potential issues that may or may not be noted by client. • Demonstrates courage to ask questions and be open about doubts. • Creates a working environment where authenticity, honesty, rigor, and integrity are commonly demonstrated fostering frank and open dialogue.
Diversity	• Strives to model acceptance of self and others. • Shows respect and acceptance for diverse thoughts, views, opinions, approaches, and people. • Appreciates that every individual is unique and deserves to be respected. • Understands that the pace of understanding, development, and change varies among individuals. • Is sensitive to and promotes cross-culturalism, diversity, equity, and inclusion. • Actively engages diverse voices in the room while paying attention to diversity dynamics including identity. • Helps clients develop the skills and capacity to engage in and navigate conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Value Label	Behavioral Indicators
Collaborative Engagement	• Promotes the importance of meaningfully and purposefully involving a diverse group of stakeholders in interventions and change initiatives as early as possible. • Includes others' voices in written or spoken form to enable expression of diverse viewpoints. • Generates participation by creating opportunities, both one-on-one and in groups, for the expression of viewpoints and needs. • Builds trusting environment that provides a safe space for open, honest & transparent communication. • Designs avenues to balance the power and increase participation of all stakeholders, including the marginalized. • Promotes an inclusive culture that recognizes, respects, and values people's differences.
Trust & Respect	• Expresses empathy to allow others to feel comfortable to express their positive and negative feelings and thoughts. • Seeks to understand and articulate what others are experiencing emotionally and cognitively, in ways that they feel accurately portray them. • Refrains from making judgment about others. • Respects all humans, their cultures, and their environment. • Conveys good or bad information without prejudice in a neutral and respectful manner. • Accepts that most of the time everyone is behaving the best they can with the resources they have available to them. • Humbly listens, speaks, and acts from a spirit of sincerity. • Is fully present when working with clients and keeps the best interest of the client in mind.
Client Growth & Development	• Encourages clients to take responsibility for personal and overall system growth and development. • Recognizes the stages of development when designing interventions. • Assesses the readiness of all levels of the system for intervention. • Develops others' capabilities in order to ensure sustainable development. • Trains and educates people in the system so that they can initiate and execute change on their own. • Helps the client learn from non-productive behaviors in order to develop behaviors conducive to growth/development. • Educates and encourages interpersonal skills among all levels of the organizational structure.
Strategic Practicality	• Knows common organization elements such as mission, vision, business strategy, business models, business processes, and budgets. • Helps the client implement interventions to achieve desired goals. • Supports strategic alignment of individual and group goals with the vision, mission, and values of an organization. • Works with client to assess the impact of change on business results. • Helps the client define clear, measurable goals and desired outcomes. • Helps the client choose actions most likely to achieve top priorities, sometimes in thoughtful compromises of comfort, popularity, or other lower values. • Facilitates gaining clarity and alignment towards long-term goal & overall strategy. • Encourages developing alternative approaches and solutions.

NOTE: Adapted from "Organization Development Values From a Future-Oriented Perspective: An International Delphi Study," by H. J. Yoon, S. Farley, and C. Padilla, 2020, *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, p. 14–17. Copyright 2020 by Sage.

Initial OD Values from the 1st OD Gathering Breakout Session and Feedback in December 2018

Growth
Involves development, transformation, learning, and unfolding

Integrity
Involves wholeness, ethics, trust, authenticity, honesty, advocacy, and truth

Innovation
Involves impact, creativity, technology, dealing with unknown/ambiguity, monumental leaps, and spontaneity

Empowerment
Involves participation, democratic processes, inclusion, diversity, collaboration, and cooperation

Consciousness
Involves self-awareness, love, mindfulness of environment/economic disparities/etc.

Respect

Additional ideas/questions for the larger OD Gathering

What about social justice?

Should we call out diversity, inclusion, and equality?
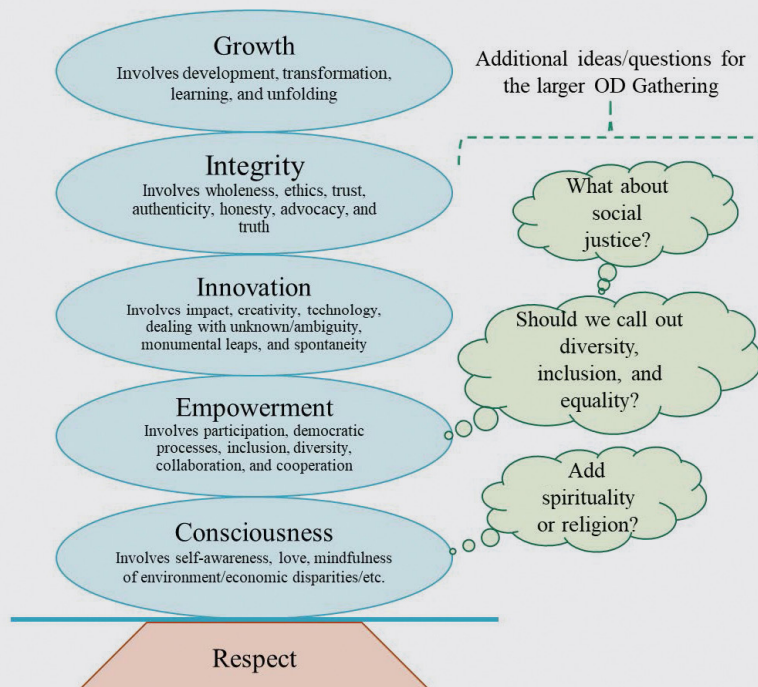
Add spirituality or religion?

Figure 1: Initial OD Values From the First OD Gathering Breakout Session in December 2018

both academia and applied practitioners. During this session we created a visual with six values that applied at all levels of the system including personal, individual, group, organizational, societal, national, and global. *Figure 1* shows the visual depiction of the results. Four participants from the breakout session shared the resulting visual and six OD values list with the larger OD Gathering. The participants provided initial feedback to the six values. This feedback included suggesting additional values of social justice and spirituality/religion. In addition, some OD Gathering participants discussed that diversity, inclusion, and equality should be called out and highlighted as an independent value instead of simply being a part of another value. These suggested elements are also depicted in *Figure 1*.

The OD Values Circle was created following the session of the OD Gathering, where participants volunteered to explore OD values further and to create a list of values to bring to the next OD Gathering in 2019. Thirteen people signed up and we met to discuss a plan for working together over the next year and select Circle leaders. The specific goal of the Circle was to answer the question of "What values will define and guide OD in the future?" The

immediate task was to build on the preliminary list of six OD values created during the breakout session.

During the first meeting, the OD Values Circle considered beginning anew because the values presented in *Figure 1* were created by only four individuals and the Circle wanted to include the voices of a larger and more diverse pool of OD practitioners and researchers. The Circle collectively identified seven principles to help guide our work and decisions as we sought to identify a list of values to define and guide OD in the future. The seven principles that the Circle identified were:

»   Identify values that OD practices (we should practice what we preach)
»   Values should encompass instrumental and terminal values
»   Work remains unfinished until buy-in and consensus from diverse, global representatives are secured
»   Involve as many entities and people as possible
»   Review existing work, but the purpose is to discover values for the future
»   Use clear criteria for inclusion
»   Make it practical (labels, definitions, behavioral indicators/examples)

OD Values Circle Work

The OD Values Circle met a few times in early 2019 to review our principles and goals and to determine an appropriate path forward. The Circle conducted a literature review of all published writing on OD values. The Circle leaders conducted a literature review on OD values, and members provided insight on additional resources. Circle leaders shared a summary document with the full circle. Upon completion of the literature review, it became apparent that the literature on OD values contains overlap but also significant variation in values lists. This variation highlighted a lack of current consensus on OD values. Due to this lack of consensus and our Circles goal to identify values that would define and guide OD in the future, we decided to conduct a future-oriented study instead of relying on historical literature.

The OD Values Circle called for a research study to identify new OD values. This research study would be conducted with an international sample of OD practitioners and researchers to gain diverse perspectives and try to achieve consensus on core values for OD. Together, the Circle decided the best study design to achieve our goals was to conduct a three-round Delphi survey study starting with an open prompt to provide three to five values, descriptions, and associated behavioral indicators that can help guide the field of OD in the future. Sixty participants were selected from over 100 respondents, and 42 participants participated in at least one round of the study.

Participants represented OD practitioners and researchers who practiced in 58 countries, in five continents and who represented diverse groups in terms of age, ethnicity, gender, and educational backgrounds. Throughout the study, eight OD values Circle group members served as a small advisory council and met with the research team which was made up of the Circle leaders and a PhD student, to assist us in making decisions on any conflicting or complex feedback from the study participants. Round 1 of the study sought to gather values, value descriptions, and associated behavioral indicators from participants to aggregate into a list of 10 values or

less. Round 2 of the study sought to refine values and receive feedback and validity ratings from participants on the list of values from Round 1 to begin building consensus. Round 3 of the study sought to gain consensus and collect final rating on the validity and additional feedback on the list of values from Round 2 to generate the final list of nine core OD values. For more detailed information on the study, see Yoon, Farley, and Padilla (2020).

OD Gathering 2019

During the third and final OD Gathering held in December 2019, we presented the research design and analysis process our Circle used and the final list of values, descriptions, and behavioral indicators to all the OD Gathering participants. The participants then broke into small groups to discuss the results and provide feedback, inputs, and suggested edits. One major piece of feedback, and in-depth discussion, was related to the value that was initially labeled as "Acceptance and Diversity." The feedback and discussion around this value focused on the lack of the term "Inclusion" or "Equity" and that by instead linking diversity with "Acceptance" it downplays the importance of inclusion and equity in relation to diversity. The argument was that in OD we believe diversity should not just be accepted but championed through inclusion and equity-generating actions and decision. Based on this feedback we removed the term "Acceptance" and made the value simply "Diversity." Other major feedback we received was about better highlighting the interconnectedness of the values. Specifically, some values needed to be taken together to fully capture how OD would make choices and behave on a given topic. For example, the three values of "Collaborative Engagement," "Diversity," and "Trust & Respect" needed to be taken together to capture the OD value that underpins our belief in the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Therefore, we modified the depiction of some values in a way that displays related values next to each other to make clearer how values built on each other to create the whole. Lastly, the OD Gathering participants noticed a pattern in the values. They identified

Figure 2: OD Value Model: Nine Core OD Values from a Future-Oriented Perspective

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that some values applied more inwardly towards the OD practitioner or researcher and some applied more outwardly towards the client. To respond to this observation, we created a visual that displays the values in concentric circles that will be addressed later in this article (*Figure 2*).

Next Steps and Applications

We identified numerous ways to use the OD values and how to apply them in OD practice and beyond. All nine OD values should be applied collectively to fully capture what underlies OD practitioner and researcher's choices and behaviors. The nine core OD values apply at all levels of the system including, self, dyad, group, organization, society, nation, and global levels.

We created a visual model to best summarize and display the nine core OD values using two circles—inner and outer

(see *Figure 2*). The inner circle depicts the values that orient more frequently toward OD practitioners themselves. The outer circle depicts the values that orient more frequently towards interactions with others including co-workers and clients. These concentric circles in the OD Values Model serve only to enhance the understanding of the user in the primary ways to apply the values. We want to emphasize that while there may be an inward or outward lean to some values, all values can be applied both inwardly and outwardly to guide OD practice. For example, a person can use "Strategic Practicality" which is in the outer circle, for self-management. Likewise, a person can champion "Courageous Leadership," which is in the inner circle, with the client to help them call out and address injustice. We will need to conduct further research to fully explore the interconnection between the values to build up the OD Values Model and enhance its application.

Table 3: *Examples for Applying OD Values*

Actors	Key Application Ideas
OD Educators and Researchers	• Use it to distinguish what makes OD different from other practices • Use it as a basis for comparison to actual OD practice • Conduct research on to what extent these values make OD practitioners and organizations more effective • Embed the values in every OD class and model the values • Discuss the values along with OD definitions and competencies with students and OD practitioners • Use the values as a guiding filter for making a decision on the types of research and the way research is conducted
OD Practitioners	• Live and breathe these values to be an effective practitioner • Use it to communicate how the OD practitioner will work with the client, especially at the contract phase, and how OD is distinguished from other practices • Apply the values to the interactions with coworkers and clients • Use as a framework to conceptualize and market own OD practice • Use as a self-assessment tool to identify developmental needs • Raise questions about values that have been ignored at the individual, organizational, and societal levels • Share it with colleagues and partners to confirm alignment
Leaders	• Model the OD values so that members of the organization will know what these values look like • Identify values that help improve performance at each of the levels • Use it to support decision making and visioning • Confront where these values are not evidenced • Demonstrate them in organizational town halls
Other	• Use the values and behavioral indicators in a survey with customers or clients to see they are demonstrated by leaders, consultants, and organizational members • Use some of the values as part of performance criteria for employees • Demonstrate them in personal and family interactions as a parent, spouse, and friend • Use them to select and evaluate internal and external OD consultants

We envision the OD values to be useful not just to OD practitioners but to anyone seeking to practice OD. To support this broader application of the OD Values Model, we collected application ideas, through a webinar, for the following key stakeholders: (1) OD educators, (2) OD practitioners, (3) leaders, and (4) other. *Table 3* shows a summary of the results from this webinar. Three salient themes arose in the results. First, we as OD practitioners should seek to apply these values and behavioral indicators on ourselves first, and then exhibit them while interacting with others. Second, the OD values are relevant to many aspects of our lives, not just in our work. Therefore, we can seek to model the OD values in everything that we do as a person, educator, researcher, consultant, leader, and even as a parent or friend. Third, the behavioral indicators associated with the values will help us clearly articulate, understand, and practice OD values. Many participants expressed an interest in explicitly applying these values in how they practice OD with clients and within their own organizations. Given this interest, a future research area can explore the effect of applying the OD values on organizational performance. Results of this type of research can provide a strong rationale for benefits of OD in organizations.

Interestingly, numerous ideas arose around the concept that the nine OD values are relevant for all organizations, teams, and leadership practices. A few respondents shared application ideas for the nine OD values in this broader application context:

» Use the values to assess corporate culture
» Incorporate the values in the strategic HR dimension and day-to-day interactions with manager and executives
» Help organizations embed the values into management systems to make them real
» Motivate and mentor teams to live and breathe these values

While in some instances these may be appropriate uses of the OD values, we feel it is important to note some distinctions. Practicing OD, whether we are in the role of an OD consultant or an OD-centric professional, means we should demonstrate these values in how we interact with ourselves and others. However, exhibiting these values ourselves does not mean it is appropriate, or best, for our clients or organization to hold our same values. The discussion of the validity of applying OD values in the context of the benefit on society and organizations at large is outside the scope of this article.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the OD Values Circle, through the support of the OD Gathering organizers and participants, were able to gain consensus on nine core OD values that will help guide the practice of OD in the future. These values and the associated behavioral indicators provide a practical model to help future OD practitioners and researchers, as well as leaders or other professionals, bring the values of OD into their work and life. Having a common understanding of OD values that does not rely on the traditional jargon, which prevented translation of the values outside of the OD field, helps make OD more accessible and applicable to a broader and more diverse group of people. Our research and results demonstrate the power of OD values and can serve as a foundation to help drive the impact of OD on the world and into the future.

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Organization Development Network

Advancing the Science, Practice & Impact of OD

THE OD GATHERING

2017–2019

> "Over the past 30 years, the field has seen the dispersion of core OD principles into an array of diverse approaches, some of which build on and others which move away from the early coherence of the field. This has created a tension around defining which are 'legitimate' OD practices…"

What Capabilities are Needed in the Practice of OD in the Future?

Report on the *Capabilities* Circle of Work

By Todd L. Matthews, Anne L. Clancy, Neha Ghadge, Rosa Colon-Kolacko

Introduction

The three OD Gatherings held in 2017–2019 resulted in Circles of Work that address four main aspects of interest to the field: (1) the essence, vision, and critical needs of OD; (2) OD values; (3) definition of OD; and (4) OD capabilities. The purpose of this article is to describe the work done by an eclectic group of interested OD scholars, researchers, academicians, practitioners, writers and activists who came together at the 2018 OD Gathering to address a significant question for the future of OD:

> *What critical competencies are needed in the practice of OD for the future?*

This question arose given concerns held by many participants at the Gathering about the viability of OD as a profession moving into the future. Over the past 30 years, the field has seen the dispersion of core OD principles into an array of diverse approaches, some of which build on and others which move away from the early coherence of the field. This has created a tension around defining which are "legitimate" OD practices and has led to a fragmentation of the field, especially from the perspective of new generations of OD professionals. Would a coherent set of OD competencies help bridge the tensions and divisions in the field? This is what the Competency Working Circle set out to discover.

In the process of doing the work, the group shifted the concept from "Future OD Competencies" to "Future OD Capabilities." This had been the source of much debate amongst the Circle for months, as some members argued that Competencies were too prescriptive and/or constraining upon OD practice, while others maintained that true Competency work such as that done by related organizations like SHRM and ATD was much more extensively researched and vetted before it was finalized. The final resolution was that the Circle Team believed that "Future OD Capabilities" is a better descriptor of what was developed. The term "capabilities" is drawn from the capability approach developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum and refers generally to "what individuals are able to do."

The Result

The revised and finalized Core OD Capabilities for the Future include the following six items (the list includes definitions and a brief behavioral indicator example to highlight possible aspects of how this can be put into practice):

1. **Develops and maintains an enhanced and reflective use of self**—drawing on the work of Jamieson, Auron, and Schectman, this is defined as "the conscious use of one's whole being in the intentional execution of one's role for effectiveness in whatever the current situation is presenting." *Behavioral indicator example: Able to identify own emotions, biases, and assumptions, and use them as a source of information and motivation.*

2. **Embraces diversity and develops cultural competence** to practice and support inclusivity and equity across all settings and levels of system at all times—engages in the creation of opportunities and the overcoming of systems, structures of bias and inequality to support the development and equal access to opportunities to all individuals and social groups. This includes leveraging all differences, similarities, related tensions and complexities to create an environment where everybody feels valued, respected, appreciated, and

example: Knows and can apply various decision-making approaches.

5. **Understands and applies relevant theories, concepts and methods**—has the knowledge and ability to apply existing and emergent theories, concepts and methods from relevant disciplines and fields. *Behavioral indicator example: Knows the difference between sound and pseudo research practices and can appropriately implement them.*

6. **Utilizes existing and emerging tools and technologies** for practice—can learn and implement various tools and

cultural fluency; enhanced use of self; and an integrated cross-disciplinary approach. The group also agreed that each of the competencies should be overlaid by a professional's level of tech savvy, a commitment to ethics and a systems perspective. The group developed some core assumptions about the topic to help frame the discussion and generated a picture of what the OD competencies would need to tackle in the future—namely, a world that is becoming increasingly virtual, chaotic, complex, ever-changing, and reliant upon a sophisticated understanding of group dynamics.

Regular virtual discussions via Zoom took place roughly every three weeks for 1–2 hours throughout most of 2019 to review and finalize a list of core competencies that would be presented at the December 2019 OD Gathering. The framework of these discussions was initially divergent to ensure the competencies would be based on current and past research, matched anticipated future megatrends, and incorporated key needs and opportunities that OD could help address for a positive future impact. Side discussions ranged from the question of OD certification to identifying an OD body of knowledge needed for the future.

The discussions gradually converged along specific pathways that the group considered to be the most helpful in moving forward in a meaningful and timely manner:

1. Identifying future megatrends that the competencies would need to match. These are discussed in more detail in the next section.
2. Delineating OD needs and opportunities in the future. These were identified as: navigating speed of change; enacting clarity of principles, purpose, and values; fostering learning and development; adapting to technology; maintaining individual and group identity; promoting sustainability; influencing power dynamics; and aligning mission, vision, and strategy. Completing this task helped the group better frame the discussions.
3. Naming current and future stakeholders connected to or impacted by

> Two primary outputs emerged from the research, dialogue, and deliberation conducted amongst the Circle Team—a list of what were termed "future Megatrends" that were believed to be key societal drivers of change impacting organizations and societies more broadly over the next 5–10 plus years; and the subsequent list of OD Competencies (re-named Capabilities) that were believed would best position practitioners of OD to engage in a world impacted by these Megatrends.

treated with equity; including addressing racial behaviors, unconscious bias, cultural sensitivity, knowledge, and managing team dynamics amongst diverse teams. *Behavioral indicator example: Is willing to work across cultures and is able to facilitate difficult conversations managing differences and/or charged group settings.*

3. **Utilizes systems thinking and flexibility** to support execution of successful practice—ability to support organizational efforts to maximize competitive advantage, differentiation, and value creation while fostering a climate of continuous assessment and adaptation to change *Behavioral indicator example: Knows and utilizes system and complexity theories for the benefit of the organization.*

4. **Skillfully engages, intervenes and facilitates** within and across systems and organizations—capacity to design, support, and (when necessary) lead efforts focused on organizational change and development. *Behavioral indicator*

technologies necessary to support practice efforts. *Behavioral indicator example: Demonstrated understanding of advanced technology such as AI, Robotics, Block chain, IoT, Big Data, and their potential influence on the client system.*

The list of capabilities was revised based on the feedback and then presented at the Academy of Management conference in August 2020 at a virtual meeting with over 100 attendees. They were well received. No further changes were made.

Our Process

At the 2018 Gathering, 18 participants began a discussion and formed a "Circle of Work" team to carry forward the effort. The group was tasked by the Gathering Leadership to attempt to identify 3–5 OD competencies for the future. The participants in the Circle brainstormed an initial list of general competencies: strategic acumen; skilled facilitation; emotional, social, and

OD. Stakeholders were first identified and then organized into groups of practitioners; academics; professionals focused on HR, talent, leadership, learning, and development, organizational, social justice, change and community leaders, and practitioners of organizational design. It was thought the competencies would need to be most relevant to these groups.

4. Defining the concept of competency, and ultimately shifting to the language of capability. This is discussed in more detail in the following section.
5. Recognizing that the list of capabilities would be primarily drawn from a North American perspective although efforts were made to be global in outlook.
6. Adding behavioral definitions to each of the six capabilities to connect the concept with its application.

To complete its task, the group necessarily had to limit the content and discussion of concepts. The following competency ideas were not discussed at the OD Gathering but the group acknowledged they were important to other researchers and OD organizations: history and evolution of organization development and change, ability to measure positive change, and integration of theory and practice.

Upon completion of a draft of the competencies that was "90–95% complete," the work was presented to several audiences in Fall 2019 before a presentation to the full OD Gathering in Baltimore, Maryland in early December 2019. The presentation was followed by the opportunity to solicit small group feedback in a World Café format. The feedback themes included: shift away from the term "competencies" to the language of "capabilities," adjust some of the descriptions in the behavioral definitions, separate one of the capabilities into two separate ones, further clarify the competency of strategic acumen, broaden the competency of skilled facilitation, create a new definition for inclusion and equity, address whether the competencies will translate globally, reflect on the role of ethics, and speak to how the competencies might be affected by the issues of

standardization and the tension between curriculum/theory and practice.

Two primary outputs emerged from the research, dialogue and deliberation conducted amongst the Circle Team—a list of what were termed "future Megatrends" that were believed to be key societal drivers of change impacting organizations and societies more broadly over the next 5–10 plus years; and the subsequent list of OD Competencies (re-named Capabilities as noted earlier) that were believed would best position practitioners of OD to engage in a world impacted by these Megatrends.

Several definitions of Megatrends and past research on this topic was reviewed by the team. Ultimately the working definition of Megatrends utilized involved: "a set of global, sustained macroeconomic forces that 1) are nearly impossible to reverse; 2) significantly influence the future; and 3) have far reaching implications on businesses, economies, societies, cultures, and personal lives." After considerable deliberation, the four Future Megatrends that were delineated by the Circle Team included:

1. Emerging Technologies—including those in the continuing digital revolution; wind and solar power; etc.
2. Power Shifts—foundational changes in economic, demographics, social justice, oppression, political and diversity inclusion and structures of inequality.
3. Sustainability of Organizations, Social and Natural Systems—inclusive of ecological sustainability particularly around climate change and other global environmental challenges, but also addressing cultural competence, organizational and societal sustainability in a destabilizing and decentered world.
4. Individual and Organizational Risk and Security—concerns around issues ranging from terrorism, espionage, cyberdata security and privacy, and workplace/societal violence.

The Circle Team next worked on identifying 3–5 future OD competencies (numbers provided by the Gathering Leadership team as noted above), utilizing the Megatrends above as a background for where OD practice would need to move in the next years, and also after reviewing roughly two dozen

articles and book chapters that have been written in the field of OD and related fields over the past two decades. The Team used the commonly held definition of competency that centers around the relationship between knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) needed to successfully perform required tasks. This work resulted in five future OD competencies included:

1. An enhanced and reflective sense of self
2. An emphasis on Inclusion & Equity
3. Strategic acumen balanced with flexibility
4. Skilled facilitation abilities within and across levels of organizational systems
5. A diverse set of research skills, theoretical lenses, and tools for practice at their disposal.

After presentation of this work and the collection of feedback from events discussed in the previous section, significant revision of the language used to describe several of the competencies was undertaken, as well as the splitting and refining of the final competency into two separate items

Next Steps

To accelerate the next steps of the conversation about Future OD Capabilities, the Circle Team believes it is important to first focus on the important relationship between diversity and inclusion. Inclusive, diverse, and equitable organizations can inspire leaders and team members with possibilities and close the gap between aspiration and reality, and support the development of each of the future OD capabilities for the global workplace.

A holistic approach to diversity creates a new perspective for an individual to see new things and ideas beyond the demographic parity that enabled people to reach their full potential. Further, we have seen that high performing teams are both cognitively and demographically diverse. Cognitive diversity means the educational and functional diversity that helps an individual to solve the problem with the help of diversity in the mental frameworks. To listen to several voices and create a safe environment where every voice is heard and valued

The practice of OD has always been important as a means of directing organizational attention and activity towards more humanistic cultures, structures, and processes. That practice may be more important than ever today, in an age of societal, organizational, and interpersonal turmoil connected to global pandemics, health disparities, economic and education inequalities, the climate change crisis, systemic oppression and conflict along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity, rapid technological change, and a myriad of other complex, often interlocking issues that demand working across divisions in the pursuit of our collective survival and flourishing.

is one of the dimensions in the diversity, inclusion, and equity framework where more work needs to be done.

While Inclusion is a priority, we need to also focus on building understanding of what is Equity—*to have the ability to achieve the highest level of success, and health possible, regardless of who you are, economic status, and where you live.* Many diversity programs failed to deliver on expectations, very often due to lack of partnership with leaders to translate inequities into goals, from increasing new jobs and succession planning to diversifying candidate talent pools. Hence, this can balance the action planning focus not only around inclusion and diversity, but also on developing equitable workplaces.

In addition, all of this work necessitates that individuals develop and maintain an enhanced and reflective use of self as described above, while simultaneously working to ensure that OD practitioners and their collaborators utilize systems thinking and flexibility as its foundation and in its execution. And of course, understanding and drawing on past and current theories, concepts, methods, tools, and technologies as appropriate is critical in this work. In this way, it is clear to the Circle Team that these competencies are inter-related and mutually reinforcing for OD practice.

Conclusion

While the multi-year project of the OD Gathering has been largely completed, inclusive of the Capabilities work described in this article and the work done by the other Circle Teams, the broader effort to ensure the vitality and viability of OD as an area of practice continues. As relates to the Capabilities we have outlined, it is our hope that this list serves as a solid foundation from which other work may be launched, in support of the important work that OD practitioners engage in across all types of organizations.

The practice of OD has always been important as a means of directing organizational attention and activity towards more humanistic cultures, structures, and processes. That practice may be more important than ever today, in an age of societal, organizational, and interpersonal turmoil connected to global pandemics, health disparities, economic and education inequalities, the climate change crisis, systemic oppression and conflict along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity, rapid technological change, and a myriad of other complex, often interlocking issues that demand working across divisions in the pursuit of our collective survival and flourishing. Identifying and building these capabilities

will be a critical element to address the new megatrends, emerging businesses, and demographic needs.

In addition, this will contribute towards building a future-focused practice of OD that can play a bigger role in cultural and community transformations stimulating and fostering the dialogue necessary to leverage differences to build innovative OD interventions to grow and develop individuals and inclusive and equitable organizations.

Note: A list of references, including the works referenced in the review of the past literature on competencies in OD and related fields, is available from the lead author upon request.

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Why is it so Hard to Change Organizational Culture?

Introduction

One thing OD professionals share in common is belief in the power of organizational culture, even when we differ on how to best help leaders and companies understand and leverage this concept. In this issue of *OD Review*, **Lukas Neville** and **Benjamin Schneider** pose the question, why is it so hard to change organizational culture? They focus on the people side of the equation. Building off Ben's long history of applied research and work on organizational climate and culture (Schneider, 2020), these authors describe how the combination of attraction, selection and attrition (ASA) shape the aggregate of personality and behavior we see in companies. Changing culture, they offer, requires intentional focus on these dynamics and recognizing that, in the end, people make the place.

Reflecting on this perspective we are fortunate to share a number of commentaries, some expanding on points of the lead article and others offering a different view. All acknowledge the power of the model, but many of them take issue with how much this framework, by itself, drives organizational change.

While agreeing that personality has aggregate impact, **Edgar Schein** cautions us about the slippery slope of over-reliance on personality when we tackle the complex challenge of organizational culture and organizational change. **Sharon Glazer** adds perspective on the bidirectional nature of acculturation, as incumbents and newcomers adapt to each other over time. **Dan Denison** notes that it is not just acculturation, but context that shapes cultural behavior. For **Corrie Voss** and **Deborah O'Neil**, the lead article surfaces several underlying questions, such as how to balance diversity and homogeneity in organizational culture.

With our lead article focusing on change in one auto industry company, **Lisa Meyer** shares the case of another auto company where the CEO's actions were essential to initiate culture change. **Norm Jones** focuses on how a different key actor, the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO), negotiates between patterns of organizational personality and aspirations for workplace diversity. **Jim MacQueen** observes that it's really a matter of surfacing and disrupting unconscious behavioral patterns, actions that OD professionals, executives and CDOs may each do as they seek to drive change. For **Jennifer Chatman**, it's the behavioral norms people then follow, not just personality, that enable organizational change.

Karen Paul reminds us that there are multiple aspects of culture. Only through research can we determine if we have sufficient alignment or overlap of cultural elements to enable real change, a fitting place to close our commentaries given Ben's many years of evidence-based learning. Neville and Schneider have the final word here, providing a reply to the commentaries.

As you read the focal article and the commentaries that follow, consider the range of perspectives offered and add your own insights as you reflect on this topic. We hope this issue of *OD Review* sets the stage for productive conversations with your clients, colleagues and students.

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Why is it so Hard to Change a Culture? It's the People.

By Lukas Neville and Benjamin Schneider

Abstract

Advice about enacting change in organizations often treats culture as malleable: With the right processes, the right structures, and sufficient managerial resolve, cultural change will happen. But OD practitioners often discover that there are limits to how much culture can be changed. In this article, we argue that culture, rather than shaping people, is often a reflection of relative personality homogeneity in firms. This homogeneity is the result of the attraction–selection–attrition (ASA) cycle. Thus, efforts to change culture will often falter because it treats culture as a force shaping employees, rather than it being a reflection of those employees' stable, enduring, and shared personality traits. We share evidence from recent research documenting relative personality homogeneity in firms and conclude with suggestions about what culture change might look like when we accept the ASA idea that *"the people make the place."*

Keywords: Organizational change; ASA cycle and change; Personality and organizational change; Organizational culture.

In 2015, German automaker Volkswagen found itself embroiled in a scandal after its cars were discovered to have a software cheat installed designed to misrepresent the cars' performance on emissions tests. The controversy would result in resignations, criminal charges, billions in fines, and the recall of tens of millions of vehicles. CEO Matthias Mueller, appointed a week after the scandal broke, focused on changing a rigid command-and-control culture that he and others saw as having contributed to the emissions cheating. Mueller aimed for a more transparent Volkswagen and wanted employees to be less deferential to authority.

Two years into this project, Mueller admitted the cultural change was proving challenging: *"There are definitely people who are longing for the old centralistic leadership. I don't know whether you can imagine how difficult it is to change the mindset."* (Cremer, 2017)

Volkswagen is not alone in its struggles to change corporate culture by changing employees' mindsets. In many organizations, the history of cultural change initiatives is a checkered one; attempts to transform culture often fail, stall, or backslide. A McKinsey global survey of more than 3,000 executives suggests that two out of every three major change initiatives will fail (Dewar & Keller, 2009). A more recent survey of 400 CEOs finds that half of CEOs found it more difficult than expected to enact cultural change (Najipoor-Schuette & Patton, 2018).

Attraction, Selection, Attrition

So why is cultural change so hard to achieve, and why does it so often fail? To

THE ASA MODEL

The ASA model involves three elements that create and maintain a distinct 'organizational personality' that leads to enduring and hard-to-change organizational cultures. These three elements are (1) attraction, (2) selection, and (3) attrition.

ATTRACTION describes how candidates are drawn to organizations with characteristics that they think they fit. Whether it's word of mouth from current employees, interactions with recruiters, or how companies represent themselves in job ads and other recruitment materials, applicants make inferences about what an organization is like, and how they might fit in (or not). In other words, to understand the culture, you can begin by understanding who applies.

SELECTION is a two-way street: Applicants are chosen by firms, and applicants select among offers from firms. This occurs after candidates go through interviews and other selection processes that further communicate the nature of the organization and provide signals about how they fit (or don't). By looking at how those who are selected by the firm (and choose to be there) differ from the population at large, we continue to narrow the range of people in the firm—the firm's culture is increasingly a function of shared personality.

ATTRITION describes who leaves the organization. It is those who fit with the dominant personality of the organization who are more likely to want to stay, more likely to see a career path for themselves in the organization, and less likely to be terminated or managed out of the firm. In other words, the wide range of people who apply and are initially selected into a firm tends to be winnowed down further over time by departures (voluntary and involuntary alike). So, while it may look like culture shapes us (we become more like the organization over time), it is us becoming more alike by attrition: It is only those who are most like the organization who stay the longest.

explain this challenge, we revisit a classic framework from organizational psychology: Ben Schneider's *Attraction–Selection–Attrition* (ASA) framework (Schneider, 1987). The framework explains the existence and persistence of culture as a function of three simple questions: Who is drawn to join a given organization? Who ends up being selected? And who stays?

In the ASA approach, culture is the product of the preferences and traits of founders and other early organizational members. Organizations are not formed at random. Instead, they reflect all of the processes and structures put in place via the idiosyncratic characteristics and personalities of their early founding members. And the fingerprints of organizations' founders on their firms' culture often persist long after their retirements or departures. Firms recreate and reify the culture through a series of mundane staffing choices: How

the firm recruits and selects employees, which employees feel compelled to apply and accept offers, who the firm chooses to promote and retain, and which employees choose to stay versus leaving.

These forces create organizations with distinct organizational personalities. We often mistake this for proof that organizations' cultures shape the people within them: We come to believe that Volkswagen's command-and-control culture must have made its staff deferential to hierarchy and reluctant to speak up. But the ASA framework suggests the opposite possibility. Organizations' cultures simply reflect the values, personalities, and traits of those who have chosen (and been chosen) to work there. If Volkswagen had employees who resisted change and wanted to keep the predictability and order associated with hierarchical, centralistic leadership, this was for a reason: It was because Volkswagen had been built to attract, select,

and retain people who thrived under that model of management.

In other words, people find themselves in firms that they are attracted to, selected by, and where they thrive, are recognized, and choose to stay. Firms, VW included, are full of people who like things the way they are, because firms build workforces that are homogeneous in very specific ways. While firms deliberately select for functional and demographic diversity, they often also deliberately select for cultural fit—yielding personality similarity. This homogeneity-by-design is often ignored in cultural change projects that attempt to change the environment by attempts at altering processes and structures.

Many organizations already pay attention to the composition of their employee base in terms of demographic characteristics (for example, gender or ethnicity), or functional diversity (a range of disciplines or educational backgrounds). But fewer take careful stock of personality diversity. Even in the most gender diverse, culturally diverse, and even functionally diverse organizations, there is very often still a significant homogeneity of personality.

Next, we explain where this homogeneity comes from in organizations, and why it can both strengthen firm performance—but also act as a substantial obstacle to the enactment of cultural change at moments where change is necessary.

Shared Organizational Personality as a Barrier to Cultural Change

Research by Ben Schneider and Dave Bartram with more than 35,000 employees in more than 150 firms worldwide shows that organizations have a collective 'personality,' and this shared personality has financial consequences (Schneider & Bartram, 2017). They measured financial performance using returns on assets and returns on investment (ROA and ROI), with controls for country and industry.

Their research, using data gathered from a consulting firm that administers personality surveys, examined the degree to which members of individual firms shared personality traits. They found significant homogeneity of personality within

companies: Organizations, as the ASA framework would suggest, tend to have a statistically significant 'shared personality' that differs from other firms.

There wasn't one 'correct' personality for a firm to have. For example, the research examined a personality trait called "openness to experience," which measures the degree to which people are interested in creativity, fresh experiences, and novelty. Firms varied in this trait: In some firms, the shared personality was low in openness to experience, filled with staunch traditionalists who preferred routine. In others, openness was high, with employees who were prone to experimentation, innovation, and novelty. There was no effect of what *kind* of personality the firm had on performance: Both high-openness and low-openness firms could perform well or poorly.

Instead, what mattered to financial performance was not the traits themselves, but the similarity in traits. In firms where employees had more similar personalities (regardless if they were all high or all low in openness, for example), their firms performed better as measured by industry-adjusted return on investments and return on assets.

These findings suggest important paradoxes for managers trying to lead cultural change. First, the organizational culture they think of as shaping employees' behavior may in fact simply be a reflection of the hard-to-change personality traits their employees share. To some extent, the culture doesn't shape the people: The people *are* the culture—Schneider says "the people make the place." Secondly, the way that organizational members come to resemble one another in personality is both natural and functional—but the similarities that make it easier to perform can also stand in the way of the need for enacting necessary cultural changes.

To really see how ASA might operate, consider extraversion—the personality trait whose continuum runs from outgoing, social behavior at one extreme to a preference for solitary, reserved activities on the other. Extraversion-introversion is a stable personality trait: Introverts and extraverts both know where they stand

on this continuum, and they are unlikely to change drastically over the life course. And these different personalities tend to congregate together in organizations. Some organizations are sociable, talkative places. These organizations choose open floor plans, regular socializing, frequent participative meetings, and so on in part because their founders and earliest members were extraverts. These founders were not made extraverted by regular meetings, but rather chose frequent meetings *because* they were extraverts. A place founded by introverts would choose structures, routines, and procedures that afforded more quiet moments, more opportunities for independent work, more places to work in solitude.

From those initial founder traits come self-reinforcing environments: Extraverts are attracted to more outgoing gregarious places. They'll feel like they 'fit' comfortably in the culture and decide to stay and they'll be less likely to be let go. Introverts will like the quiet, focused environments of introverted firms. Their deep, careful thought processes and decisions will get them hired. They'll fit; they'll be kept; they'll stay. In sum, what the study of 35,000-plus employees showed was that extraverts and introverts—and other personality traits—can characterize firms and that firms differ significantly from one another in the traits that define them.

But this doesn't necessarily square with our intuition. We might only have to think as far as the obvious personality differences between those in accounting and sales and conclude that firms cannot possibly share a distinguishable 'personality.' What this misses, however, is considering relative homogeneity, not absolute homogeneity. We will always be able to tell accountants apart from salespeople. But relative homogeneity means that accountants in one company will be closer in personality to all the non-accountants in their own firm than they would be to all the non-accountants in other firms. In the same way that there is a distinct personality core to certain professions, it is now clear there is also a distinct personality core to organizations.

There are also firms in which divisions or silos have truly independent cultures—where one operating unit has its own independent history and has operated with complete autonomy in shaping the processes that compel people to apply, determine who is chosen, and shape who stays and who leaves. This may exist in different operating units controlled by a hands-off holding company, for instance, or in a firm that is acquired but never integrated with its purchaser and left to operate independently. But these are exceptions to the rule. In most companies, even those with strong silos, people are more similar to employees from other silos in their own firm than they would be to employees from other silos in other firms. Personality homogeneity remains alive and well, even when we can point to cultural differences between divisions or departments. Just like accounting units appearing to differ from sales units, the differences within firms are not in terms of absolute homogeneity differences; relative homogeneity remains.

Returning to Volkswagen, we can see how these processes might have interfered with desired cultural change. As CEO, Mueller wanted to shift from a centralized, directive form of leadership to an environment that was more open, flatter, and tolerant of dissent. But Volkswagen was a place with strong deference to authority, so it attracted people who were markedly different than those who chose to work and get selected by other flatter and open companies. In short, those who would have been most open toward a flat, participative culture would be less likely to be attracted to VW, less likely to be chosen to work there, and less likely to stay.

Cultural Change Is Doomed When We Ignore Personality Homogeneity

Prescriptions about culture change often ignore this basic fact of organizational life: Firms attract, select and keep people who shape the culture just as much as the culture shapes them—all in a self-reinforcing cycle. This is why, in our view, culture is so often permanent and resistant to change. Advice about culture change often focuses on behaviors, processes, and structures,

calling for formal changes, targeted interventions, and the aid of 'influencers' (Katzenbach, Steffan & Kronley, 2012). Or they focus on execution from a behavioral standpoint: How to communicate vision, build coalitions, and celebrate 'small wins,' for instance (Kotter, 2012).

Implicit in these accounts is the assumption that organizational culture is a powerful force that shapes employee behavior. This seems patently obvious—a truism, even. One consultant writes, summarizing this view, that "corporate culture is what energizes us or drains us, it motivates us or discourages us, it empowers us, or it suffocates us." (Morgan, 2015). We disagree with such accounts: Corporate culture, instead, *reflects* us. It fits with the way we tend to be motivated or discouraged. We are empowered or suffocated depending on how the culture fits and reflects our personalities, and over time, those who are suffocated tend to exit, and tend to be replaced with those for whom the culture is desirable.

As *The People Make the Place* (Schneider, 1987) argued:

> *"When an organization has been in existence for a while it looks like the people there are behaving as they do because of its (seemingly) non-personal attributes. In reality the way it looks is a result of the people there behaving the way they do. They behave the way they do because they were attracted to that environment, selected by it, and stayed with it."*

Some of our more cynical MBA students have recognized this: We remember one student who joked that the only thing needed to enact culture change would be to have every one of the employees leave and be replaced by very different people. We are not quite so cynical, but we suggest that efforts at cultural change must not neglect the central role of shared personality. And, we argue, managers need to carefully think about the challenge of cultural changes that do not fit the dominant organizational 'personality.'

Culture Change, Recognizing That People Make the Place

So, what might a program of cultural change look like in an organization that recognizes that culture often reflects the personality composition needing change? We return to the fundamentals of the ASA (attraction, selection, attrition) framework to make the case for what such a program of cultural change might look like when managers recognize that the 'people make the place':

Change more than the CEO. When organizations want to or have to change, they often shuffle up the C-suite, changing CEOs and other senior leaders. But a meta-analysis (a "study of studies" examining 13,000+ leadership successions) suggests that new leaders rarely drive better performance, and new 'outside' CEOs fare worst of all (Schepker, Kim, Patel, Thatcher & Campion, 2017). So, shuffling the leadership team and leaving everyone else to function with each other and within intact structures is likely not enough. Leaders looking to shift culture might need to think more broadly about how to disrupt personality similarity. Leaders might use retirements or terminations to forcefully change the composition of the workforce. Or, they might even copy Zappos and its acquirer, Amazon, and use 'pay to quit' incentives, which provide an incentive for early voluntary departure, as a way to give those questioning their fit an opportunity to leave (Burkus, 2016). But what to do after forced attrition? Attraction and selection.

Use recruitment and selection to advance cultural change. Cultural changes can run head-on against deeply embedded, stable individual traits that are widely shared in the organization. Leaders need to think very deliberately about how to use hiring and selection to break up the dominant 'organizational personality.' This can be done by shifting who is attracted to the organization. For example, police services have found that they attract different types of officers when they emphasize career development rather than service (Linos, 2018) in recruitment.

It can also be done by changing who is selected into the organization. Patty McCord, formerly Netflix's Chief Talent Officer, has pled with firms to stop applying 'beer tests' in hiring (that is, assessing whether you would want to go out for a beer, or coffee, with the applicant; McCord, 2018). We would go further and simply stamp out the hiring processes that promote (and reward) applicant fit with the aggregate personality of the organization as the goal of new hires.

So, while such hiring for "fit" can be beneficial during normal times, unfortunately, during periods of cultural change, changes to HR processes like recruitment and hiring often lag behind hoped-for strategic and cultural shifts.

When that happens, HR spends its time hiring people for a culture that is being left behind—essentially inhibiting the very change needed. Or, most dangerously, the logic given to HR is to stop hiring until the culture change gets worked out as if it can happen with present talent. But this can backfire: if cultural change is stalled by personality homogeneity, hiring freezes do nothing but deepen the personality homogeneity that leaders are trying to break. In fact, research shows that selection is the strongest force in the ASA model in determining the degree to which firms develop a shared organizational 'personality.' One study tracked a cohort of thousands of job applicants over five years. They measured who was hired, and who stayed versus left. They found that it was the initial hiring decisions that most strongly promoted the emergence of an organizational personality (Oh, Han, Holtz, Kim & Kim, 2018).

Find change agents that fit. Recognizing the reality of shared firm personality does not mean that our only option for cultural change is the wholesale replacement of employees. In many organizations, such large-scale staffing shifts are impossible. And in any case, Schneider and Bartram's results, described earlier, suggest that personality similarity can pay off for firms' financial performance. So, managers may need to find ways of enacting cultural change without having to change the

dominant personality. What is needed then is role-modelling from highly visible positions throughout the firm, not only at the top. These change agents should be chosen not only based on their enthusiasm about the proposed change, but also for their relative fit with the dominant firm personality. These people, placed in positions in divisions and units to serve as opinion leaders, must be assertive in acting as role models, and capable of enacting behavioral change—and they must be recognized and reinforced for their active role as opinion leaders and informal change agents as they show how the changed behavior is a fit to

Similarly, Volkswagen's workforce recruited, hired, promoted and retained employees for their embrace of hierarchy and comfort with a command-and-control culture. If they want to promote ethics, safety, quality and accountability, they may want to do so in ways that do not require shifts to hard-to-change traits and values. At Volkswagen, employees were selected for and stayed around because they fit in a place that valued hierarchy.

So, an appropriate approach to cultural change would have focused less on undoing the hierarchical structure. Instead, it might have focused on introducing role

adjusting the framing of cultural change in ways that encourage fit with the existing personality of the firm's employees. And, these can be mutually reinforcing. Firms can first find ways of fitting desired changes into the existing orientation—and then use selection processes to position role models into visible and influential roles in the firm.

This model of culture change based on personality homogeneity has implications at every level of the organization, and for OD practitioners of all stripes. For change practitioners, and cultural change specialists in particular, it requires that change *begin* with an inventory of the personalities, values, and other stable, unchanging individual differences that are shared among the members of the organization. Diversity practitioners may already recognize the issue of personality homogeneity as one of "deep level" diversity—that is, an issue of diversity that goes beyond demographic or even functional differences or similarities. The first step, of understanding the sometimes-hidden ways in which organizational members resemble each other, requires the participation of specialists in personality assessment, human resource management, psychometrics and measurement, talent management, and so on. To be able to change within the parameters of the organization's shared personality, we must first seek to understand what that personality is. And, this focus on peoples' personalities requires a different approach to talent during change: We must not only hire for technical skills or experience, but for the ability to take potentially disruptive and foreign-seeming changes and make them feel and appear natural in the organization's culture and well-suited to the organization's personality.

To be able to change within the parameters of the organization's shared personality, we must first seek to understand what that personality is. And, this focus on peoples' personalities requires a different approach to talent during change: We must not only hire for technical skills or experience, but for the ability to take potentially disruptive and foreign-seeming changes and make them feel and appear natural in the organization's culture and well-suited to the organization's personality.

the established values and personality characteristics of the organization.

If your organization is an introverted, thoughtful, quiet one, your plan to develop a rock-star sales culture should not be tried, period. But you might instead ask this question: How do you turn business development into a process that introverts can comfortably contribute to? Then, you find people who can show what it looks like. These change agents role-model the necessary behaviors but do so in ways that feel familiar and concordant with the culture: The thoughtful listeners who effectively understand their customers' needs. The quiet analysts who transform customer data into actionable leads. The change leaders (whether promoted from within or recruited from outside) must, above all, act in ways that are consistent with the shared organizational personality and appear to others as both a clear fit with the existing ethos and outlook as well as representing new ways of enacting that ethos.

models who were able to integrate ethical practices into the existing hierarchies. Employees would still have rules, measurement, incentives, goals, and monitoring, which would feel like a familiar fit. But the firm's existing rigor, direction, and clarity would be directed to managing ethical conduct. The rule is to take the existing orientation and focus it on new behaviors—using role models to show how.

Looking Ahead

We have outlined several paths to cultural change that recognize the realities of relative shared personality in organizations—and between-organization differences in relative personality. One path draws on the mechanisms of attraction, selection, and attrition, seeking to enact wholesale change in the personality of the firm through the movement of people into and out of the organization. Another path avoids these wholesale changes by

Of course, it may not always be possible to nudge the culture along without changing the dominant organizational personality. There may be cases where the value of cultural change may far outstrip any benefits from personality homogeneity. But for managers contemplating change or mandated to deliver it, forewarned is forearmed. Thirty years of research, including Schneider's findings about

financial performance, show that personality homogeneity is real, pervasive, and likely difficult to change.

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Responses

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As Drs. Neville and Schneider have addressed a critical element in the OD field, we have asked a wide range of members of our community for commentaries to the article.

EDGAR SCHEIN

The Slippery Slope of Linking Personality to Organizational Change

I make these comments with some ambivalence because I know that I will be preaching to the authors who certainly know much of what I will say, but I feel that this paper does a disservice to what we know about organizational culture, subculture, and culture change dynamics. It oversimplifies the change process and the role of culture in that process. The key to effective change usually ends up using some of the deep elements of the culture to help change structures, processes, and norms of behavior to fix the diagnosed business problems. Linking personality types to specific organizational problems is a slippery slope. The paper explains why the VW CEO was frustrated, is convincing that homogeneity is correlated with business performance, explains how that homogeneity arises and can be managed, but the link to explaining organizational change as culture change in this manner is highly misleading.

The findings that organizations with more homogeneous personalities perform better is an important research result from Schneider. However, the extrapolation that this explains the difficulty of culture change falsely assumes 1) that culture can be defined by personality constructs, and 2) culture *change* is related to organizational performance.

Let me comment on the second point first and note that culture is a product of group learning, so the VW culture is a product of what kind of people successfully built that organization and perpetuated it through recruitment and training over the life of the organization. That culture has many facets—a *technical culture* dealing with VW technology, products, strategy, and business processes and a *social culture* dealing with the kinds of personalities that founded the company and built a preferred kind of relationship and personality type, and in each domain many functional, geographic, and technical *subcultures* that sometimes are well synchronized and at other times fight with each other. VW must have had elements of all this. VW is not just "a culture" (Schein & Schein, 2017; 2019).

Unfortunately, when the press and the analysts said the VW has "culture

problem," they do not clearly explain what the business problem was that led to the scandal. When companies get into trouble like VW or Boeing, we glibly say they have a culture problem but that statement neither explains anything, nor tells the organization what they should do. Changing the culture without knowing what problem you are trying to fix is doomed to failure no matter what the homogeneity of the personalities of the organization is. The CEO's aim "to changing a rigid command-and-control culture" and saying he wanted "a more transparent Volkswagen and wanted employees to be less deferential to authority" does not explain why they tried to cheat or how this change would fix it.

The way the authors present this paper confuses *organizational change* with *culture change* and, by implication, that all the failures of organizational change are, in fact, culture changes that fail because of homogeneous personalities. This finding is absolutely correct, if the change goal is to *change personalities.* But a successful change in VW should not begin with a glib diagnosis that it was "a rigid command-and-control culture that he and others saw as having contributed to the emissions cheating." And either he or his consultants should have known if they studied organizational culture at all, that *the history of that organization's success resulted from that command and control culture.*

The real question in this story is what strategic decisions (in the technical culture) led to the commands to bring the cost down "no matter what," and "if you managers can't do it we will find others who can." These commands were quoted at the time in the press and they reflect some strategic and financial decisions that might have nothing to do with the social culture and the personalities of the employees.

The CEO's desire to change them into "a more transparent Volkswagen and wanted employees to be less deferential to authority" was messing with the *social culture* which demonstrably has been one of VW's historic strengths and reflects some of the cultural traits of the German national culture.

What this article illustrates powerfully is that managers (CEOs) don't understand culture dynamics at all, focus on culture instead of business/organizational problems, and consequently fail in so many change efforts. We as social scientists must educate organizational leaders on:

1) how to think about culture as the accumulated learning of the organization's history,
2) to realize that this indeed produces a degree of homogenization of personality types,
3) to realize that attributing business problems to a particular personality type can be a dangerously oversimplified explanation of those problems, and that,
4) if that is really the cause of the problem the only fix is massive changes of people at the top which then cascades over several years through the layers and, in effect, starts building a whole new organizational culture.

Peter Schein and I have recently updated and enhanced our efforts to explain organizational and culture change in detail, and hope that culture change issues get taken more seriously as further scandals like Boeing surface. A more thorough analysis of organizational culture is found in our book, *Organizational Culture and Leadership, 5th Ed.*

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Yesterday You were a Customer, Today You are an Employee

Long ago I heard a joke about immigrants' experiences moving to a new country that I adapted to help someone cope with culture shock moving into a new organization. It goes like this:

An avid and excited customer of a company's online market site was offered an interview with the very same company. Attracted to the company, the customer went in for an interview during which she was given a tour of the company. She saw its bright colors and open work spaces, massive cafeteria with lots of cook-to-order heavily reduced price food, and recreational areas for workers. Surely, this was a great place to work. When offered the job, the candidate happily accepted the offer. At the end of the first day of work, the new employee realized she hardly had time for lunch, did not have a chance to use the recreational area, and sat by her desk nearly the whole day working. She asked a colleague, why her experience was so different from when she interviewed? The response was "Yesterday you were a customer, today you are an employee."

Neville and Schneider note that changing an organization's culture is like trying to change personality. They state that changing some key contributors in the C-suite is not enough to mobilize organizational change, but major changes may be achieved by attracting and selecting the right people to support the new desired culture. As the authors admit, this view may be a bit too simplistic. Aspects to organizational change that have not been considered include considerations from cross-cultural psychology, starting with the definition of culture and acculturation.

Culture is powerful and hard to change. Culture refers to shared values, beliefs, norms, language, and history that are shared by a group of people and passed down over time and taken for granted by those within it (Glazer, 2002). This notion of culture applies not only to nations or

religious groups, but also to organizations, professions, generational cohorts, gender, family units, and more. Culture is often first observed through **artifacts** (what we see, smell, hear, observe) and more deeply by **values** and **assumptions** that explain the artifacts. Schein (2010) represents this in an onion model; at the core are beliefs or assumptions that influence values, which affect observed artifacts. Values represent guiding principles in life that drive us to behave, think, or feel as we do. Valuing a varied life might result in someone thriving on decentralized decisions that enable autonomy to choose how one works and resisting an organization that is wanting to centralize decisions. In contrast, valuing conformity might result in someone thriving on maintaining status quo, clear roles, and perhaps on structure for the sake of consistency. Such a person might resist breaking down barriers and decentralizing decisions. The innermost layer are assumptions based on generalized beliefs about how the world works—(e.g., "Good deeds will be rewarded, and bad deeds will be punished" Bond et al., 2004, p. 557) and explain the values people strive to achieve (e.g., social justice) and the artifacts observed (e.g., 360-degree performance evaluations throughout the organization).

A reason that an organization's culture cannot change despite the desires of a new CEO is that a culture is created over time. Culture is not simply a product of the founders and early members, but also a product of shared values, beliefs, norms, and so forth. So, when there is a threat to what people have become accustomed to, there is likely to be pushback. People strive to sustain that with which they are comfortable (Sortheix & Schwartz, 2017). Organizational change (e.g., restructuring and resource reduction) is typically initiated by leadership and not by the majority of an organization. More often than not, the followers are not on board with the change. For example, eliminating resources while trying to create change is only successful at achieving a culture of instability and

mistrust. Any form of destabilization of the environment people are used to, in ways that compromise their values, creates enormous instability in mental health (Sortheix & Schwartz, 2017). When people's values are threatened, they will resist as a way of coping, and strain will increase. Those experiences create incremental changes to culture.

Acculturation occurs to any group of people in an environment experiencing even incremental changes. Both resident employees and new employees (of any level in the organization) experience acculturation. Consistent with the ASA framework, people are drawn to companies that appear to share similar values. Likewise, voluntary immigrants choose to move to a country that will enable them to realize their values and goals. Thinking about new employees as immigrants and current employees as "residents," it is clear that both are affected by the "migration." Both "immigrants" bringing their past cultural experiences and the residents adapt to each other. The socialization process that transpires is referred to as acculturation (Berry, 2008). Many people in management associate acculturation with adjustment to a national culture, particularly as an international assignee is adapting. However, acculturation occurs in any cultural milieu. The organizational culture is no exception.

Socialization occurs top-down (from nation to organization to business unit to individual) and bottom-up (from individual to business unit to organization to nation; Erez & Gati, 2004). Even if the new employee feels like s/he is doing the most adjusting to the business unit and organization, residents are also adjusting. The culture at the business unit level and organizational level are also changing as new employees join it.

When we consider the dynamic model of culture, it becomes clear that this bi-directional acculturation process exemplifies just how the ASA framework is one of alignment between individuals, business

units, organizations, and the national culture levels. In short, ASA is about alignment of multiple layers of culture. An individual is embedded within the organization and it is ideal to seek alignment between the individual's values (a part of a person's cultural self-representation) and the values of the group. Often when a person's values do not align with the group, the individual is marginalized, transferred, and/or terminated. At the next layer, there is a desire to see alignment between the group and the organization's cultures. Again, if a group within the organization is not fitting in with the organization's culture, fewer resources are allocated, and so on.

The essence of this observation is that national cultural values impact individuals' values, and variations across cultures in who is selected into a group or organization might depend, in part, on their alignment with both the group and organizational context, as well as the national context. Culture plays a crucial role in people's identities, their attraction to certain professions and organizations, connections with their organizations, the ability to socialize them, and the likelihood of retaining them. And now, more than ever, we know that the success of an organizational transformation will depend on the intervention aligning with the environment, along with the people needed to support the initiative for change.

Bringing it all together, I appreciate Neville and Schneider's depiction of organizations as personalities, but they are not. Organizations are much more than a "king-size" personality (Hofstede, 2001, p. 17) of its founder. They are entities that are represented by people who have personalities, values, beliefs, normative expectations, language, and a shared history, coupled with resources that are used in ways that promote the desired organizational image. Just as it is not reasonable to expect personality to change (personality tends to be quite stable; behaviors, however can change), and trying to change an individual's behaviors requires resources, so are resources required to influence organizational culture changes. Acculturation happens with the constant interchange of affect, values, beliefs, resources, etc. People will change when the resources appear to align with the cultural change needs. Ultimately, just like acculturation, organizational change happens when all parties adapt.

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Culture is not simply a product of the founders and early members, but also a product of shared values, beliefs, norms, and so forth. So, when there is a threat to what people have become accustomed to, there is likely to be pushback. People strive to sustain that with which they are comfortable . . .

Context Matters!

Neville & Schneider's article provides us with clear insights on one of the most powerful influences on organizational change: An organization's incumbents. Using Schneider's well-known ASA model of attraction, selection, and attrition, the authors lay out the case that organizations are inevitably a reflection of the personalities of their people. Unless an organization attracts different people, selects different people, or retains different people, there are some pretty clear limits to the level of change that can occur. Alternatively, real change occurs when the team begins to change by attracting different people, selecting different people, and retaining different people. If you want to change an organization, change the people. If you have an entirely new team, almost anything is possible.

While we ignore this core dynamic at our peril, it is also important to literally put it in "context." Social contexts in organizations are built up over time and they can have an equally profound effect on human behavior. Organizational structures and processes are always under construction, and people of many different personalities can collaborate to create robust structures that can shape the same types of behaviors from many different types of people and can last for along time. The context that organizations create is also a powerful influence on behavior. Context matters!

We Shape our Buildings; Thereafter our Buildings Shape Us

Winston Churchill's well-known quote about architecture gives us an important perspective on how people create structures that shape behaviors for a long time to come. The act of design is a human creation, but the design process literally creates a structure that transcends personality and influences on-going activity. Renown British sociologist Anthony Giddens's theory of "structuration" argues that structure and agency must always be considered in combination (1984), never quite knowing which one is cause and which is effect.

Solomon Asch's experiments on conformity gave researchers an early indication of the powerful influence that social structure has on behavior (Asch, 1956). Asch argued that the whole is not only greater than the sum of the parts, but that the nature of the whole fundamentally alters the parts. My favorite example of the power of this dynamic came from G. R. Stephenson's famous "monkey ladder" experiments (Stephenson, 1967). Stephenson put five rhesus monkeys in a room with some tables and chairs and then hung a bunch of bananas from the ceiling. As soon as the experimenter left the room, the monkeys quickly built a ladder out of the tables and chairs so that they could grab the bananas and have a feast! But just as the monkeys were about to reach the bananas,

the experimenter reappeared with a hose and sprayed the monkeys with cold water! The monkeys scattered and hid under the tables.

Then the fun began. One of the monkeys was replaced with a new monkey. After the experimenter hung the new bunch of bananas on the ceiling and left the room, the new monkey began rallying the others to stack up the chairs and go after the bananas. What do you think happened? The four old monkeys quickly beat the new monkey into submission! They knew what happened when you tried to get those bananas. Then the experimenter replaced a second monkey and the process repeated itself. Not only did the dynamic continue long after all of the original monkeys had been replaced, but it actually got stronger in terms of their sanction of each new monkey! I don't know if anyone did personality testing on the monkeys, but I'll bet it wouldn't have made much difference!

Or consider this more corporate example. Swiss food and consumer goods giant Nestle has a unique approach to developing their executives. A strong performance as a new Product Assistant in your home country could lead to a promotion to a Headquarters job. After a year stint in a staff role at HQ, the next promotion was likely to be back to another country as a Product Leader. A successful performance in that role often meant another promotion back to HQ. Success in that role often mean an

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assignment in yet another country, usually a small one, as the GM with responsibility over all of the products. For those still on the rise, the next step was clear: Back to Vevey! And the next promotion from that was likely to be as GM of a major country. Only then was an up-and-coming leader thought to be leading candidate for a high-level executive role at Headquarters. This process has shaped generations of leaders to have a common global perspective that is core to Nestle's success.

So, be certain to take heed of Neville and Schneider's perspective—it is a powerful one! But also, be mindful of the fact that human beings are quite artful in the way that they endlessly create their own environments that serves to shape and socialize the next generation. ISTJs and ENFPs alike are influenced by the contexts that they work in, and they all play their part in creating that environment for the next generation. Yes, the people make the place. But we need to be aware that this simple phrase may actually have two quite different meanings: The people clearly "make up" the place in the way that Neville and Schneider's article suggests. But the people also "construct" the place in a way that has a powerful influence on those who come along next.

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Why is it so Hard to Change Culture? More Questions than Answers.

The article by Neville and Schneider entitled, "Why is it so Hard to Change a Culture? It's the People," provides an interesting assessment of the 2015 Volkswagen Emissions Scandal by examining the corporate culture through the lens of the Attraction–Selection–Attrition (ASA) Model. While this model offers one framework to examine the existence and persistence of culture in organizations, we acknowledge that culture is a highly complex phenomenon that can be experienced but not easily explained. Thus, the argument posed in this piece left us with more questions than answers.

As a place to begin, we must accept the basic premise of the ASA model. In truth, in our discussions about the commentary we have been asked to write, we remain slightly skeptical of the application of the model to the practice of culture change. However, our commentary rests on the authors' use of the model to examine why Volkswagen struggled when they tried to change their culture following the emissions scandal.

1. **How to balance homogeneity and diversity in organizational culture?**
    "Instead, what mattered to financial performance was not the traits themselves, but the similarity in traits. In firms where employees had more similar personalities (regardless if they were all high or all low in openness, for example), their firms performed better as measured by industry-adjusted return on investments and return on assets." (Neville & Schneider, p. 43)

The authors underscore the point that the more homogeneity in an organizational culture, the better the organizational performance. While particular personality traits may have positive and negative attributes, attempting to change the culture may lead to decreased firm performance, and ultimately, as the ASA model suggests, the established culture will continue to persist. This left us to wonder, does the ASA model leave certain cultural nuances unstated and unexplained?

If firm performance is strengthened by similarity among employees, then firms would be best served by hiring to preserve the culture and taking the necessary steps to mitigate negative attributes of the common personality.

Beyond the idea of preserving or changing the culture, the concept of the homogenous personality in organizations would, in principle, seem to argue against the very idea of diversity. Yet, diversity in organizations has been shown to be a competitive advantage (Cummings & Worley, 2015), a source for creativity and new ideas, and a bulwark against negative behavioral patterns like group think (Janis, 1971). Again, if firm performance is positively correlated with homogeneity, then it would seem to counter what we know about the benefits of diversity of thought, gender, race, ethnicity, background, and so on. The basic premise of the ASA model would seem to reduce diversity to a superficial level; while employees may have identities diverse in gender, ethnicity, or social class, the collective, homogenous personality would seem to outweigh individual diversity and perhaps result in disadvantages to the firm like flawed decision making (Apfelbaum, interviewed by Mangelsdorf, 2017). It is possible that there are benefits to accrue from homogeneity in certain instances and diversity in others, yet we struggled to find this nuance within the ASA argument.

While there are reasons beyond financial to pursue culture change (e.g., social responsibility, equity, diversity, etc.), a firm might have a hard time achieving true change if the ASA model explains how culture persists. As a means to drive the change initiative, the authors suggest that firms, "use recruitment and selection to advance cultural change" (p. 10). This is puzzling; does this not violate the ASA model of attracting and selecting homogeneous employees? If we accept the ASA model, would we not expect that employees selected to diversify the culture would be less likely to stay with the organization

given that they would not 'fit well' with the homogenous personality of the organization? Thus, cultural members who do not reflect the dominant personality would not be attracted to the organization, nor would they choose to stay, eventually leaving through attrition, likely before much culture change has been realized. The use of recruitment and selection to change organizational culture would not seem strategically feasible based on the basic premise of the ASA. The ASA model is likely beneficial for recruitment and retention purposes, but we are less sure of its utility as a mechanism for culture change.

2. **How to explain the impact of the people on the culture and the culture on the people?**
    "We often mistake this for proof that organizations' cultures shape the people within them… But the ASA framework suggests the opposite possibility. Organizations' cultures simply reflect the values, personalities, and traits of those who have chosen (and been chosen) to work there." (p. 42)

We stipulate that the people within the organization play a role in creating the culture, but we also believe that cultural socialization plays a part in the assimilation of organizational members. Schein's (2010) assertion that the artifacts, values, and basic assumptions that comprise an organization's culture, teach members, 'how things get done around here,' would seem to suggest that it is a reciprocal process. Based on the ASA framework, it seems that people come pre-primed and ready to be part of the organization. If this were true, then employees would not need to be socialized directly and indirectly by onboarding, training and leadership development, the sharing of organizational histories and norms, and non-verbal behaviors when they first join an organization.

3. **How to account for the dominant geographical ethnicity of organizational founders?**
    "Organizations are not formed at random. Instead, they reflect all of the processes and

structures put in place via the idiosyncratic characteristics and personalities of their early founding member." (p. 42)

The authors state that persistent organizational culture traits are reflective of the earliest organizational members. The ASA model highlights who is attracted to the organization, and then who is selected by the organization. Yet, the model does not account for the geographic ethnicity of those early members. Volkswagen's earliest members were of German descent. In German business culture, strict vertical hierarchies are established, and authority is respected (Okoro, 2012), with subordinates rarely challenging leadership decisions publicly. If the Volkswagen case is examined with the ASA model in this light, then it would imply that culture change requires changing the cultural norms of a particular region. Thus, if culture is formed by its earliest members, then any change suggested that is not in alignment with the dominant ethnic cultural norms might eventually be doomed to fail according to the ASA model.

In conclusion, we thank the authors for stimulating our thinking about the important topic of culture change. Providing commentary on this article invited us to consider aspects of culture that we believe to be key drivers in organizations. While the ASA model offers one perspective on culture change, we believe that culture is a multi-faceted, reciprocal process influenced by an abundance of factors—people, perspectives, processes, policies, and places all coalescing to create these dynamic and vibrant entities that we experience as organizational cultures.

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Beyond the idea of preserving or changing the culture, the concept of the homogenous personality in organizations would, in principle, seem to argue against the very idea of diversity. Yet, diversity in organizations has been shown to be a competitive advantage…

Yes, And . . . It's Leadership, Too

The Volkswagen "dieselgate" scandal that prompted Neville and Schneider to ask, "Why is it so hard to change culture?" provides a useful backdrop for examining the residue of culture failure and thwarted attempts at culture change by an automobile manufacturer.

Interestingly, "dieselgate" can be contrasted with another culture failure at a major car manufacturer that happened slightly more than a year earlier. In February 2014, General Motors (GM) began the first of what would eventually be 84 safety recalls involving almost 30 million cars suspected of having a faulty ignition switch that automatically turned the car's engine off and prevented air bags from deploying—while the car was in motion. The faulty switch was eventually tied to hundreds of injury accidents including 124 deaths.

An independent investigation into the ignition switch failure detailed "an 11-year odyssey" that began with decisions made by GM engineers in 2002 and ended eventually with mass recalls in 2014. The report identified GM's culture as the main cause of the failure to identify and elevate the ignition switch problem. The findings of the investigation were published in what became known as the Valukas Report, which contained scathing characterizations of the culture at GM.

> "*Although everyone had responsibility to fix the problem nobody took responsibility. It was an example of what one to executive described as the "GM nod," when everyone nods in agreement to a proposed plan of action, but then leaves the room and does nothing.*" (Valukas, 2014).

The first of GM's safety recalls was announced in February 2014, only one month into the tenure of Mary Barra, the first female CEO of GM and the first woman to lead any major automaker. Barra, a GM "lifer," had inherited the finance-driven culture at GM that in recent years had gone through bankruptcy, a federal bailout, and relentless negative press over quality and safety issues. Just five months after she stepped into her new role, Barra faced the need to respond to the scathing Valukas Report and set the tone for a new culture at GM.

What Barra needed to address were aspects of the culture at GM that could be traced back to when Alfred P. Sloan was leading the corporation in the 1950s. Sloan set the model for a string of finance-driven CEOs who were in GM vernacular, the "finance men" who led the engineers and marketing executives, known as the "car guys." One of those "finance men" was Roger Smith. In the 1980s, Smith led GM through a reorganization that collapsed the eight different GM brands into a big-car and a small-car division. This resulted in internal sparring and undifferentiated, uninspiring cars and ultimately proved disastrous for GM culture.

Inheriting this legacy in 2002 was Rick Wagoner who launched a multi-year cost-cutting effort that included closing nine assembly facilities, three service and parts facilities, an elimination of more than 30,000 manufacturing jobs and supplier cost reductions amounting to $1 billion. Wagoner's troubled tenure as CEO ended in 2009 during the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression and GM facing bankruptcy (Sonnenfeld, 2009).

A Leadership Moment

The ignition switch recall was not the first crisis for GM. And Mary Barra was not the first CEO being pressured to change the culture at GM. But the Valukas Report brought these issues into high relief to create what was for Barra a career defining moment. The message Barra delivered to GM employees in a Global Town Hall meeting provides insights into Barra's thoughts and how they informed the actions taken at the time, and other subsequent actions.

In her address, Barra placed concern for the victims before the needs of the organization and the shareholders, and as GM's leader she accepted responsibility for those who were harmed. In doing so, she expressed emotion and emphasized inclusiveness and accountability. She framed GM's culture failure as having failed in their responsibility to the customer. Her message was a purpose-driven statement about personal responsibility and learning from failure.

Barra did not hold back in accepting the many ways in which the company fell short of customer expectations by connecting decisions made by GM employees directly to the fatal accidents. She was brutally honest about the incompetence and neglect. No one escaped needing to accept their share of the responsibility, yet, at the same time, Barra held to a moral center by saying this is not the company she knows "in her heart."

> "*I hate sharing this with you as much as you hate hearing it. But I want you to hear it. In fact, I never want you to forget it. This is not just another business crisis for GM. We aren't simply going to fix this and move on. We are going to fix the failures in our system—that I promise. In fact, many are already fixed. And we are going to do the right thing for the affected parties. But I never want to put this behind us. I want to keep this painful experience permanently in our collective memories. I don't want to forget what happened because I—and I know you—never want this to happen again.*" (General Motors, n.d.).

This is the most remarkable part of Barra's address. In times of crisis, there is often a strong tendency for companies to isolate a failure and then to blame the culprit or culprits and express a strong desire to "move on" as a way to offer a clear path forward. Barra does none of these things. First, she prioritizes systemic issues over individual blame. Second, rather than expressing a desire to "put this behind us" she says just the opposite—that she never wants to forget what happened, in order to prevent it

from ever happening again. Here she was stressing that personnel changes and disciplinary actions were just the beginning of the necessary cultural changes.

Notable in the text of Barra's speech is the turn away from a bureaucratic or authoritative leadership tone and the absence of any reference to profits and shareholder value. She consistently reinforced the theme of customer-focus and accountability. Implicit in her message was that this was an existential crisis for *all* stakeholders. Without repairing the cultural problems and rebuilding the trust of customers, there can be no jobs, or shareholder value.

In all, 15 people at GM were terminated and five others were disciplined as a direct result of the Valukas report. Additional actions taken included the elevation and integration of safety processes under a single leader, adding 35 new safety investigators, creating a new Global Product Integrity organization, and restructuring the safety decision-making process to raise it to the highest levels of the company. Barra also launched a "Speak Up for Safety" hotline as a way for employees to easily and quickly report concerns they have about vehicles.

Walking the Talk

Following the Global Town Hall, Barra continued to initiate actions based upon her inclusive, customer-focused leadership style. She, along with her hand-picked executive team, tackled tough assignments that challenged the status quo. Notable among them was the redesign of what was described as GM's Byzantine financial systems with an almost 90 percent reduction in the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used to measure performance. The new system provided management with a common language for answering simple questions like "how are we doing" and provided "one version of the truth" that facilitated more robust performance measurement and helped drive accountability throughout the organization (*Wall Street Journal*, 2013).

Barra also was committed to diversity and equity by making GM one of just two global businesses to institute pay equality across the top, middle and bottom bands and eliminating gender pay gaps across the company. In 2017, women ran six of GM's 17 North American assembly plants and two of the senior executives who all GM plant managers reported to were also women (glassdoor.com, n.d.).

In 2018, Matthew DeBord, writing for *Business Insider*, wrote that before GM's 2009 bankruptcy, GM was known for its internal conflict, but the company was now a model of cooperation. GM had gone from government bailout and bankruptcy to being one of the world's best run car companies (DeBord, 2018).

What this tells us is that leaders can affect culture change when they express confidence and trust, and then provide the model for change. This is done by (1) publicly confronting reality, especially in the wake of things not going as they should, (2) being authentic and displaying their own vulnerability in how they convey the situation's impact upon themselves and all other stakeholders, and (3) having a clear plan of action for the company to respond. Think of it as Facts, Feelings, and Focus. They establish personal and collective ownership for the situation and offer a higher calling or North Star for the culture to follow.

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> **What this tells us is that leaders can affect culture change when they express confidence and trust, and then provide the model for change.**

Chief Diversity Officers and the Challenge of Organizational Change

"A culture of inclusion." "A more equitable culture." "A culture where everyone thrives." These words often find their way onto the pages of leadership profiles carefully developed and curated by executive search firms hired to find an organization's next (or perhaps, first) Chief Diversity Officer (CDO). Senior leaders and board members often speak with exuberance and sincerity about improving their organizations by expanding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

What these leaders and governors usually don't say is that the desired change is dependent upon the very people who—consciously or unconsciously—have made the need for change so necessary. CDOs are expected to identify organizational spaces where oppressive behaviors and inequitable structures may exist. Their recommended changes, however, ultimately depend upon their ability to influence decision-making. It is in this space that the organizational personality becomes a critical consideration. If an individual, irrespective of their position within the organization or their social identities, is asked to abandon what they've come to know and enjoy as a kind of organizational solidarity, the likelihood of significant change may be diminished or fundamentally compromised.

For example, the CDO asks the CFO to modify all departmental budgets to require that more of the budget is explicitly dedicated to DEI initiatives. While re-organizing budgets may, by itself, be laudable, one must also consider the organization's predisposition to resource allocation in general. What is the culture around resource management, around taking money from the traditional to fund the new? What clues might be drawn from the organizational personality?

As Neville and Schneider point out, organizations hold personalities just as people do. The CDO is immediately faced with the conflict between the desire for culture change and cultural inertia. Senior diversity officers are often expected to bring about cultural change that's rooted in histories of oppression and inequality. The need for the change is sometimes tied to an event or episode that requires swift response and attention. But we all know that sustainable culture change does not come about because of one person, nor does the change come about because of new programs. Positive change happens when synergies occur between agreed-upon plans, organizational aspiration, and the actors responsible for carrying out the change who are appropriately positioned to "own" and advance the change.

An organization's personality matters when it comes to the efficacy of DEI culture change. A CDO must be able to influence individuals' behaviors around leadership development, policy development and revision, structural formation and re-design, the ability to situate organizational history in a contemporary discussion, and much, much more—all the while, negotiating the tensions among desired fast-paced change results, a presumably and all-too-often immutable culture, and a presumably homogenous organizational personality.

Unless an organization's opinion leaders and change agents have agreed that a complete "gutting" of the workforce is in order, CDOs must advocate not only for an ideal culture in terms of DEI, but also for a reasonable roadmap for getting to that improved culture.

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Stop Kicking the Dog!

"Jim, you have to understand. We are not just developing our companies; we are developing our nation." It was the voice of the VP of HR for a sizeable corporation in Johannesburg, South Africa. I was there to consult to several large companies. This person's comment stopped me dead in my tracks.

It had only been about 10 years from the time when South Africa had abolished Apartheid as a national policy and the effects of that policy were still felt in most aspects of daily life. The day before, I had been in Soweto to see the school where the June 16 Soweto Youth Uprising began in 1976. Then, over 3,000 South African students organized what was supposed to be a peaceful march to a rally at a Johannesburg stadium. Instead, they were met by armed police who teargassed and used live ammunition on the crowd, killing 23 people. (Sound familiar?) The police violence sparked a revolution that changed the entire country.

The comment stirred the awakening of my own expanded sense of the greater possibilities for the practice of OD. It also helped to bring into focus my personal sense mission and purpose as an OD practitioner.

Most of us spend two thirds of our lives in organizations doing our jobs. If the culture of that organization is to kick the dog as we go out the door at work, it is likely that many of us will kick the dog as we go out the door at home. My job is to support people in organizations when they want to change the cultural assumptions in their organizations about what are "the appropriate ways to perceive, think, and behave" (Schein 2016) in the context of the organization. These assumptions are what make it OK to kick the dog on the way out the door of this organization.

I've spent a lot of time over the last 30 years on organizational culture. I've read tons of books and papers, talked to dozens of experts, and even written a book on organizational culture and changing it. I am always on the lookout for new ideas that will help to simplify the concepts and practice around organizational culture. I came to Neville and Schneider's article, "Why is it so Hard to Change a Culture? It's the People," hoping that an expanded answer to the question in the title might provide new insights for my study and practice.

The article presents us with a well written introduction to Schneider's "Attraction–Selection–Attrition" (ASA) framework applied to implementing cultural change in an organization. The framework is new to me and is a welcome addition to the extensive literature available to OD practitioners. As a stand-alone method for enacting change in the context of a complex organization, I find its emphasis on one aspect of the multifaceted challenge of shifting the culture of an organization to be a bit oversimplified.

The ASA, as applied to culture, suggests that the basics of how a culture is formed and maintained revolves around the role of "fit" in the hiring and retention of its people. People and organizations are attracted to and select each other for co-participation in organized activity because they perceive that the individual and the group have certain qualities in common that will make them comfortable with each other. Often, people and organizations part company because some aspect of that fit no longer applies in the way it did at the beginning of the relationship.

I don't believe, however, that this reveals a comprehensive picture of the nature of organizational and group cultures. Nor do I think that it provides the kinds of 'hooks' necessary for leaders and consultants to grab hold of in order to implement and guide cultural shifts and changes.

So, what has been left out that is central to providing the hooks in Neville's and Schneider's article? Organizational cultures are complex, dynamic systems made up of interconnected, interdependent process elements. The interdependence and interconnectedness of these processes produce ongoing interactions that generate the emergence of new cultural artefacts that are also interconnected with the rest of the system and whose behavior is dependent on the behaviors of other elements in the system. This emergence is what we actually experience as change in the culture. So, a culture is in continuous flux: like Heraclitus' river in which you can only step once because between one step and the next, both you and the river have changed.

While there are several process elements existing in any cultural system, I'm going to focus on three because they are especially accessible to intervention. These are, sense and meaning making, group and personal identity formation, and the development of shared assumptions in a group. Because culture, its formation, maintenance, and modification are social phenomena, all of these processes are group processes.

All changes to an organizational culture begin with some sort of disturbance in the system, what Karl Weick would call an interruption.

> Interruption is a signal that important changes have occurred in the environment. This is a key event, for emotion is the "interruption of expectation." It makes good evolutionary sense to construct an organism [organization] that reacts significantly when the world is no longer the way it was. (Weick 1995)

When this event occurs, people experience the need to engage in sense and meaning making to reconnect with what was happening prior to the interruption and make decisions about how to resume their activity.

In fact, what the group is doing when engaged in sense and meaning making is restoring their perception of the organization's context. Context is necessary in order to make decisions and solve problems. A critical aspect of this context is, "how do we define ourselves and our organization?" In other words, constructing and/or reconstructing our sense of group and individual

identity (Weick, 1995). In both cases, these are group and sometimes multi-group processes in which we put out ideas about who we think we are and make modifications to those ideas based on the responses we get. (Hatch and Schultz 2002, MacQueen 2020) This is an important part of determining our ideas about "fit."

As we go through these and other context building processes, we make decisions about what we might do next— a decision about action in response to the problem of disruption. Schein says that culture is formed as a result of groups solving their problems of "external adaptation and internal integration." When these solutions have worked well enough to appear successful to the group solving the problem, the learnings derived from that problem-solving process often become shared assumptions about the correct way to perceive, think, feel and behave in relation to [that] problem." (Schein 2016)

These assumptions are often the most confusing artefacts of the culture in question. By definition, assumptions are invisible to the population. Cultural assumptions, because they are based in a history of *successful* problem solving, are often resistant to conscious evaluation and discussion as a method for changing them if they can be recognized by the group at all. However, sensemaking and

the problem solving that leads to the creation of shared assumptions may well be influenced by consultation that may shift a culture.

Neville and Schneider have done us good service by bringing the ASA framework to our attention. As the authors note, Kotter (1996) has already expressed reservations about whether or not relying on the tactic suggested here would be effective in a contemporary corporate environment. Should anyone in the audience want to follow this path, however, I believe they would do well to use the Kirton Adaptation-Innovation inventory (KAI) (Kirton and De Ciantis 1986, Chan 2000) as a way of diminishing the organization's reliance on fit for making hiring decisions and integrating new people in to the existing population.

Thoughtful, empowering culture change is undoubtedly the only way to stop kicking the dog or otherwise disrupt the largely unconscious colonialist patterns infecting many, if not most, western style organizations. The ASA represents yet one more resource for those who want to go there.

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Behavioral Norms, Not Personality, is How Cultures Change

It is an honor and a joy to revisit Ben Schneider's Attraction–Selection–Attrition model, which has had so much impact on my career and more importantly, on what we know about person-culture fit. Ben and I have engaged in wonderfully illuminating debates about organizational culture over the years and, in the interest of continuing that fruitful debate, I offer some contrasting views on three of the themes that he and Lukas Neville surface in their interesting paper.

1. **Organizational culture changes more rapidly than Neville and Schneider suggest.** Culture is not as inert as Neville and Schneider claim. Organizations in which members agree about a wide range of cultural norms but whom also prioritize adaptability as a key cultural norm perform better over time (Chatman et al, 2014). In fact, the combination of a high consensus culture characterized by adaptability was worth about 15% in annual revenue growth, or about $5B for the high-technology firms in our study. In another pair of studies, we found that when leaders across levels were consistent in emphasizing the strategic relevance of the culture change they were pursuing, meaningful change occurred quickly (Caldwell et al 2008; O'Reilly et al, 2010). Other research has shown that culture can be malleable, much like a growth mindset (Dweck et al, 2014), and that employees and prospective employees view malleable cultures more positively (Canning et al, 2020).

In a more anecdotal, but striking case at Genentech, I tracked the pace of culture change and its link to strategy execution (Chatman, 2014; Lyons, 2017). Genentech tripled in size, an accomplishment they had expected to take five years, in 11 short months. Genentech leaders attributed their staggering success to deliberate culture change. Finally, colleagues and I have a set of in-progress studies examining the pace of culture change in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are finding that organizations may have significant capacity for both rapid and fundamental cultural change (Brown, et al, 2020; Stein, Chatman, & Schroeder, 2020).

2. **Culture is derived from behavioral norms within organizations, not aggregations of members' personality.** Why might Ben and I disagree about the pace of culture change? Probably because we disagree about what culture is. I conceptualize organizational culture as behavioral norms, which have greater plasticity than personality. My longtime collaborator, Charles O'Reilly, and I suggest that when the norms characterizing an organization are both widely shared and strongly held, they act as a social control system to shape members' attitudes and behaviors (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). These behavioral norms are socially created standards that help members set expectations and interpret and evaluate behavior. Organizational culture, then, is a pattern of beliefs and expectations that members share and that produce these norms, which in turn, powerfully shape what people do in that organizational context.

To illustrate the potency of behavioral norms, consider a small but vivid example of culture change at Genentech: As the organization sought to triple their sales by becoming more focused on the patients who could benefit from the medicines Genentech produced, members changed the way they talked about sales. Instead of discussing the number of "vials sold," they intentionally discussed sales in terms of the number of patients they had helped in the period. They also began opening meetings with a patient story. As a result, one of the leaders at Genentech said, "People shifted focus from 'how are your numbers?' to 'what have you done for patients?'" These small behavioral changes "led to a big dynamic shift." (Chatman, 2013, p. 11).

This distinction, between culture as an aggregate of members' personality versus behavioral norms, is important and has significant implications for how we think about culture change. We have long known that personality is remarkably stable (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1986) and so, if we define culture as aggregated personalities homogenized through the ASA process, we can only imagine culture changing slowly if at all. And yet, we observe that cultures can and do change. The reason is that even if personality is not very flexible, behavior is. Most people, regardless of their personality, could make the kind of behavioral shift described at Genentech—changing the way they talk about sales from vials to patients—and this reprioritization of strategically effective behaviors is where the potential for meaningful culture change lies (Chatman & Gino, 2020). In other words, people are not destined to behave in accordance with their personality. Indeed, in even the best studies attempting to link personality traits and exhibited behavior, correlations top out in the .40 range (e.g., Funder, 2006). Further, people can behave in ways that are quite different from their personality when the culture favors doing so (e.g., Chatman & Barsade, 1995).

There is also new evidence that people perform well in organizations even if they don't fit the culture in conventional, personality-fit terms. In contrast to previous theories of person-culture fit based on personality or values fit (e.g., Chatman, 1991; Sheridan, 1992), colleagues and I recently found that a newly identified form of culture fit, which we call "perceptual congruence" or the degree to which a person can decipher the organization's cultural code, equips people with the capacity to exhibit behavioral conformity,

regardless of their actual personality or value fit (Lu, et al, 2020). Further, perceptual congruence enables behavioral fit and ultimately, upward mobility within a firm.

3. **Leaders and their personalities do influence organizational culture, but identifying exactly how this happens is essential.** Ed Schein has long argued that CEOs and founders have a unique impact on organizational culture (Schein, 2010), and Neville and Schneider appropriately recognize this. But it is too simple to attribute leaders' impact exclusively to their personality; we need to continue to uncover the mechanisms by which a leader's personality becomes reflected in culture.

We did this in a series of studies linking leader narcissism to organizational culture. We found that narcissistic CEOs were more likely to develop cultures that were low in cooperation and integrity (O'Reilly & Chatman, forthcoming). The way that narcissistic personalities influenced the culture, however, was not through role modeling, or even attracting, selecting, or retaining people who were also narcissistic—in fact, the last thing a narcissistic leader wants is to be surrounded by other narcissists. Instead, narcissistic leaders influenced their culture by embedding policies, practices, and sanctions that favored behaviors associated with lower cooperation and lower integrity. And, of great concern, our work also suggested that narcissistic leaders may leave a residue on their

organizations that causes these dysfunctional norms to persist even after they depart. The reason for this is that members of the organization follow the culture—those policies, practices, and sanctions that became embedded during the narcissistic leader's era, regardless of who currently sits in the CEO's office.

Focusing on culture as behavioral norms, emphasizing cultural adaptation, and recognizing that people with many personality orientations can enact a wide range of behaviors enables researchers and managers to be more optimistic about the possibility of achieving fast, functional culture change within organizations. This is good news!

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Culture Alignment or Overlap? Only Research Can Tell.

Neville and Schneider (2020) bring a much-needed reminder that culture is not just a product of past processes, policies and practices but is alive and defined by the very people who currently live the culture as "People Make the Place." The authors provide possible explanations for why cultural change in large organizations can be so difficult and offer hope by proposing a different lens for driving organizational change. This article provides numerous angles for additional and a fundamentally different kind of research where the organization is the level of analysis.

Dominant organizational culture of organizations needs to be more widely studied

Yet, what is also clear from the article is how infrequently dominant organizational culture/personality of an organization is specifically articulated or measured. In order to assess the true usefulness of the ASA model, more needs to be done by Organizational Practitioners to define the dominant organizational culture of their organizations. The ASA model is powerful in conceptualizing and implementing organizational change. Yet, without a clear view of the dominant organizational culture and the required traits that need to be inculcated or culled from that culture for successful change implementation, the practitioner will be merely guessing how best to implement the ASA model. Additional research at the organizational level of dominant organizational culture needs to occur.

Alignment of subcultures or overlap in traits of successful external CEOs also requires more research

Schein (2017) has described three segments of organizational culture within large organizations: executive, operator, and engineering cultures. Further, Schein has been adamant that for successful change transformations the three cultures need to be in alignment. In the Neville and Schneider article they point out the numerous failures of just replacing top leadership

for achieving change. Applying the ASA logic to Schein's three segments could easily explain why just replacing the top of the house, which focuses mainly on financial matters, is less likely to affect fundamental change in the overall organizational culture as the other two major segments could remain relatively unaffected. To the extent there is lack of alignment across culture segments, failure is more likely. Further, using the ASA model with a look toward the three subcultures could also explain why some savvy external CEOs have been able to leverage and drive fundamental change (Paul & Fenlason, 2014). Alternatively, successful external CEOs may have been selected (inadvertently or not) to overlap with some of the dominant organizational personality to drive alignment while having enough of the needed differential traits to enact the modifications required. In either case, more research on dominant organizational culture at the organizational level is required if true understanding is to be achieved.

Relevance and additional research demands intensified by Investors' focus on Intangibles

With the new SEC requirements (Modernization of Regulation S–K, 2020) for data reporting on human capital metrics, it is becoming clear that the perceived intangible value of organizations is being sought out by investors and makes research in this area of special relevance. This SEC requirement reflects wide-scale acknowledgement of the massive shift in the corporate value equation that has occurred over the past few decades—from only tangible assets to the addition of intangible assets such as people and culture. Research on the dominant personality/culture of organizations is needed and its timeliness could not be any more opportune.

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> **. . . without a clear view of the dominant organizational culture and the required traits that need to be inculcated or culled from that culture for successful change implementation, the practitioner will be merely guessing how best to implement the ASA model.**

The People Make the Range of Possible Places: A Reply

We would like to begin by expressing our gratitude to commenters on our article for their insightful and thought-provoking responses, and to Marc Sokol, the Associate Editor of *OD Review*, for creating this valuable forum for discussion and the exchange of ideas. Our article began when one of us (Lukas), sought a readable discussion piece on the role of ASA (Attraction–Selection–Attrition) in culture change for use in his MBA teaching. Thanks to Marc and to the commenters, we now have a rich and varied set of perspectives and viewpoints organized around this idea. The perspectives presented here, we hope, will serve to provoke interesting discussions in the classroom, among and between researchers, and within the challenging world of organizational development practitioners.

To reply in full to each of the commenters' insights and ideas would exceed the space available and the patience of our readers. However, taken together, the very diverse and useful set of comments have provoked us to draw out five key extensions, clarifications, and refinements to the ideas we presented in the focal article.

The primary takeaway from the comments is that no one, including us, should approach the ASA model as if it gives us a deterministic picture of the basis for cultural change, nor as if it suggests that change is impossible without radical top-to-bottom replacement of people in organizations.

Instead, we think of the people (and the personalities and individual differences they share in organizations) as creating a set of boundaries around what kinds of cultural change are possible, how change can be carried out, and how speedily it might happen. In Ben's seminal paper, he told us that the people make the place. Responding to the comments here, we might refine this in the context of organizational culture to read: The people make the *range of possible places.*

1. Personality homogeneity doesn't rule out cultural change, but it sets limits on the range of change that is possible.

A number of the comments remind us with both theory and practical examples that organizations' cultures do change and can change quickly. Jim MacQueen emphasizes the power of Weickian 'interruptions' and Scheinian adaptations and integrations. Lisa Meyer describes the power of deliberate leadership behaviors in creating a change to General Motors' deeply entrenched culture of "finance men." Jenny Chatman compellingly describes the example of Genentech making a change from describing their accomplishments in terms of sales numbers to describing them in terms of patient impact.

So, how can we square the ideas that culture reflects shared personality, and that personality is stable and unlikely to change with these observations of profound and sometimes rapid cultural change? Looking at the case of GM, we recognize the ASA in many elements of Barra's approach. Her actions to set the safety culture included the terminations of old guard executives and hiring of 35 new safety engineers with authority to monitor and instill the safety imperative—precisely the sort of ASA dynamics we describe. And, of course, GM's approach of appointing a long-serving insider with manufacturing and engineering chops is exactly what we mean when we talk about finding role models for new behaviors who are nonetheless seen as fitting the dominant personality 'mold' of the firm.

But not every successful change story is one that is simply about moving people around or shifting them into or out of the firm. How does the ASA help us to understand why and when change works when we consider the changes at GM or elsewhere that were not related as clearly to newcomers and departures? One way is to think about shared personality as not creating a single possible culture, but rather as a constraint defining the range of possible cultures. Consider GM: They did not try to

do away entirely with KPIs, performance management, or accountability, but instead built a culture that shifted these familiar elements to new goals.

At Genentech, the role that shared personality plays is even starker. That is, while yes, the organization seemed to shift its culture rapidly, Jenny Chatman's study of the firm describes a 95% rate of agreement among employees about where they wanted the culture to go in the future (Chatman, 2014). Obvious to us is that the change worked *because* it reflected the shared traits, dispositions, and personalities of Genentech's members. And Chatman is right that it is behavioral norms that help define a culture, but the range of the behavioral norms that will exist in organizations is at least partially set and also constrained by the shared traits of the organization's members. As John Holland (1967) showed through conceptualization and evidence, different occupational environments, like accounting firms versus advertising agencies, are characterized by different behavioral norms (Holland, 1967). In other words, there are a range of cultures that are possible—but ASA processes and the personality homogeneity that results also creates a set of cultures that are not possible with the organization's current membership.

2. Aggregate personality isn't culture, but it informs our understanding of culture and its origins.

Ed Schein expresses a concern about a reductionist 'slippery slope' if we boil culture down to aggregate personality. We did not mean to suggest that personality and individual differences are the *only* way to understand how cultures form. But in Schein's own very creative writings on organizational culture, one of his primary culture embedding mechanisms closely resembles the ASA model: *"Founders and leaders tend to find attractive those candidates who resemble present members in style, assumptions, values, and beliefs. They are perceived to be the best people to hire…"* (Schein,

1992, p. 244). In other words, the idea of culture as the "accumulated learning of the organization's history" is not discordant with an ASA approach. Rather, the mundane questions of who is recruited, who is chosen, and who stays, are clearly relevant as at least one way for understanding *how* this learning and history is embedded into the organization. If the ASA model is useful as *a* way (not *the* way) to understand the formation of culture, we simply raise the question as to whether it is not also relevant when thinking about culture change.

We appreciated Dan Denison's call to think of these dynamics in a way that considers both structure and agency, that "we shape our buildings, thereafter our buildings shape us." We might add, inelegantly, to this metaphor: We shape our buildings, and thereafter those buildings shape which tenants choose to occupy them. But we do not want to limit the role of agency in change: research on ASA shows that there is *relative homogeneity* in firms, but that does not mean those firms are entirely homogeneous (there are spruce forests that nonetheless contain some oaks; Schneider, Goldstein & Smith, 1995). And, as Jenny Chatman reminds us, there is an imperfect correspondence between personality and behavior, even at the individual level, let alone as personality is aggregated in firms. So, our proposal is not to discount the variety of structural and process issues that certainly underlie culture and culture change (where there also exists an imperfect relationship) but that it is important to understand aggregate personality in order to understand which kinds of structural and process change initiatives might fit and perform well or misfit and fizzle.

3. We must think of both culture and personality homogeneity across levels, from subcultures to national cultures, but not forget to think in terms of *relative* rather than *absolute* homogeneity.

A number of the comments draw our attention, in different ways, to important levels-of-analysis questions. Ed Schein and Karen Paul point out that firms do not have a singular monolithic culture, but different segments of culture: Technical and social cultures, as Ed Schein describes them in

his response, and the executive, operator, and engineering cultures Karen Paul describes, citing Schein's other work in this arena. In addition to these culture 'segments' and subcultures, Sharon Glazer reminds us that we must situate organizational cultures in the context of the broader national cultures in which they are located.

None of this is incorrect, but neither does it change the basic fact of personality homogeneity within firms. Even *within* national cultures, there remain organizational differences in aggregate personality (Schneider & Bartram, 2017). As we argued in our focal article, the idea of organizational personality homogeneity does not rule out distinct occupational, 'segment,' or country-level subcultures: Accountants will differ from salespeople. But accountants at a given firm will be more like salespeople at their own firm than they are like salespeople at another firm.

What is important, and what we underemphasized in our focal article, is that ASA processes can occur within units of people working together at different levels. Ben's recent work on this topic focused on organizations as a whole. But the level of culture, we would suggest, is also likely the level at which ASA processes operate. There may be places with the imprint of different founding members, as you might find in divisions that began their existence as separate firms before being acquired and integrated. There may also be places with considerable autonomy over the mechanisms of recruitment, selection, and movement through (and out) of the firm. Examples could include subsidiaries and other arms-length organizations, units that are set up as independent 'skunkworks,' and other divisions or departments that have a high degree of autonomy. Consideration of how ASA processes shape culture must always consider the level at which those processes operate. This is usually, but not always, at the level of the firm. The development of subcultures or cultural 'segments' can be a lever for change, especially in places where the level at which ASA processes can predominantly operate is at a sub-organizational level. We did not address this issue in our focal article, but OD practitioners would do well to consider

these levels issues in relative personality homogeneity as they approach full organizational change challenges.

4. We should take insights from equity, diversity and inclusion practice about the challenges of changing the relative personality composition of organizations.

We were glad to see Norm Jones, Corrie Voss, and Deborah O'Neil consider more deeply the link between the arguments we make and broader issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. We hope that readers will interpret the research in our focal article as descriptive rather than normative.

We report, drawing on Ben's research (e.g., Schneider & Bartram, 2017), that the sharedness of personality is associated with certain measures of financial performance. This fits with prior work showing that so-called "deep level diversity" (of which personality diversity would be an example) is associated with lowered performance (Triana, Kim, Byun, Delgado & Arthur, 2020). The *descriptive* message is that there are natural organizational tendencies toward relative homogeneity, and that relative homogeneity is an important element of how cultures form and are maintained.

But the normative conclusion should not necessarily be that firms should seek *more* homogeneity or avoid attempts to increase deep-level diversity. We know that when managed well, deep level diversity can be a source of new perspectives, productive dissent, and innovation. And, as we hope it is clear from our arguments, relative personality homogeneity can slow or even block necessary changes to dysfunctional organizational cultures.

The same research we describe above that tells us that deep level diversity can diminish team performance (Triana et al., 2020) *also* shows us that the mechanisms for this diminished performance are not unavoidable: They include, for example, factors around team process and team conflict. In other words, they are factors to manage, not unchangeable forces of nature. More broadly, the work showing the challenges of deep level diversity, along with Ben's finding about relative

homogeneity and financial performance, can be taken as a call for greater attention to the mechanisms of ASA as inhibitors of change—or, as we discuss in the next section, accelerators of change.

With personality as with demographic or cultural characteristics, managing diversity requires us to understand and measure diversity. OD practitioners, knowing that shared personality can constrain the range of possible cultures, must first be able to identify and understand the nature of that shared personality. It is often easy for us to spot differences within a firm (the accountants who differ so greatly from the salespeople). But it is often harder to spot the hidden sources of relative personality homogeneity. OD practitioners may want to think about how they seek to identify and understand an organization's shared personality—whether it is through interviews, observations, culture surveys, or aggregated individual personality measures like those used in Ben's research.

5. Certain types of personality homogeneity may speed rather than slow processes of change.

Jim MacQueen described searching for managerial 'hooks' in the ASA model, and Karen Paul's response similarly sought "traits to be inculcated" to create value. The research by Ben and his collaborator that we described in the focal article seemed to conclude that it's more about the sharedness of a trait than the level of that trait. But Jenny Chatman's response awakened us to some other possibilities: She describes traits and individual differences like adaptability, flexibility, and growth orientation. In fact, she describes *firms* with such traits and we simply promote the idea that such firms contain such people.

We had written our focal article thinking about shared personality as often

being an obstacle to change (for instance, the example of trying to convert an introverted organization into a gregarious, outgoing sales culture). But the traits Chatman describes, especially when shared, could accelerate certain kinds of change efforts. Similarly, even elements of openness, like the need for variety, tolerance for ambiguity, and openness to diversity, might make organizations more open to change efforts, companies in which change is the norm. Even if some degree of homogeneity of personality is unavoidable given the power and ubiquity of ASA processes, there may be some traits where relative homogeneity is change-enabling rather than change-inhibiting.

Concluding Thoughts

Obviously, the shared personality of people in an organization by itself is incomplete for understanding culture and the requirements to impact culture change. Systems, processes and dynamics must be impacted to secure real change. However, shared personality is a part of this full picture. To ignore the role of an organization's shared personality when attempting change is to omit important and useful information from the practitioner's diagnostic and intervention toolkit. As we noted, some attributes can be leveraged to accelerate change, while other attributes might naturally inhibit change and thus require intentional management. Just as we can intentionally monitor and manage many of our own personal tendencies, we must be mindful of the personality-determined tendencies in the variety of organizations we work with. When we are, we can design and implement effective tactics to address these. OD practitioners can be that much more impactful to the extent they incorporate these concepts as they assess, advise

and collaborate with organizations to support desired change.

In summary, we so greatly appreciate the commentators offering us such stimulating opportunities to clarify how we think the ASA model contributes to understanding organizational culture and culture change. We also hope that by seeing how ASA processes create a range of possible cultures (while limiting others), that we awaken practitioners to the potential of this viewpoint in understanding how to make culture change work. ASA is not *the* arrow in the quiver, but *an* arrow in the quiver as we strive to understand culture and culture change. We hope that the arrow we propose is useful and continues to stimulate discussion.

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*Practicing***OD**

» Higher Aspirations for Performance Development
by Susanna Katsman

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.

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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.
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» Include a short *(25–50 words)* author bio with your email so readers can contact you.

"…when employees can internalize authority and strategic decision-making,
they can solve problems autonomously, manage risk, and align individual
and organizational goals."

Higher Aspirations for Performance Development

By Susanna Katsman

Typical performance development processes measure and reward an employee's understanding of expectations and adherence to established processes. By contrast, when employees can internalize authority and strategic decision-making, they can solve problems autonomously, manage risk, and align individual and organizational goals. By supporting employees to develop this mindset, organizations elevate system performance and support culture change. Prioritizing employee and performance development is as important as business development. OD practitioners have a valuable role to play in organizations seeking to build this capacity.

Kegan's Adult Development Theory

Performance development can be more powerful by considering two aspects of Kegan and Lahey's (2009) Adult Development theory, the Socialized Mind and the Self-Authoring Mind. In my experience, workplaces are grappling with two sets of expectations: a Socialized mind which may not sufficiently meet today's need, and the expanded capacities of the Self-Authoring mind.

According to Kegan, the Socialized mind internalizes expectations of behavioral norms and externalizes authority. In an environment where employees are told what to do, the Socialized mind ensures close adherence to directions. Historically, the mental complexity of the Socialized Mind was sufficient to meet the demands placed on line employees and managers. Today's needs may require Self-Authoring Minds.

Self-Authoring minds internalize individual authority and are more self-reliant in decision making. This internal seat of judgment enables Self-Authoring employees to incorporate multiple data points and contradictory messages from key stakeholders in determining how to proceed. While many job descriptions call for independent decision making and adaptability, performance appraisals often lag behind in measuring and rewarding an employee with a Self-Authoring mind.

Self-Authoring capacity does not lead employees to disregard rules and norms. Rather, a Self-Authoring employee, while fully aware of rules and norms, is better able to subordinate expectations for compliance to the broader perspective. A Self-Authoring employee can recognize when an organization would benefit from maintaining the status quo and when an

organization would benefit from the status quo being questioned and possibly disrupted.

Some Self-Authoring capacity in front-line employees is indispensable to navigate contradicting demands presented by leaders at different levels within an organization. Many immediate supervisors of front-line employees are concerned with reduction and mitigation of risk whereas senior leaders expect agility and innovation to keep ahead of the competition. Capable Self-Authoring employees can negotiate those seemingly conflicting demands with

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greater nimbleness because they can hold a larger frame than a Socialized employee. What constitutes "contradictory demands" to the Socialized employee presents a "welcome challenge" to the more Self-Authoring employee.

Why Self-Authoring Capacity?

Today's managers and individual contributors need to be responsive in real-time to competing demands facing them using the Self-Authoring mind rather than depending on direction from leaders. For example, a line employee may be asked to create a comprehensive solution while also receiving a directive to conserve organization resources. This conundrum is likely to frustrate a Socialized employee who feels stuck and looks for precedent or instructions. A Self-Authoring employee will likely come up with an ingenious solution without waiting for pre-approval.

What supports the development of Self-Authoring capacity required to meet the challenges of today's business world?

How can OD practitioners facilitate this development?

Encourage risk-taking. Risk involves introspection, reflecting on feedback, and venturing outside of accepted norms to stretch beyond existing individual and organizational capabilities. In supporting employees in taking risks, management initially feels the increased demands to provide appropriate scaffolding, contain risks, and emphasize learning over expected outcomes.

Unless deliberately designed to encourage disruption, organizational systems support the status quo and discourage risk-taking. Without risk-taking, there can be no progress toward the Self-Authoring mind that allows employees to meet the demands of today's work environment.

A typical performance development process stresses organizational KPIs over development of employees' mental complexity. By holding employees accountable solely for the performance metrics which impact their compensation and promotion readiness, the performance development processes can discourage the risk-taking needed to move from the Socialized to the Self-Authoring Mind.

An OD Practitioner can help their client organization identify areas that can sustain some turbulence and invite leaders and employees to take risks by stepping away from established processes to experiment with new approaches. Rather than a sole focus on the bottom-line which stymies people development and sabotages performance, organizations can see bottom line impacts while equally prioritizing people development with business objectives.

Developing Self-Authoring Capacity

Regardless of where an organization is in its performance management process, the following actions will lead to a more developmental process. Beginning steps are low investment and low risk.

1. Encourage clients to set stretch goals alongside regular goals to promote risk-taking. Falling short of a stretch goal should have no bearing on performance rating/compensation and can be mined for the lessons learned from taking a risk.

2. Help clients identify inconsistencies between performance expectations and rewards. Collaboration provides richer opportunities for the development of Self-Authoring capacity than siloed work and produces better business outcomes. Use team bonuses to promote collaborative behavior.

3. Ask clients "What are you learning?" especially when initiatives are not going according to plan. Encourage clients to reflect on this question as part of the ongoing performance management conversation. When leaders and managers share their learnings from challenges, they foster psychological safety necessary for developing greater mental complexity.

4. Model risk-taking during brainstorming, planning, and problem-solving sessions with clients. Ask "Given the current constraints, what are the options? What can be accomplished with what's available?" Sometimes minimalist solutions are best, especially in times of rapidly changing conditions. Suggest that the client introduce these questions in the goal-setting process with their teams.

5. Surface and question individual and collective assumptions. Ask clients "As we start this change effort, what assumptions are we making?" Take the opportunity to clarify assumptions. If it is not possible to clarify, treat the assumption as an assumption, not a fact. Recommend to clients that they practice challenging their own and one another's assumptions within their organization.

6. Engage with clients in regular reflection to support development of greater mental complexity. This can be as simple as Richard Elmore's "I used to think… And now I think…" exercise. Reflection is powerful when practiced by teams at set intervals, following completion of project milestones, going through a change, or responding to a crisis. Written responses to "I used to think… And now I think…" capture both individual and collective evolution. When clients ingrain this reflection exercise into their organizational culture, progress towards Self-Authoring follows.

As OD practitioners help put the above performance development recommendations into practice, the organization will see appreciable culture shifts over time which support individuals to become more Self-Authoring and contribute to the realization of business development.

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