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Opportunities: Some Thought on the Future of the OD Field

Peter F. Sorensen Jr.
Benedictine University

Therese F. Yaeger
Benedictine University

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Comments

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OPPORTUNITIES:

SOME THOUGHT ON THE FUTURE OF THE OD FIELD

Peter F. Sorensen, Jr., Ph.D.
Benedictine University

Therese F. Yaeger, Ph.D.
Benedictine University

The Benedictine University OD Program is currently celebrating its 10-20-30-40 year anniversaries. It has been ten years since Benedictine University started the Ph.D. program in Organization Development, building on the existing lecture series the hallmark of the program, featured over 150 Distinguished Visiting scholars such as:

Jean Bartunek
David Cooperrider
Wendell French
Frank Friedlander
Ron Fry
David Jamieson
Bob Marshak
Glenn Varney
Marvin Weisbord
Richard Woodman
Chris Worley

It has now been 20 years since the George Williams program moved to Benedictine University.

Thirty years ago, the Contemporary Trends in Change Management began, which over the years

has included such renowned speakers as

Chris Argyris
Dick Beckhard
Robert Blake
David Bradford
Warner Burke
Thomas Cummings
Kathie Dannemiller
Ed Lawler
Jane Mouton
Edgar Schein

among others. Finally, it was 40 years ago that the now Benedictine University OD program first began at George Williams College in nearby Downers Grove, Illinois.

Based on these 40 years in OD graduate education, we have watched the field grow and, we believe, become remarkably successful. Although OD has changed (evolved), it retains a core of critical characteristics. The most important of these characteristics, we feel, that differentiates it from other change methodologies, is its value orientation and behavioral science knowledge base.

What are the opportunities today for Organization Development? How do we present ourselves as a field? How are we perceived by managers? Are we seen as contributing value? There are numerous ways and avenues by which to answer these questions, some far beyond the limitations of this paper. The following are some brief comments on five opportunities for OD: image, curriculum, managing OD academic programs, strategic and global OD, and the knowledge base of the field.

First, the question of image. Our feeling is that OD has been successful, in some way, in spite of itself. For 40 years concerns have existed about the nature of the field, and predictions regarding the death of OD. We don't know if this has been particularly helpful -- interesting, provocative maybe -- but not very helpful. This is particularly true for new students to the field and for our image as meaningful contributors to organizational effectiveness.

But what are the alternatives? Why aren't we talking about and promoting the exceptional success rates in the field, so well documented by Bob G. Our own experience, for example, with Appreciative Inquiry has been the more rigorous the assessment the better and stronger AI appears.

Curriculum is a second issue related to competencies. Here we have made significant progress, primarily through the hard work, persistence, and tenacity of Glenn Varney whose work, along with the work of Roland Sullivan and Kris Quade, has been incorporated into Cummings and Worley's OD textbook.

A third area pertains to the management of OD academic programs and the structure or design of the college or university to which they belong. The success or failure of OD programs is, we believe, frequently a result of how well we navigate the structure and policies of the academic institutions of which we are a part. For example, there is increasing evidence that relatively free standing, high autonomy, responsibility or profit centers have higher rates of innovation and sustained success. We believe that we may have much to learn and share as program directors about successful and unsuccessful strategies for working effectively within our own colleges and universities.

Strategic OD and global OD represent another area of opportunity. There is no question that OD needs to play a role as a strategic partner with management. Again, there is consistent progress, but we probably need to know more about how ODers gain credibility in terms of being strategic partners with executive management. If the number of organizations with positions that include

the term 'global' and 'OD' in the title is any evidence, then clearly OD is partners in global initiatives. For example, the five largest Chicago-based global organizations, in fact, have Directors or VPs of Global OD. A major source of increasing information and knowledge in this area is our own graduate students, particularly our doctoral students, as we see significant increases in the number of our students that have global responsibilities.

The final area of opportunity involves expanding our knowledge base. This conference and the endowment fund are important and major efforts in this direction. Two other events in particular warrant our support. The first is the first international doctoral (graduate) conference in Lyon, France this month co-sponsored by the OD&C Division of the Academy of Management. It is the first international conference sponsored by the OD&C Division. The conference will be attended by over 50 European, Scandinavian, and U.S. universities and colleges. This is again a major effort at increasing the OD knowledge base through the establishment of a global network of current and future scholars dedicated to the creation of knowledge pertaining to our field. This effort deserves our full support as a continuing activity.

Finally, we have the OD&C Executive Doctoral Consortium held annually at the Academy of Management, which is now in its 10th year, and has involved a number of both US and non-US universities. Again, this is an activity which needs our full and ongoing support.

The OD field continues with its success. These are simply a few of the many opportunities that we have now, with more to come in our future.