

Talent Development 25 Organizational Development Strategy

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Section 3.3 in the CPTD Certification program for ATD is Organization Development and Culture. Section A reads, “Skill in designing and implementing organizational development strategy.”

I will share my process for helping organizations establish a constructive pathway for organizational development. The process always starts with knowledge of the organization.

Research

You must be intimately familiar with the needs, desires, purpose, vision, mission, and values of the organization before starting to craft a successful OD effort. Going in with a standardized or cookie-cutter approach may allow you to make some progress, but the end result will be far off the mark from one that is totally customized for this particular application.

Start by talking with people in the organization. For sure, you want to interview the top leaders and managers to get their ideas. You also want to interview several people at different levels in the organization, because the view at lower levels may be significantly different from that at the top.

Obtain any extant data that is available, such as employee quality of work-life surveys, grievance data, turnover stats by area, blockage surveys, and other data. These data are usually collected by the Human Resources Staff.

Collect Additional Data

You need more specific data before starting to design an OD program. There are many commercially available surveys you can use for this purpose. I prefer some instruments

that I have developed over the years that allow me to assess what topics have the greatest need in this particular group.

The one I use most often is what I call the “[Analysis of Leadership Training Needs](#).” This instrument is a broad look at what specific training modules would be most helpful for this particular population. A total of 56 different skill areas are on the survey, and each individual gives all of the skills a score of 0-3. Zero means there is no need for training on that skill. Three means there is an urgent need for training on that skill.

I have a suite of ten different surveys that I use depending on the data generated in the interviews. For example, if there is an issue with ethics in this organization, I have an instrument that will measure what types of skills need work.

If the group might be considering a merger or acquisition, I have an instrument that measures readiness for that. These assessments can be accessed on my home page www.leadergrow.com under “Services.”

Design Phase

Once the data phase is complete, it is time to start the design phase. You will need to select not only the topics to cover, but also the OD methods to use. In general OD activities fall into four categories. (There are others, but they are usually combinations of these four.)

1. Action Search
2. Appreciative Inquiry
3. Future Search
4. Whole System Intervention

Although the objective of each of these methods is the same, the viewpoint and methodology for each is different. I will give my personal views of the strengths and problems with each method from my experience. All of these can work. The trick is to match the leadership style and organization culture so that the one selected has the best chance of success in a particular case.

Action Search

Most organizations contemplating an OD initiative, do so because they are not satisfied with how things are going. If the current trajectory of business is meeting or exceeding goals, there is little impetus for change. The Action Search approach takes on a somewhat negative spin from the outset. The idea is to determine what is wrong and fix it quickly.

Appreciative Inquiry

This approach is the mirror image of the “action research” technique. The process starts by asking what is working well. Groups focus on what is going right rather than what is going wrong. The idea is to find ways of doing more of the right things, thus providing less reinforcement for doing the wrong things.

Future Search

In this process, the focus is on the vision rather than the current state. The idea is to get groups engaged in defining a compelling view of the future. When compared to the present, this allows clarification of the gaps between current practices and organizational goals. Outstanding vision is the most powerful force for all individuals and organizations.

Whole System Intervention

This is a kind of zero-based approach to OD. In this case, the activities of the organization are viewed through a “systems” approach. The emphasis is on getting a critical mass within the organization to redefine the business. Processes become the focal point for redesign efforts. This approach is less threatening than the action research technique because of focuses on the “what” and “how” rather than the “who.”

It is always best to work with a skilled facilitator whenever doing any form of Organization Development. Groups that try to navigate these choppy waters without the help of an experienced sea captain often end up in a bigger mess than when they started.

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