ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

A Process of Learning and Changing

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to respond in an appropriate and timely manner. Major events in organizations—planning, budgeting, quarterly reports—are repeated over time; as these events are repeated, new data are likely to be generated each time. Two quarterly reports are rarely the same, and plans and budgets change continuously. Consequently, the diagnosis of an organization in December will be at least somewhat different from the diagnosis conducted the previous June—significantly different if a significant intervention has occurred during the intervening six months. If things in the organization are significantly different six months later, and if these differences are disturbing to organization members, they will seek equilibrium—back to the former state. Organization development involves change. When change occurs in one of the organization's components or subsystems, other subsystems act to restore the balance. Pressure is brought to bear on organizational behavior that is different from the norm of the organization's culture as it has evolved. Thus, in OD practice, for change to last, recurring diagnoses must be undertaken to determine the state of earlier interventions, and further actions (interventions) are usually needed to reinforce the new behaviors. The long-run objective is to institutionalize the change so that possibilities of changing the OD change will be resisted within the normal pattern of open-system life—equilibrium seeking.

Conclusion

This chapter considered the four background models for any OD effort and the seven primary phases of OD consultation using a case to illustrate the phases. Although it is instructive to consider these phases—entry, contracting, diagnosis, feedback, planning change, intervention, and evaluation—as discrete steps, and although the consultative flow of events essentially follows the order of the seven phases, in practice the phases are not discrete; they blend together and overlap. When the consultant enters the client organization to collect information (by interviews, questionnaires, or observations), the intervention phase, sixth in the ordered group of seven, has already begun, and although evaluation is listed as last, it begins at the entry stage as far as the client is concerned.

These phases are therefore guides for OD consultation. They are highly useful for planning and for ordering sequences of activities and events, but they should not be considered as discrete, rigid steps to follow or as the only phases of consultation in organization development.

Finally, it should be remembered that these guides help to accomplish primary objectives of any OD effort. That is, as OD practitioners, we are concerned with (1) providing people with choices, so that their feelings of freedom will not be unduly curtailed and thus their resistance will be minimized and (2) involving people at some level of participative decision making and communication regarding the direction of organizational change, so that commitment to change implementation will be enhanced. Although we have used slightly different language with this closing statement, we are meaning the same as Argyris (1970) when he describes his criteria for an effective intervention.

Endnote

1. Lippitt et al.'s model is an elaboration of Lewin's three steps. Schein (1987) has provided a more recent elaboration. We shall cover his version as well.

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Defining the Client: A Different Perspective

Over the many years of my work in organization development (OD), I (Burke) have overheard or taken part in numerous discussions about "Who is the client?" Is the client the head person, the boss, a particular unit or group, or the total system? In these discussions, OD practitioners have identified at least one of the above.

Let me be concrete by using an actual case, a consulting project of mine a few years ago, with a small, highly technical company, a subsidiary of a large corporation. I was introduced to the president by an employee relations person to explore the possibility of working with the company. Contracting with the president and later with his top group went fairly smoothly. After some interviewing and observing, I was soon able to provide them with some preliminary feedback. Although the employee relations person did not accompany me during this early stage, at my request he became my internal counterpart as I began to move downward through the organization.

I looked forward to this consulting project because I had rarely worked with an organization so small—about 90 employees—and so interesting scientifically and technically. (The firm was developing commercial lasers.) In short, this was an organization of a size that I believed I could "get my arms around" and one that seemed to be on the verge of exciting technical advances.

The top management group was relatively small, consisting of five persons, including the president (see Figure 5.1). Most of the staff was located in operations, which consisted of both manufacturing and marketing/sales. At least a third of my consulting effort was within this unit of the company.
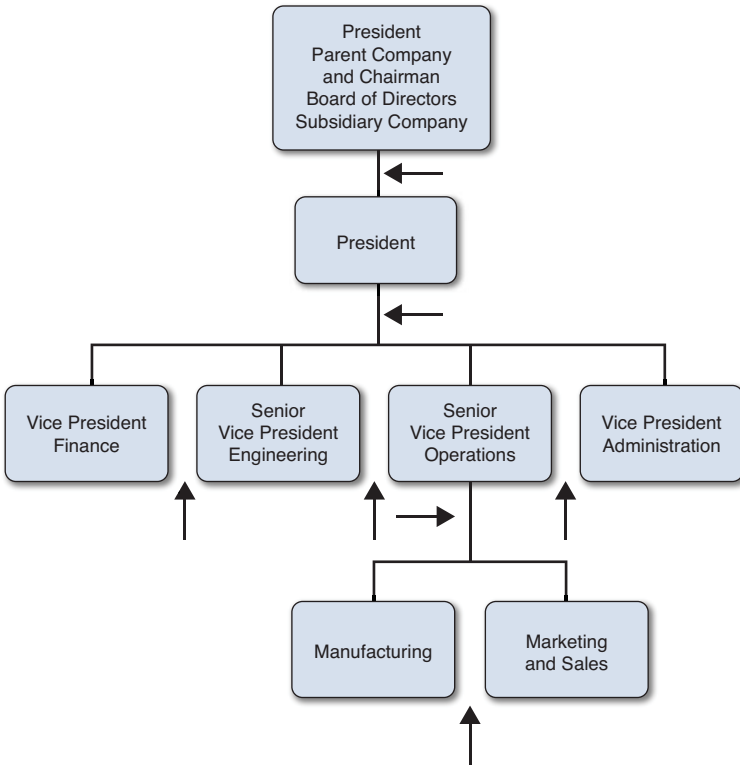
Figure 5.1 Partial Organizational Chart of Client Firm

Now to the central question: Who is my client? Answer by responding to the following multiple-choice question:

The client is which of the following?

  a. Company president
  b. Top management group
  c. Employee relations person
  d. Total company
  e. Parent corporation
  f. All of the above
  g. None of the above

To be *au courant*, you would choose either (d) or (f). After all, OD is a total system approach to planned change that starts from the top. My contracting, however, was done first with the president and next with his immediate reports as a group. Perhaps a better answer is (a) or maybe (b). But what about the employee relations person? My coming in was originally his idea and he paved the way. Also, he later was very much involved in my efforts. Alternative (c) may be the best answer. But what about the parent company? Was I not really serving them? The president of the parent company was chairman of the board of the subsidiary. Although he was not the subsidiary's CEO, he was nevertheless clearly in a position of authority. Maybe (e) is the best reply. These answers all seem reasonable. Thus, the safest alternative should be (f).

Consider the title I chose for this chapter and now, perhaps reacting to the way I presented the multiple-choice question, you already conclude that my answer is (g). The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to provide a rationale for that answer.

But, first, one other viewpoint should be considered. Schein's (1987) definition of the client is valuable because it is practical and multiple. He states that we must think in terms of client *categories:*

- *Contact clients* approach the consultant initially (the employee relations person in my example).
- *Intermediate clients* get involved with the consultant in the early stages of the OD effort (the top management group in my example).
- *Primary clients* own a problem for which help is requested (the operations group in my example).
- *Ultimate clients* may or may not be directly involved with the OD practitioner "but their welfare and interest must be considered in planning further interventions" (Schein, 1987, p. 118). (In the case I described, this could be the parent company.)

The value of Schein's categories is the fact that he addresses the reality of consulting. We often do not end up where we started in the consultant-client relationship.

Relations and Interfaces

Now back to my selection of (g) "none of the above." I chose it because I believe that our client in OD consultation is never one individual, regardless of position or role, or any particular group, team, or subsystem of the organization, or any combination thereof. Even though I generally subscribe to the idea of OD being a "total system," I often wonder if changing a whole system is even possible. Besides, I have trouble defining what the total system is because each one resides within yet a larger "total system."

The truth is that I have come to think of my client as the relationship and/or interface between individuals and units within and related to the system. Thus, the arrows in Figure 5.1 depict my view of the true client. This in-between-ness is the main subject of my consulting.

From the perspective of the consultant role, my notion of client is not new. In his 1970 book, Argyris avoided terms such as consultant, change agent, or practitioner, favoring instead *intervenor* and *interventionist.* These terms were, of course, an extension of his definition of a consultant intervention:

> To intervene is to enter into an ongoing system of relationships, to come between or among persons, groups, or objects for the purpose of helping them. There is an important implicit assumption in the definition that should be made explicit; the system exists independently of the intervenor (Argyris, 1970, p. 15).

For Argyris, then, to consult is to intervene.

Margulies (1978) characterized the role of the OD consultant as a marginal one (see Chapter 8, "Understanding Organizations: Covert Processes"). He argued that the degree to which the consultant is effective is a function of how capable he or she is at maintaining a certain social distance between self and other individuals in the client organization and at operating on the boundaries of units rather than exclusively within them. In these ways, the consultant can more readily maintain an objective stance *in between* persons and units in conflict rather than by being *with* one or the other.