

I, Organization: Santa Cruz County's Methods and Utilization of Organizational Development

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our department's greatest asset is its employees; the department's effective engagement of all employees is an essential component of the organization's culture. Effective employee engagement enhances employee well-being, longevity, and contribution via an environment where their work is meaningful and transformational (Kahn, 1990).

This paper includes research on Organizational Development (OD) and the utilization of OD in Santa Cruz County's Human Services Department (SCCHSD). Based on the SCCHSD annual employee engagement survey, I recommend that Sonoma County Human Services Department embed an Economic Assistance

(EA) Organizational Development Practitioner from the Program, Planning, & Evaluation Analyst job classification. The practitioner would create and maintain a yearly EA survey adopting five themes of Career Development, Work Engagement, Work Relationships, Communication, and Work Environment. The goal is to enhance EA's organizational development by empowering the leaders and employees, creating a culture of continuous quality improvement, aligning shared goals, making change more accessible and efficient, creating multidisciplinary workgroups allowing the contribution of all employees, and giving leaders more control over results by giving employees more control over how they do their jobs.

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Introduction

Over the years, OD has been defined by many scholars, and all differ in emphasis. This paper defines organizational development as a "science-based process that helps organizations build their capacity to change and achieve greater effectiveness by developing, improving, and reinforcing strategies, structures, and processes" (Cummings and Worley, 2014).

This paper researches the practice of organizational development, a practice that has existed for over sixty years. What is organizational development and exactly how is it utilized in organizations? This paper will touch upon the origins of OD and one of its founding fathers, Kurt Lewin.

Organizational methods are ever-changing and continuous. Likewise, change is ever-present and continuous. This paper reflects on the crucial aspects of dealing with the constantly changing business environment and its effect on staff and morale. The paper will focus on three themes: *science*, *culture*, and *change*, and will explore how Santa Cruz deals with these themes by analyzing the results of the annual employee engagement survey.

Science - Action Research

The action research theory is a model that Kurt Lewin introduced in the 1940s. Action research is a method in which the researcher intervenes in and during the research. It serves two purposes: firstly, according to Kurt Lewin, it will bring about positive change, and secondly, knowledge and theory will be generated. The foundation of the action research theory is that there cannot be action without research or research without

action. It provides the basis and the purpose of the OD analytic stage in the OD cycle (Weisbord, 1987).

OD is an evidence-based process. It is not about applying an approach and observing its outcome. Instead, it is about using results as input and fashioning a structured process to assess the outcomes. Organizational data has become more critical over time. Our present world is characterized by Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA). This VUCA world requires new agility from organizations, and organizational development is the means to that end. How do organizations approach an unpredictable, challenging situation—after all, they can't prepare for a VUCA world (Bennet & Lemoine HBR, 2014).

They can, somewhat. The best predictor for uncertainty is data. Data is an effective tool that is available to organizations by way of surveys, exit information, roundtable feedback, and focus groups. These are some methods that Santa Cruz County practices and uses to drive decision-making, impact strategy, Continuous Quality Improvement formulation, and improve organizational performance.

Analyzing data to answer questions, identify trends, and extract insights can be daunting. In 2016, Santa Cruz hired Jennifer Kaley as their Organizational Development Manager to take on this daunting task.

SCCHSD's vision was to increase employee engagement and align those efforts across divisions. Jennifer Kaley began her long view work as an organizational development practitioner to plan employee engagement frameworks to upsurge all staff engagement and job satisfaction. One key component of

data collection is the annual employee engagement survey. In the annual survey, she categorizes six sections: (1) Career Development, (2) Work Engagement, (3) Work Relationships, (4) Communication, (5) Work Environment, and (6) Other-Tenure, Division. The survey is designed with question flexibility, staff can skip questions, and results are converted to a percentage and assigned a grade.

Jennifer Kaley identifies and analyzes staff responses to surveys, roundtables, exit interviews, and focus groups. She presents results to the stakeholders and leadership. She makes long and short-term recommendations focused on the desired outcomes to increase employee job satisfaction, employee retention, internal candidate promotions, and ultimately to improve the division's grades (which represent employee satisfaction).

Culture – B = F(P, E)
Behavior = function of (Person interacting with their Environment)

Kurt Lewin's behavior equation, his modest model of human behavior, is very practical and somewhat simple. Its uncomplicatedness helps make it notable but bares a great insight into what affects how people behave. A way of seeing this is with athletes or musicians. You can take a mediocre athlete and place them in a great team with a great coach and a winning culture. That Environment will multiply their effectiveness. The opposite of that statement is that you can place a great player and put them on a team that is not doing so well, where the environment is “unhealthy” with a losing culture, and that player will falter, falling short of their potential.

The SCCHSD's annual survey includes a Work Environment section that describes the surrounding conditions in which an employee operates. These include physical conditions, equipment, commute, and even parking. Santa Cruz has also added new questions to gauge staff navigating through a hybrid office/remote work environment.*

WORK ENVIRONMENT	
SURVEY QUESTION	%/Grade
Q26. I am satisfied with my overall job security.	2.58/B-
Q27. My division's work positively impacts people's lives.	3.50/A-
Q28. My division operates in a socially responsible, ethical manner.	3.17/B+
Q29. My division has a safe work environment.	3.42/B+
Q30. I am as productive working remotely as I am in the office.	3.64/A-
Q31. When working remotely, I am able to stick to my work routine or schedule including taking breaks.	3.45/A-

*2021 Annual Employee Engagement Survey Summary of Results

Organizational culture reflects the characteristics of values, traditions, or behaviors that organizations and employees share. An easy way to describe culture is “how we do things around here.” It is the personality of the organization.

A question organizations can ponder for cultural change is: What is the change that we need to have to happen in the head,

heart, and hands of what individuals will do in our workplace? Organizations should acknowledge how change impacts individuals. Individuals can also relate to a sense of identity and pride associated with their organizations.

In survey results, SCCHSD sites that employee engagement strategies reduce staff turnover and improve productivity and

efficiency. Most significantly, engaged employees report feeling happier, both in their work and personal lives, creating an overall better culture.

Change & Communication

It is difficult for organizations to avoid change, whether growing or downsizing. If the change is wrongly implemented, resistance can sometimes be very severe and cause the change to falter or reduce overall productivity during and following the change. Good communication can be used to demystify the change process. Some of the major barriers to change include fear of the unknown, lack of innovation, lack of space, organizational culture, hasty planning, poor communication, and lack of involvement of all key players.

OD can help an organization create effective responses to changes, whether triggered from within or from without, and in many cases can influence the strategic direction proactively.

Organizational development plays a crucial role in helping organizations change themselves. It helps members go beyond surface changes to transform the underlying assumptions and values governing their behaviors. As a result, OD has become more responsive and practically relevant to organizations' needs to operate effectively in a highly volatile and complex world (Cummings and Worley, 2014).

The SCCHSD uses the annual survey to deal with change by measuring Communication Themes, Work Engagement Themes, and Work Relationship Themes. Staff scores top-down communication, lack of transparency, clarity, and timeliness in communication. Work Engagement staff voices the need for supplementary

collaboration between divisions, teams, and external partners.

The collected feedback becomes incorporated in the future year's Organizational Development Workplan. The work plan incorporates feedback and outcomes, and results are posted on the internal intranet, and status is updated quarterly.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Sonoma County Human Services Department embed an Economic Assistance Organizational Development Practitioner from the Program, Planning, Evaluation Analyst (PPEA) job classification. Specifically, the Recruitment and Retention PPEA. The practitioner would use .25 of the FTE to create and maintain a yearly Economic Assistance survey adopting the following five pillars: (1) Career Development, (2) Work Engagement, (3) Work Relationships, (4) Communication, and (5) Work Environment. The goal is to understand and improve (where needed) Economic Assistance's organizational culture by:

- empowering the leaders and employees and creating a culture of continuous quality improvement
- aligning shared goals
- making change more accessible and efficient
- creating multidisciplinary workgroups allowing more significant employee contribution
- giving leaders more control over results by giving employees more control over how they do their jobs.

The PPEA would share data collected from the survey with managers and staff with letter grades as a metric and goals for improvement in the future year.

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