

ASSESSING AN INTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Debra Dake*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study is designed to explore the Organizational Development (OD) program within San Mateo County's Human Services Agency. Organizational Development is defined as "a top-management supported, long-range effort to improve an organization's problem-solving and renewal processes, particularly through a more effective and collaborative diagnosis and management of organizational culture—with special emphasis on formal work team, temporary team and inter-group culture—with assistance of a consultant-facilitator" (French & Bell, 1990, p. 17). According to the San Mateo County training manual, organizational development:

- Is rooted in a set of values which emphasizes openness, trust and collaborative effort
- Seeks to simultaneously meet individual needs and the needs of several levels of systems—small groups, large organizations, and so on
- Is grounded in immediate experiences as they occur: this often gets expressed as a here and now orientation
- Emphasizes feelings and emotions, as well as ideas and concepts
- Places pre-eminence on the individual's involvement and participation—as subject and object, as generator of data as well as responder to those data—in an "action-research" sense
- Puts heavy reliance on group contexts for choice and change—to validate data, to develop and enforce norms, and to provide emotional support and identification

HISTORY

In 1996, San Mateo County's Human Services Agency began the process of hiring an internal Organizational Development Specialist. This process eventually took the agency to a nationwide search for applicants and culminated in a day-long screening process that included interviews, group sessions and applicant presentations. In addressing the challenges of hiring an OD Specialist, Madelyn Martin, Executive Manager, states:

"The greatest difficulty, I think, was to ensure that the internal consultant was truly neutral and the credibility that her services would be confidential. Some people will always be resistant to OD concepts, therefore the style and skill level must be such that the advantages are evident. We sought someone with the education, training and experience for the OD work. This is important to add to the credibility of the work and the OD experience."

LESSONS LEARNED

When San Mateo first implemented their regional, multi-disciplinary Family Self-Sufficiency Teams (FSSTs), the assistance of the Organizational Development Specialist was offered to the teams. Unfortunately, the offer of facilitation was presented as "help in team-building if you think you need it." and the offer was declined by the FSSTs. The FSSTs continued to meet weekly to discuss cases, problem solve and assist families and/or clients in reducing

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barriers to self-sufficiency. Two years after implementation, the FSSTs were not functioning as effectively as was hoped, and a series of OD interventions was required to assist the team in identifying their own barriers to success. Most of the team members later reported that OD assistance was helpful and gave them a better understanding of their role and the roles of other team members, illustrating the first two lessons learned in San Mateo's adoption of the OD process:

Lesson 1: The presentation of organizational development concepts is vital to a program's success.

Lesson 2: Continuous and consistent support from top management is needed to effectively implement an OD process.

In an interview with Donna Woche, OD Specialist for San Mateo, some of the challenges that a bureaucracy can provide to an OD process begin to emerge:

"I assumed that all of the Executive Directors knew the process of OD. . . I falsely assumed that they knew what OD was and the cycle used in implementing such a program."

It was due partly to this assumption, and the inconsistent "buy-in" from all top managers, that San Mateo's internal OD program has not yet effectively reached all levels of the organization, leading to the last three lessons learned:

Lesson 3: Ongoing education about OD concepts and the benefits of such a program are required for success.

Lesson 4: In order to maintain the momentum and effectiveness of an OD program, new managers and

staff should be brought on board with the OD concepts and principles.

Lesson 5: In order to be fully effective, an OD process must be embedded in all aspects of work within the agency.

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“Most OD consultants find working with bureaucracies, especially public ones, to be difficult at best.” (Golembiewski, et al., 1981, p. 679)

INTRODUCTION

This case study, designed to explore the Organizational Development program within San Mateo's Human Services Agency, began with a simple question: How does San Mateo's Organizational Development program work? In searching for that answer, this study became driven by a series of questions that continued to emerge with each answer: How did San Mateo bring on an internal OD Specialist? What would prompt a government agency to embark on a nationwide search to fill this position? What is it about the OD process that would require such extensive efforts? How do the concepts of OD translate into the real world? And the question that ultimately shaped the theme of this study: *Does a government bureaucracy offer the environment necessary for an internal OD program to succeed?*

WHAT IS ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (OD)?

The terms and concepts of “Organizational Development” are often confused with those of Organizational Transformation, Organizational Effectiveness, Organizational Improvement and other change processes. To begin this study in a relevant context, let us review the definition chosen for use in the initial case study of San Mateo's OD efforts: “Introducing Organizational Development Practices into a County Human Service Agency” (DuBrow, Wocher and Austin, 1999).

“Organization Development is a top-management-supported, long-range effort to improve an organization's problem-solving and renewal processes, particularly through a more effective and collaborative diagnosis and management of organization culture B with special emphases on formal work team, temporary team and inter-group culture B with assistance of a consultant-facilitator.” (French & Bell, 1990, p 17).

HISTORY

In 1996, San Mateo County's Human Services Agency began the process of hiring an internal Organizational Development Specialist. This process eventually took the Agency to a nationwide search for applicants and culminated in a day-long screening process that included interviews, group sessions and applicant presentations.

“We had been hiring via a contract OD consultant for over two years to assist us with the Strategic Planning process, and to serve as a consultant to our Executive Team. We decided that since the need appeared to be ongoing, that we would hire an ‘internal consultant.’ We also felt our organization was ‘ready’ to do this—we had experienced the benefit of the function. We had already had two of our trainers participate in a county sponsored 18-month OD class.” (Madelyn Martin, 2000).

In moving from an outside OD Consultant to hiring an internal OD Specialist, the San Mateo Human Services Agency began to pave the way for a successful OD program:

“A major value of OD consultation is the philosophy that any program has to be long term in order to be effective. One-shot or time-limited OD have very little impact and no lasting effect, particularly on large and complex organizations . . . One of the typical long-range goals of an OD program is that it will become institutionalized and rely primarily on internal resources.”
(Hansen and Lubin, 1998, p. 101-102).

THE DIFFERENCE: KEY CONCEPTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

What is it about the OD process that would require such extensive efforts?

Most significantly, what sets Organizational Development apart from other programs is its key concepts and ethical guidelines, many of which seem the antithesis of operations in a typical government bureaucracy. It is in reviewing the complexities of those concepts and ethical guidelines that we also discover why success of an OD program depends on a continuous and long-term process.

Organizational Development reaches much deeper than other organizational change programs. OD is a process B almost a way of being that requires a systemic shift in bureaucratic attitude to be successful. San Mateo County’s training publication: “OD Process Facilitator Training Program” states that OD:

- Is rooted in a set of values which emphasize openness, trust and collaborative effort
- Seeks to simultaneously meet individual needs and the needs of several levels of systems B small groups, large organizations, and so on
- Is grounded in immediate experiences as they

occur: this often gets expressed as a here-and-now orientation

- Emphasizes feeling and emotions, as well as ideas and concepts
- Places pre-eminence on the individual’s involvement and participation B as subject and object, as generator of data as well as responder to those data B in an “action-research” sense
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THE DIFFERENCE: GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND ETHICS

As the full context of Organizational Development principles begins to crystallize, the question arises: “Did San Mateo’s Executive Management know the extent of what they were committing to in an OD program?” In addressing the difficulties of bringing on an OD Specialist, Madelyn Martin, Executive Manager, demonstrates an awareness of the complexities involved in committing to an OD process:

“The greatest difficulty, I think, was to insure that the internal consultant was truly ‘neutral’ and that her services could be confidential. Some people will always be resistant to OD concepts, therefore the ‘style’ and skill level must be such that the advantages are evident. We sought only someone with the education, training and experience for the OD work. This is important to add to the credibility of the work and the OD experience.” (Martin, 2000).

The enormity of the commitment that the Executive Management of San Mateo’s Human Services Agency made in hiring an internal OD Specialist unfolds further as we examine the underlying prin-

cipals and ethics that guide this profession. Dr. Michael-Laurie Bishow relates that: "Any Ethics Code might begin with the phrase 'whatever intervention we plan or engage should promote' . . ."

- Quality of life, satisfaction in general
- Growth, human potential, empowerment
- Freedom and responsibility
- Justice, live lives which result in fairness
- Dignity, integrity, worth for people and cultures
- All-win attitudes and cooperation
- Authenticity and openness in relationships
- Effectiveness, efficiency and alignment of people, production, and system
- Holistic, systemic and stakeholder orientation
- Confrontation of issues leading to solutions through democratic decision-making

The ODI registered professional is also expected to show responsibility to self, client, professional growth, and society (Bishow, 1998). Bishow also urges OD practitioners to consider adopting the following ethical imperatives as part of their OD mission statement:

1. Include the voices of people at any level impacted by the organizational intervention.

Represent all relevant employees for expertise on the impacts to the whole system . . . Avoid fixed power relationships by using fluid groups with changing roles (W. Daniels, 1990, 1991 for theory-based practice) . . . Be sure to represent "protected" classes, geographic locations, and occupational groups (i.e. all shifts and job classes). Access to participation is not enough. In a troubled environment, people need protection from retaliation. We encourage participation by emphasizing whose participation is necessary to promote an ethical OD process.

2. Ensure freedom of information about the process and the OD vision.

Publish and present to all levels of the organization what the OD intervention goals are and who will do what when. Respond honestly about the expected consequences to people and feelings and production. Publish your ground rules for group interaction before you start, especially protections and ethics.

Respond to wrong moves with open information about corrections. Tell the truth. If you must keep some information confidential, say so and keep confidences.

3. Build capacity in the system to respond to changing internal and external environments.

An ethical process promotes benefit to the system as a whole. The OD work may decentralize authority and create more system-wide communication; however, the balance between process time and productivity must be maintained.

4. Protect and build self/other esteem.

An ethical group process values the individual and builds a socio-technical system which melds individual benefit with the organizational benefit over the long term and the short term. In the short term, provide stress reduction from the uncertainty created by the OD process as it progresses.

5. Provide specific OD-related competencies.

Your contribution depends on application of the best theory available and your theory-based skill level . . . only contract for work fit to your existing competencies, but set stretch goals. Working in

teams increases the range of skills you can offer. Be realistic about your ethical, energy, skill and emotional limits.

6. Respect the client's cultural patterns.

Your ethical first step is to understand the relationship of your cultural expectations and the client's. Respecting difference might mean accepting that the client will not trust you and you need a partner or another client. Some large corporations send teams overseas to have several demographics available to contact.

7. Above all, do no harm.

You may not be able to solve many problems but you must not damage individuals or promote change that destroys healthy aspects of the organization. Even in the middle of the project, an ethical professional is obliged to openly object to destructive actions. You may even need to leave the project if the client goal seems to be self destruction.

**LESSONS LEARNED—
THE IMPACT OF REALITY**

In an effort to simplify the ethical guidelines for Organizational Development Specialists, C.M. Deaner (1994) proposed a three-part code: PARTICIPATION, SHARED POWER and TRUTH. Indeed, even pared down to three basic guidelines, this seems a lot to ask of a government bureaucracy.

Staffing changes, reorganizations, bureaucratic procedures, internal politics, new directors with new vision and direction, changing political winds, Boards of Supervisors, County Executives, and new mandates from the State and Federal Governments all contribute to a continuously changing environ-

ment of public service. Here is where the rubber hits the road—In view of the realities, the question arises: How do all of those wonderful OD principles, concepts and ethics translate into the real world of human services?

One of the key components of the OD process is effective team development. With the advent of the great "Epidemic of Collaboration" that Welfare Reform brought us, productive and effective teams are vital to our success in human services. Unfortunately, very little, if any, training has been done with staff on how to work productively as a team B it's as if we expect people to intuitively know how to work effectively in teams.

When San Mateo first implemented their regional, multi-disciplinary Family Self-Sufficiency Teams (FSST), the assistance of the Organizational Development Specialist was offered to the teams. Unfortunately, the offer of facilitation was presented as "help in team-building if you think you need it," and the offer was declined by the FSSTs. The FSSTs continued to meet weekly to discuss cases, problem solve and assist families and/or clients in reducing barriers to self-sufficiency. Two years after implementation, the FSSTs were not functioning as effectively as was hoped, and a series of OD interventions was required to assist the team in identifying their own barriers to success. After an all-day team-building intervention, the participants were asked if this type of team process would have been helpful to them at the inception of their teams B six of the ten participants said "yes," three were not sure, and one said "no."

In addition, eight participants said that, after the team development work, they had a better understanding of their role and the roles of the other team members as well as a better idea of what was

expected of them and their team. Remember that this team development work occurred two years after the team began working together and that these same team-building activities had been offered to the team when they were first forming.

The story of San Mateo's FSSTs not only demonstrates how OD concepts can translate into the real world of human services, but also illustrates one of the first lessons learned in San Mateo's adoption of the OD process:

Lesson 1: *The presentation of organizational development concepts is vital to a program's success.*

Given a more inviting and accurate description of the team development guidance OD has to offer, the San Mateo FSSTs may have spent two years working together effectively and certainly with much less frustration.

Lesson 2: *Continuous and consistent support from top management is needed to effectively implement an OD process.*

In an interview with Donna Wocher, OD Specialist for San Mateo, some of the challenges that a bureaucracy can provide to an OD process begin to emerge:

"I assumed that all of the Executive Directors knew the process of OD . . . I falsely assumed that they knew what OD was and the cycle used in implementing such a program."

It was due partly to this assumption, and the inconsistent "buy-in" from all top managers, that San Mateo's internal OD program has not yet effectively reached all levels of the organization.

Lesson 3: *Ongoing education about OD concepts and the benefits of such a program are required for success.*

Ms. Wocher smiles when she addresses common misconceptions about a basic OD concept: "Team building is not holding hands and singing 'Koom-ba-ya'" Simple as that may seem, it is often similar misconceptions and assumptions that act as barriers to effective team work. The process of team building includes bringing the team members together and involving them in a total program of goal setting, problem solving and development.

Lesson 4: *In order to maintain the momentum and effectiveness of an OD program, new managers and staff should be brought on board with the OD concepts and principles.*

Within a few months of working with the FSSTs in the day-long team intervention, a new manager from another county was brought on to manage one of the regional teams. Not having any background or knowledge of the concepts and principles of OD, the new manager's style was actually counter to, and potentially detrimental to the group participation that the OD process has encouraged.

Lesson 5: *In order to be fully effective, an OD process must be embedded in all aspects of work within the Agency.*

In the most recent reorganization of San Mateo's Human Services Agency, the OD Specialist was promoted to the position of Manager of the Human Resources and Development Department (a blending of Staff Development, Human Resources and Organizational Development). When asked what her vision for OD was in the context of her new position, Ms. Wocher responded:

“My long-term goal of two-three years is to broaden the services we provide and how we provide them (also the goal of the Director of Planning and Development and the Agency Director). For example, currently this group responds to training requests by delivering the requested training. However, little to no analysis takes place to determine whether or not the problem can be fixed by training.”

“I plan to provide education to the staff around performance analysis both at the individual, team and systemic levels. The idea here is that when staff get a phone call from a supervisor or manager, or for that matter the agency director, we will instinctively ask a series of questions that starts a process of assessment to determine the service problems, and identify if the service problem is residing at the individual, team or systemic level . . . Finally, our department will determine whether or not we can provide those services or if we need to refer them to some other group inside or outside the agency.”

- We commit ourselves to promoting the *highest level of customer service*. We will be *knowledgeable, proactive and continuously improve our services*.
- We promote *innovative and effective leadership*, which is *guided by fact, encourages rewards based upon merit and holds us accountable for our actions*.

Does a Government Bureaucracy Offer the Environment Necessary for an Internal OD Program to Succeed? It would seem that San Mateo certainly does.

HUMAN SERVICE AGENCY VALUES

- We will *attribute goodwill* to people’s actions and foster a high level of *honesty, openness, free dialogue, integrity, ethics, and trust*.
- We *value individuals* and their *diversity* and treat each other with *respect and dignity*.
- We will *promote partnerships* and expect a *maximum contribution* from employees, customers and communities.



Family Self-Sufficiency Teams (FSST)

Fact Sheet

What are Family Self-Sufficiency Teams?

- FSST's are regional teams whose members are from different professional disciplines and/or agencies.
- FSST's meet weekly to discuss cases, problem solve and assist families and/or clients reduce barriers to self-sufficiency.
- FSST's consist of a standing committee who attend each FSST meeting, and an extended team who are available to attend on an individual basis, based on the specific needs of the family/case.
- Other service providers may also be requested to attend.

How does an FSST work?

- Most cases come to the attention of the Family Self-Sufficiency Team via the Income and Employment Service Specialist (IESS) who prepares and presents the case. Other FSST extended members or partners, such as Probation or Community Based Organizations (CBO's), may also present a case for review.
- East FSST member receives a faxed case outline and release of information several days before the meeting. Members come to the FSST meeting having searched their own records for previous and/or current family/client participation.
- Families/clients are invited to attend their case review.
- Identified cases are discussed by the attending members and a plan for accomplishing both short and long term goals is formulated. These plans help families/clients proceed toward achieving and maintaining self-sufficiency. Most cases are reviewed by the FSST every three months.

Where are the FSST's and when do they meet?

- The four FSST's are regional located throughout San Mateo County:
 - ☛ Daly City (North) Tuesday, 1:15 p.m. in the County Mental Health Building
 - ☛ Belmont/San Carlos (Central) Tuesday, 10:00 a.m. at Vocational Rehabilitation Services
 - ☛ Redwood City (South) Wednesday, 1:30 p.m. Fair Oaks Community Center
 - ☛ East Palo Alto/Menlo Park (also South) Thursday, 10:00 a.m. University Avenue

For more information about FSST's, contact Stuart Oppenheim, FSST Policy Chairman, 650 301-8710

Family Self-Sufficiency Team

Team Development Off-Site Formative Evaluation

1. When you walked in this morning, did you think today's process would result in an action plan to make the team more effective?

Choose One: Yes (6) No Not Sure (3)

Comments:(Not sure but hopeful; (Yes, did more than I expected); (I hoped it would)

2. When you walked in this morning, what did you think was the greatest barrier to your team's effectiveness?

Comments: Focusing on issues; Differences in goals between team members and IESSs; Focus; Time management; Not being to reach a consensus on crucial issues; Resistance; Time mismanagement; Lack of plan for processing cases.

3. After looking and analyzing the survey data and the FSST report, how has your opinion about the greatest barrier changed, if at all?

Comments: No, it continued it. It also looked like we all agreed.; The survey reflects my opinion; Time management is consensus "greatest barriers/" We did develop action plan that included steps which may have positive impact on IESSs participation; Not yet addressed; No; We can reach consensus because we share a common purpose; Getting to know other FSST members; Yes, we have beginning of a process plan.

4. After today, do you have a better idea of your role and the roles of your team members?

Choose One: Yes (8) No Not Sure

Comments Same; continued it; Having to write out our roles. I have a much clearer understanding; Just from our discussions today; Same

5. After today, do you have a better idea of what is expected of you and your team members?

Choose One: Yes (8) No Not Sure

Comments: Same; Case review flow process is very clear now; Given the action plan; Same; I understood some team members roles much better

A. Make realistic service plans for clients

		(4)	(5)	
Not at all	To a little extent	To some extent	To a considerable extent	To a great extent

B. Maximize the individual resources each member represents or brings to the team

		(3)	(5)	(1)
Not at all	To a little extent	To some extent	To a considerable extent	To a great extent

C. Evaluate the effectiveness of its operation

		(2)	(5)	(2)
Not at all	To a little extent	To some extent	To a considerable extent	To a great extent

D. Evaluate how well the psycho social needs of the team is being met

		(7)	(2)	
Not at all	To a little extent	To some extent	To a considerable extent	To a great extent

E. Plan together and coordinate efforts

		(3)	(4)	(2)
Not at all	To a little extent	To some extent	To a considerable extent	To a great extent

6. Upon walking out of today's session, how you think the team's new action plan will lead toward making a positive difference, if at all, in how members work together as a team?

Comments: Yes, hopefully will be more time effective; The new action plan will greatly improve our efficiency in reviewing cases; We have a good action plan and members appear ready to work more closely together; Will greatly benefit structure of the meeting; Very much so. I think it will bring the team together to the end to which they are committed; If people feel more productive time-wise, they will feel better in providing a service to the client; Good; Better organization, time management, etc.; We will feel a clearer sense of direction.

7. Would an off-site such as this have been helpful in launching the team when it first began?

Choose One: **Yes (6)** **No (1)** **Not Sure (3)**

Comments:

Although some of the issues would have been more theoretical and less vivid; Yes, yes; Some of the issues would have been identified before the team began; After about two months of interacting would be better than at the launch; I was not part of it since the beginning.

8. Any other comments you would like to make?

Lots accomplished today; Thanks for an excellent job, Donna; More of these. We as a team will never take the time to take care of ourselves because there is not time for this; The day felt productive both in it task focus and group dynamics;

Thank you for providing feedback.

Please return to:

**Donna Wocher
Human Service Agency
400 Harbor Blvd., Building C
Belmont, CA 94002**

In the October 1986 issue of the *Training & Development Journal*, Ralphs and Stephan presented a study of the HRD functions in *Fortune 500* companies. In one item of the study, respondents were asked to identify the human resource areas they would include under the label of "human resource development." Four highly ranked activities clearly stood out from the rest:

- training and development
- organization development
- human resource planning
- career development

It was not the first time that organization development and career development had been closely identified with HRD. The two practice areas have been represented in ASTD subgroups for years. But it was the first study to acknowledge publicly what I believe was, and is, a widespread, but unspoken consensus in the field.

In August 1987, ASTD convened a task force to revise its 1983 *Models of Excellence* (McLagan) role-and-competency study and to examine the issue of setting standards of performance for the field. Because the 1983 study team did not want to tackle the "What is HRD?" issue, its study was based on a narrow spoke of the human resource wheel entitled "training and development" (see Figure 3). Training and development seemed the safest area to study, as it was the only part of the wheel that everyone agreed was a definitive part of HRD.

The 1987 task force decided to examine the "What is HRD?" issue. To everyone's pleasant surprise, the members unanimously agreed on a conceptual framework to define the field. They proposed that HRD comprises the following three areas (not in any priority order):

- training and development
- organization development
- career development

The study team then developed and proposed the following narrative definition of HRD based on the adopted framework:

HRD is the integrated use of training and development, career development, and organization development to improve individual and organizational effectiveness.

HRD is the integrated use... means that for optimum effectiveness, the three activity areas are to be used as parts of a total integrated HRD system. The activities must be planned both strategically and tactically and should be congruent with the mission and the needs of the organization. The HRD plan must allow for flexibility and creativity, as well as provide direction. The strategic HRD plan

