



## What Makes an OD Career a Calling?

Dr. William Brendel

After establishing a research team, we realized that we had plenty of recent data to analyze regarding the career aspect of OD. But what makes an OD career a calling?

First, we needed a framework that could reflect some of the most fundamental and appealing aspects of OD. People often stumble *into* this field bringing with them a unique set of natural talents - and our field embraces these differences in an appreciative fashion.

Second data from numerous sources demonstrates that there is a place for everyone in OD, but there is also a place for OD in every profession. So, another unique aspect assessing someone's calling is to better understand how an individual hopes to identify as a pure OD practitioner, and weave OD into their professional narrative and role (even if it goes by a different name)

A third fundamental aspect of an OD calling has to do with change. We know that organizations demand change, and the world yearns for it. What makes OD so unique is its ability to assist with change across numerous contexts, most specifically in contexts that focus on improving characteristics of business operations or in addressing inequities in society.

Finally, our analysis of the OD job and education markets confirms the research and work of Gervase Bushe and Bob Marshak, that practitioners tend to gravitate toward two approaches. The first approach, we refer to as classic because its been around since before OD ever existed. It is diagnostic approach to change in which a practitioner positions themselves much like a scientist, capable of objectively assessing the health and effectiveness of an organization, solving problems, and changing behaviors. A second approach, which has grown exponentially in popularity is dialogic in nature, and approaches organizations like fields of meaning, honoring the subjective and socially constructed dimensions of organizational sense-making. Rather than focusing strictly on behavior, this innovative approach focuses on generative exchanges that changing people's hearts and minds. We'll post resources that compare diagnostic and dialogic OD on our website.

Keeping these preferences in mind, we discovered a career-calling framework in an unlikely source, and from a part of the world that has one of the largest populations of centenarians, or people who live to 100 or more years old. Ikigai is an ancient Japanese wisdom tradition for establishing a meaningful livelihood by asking four questions: What are your natural talents? What type of work-lifestyle do you wish to live? What do you most wish to change? And what forms of engagement bring you



the greatest joy? The Ikigai model purports that careers that answer all four of these questions resemble a career calling... purposeful, meaningful work that feels natural, and fulfilling. An assessment that could measure these aspects through the lens of OD could improve greatly upon the way our OD ecosystem works together, ultimately with the aim of creating healthier, and more effective systems.