

# Organization Development Review

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## OD: Research, Careers, and Perspectives

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# Organization Development Review

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“It is imperative for OD scholars and practitioners to expand their efforts to disseminate the results of our work in organizations. This research is vital to help the field stay relevant and current as change continues to intensify.”

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# In Need of Evidence

## A Call for Organization Development Research

By Anton Shufutinsky,  
William T. Brendel, and  
Todd L. Matthews

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### Abstract

“Pry or Die!” That was the top of mind quote made by a Fortune 50 CEO when asked about his perspective of being zealous in capturing real-time data on organizational behavior, culture, and leadership in his corporation during a change consult. “The research you collect is the only way we really know what’s happening on the ground.” These words are not only applicable in his and numerous other organizations, they are applicable in our field of practice. Research is a foundation and a cornerstone of what we do, as organization development (OD) is rooted in action research, diagnostics, facilitation of the application of instruments and interventions, and assessment of and adjustment to them as we guide organizations toward improvement. Yet, we do not produce and publish a considerable amount of OD research. Even the popular illusion that 70% of change initiatives fail, despite being commonly quoted in publications and presentations, lacks evidence to support the statement (Todnem, 2020). To thrive as a credible evidence-based profession that presents concrete value to organizations, we posit that OD must substantially increase both the rigor and quantity of scholarly and scholar-practitioner research.

**Keywords:** research, evidence-based practice, organization development, research-practice gap

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### Introduction

One of the common dysfunctions OD consultants tend to find in organizations undergoing transformative change is resistance to change (Deline, 2019; Hon et al., 2014; Oreg, 2018). Twentieth century American philosopher Charles Saunders Peirce (Peirce et al., 2017, p. 1) said that few people “... care to study logic, because everybody conceives himself to be proficient enough in the art of reasoning already.” However, it is also possible that many of us, the OD practitioners facilitating logical change in organizations, are ourselves resisting change by rationalizing our actual skill and rejecting the possibility that we may not have the experience,

knowledge, or ability to appropriately aid any given organization we are consulting to. The many leaders and managers running organizations may also lack those skills, which is why they hire us to begin with.

When asked about his thoughts and eagerness to capture real-time data on his enterprise’s organization behavior, culture, and leadership, a Fortune 50 Chief Executive Officer (CEO) stated “Pry or Die! They all think they already know all the answers,” he said, regarding his own team of leaders who argued funding the organizational research study to evaluate climate, structure, teamwork, engagement, and culture. “The research you collect is the only way we really know what’s happening on

the ground” (Confidential Consulting Client, personal communication, April 15, 2022). These words are not only applicable in his and numerous other organizations, for which OD was critical to improve talent retention and performance, but they are highly salient to the practitioners in our field of practice.

How many times have you heard some version of, “I’ve been doing this for X years, I’ll tell you that we don’t need that.”? As practitioners with decades of experience practicing OD under our belts, we often make fundamental errors in judgment by assuming we have seen it all and that we can predict or understand what is going on in the current or next organization that we consult to. However, as we remain dedicated to practicing our craft over years and decades, the scale, pace, and complexity of change have increased dramatically. Technology has advanced and changed at an exponential rate (Schwab, 2016; Shufutinsky et al., 2020). Along with technology, the access to information, the way we do work, the way we communicate, the kind of work that needs to be done and the way it can be done, and the way that the current and next generations of employees think, behave, and work continue to change as well.

It is imperative for OD scholars and practitioners to expand their efforts to disseminate the results of our work in organizations. This research is vital to help the field stay relevant and current as change continues to intensify.

## Background

Practically every field of practice has both a scholar/academic and research component, and the collected research is used in many different ways, including market research to understand customer patterns, medical research for evidence that can be used to provide answers regarding treatment, environmental research to evaluate conservation effort effectiveness, agricultural research to assess effectiveness of anti-pest compounds, or treatment of organizations with leadership and management principles. Research is how we find out what is happening on the ground. It is how

we know what works, what does not work, what is preferred, and which attitudes prevail around any particular action or item. Research is what informs us of how to behave by providing evidence to support or reject action. It is important in practically every area of study, but, unfortunately, not all fields of practice are as connected to or committed to research and evidence in the same way. If we are scholar-practitioners, then, in line with the terminology alone we must dedicate our attention to scholarship and practice. Scholarship is the conception, establishment, and dissemination of knowledge regarding research and practice (Van de Ven, 2005, p. xiii). Research is defined as “an orderly investigative process for the purpose of creating new knowledge” (Swanson and Holton, 2005, p. 4). Burkholder et al (2019, p. 3) state that the role that “... science plays in generating new knowledge can be used by scholar-practitioners to address practical problems.”

Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) discussed how business adages and leadership decisions are often based on flimsy evidence if they are based on evidence at all. They take a position on the importance of evidence-based management, and expose the reality of the weakness or lack of it when it comes to business management, or management of organizations in general. That is not to say that many organizations have not recognized the need to analyze data and try to understand it to make decisions that affect productivity and economic performance in organizations.

As a source of competitive advantage, and sometimes out of existential necessity, organizations have rapidly embraced data science and analytics, placing premium value on new and often large, previously unavailable sources of data. This move towards data analytics did not materialize suddenly out of thin air. As technology and management systems software emerged, organizations increased their use in order to mine data to aid decision-making regarding staff, material resources, and retention and management of projects and products (Larson and Chang, 2016; Power, 2016; Vassakis et al., 2018; Waddill, 2018). This shift toward big data did not

come as a surprise to most large firms and was expeditiously reflected in college curricula, offering bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees in data science and management. Organizations do use evidence for decision-making, and while this is often a quantitative process from data mining, data generated in OD consults, including the qualitative data we often collect, are not excluded. We are also cautioned that traditional management and information technology (IT) consulting firms, which both have big data at their fingertips, have ostensibly co-opted the role and function of OD (Burke, 2018).

Recent study has exhibited the lack of involvement in research by OD practitioners, in the conduct of research, the pedagogy of research methods, the bridging of research and practice, and the publishing of research (Shufutinsky, 2023; Zardet et al., 2021). Despite having foundational training in research methods, and particularly in action research, only 24 of 127 OD participants sampled (18.9%) stated that they are comfortable with their research skills and believed that they would be capable of running an independent research project. Only 32 of 127 (25.2%) stated that they would be comfortable enough to apply qualitative or quantitative research methods in their consulting work and attempt to write up and publish the work. Nearly 50% (63 participants) stated that they use their knowledge in research methods from their graduate programs to perform their consulting work, but only 35 of those 63 were able to specify how they use their research skills and emphasize research methodologies, practices, instruments, and procedures that they use in their consulting work. When prompted, 42 of the 127 participants (33%) were able to provide a sound definition for phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, correlation, or regression analysis methodologies (Shufutinsky, 2023; Zardet et al., 2021).

Cultivating the skill of digesting research knowledge to bridge the research-practice gap is another area of critical importance because the research-practice cycle means that research findings guide practice, and findings from practice guide research. Thus, it is vital that theory and

design be researched and applied to understand their value, and that workplace practices are studied and understood for the progression of the science and development of theory. Theory and practice are not and should not be mutually exclusive, and they supplement one another. Thus, the invention, or discovery of the Scholar-Practitioner—the professional dedicated to generating knowledge that is useful in practice, and using practice in collaboration with organizational management to generate and expand knowledge (Bartunek and Schein, 2011; Kram et al., 2012; Pass-

ever published a research article, with only 27 (21.3%) publishing a research paper in the previous 5 years (Zardet et al., 2021).

Similarly, when 115 OD practitioners (127 minus 12 business faculty) were interviewed, 55.6% stated that they have read *Harvard Business Review* (HBR) or another business or talent management magazine, but only 38.2% stated that they regularly read *Organization Development Review* (ODR), 24.3% stated that they read the *Organization Development Journal* (ODJ), 11.3% stated that they have read an article in the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Sci-*

one of which is that 70% of change initiatives fail. We do not only not have evidence to support this, because there has not been adequate research, but we also do not often know whether our own change facilitation is working when we are not long-term consultants. When mentioned, the figure 70% was recognized by 101 of 127 (79%) practitioners as the percentage of change initiatives that failed. However, of the 101, only 7 practitioners stated that they experienced their change facilitation failing in the past 5 years (Zardet et al., 2021). That is a major disparity. Despite this figure already being unsubstantiated (Hughes, 2011), we still hear OD practitioners use this figure in discussion and see it in publication. One reason is because evidence of the 70% failure does not exist, but many practitioners do not question it to begin with. Research skills promote critical and analytical thinking (EchoHawk et al., 2014; Murdoch-Eaton et al., 2010; Willison, 2012) and inquiry, not only regarding suspect information such as the 70% figure, but also of our own illusions regarding our facilitation success and failure rates.

We are left with numerous pressing questions. How can practitioners remain up-to-date and abreast of the changes in organizations and in management practice without reading the stories, examples, theory, and other practice-based findings? How can instructors know what to teach if they are not keeping up with the research findings and the theory that is generated in the field and related fields? How can we be sure that we are deploying the right surveys, using the right tools, and examining the most vital dynamics and problems in the organization if we do not know whether these instruments, surveys, tools, and application methods are validated, if the science has changed, or if the environment has shifted altogether? And why are some of us unable to get our action research into journals?

### Pilot Study of Editors

In an attempt to understand some of the reasons submitted intervention research articles are rejected by journal editors and reviewers, we performed an exploratory

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more et al., 2008; Schultz et al., 2010; Sriram and Oster, 2012; Wasserman and Kram, 2009). Of the 127 participants in the aforementioned study, 100% of the OD professionals interviewed identified themselves as scholar-practitioners. However, despite 100% being reportedly involved in action-science or action research (Argyris et al., 1985; Shani and Coghlan, 2021), only 35 of the 127 (27.5%) met Tenkasi and Hay's (2008) definition of scholar-practitioners stated as "actors who have one foot each in the worlds of academia and practice" and being pointedly involved in and intent on advancing both theory and practice. In fact, only 47 (37%) of the 127 interviewed had published any of their work in scholarly journals accessible to other scholars, practitioners, and scholar-practitioners, and only 35 (27.6%)

ence (JABS) in the past year, and only 7% and 5.2%, respectively, read *Leadership and Organization Development* published by Emerald Insight or the *Organization Design Journal* (Zardet et al., 2021). A considerable percentage of the articles published in ODR and ODJ are conceptual, theoretical, or thought leader essays, with only a few in any of the four annual journal issues coming from research. Those OD journals that do contain a strong percentage of their articles as research work have many articles published by non-OD scholars. It appears from these analyses that OD professionals are not only not participating in or conducting research, but many are also not even reading the research in the central scholarly outlets that are being published to inform the field. Todnem (2020) discusses the illusions regarding change,



qualitative pilot study to understand the perspectives and experiences of journal editors with regard to peer-reviewing action and intervention research manuscripts they receive.

#### *Pilot Study Methods*

We conducted a brief qualitative study on a sample of convenience of 16 OD and OD-related journal editors, editorial board members, and peer-reviewers. We performed one-to-one 20-minute semi-structured responsive interviews to try to understand their experiences with and perspectives on submitted intervention research manuscripts, with a focus on quality and reasons for acceptance or rejection determination.

**One way of measuring vibrance in any field is the extent to which pioneers and new pioneers create, test, and share new applications, which is a function of research. We cannot, as a field, continue to operate from a theoretical lens alone and expect to promote vibrance, thriving, and survival as a field of practice.**

#### *Pilot Study Results*

When sampled, 14 of 16 of the participants made statements that directly explained that intervention research has been limited in publication in their journals not because the journal does not wish to publish real-time research on the effectiveness of interventions, but because there is either a lack of OD empirical research submitted in comparison to theoretical work (12 of 16 statements), and/or that intervention research papers usually exhibit a general lack of rigor surrounding much of the methodology used to collect and analyze data in the organizations (14 of 16), and that the development of manuscripts appear to be an afterthought, with no pre-study research design, which contributes to the lack of rigor. Therefore, if submitted at all, many of the submitted action research and other intervention research articles are simply not of publishable quality.

So where does this leave us? How does action research, when conducted in the vacuum of the corporation alone, benefit our

field of practice for those that are boots-on-the-ground, for those that have their feet in the classroom or laboratory, and for the continued development and credibility of organization development as a field?

#### **Discussion and Proposition**

##### *Venture into Reality*

In 2011, Warner Burke discussed the undone business of OD, observing that much of the field was stuck in a state of limbo, with the field behaving as though there was no innovation in social technology to be discovered, generated, or designed after the 1997 invention of appreciative inquiry (Burke, 2011). Yet OD researchers have advanced novel ways

to hold human interaction laboratories online, have researched and developed new methods for dealing with diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging problems in organizations, have explored nuances of use-of self, and have designed new models for diagnostic and dialogic work, such as the BOATS model and numerous other instruments and emergent theories (Beach and Segars, 2022; Brendel et al., 2021; Demarest, 2011; Jamieson and Cheung-Judge, 2020; Shufutinsky, 2019), and numerous other instruments and emergent theories, including ways of doing OD in general, such as generative dialogic OD, holistic embodied OD, conscious OD, OpenSource OD, strategic OD, shock OD, visual OD, and polymorphic OD (Brendel et al., 2021; Bushe and Marshak, 2021; Shufutinsky et al., 2020b; Szelwach & Matthews, 2021; Sibbet and Wendling, 2018; Zardet et al., 2021). New models of organization design have emerged (Shufutinsky, 2017; Shufutinsky, 2019b), in addition to mindfulness research (Brendel, 2016; Long,

2019), organizational storytelling tools and methods (Boje, 2019), and assessment and diagnostic approaches, such as the study of routine dynamics and the invention of the Mastering Organizational and Societal Transformations (MOST) Careers Assessment instrument for OD career coaching through OpenSource OD (Brendel et al., 2021).

One way of measuring vibrance in any field is the extent to which pioneers and new pioneers create, test, and share new applications (Brendel et al., 2021), which is a function of research. We cannot, as a field, continue to operate from a theoretical lens alone and expect to promote vibrance, thriving, and survival as a field of practice.

##### *Pry or Die*

Despite the 2018 World Economic Forum Report that placed OD in the top 10 roles needed in the future (Minahan, 2019; The Future of Jobs Report, 2018), the closure of OD graduate programs, ongoing troubles maintaining associational memberships, lack of participation in seminars and labs, and shifting and melding of OD roles with other professions paints a challenging picture regarding the near-term viability and relevance of the field. It has been argued that we are in a state where many practitioners are stuck in the past, resistant to change, believing that they do not need to understand organizations' system components, do not need to know anything about the organizations' products or strategies (Burke, 2011; Minahan, 2019; Minahan and Norlin, 2013; Worley, 2022), and that Gestalt alone will drive success. It is a simple choice. We must pry into how things are done in organizations, how decisions are made, why some change initiatives fail and others succeed, how toxic leaders get away with their behaviors and earn promotions, how cultural artifacts and human factors affect performance, productivity, and job satisfaction, and how the different components of an organizational system are interdependent, among many other factors. We must develop the capability of and capacity for OD research and use it to study and publish these data and dynamics, or we will sit by, as though we are viewing a feature film with popcorn and soda

in hand, and watch our field's credibility, and perhaps our field altogether, sail away into obsolescence.

When we, as a people, live our lives and practice our crafts, we have an expectation that research continues and that physicians follow the research so that they are abreast of the latest information on contraindications of medicines, of side-effects of prescriptions and immunizations (Djulbegovic and Guyatt, 2017; Harvey and Kitson, 2015), so that we receive the correct treatment. There is an expectation that public health scientists investigate potential exposures to understand potential health effects of chemicals or physical agents in the workplace (Brownson et al., 2017; Lioy, 2010; Wang et al., 2017), or that they track viruses so we understand the path of epidemics and pandemics. We expect that there is research that establishes effective ways of tracing the sources of foodborne illnesses so that we can prevent death and disease from food intoxication or unintended biological exposures (Janisek, 1997; Tang, 2009; Tauxe et al., 2020; Wolfe et al., 2020). We may not know how it is done, but we presume that environmental research is performed to understand the conditions of our waters, air, soil, and climate, and potential effects on health, agriculture, weather, and sustainability (Rögener and Wormer, 2017). In social work and psychology, we attempt to understand the dynamics of social environments, social constructs, and human reactions to them, as well as psychological pathologies (Gilgun, 2005). We demand that engineering research is performed to test and provide evidence of the safety of our automobiles, coffee machines, electric scooters, and mobile phones (Arbesman and Pellerito, 2008; Bauer and Sector, 2003; Dyba et al., 2005). These expectations and the practice of research exist throughout many fields of science, social science, and humanities, and somehow in the organization and management sciences, including communities, government agencies, non-profits, and businesses, the tendency has been not to demand or require evidence-based practice, including understanding of behavior, culture, and systems (Luthans et al., 2021; Pfeffer and Sutton,

2006; Rousseau, 2006). It is argued that evidence-based management is not practiced and that the gap between theory and practice continues to widen (Luthans et al., 2021). This type of environment leads us to miss critical findings that can inform our practices, and to continue to use methods and models that we have already found not to be effective. This is because we do not only miss the evidence of what the recent advancements are, but also the evidence behind failures, problems, and their root and contributing causes. This is problematic and should not be the case as OD is a field that is rooted not only in the practice of changing, but also in the science of change, and should therefore be engaged in and represent functional, pragmatic, critical orientation, and grounded orientations, not just doing but also producing the knowledge (Meyer, 2021).

It is argued that our field has several spin-offs, including organization design, change management, organization effectiveness (OE), coaching, humanistic management, learning & development (L&D), human resource development (HRD), and leadership development (LD), and each of them has one or more dedicated journals and magazines, professional certifications, well-established academic programs, and numerous of these areas have highly active and more productive research output and academic throughput than OD, and though they emerged from OD, they have been thriving as independent fields (Minahan, 2019). From 2017 to 2019, well over 100 OD scholars, practitioners, and scholar-practitioners assembled in three separate gathering events to engage in dialogue, learning, and eventually research surrounding the future of OD. Among the topics discussed was an emphasis on the vision, definition, values, and capabilities or competencies of OD moving forward (Minahan, 2021). Excellent collaborative and inclusive work was performed and observed at these gatherings, and yielded numerous publications, including the work on needed competencies and capabilities. Despite the applauded effort and the outcomes that emerged from this work, including a need to understand and apply concepts, theories, and methods (Matthews et al., 2021), actual

engagement in and production of research was not an attribute or capability agreed upon by the authors and participants, and was mostly absent from the resulting publications. To be fair, the work was performed to understand and agree upon the capabilities and competencies necessary to practice OD, rather than the capabilities necessary for a thriving OD field. The manifesto for resilience and survival of OD as a field was more readily written about during the same period as the OD Gathering (Minahan, 2019), calling for numerous modifications to the field. Although there are plenty of critics and criticisms of his article, Minahan (2019) did bring light to the much-needed conversation surrounding OD, OD work, OD competencies, and OD marketing, and while we may agree with some and disagree with other elements of the points he raised, we add to it the vital focus on developing and growing a more robust research agenda—not just publication, but research.

Burke (2011) was correct in his position regarding promotion of a Zeigarnik effect, as a plethora of work in OD and in organization change remains undone, and we have yet to do it as more questions fill our plate. New ideas, values, demands, competitors, and expectations have been pressuring the field for years (Minahan, 2016), and we must make sure that we are not only awake to deal with them, but we must be informed, knowledgeable, and prepared to operate in a continually changing environment. With new technologies rapidly advancing and on the horizon, the optimization of human-systems integration and Industry 5.0, shifts to virtual teams, the emergence of Millennials, Z-lennials, and Generation Z entering the workforce and management positions, responses to crises such as pandemics, the continual shift to a gig economy, increased globalization, the persistence of anti-bigotry and anti-discrimination work needed, among many others, there is plenty that still needs to be explored and researched, and the list will continue to grow as society continues to change. We ask the question surrounding whether we are even close to done with OD innovation or being done with the study

of organizations to understand what will transpire and what change is necessary in these rapidly shifting and uncertain times and environments. Research is not only desired, it is essential if we are, as a field, to survive.

### *Out of the Quagmire: Now What?*

We are not the first to take the position that we do not conduct and publish enough research in the OD field, as we have heard this from other OD program faculty and scholar-practitioners. As a field, we know we need it. But where do we go from here?

There are numerous pathways moving forward that would support the expansion of research in OD. In this section, we offer a list of a few possible efforts that we believe are worthy of strong consideration.

1. We must find a way to encourage more of our OD students to conduct and participate in research. There are numerous ways to achieve this. Program faculty often conduct research as part of their academic responsibilities, or simply because they are interested and committed to moving the field forward. This creates an excellent opportunity for students to learn the research process. It simultaneously helps prepare them for thesis and dissertation research, while potentially benefiting the faculty with a research assistant for a particular research project. Some faculty already do this, but there is room for more. This is not to say that every student has the bandwidth to spend considerable time and effort in research projects, but some students are interested, capable, and eager to be involved. Additionally, some of our programs are designed in non-traditional formats, employing visiting scholars. We encourage visiting scholars and other senior scholar-practitioners with ongoing research agendas to engage with students in these OD programs to participate in their research. Further, we encourage pioneers and veterans in the field to include and involve and guide not only students, but also junior scholars in their research projects.
2. We must encourage more OD field practitioners to publish their intervention

research work. However, because publication often requires a certain level of rigor, we must help develop those skills. We have written, read, and watched numerous articles or presentations regarding the failure of journals to publish intervention research, but we have not considered the quality of intervention research being submitted (Zardet et al., 2021). For our scholar-practitioners in the field, we need to work towards development and growth of research method understanding and fluency for publishable action research. There are a plethora of avenues to accomplish this, including through webinars and certificate programs that can be offered not only through universities but through our professional associations that offer training in the field. Furthermore, we should work with journal editorial teams to develop pathways of learning for practitioners to enable them to properly conduct and prepare their field work for potential publication. Journals often hold sessions to help researchers draft their articles in acceptable formats and styles. We need also to focus attention on acceptable rigor in methods and procedures, prior to the conduct of our work, not only on writing up the findings.

3. We encourage OD masters and doctoral programs to develop more options for and more advanced research courses in their programs, or at least more concentrated attention to research methods, design, analysis, and rigor. We also encourage program faculty to demand robust dissertations and research projects be completed, and these advanced or concentrated research methods courses can be beneficial to help students achieve this. This can also include options for master's theses over graduate capstones, which are not typically offered in OD programs.

This is not to say that some programs do not already encourage research-intensive projects or healthy research curricula, or that there are no advanced and rigorous methods used in current OD student research. There certainly are. However, recent research

findings exhibit a level of discomfort with research methods by scholar-practitioners in our field (Zardet et al., 2021), so we encourage that more focus should be placed on methodology, and particularly applied research methodology, not only to help students with high-quality research projects but also to provide them the necessary understanding and experience with research methods that can be applied in action research work as internal or external consultants. This can also aid in the development of publishable intervention research projects and case studies.

4. We can leverage our professional organizations to help develop research and researchers the field. There are numerous ways to build those connections between our graduate programs and our professional associations. Many fields of practice have professional research fellowships, often both for experienced and novice scholars, and they are often sponsored either jointly or through professional associations. In OD, we are, as scholar-practitioners, engaged with the OD Network (ODN), the NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science (NTL), the Tavistock Institute, the International Society for Organization Development and Change (ISODC), the International Organization Development Association (IODA), the Center for Organization and Leadership Development and Change (COLDC), the International Leadership Association (ILA), and the Academy of Organization Sciences (AOS), and many leadership institutes such as the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), Center for Transformational Leadership (CTL), Teleos Institute, the Self-Leadership Institute, and many others. We need to foster these bodies of knowledge and these relationships to develop partnerships that build research skills and engage in research projects, such as fellowships and research internships. These partnerships can be between universities and professional organizations, or



between numerous professional associations and institutes.

5. Further, our field benefits from the development and existence of the Organization Development Education Association (ODEA). The ODEA provides a guideline for a level of capabilities or competencies in OD that member schools seek to follow to create some level of standards for the field. ODEA can also work with OD programs to aid in the establishment of a level of critical research competencies that our OD programs should strive for. Furthermore,

fields. And, we can increase publication of these research studies as OD research in journals that are prevalent in those fields, and advertise these works throughout our community. This means diversifying where we publish about OD beyond the OD journals such as *Organization Development Review*, *Organization Development Journal*, *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, and *Leadership and Organization Development*, and the non-OD outlets such as AOM journals, *HBR*, *MIT Sloan Management Review*, *Leadership Quarterly*,

7. Finally, as highly experienced practitioners, scholars, and thought leaders in our field, some produce interesting concepts and theory, even experience-driven theory. This is of course not to be discouraged, but sometimes thought leaders devise theory, write about it, publish it, and then wipe their hands of it. We are making the call for scholar-practitioners not to publish and pull away, but to continue to the next steps by either testing those concepts or theories or engaging students to do so. We know that it takes more than just being generative and writing about it, and we should not forget that. We must pave the way for our scholars to follow suit, and this should be done by engaging in the research or engaging others to undertake it, with our guidance and our participation when possible. With all the students, junior scholars, and hungry scholars out there, there is plenty of opportunity to move those concepts and theories forward. This is how we continue to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and to strengthen that infrastructure.

**Our position statement is simple. We are making a call for a revival and increase of research in OD. We do not argue that it is the savior of our field, but that it is very much a core foundation of it that we must preserve, bolster, and promote. This, however, is no small or simple task. It will require much intentional and concerted effort.**

the ODEA can possibly help coordinate, support, and manage partnerships such as those aforementioned in items one, three, and four. This may require expansion of ODEA, with an increase in ODEA member programs, but it can also decrease the number of for-profit and other programs that advertise an OD concertation and graduate “OD professionals” with limited or no OD instruction (Minahan, 2014; Minahan and Cheung-Judge, 2017).

6. Another pathway to help strengthen our field and OD-related research is by performing research and publishing our research in both an inclusive and interdisciplinary framework. We can leverage the diverse talent and knowledge in our field to get many involved in research projects, rather than just a few, and collaborate with the use of mass talent, rejecting turf battles, like that proposed by OpenSource OD (Brendel et al., 2021). Furthermore, we can perform OD-related interdisciplinary research with leaders in other professions, such as medicine, public health, engineering, education, and social work, among others. Many of us come from those

*Journal of Change Management*, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, and *Journal of Leadership Studies*. This diversification means expanding our target audience to journals in nursing, physical therapy, engineering, intelligence, safety, sustainability, economics, emergency management, hospital administration, and many more areas. We are a dynamic field with practitioners that come from around the world and across professions and industries, so we should leverage those experiences to build and promote our knowledge and research. Furthermore, we can conduct interdisciplinary research across the invisible boundaries of the organization sciences. We can increase collaboration on organization research with scholars in industrial/organizational psychology, leadership development, organizational behavior, change management, organization design, and business management, among others. There is research ongoing in these areas that, while not termed as such, is essentially OD research. We should be involved in and contributing our knowledge and experience to these bodies of research.

## Conclusion

With the recent closing of reputable OD academic programs, the redefining of OD positions on the job market, and the splintering of the field into subfields, OD does find itself in somewhat of a quagmire. At the same time, OD has experienced significant innovation, re-engagement with social and societal change, and an exploration of opportunity across industry and around the globe. There is constant disruption currently occurring in the OD field, including the movement to virtual consulting, the increase in social change work, the generational shift, digital transformation, advancements in data analytics and ROI data, and generation of novel practice methodologies. We are in the midst of a re-invention, merging time-honored traditions with the nuances and novel solutions that keep us working. Technology will undoubtedly play a key role because it can be leveraged to help like-minded and divergent scholars and practitioners find each

other, share resources, and collaborate to rapidly prototype, test, and rate new solutions, create evidence-based, stackable business cases, and disseminate powerful new practices that integrate new technologies.

Furthermore, we must strike a contrast against the speculative research on culture, teams, and change often produced by large consulting firms without describing their methods, discussing reliability, or providing access to data. Any critique must be paired with research conducted by OD professionals who present a more powerful alternative. We have the skills and abilities to become the most trusted source of information on these matters. Burke's (2011) words hold true. There is considerable work still to be done, and for this re-invention to take hold we must have our eyes, ears, and hearts open to what is happening in the field, in organizations and communities, and in the world, and one way that this is accomplished is through research.

Our position statement is simple. We are making a call for a revival and increase of research in OD. We do not argue that it is the savior of our field, but that it is very much a core foundation of it that we must preserve, bolster, and promote. This, however, is no small or simple task. It will require much intentional and concerted effort.

We must conduct research to continue to learn in our field, lest we fall into the trap, as an entire field, of the famous Eric Hoffer quote, "In times of change, learners inherit the world, while the learned remain beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists" (Murgatroyd, 2010; Senge et al., 2001; Trilling, 2009).

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Table 1. *Examples of Hybrid OD Positions*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People &amp; Culture Consultant</li> <li>• Business Transformation Specialist</li> <li>• Manager of Culture Change &amp; Teaming</li> <li>• Organizational Strategy &amp; Culture Consultant</li> <li>• Director of DE&amp;I and Organizational Development</li> <li>• People &amp; Organizational Performance Manager</li> <li>• Global Organizational Culture Business Partner</li> <li>• Director of Organizational &amp; Leadership Development</li> <li>• Learning &amp; Organizational Development Consultant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director of Global Talent &amp; Organization Development</li> <li>• VP of DE&amp;I and Organizational Effectiveness</li> <li>• Organizational &amp; People Development Specialist</li> <li>• Director of Culture &amp; Organizational Effectiveness</li> <li>• Organizational Design &amp; Transformation Manager</li> <li>• Organizational Transformation Manager</li> <li>• Organizational Design &amp; Effectiveness Manager</li> <li>• Future of Work Strategy Consultant</li> <li>• Excellence, Strategy, &amp; Innovation Consultant</li> </ul>
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information regarding the career identity associated with the position, typically indicated through the job title and department home. These included but were not limited to Organization Development, Human Resources, Organizational Effectiveness, Talent Development, DE&I, Organizational Change, Organization Design, and Change Management. Research utilized job websites including Indeed.com, LinkedIn.com, and Jobs.google.com. Search terms drew from a diverse and inclusive range of vocabulary indicated by expert consultants and educators mentioned above. These search terms included: Organization Development, Organization(al) Development, Talent and Organization Development, Learning & Organization Development, Leadership and Change, and Leadership & Organization Development. As searches continued, new and related job titles appeared, and these terms were then included in future key word searches. Some examples, which demonstrate the complexity and hybrid nature of many OD positions (Table 1).

Research also included terms that might indicate hybrid OD positions that overlap with Talent Development, HR, and Organizational Effectiveness. These included: Talent & Organization Development, Design Thinking and Organization Development, Learning & Organization Development, and numer-

ous additional variations. In addition to utilizing these terms, research sought to identify positions that influence change in organizations that support societal flourishing, including K-12 and higher education, hospitals, conservation agencies, social enterprises, charity organizations, non-profits, NGOs, community services & development, and B-Corps. Social change organizations were incorporated due to a substantial shift (Burke, 2018) and resounding call to apply OD to a wide variety of wicked social challenges (Cooperider & Godwin, 2022; Shufutinsky et al., 2022) To identify these positions, in addition to Google, Indeed, and LinkedIn, research also utilized job sites such as Idealist.org, Jobs.Greenbiz.com, Netimpact.org, Bcorporation.net, and Devex.com.

#### *Educator Artifacts*

Finally, research identified 144 OD and OD-related graduate program websites, representing both pure and hybrid OD curriculum, as well as certificates in higher education and professional associations (Table 2, next page). Analysis of the four “Career Calling” criteria discussed previously, included the educational program’s vision or high-level description, often accompanied by a statement regarding the difference students make in the professions they assume after graduation or certification. Research also examined the program’s

mission or charter, often highlighting the preferred approach or emphasis areas in OD, that appeal to different student personas. For instance, some programs tend to focus more on social justice, relative to others that focus more on organizational performance. Analysis also included a review of coursework and objectives that indicate the talents that students are supposed to develop to attain a career in (and sometimes adjacent to) OD. Finally, these programs often include information about the types of jobs that successful graduates have attained.

To identify these programs, research started with member schools that are part of the *OD Education Association*, which together crafted *OD Program Essential Elements* (2014), which presents a standard for graduate program foundations, theories, and models in OD. Next, research fanned out to include other programs that may or may not go by the name “Organization Development,” but nonetheless represented the competencies surfaced earlier in the research protocol. This author decided not to ‘judge a book by its cover’ because a considerable number of programs that do not use the term Organization Development offer highly similar if not identical coursework and textbooks that satisfy all or part of the OD Program Essential Elements (2014) and requirements of employers. Regardless of whether coursework and texts were the same, this author recognized the need to filter out programs when they were not “OD enough.”

#### **Findings**

##### *Comparative Analysis of OD Competencies*

This author’s comparative analysis of 31 OD competency publications, which were further reduced to 11 competency models (see: Cheung-Judge, 2020), confirms that universal aspects of OD can still be traced back to the elementary foundations set by many of the field’s founders. Since its inception, OD has distinguished itself by approaching organizations as socio-technical systems, which may be influenced through numerous activities that bring about effective change, including the facilitation of learning,

Domain is comprised of three elementary categories centered on developing the effectiveness of organizational systems in which people operate. These include *Strategy*, *Design*, and *Performance*. Finally, the Influence Domain includes categories that are critical to the integration and synergy that may be developed between people and the system, which include: *Leading & Managing Change*; *Consulting & Partnering*; and *Facilitating Learning*. Although Competency Domains, Categories, and Clusters are separated to make learning more manageable, they are ultimately interrelated. By remaining mindful and developing the habit of reflecting on experience, OD practitioners can spend an entire lifetime discovering new connections between each category and cluster. In this way, just as OD practice is anchored to these elementary features, they also afford space for differentiation and agency in OD represented as a coherent society.

**Competency Clusters.** Finally, competency clusters refer to the specific sets of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are required to effectively carry out the work of a given category. These include action-oriented groupings of behaviors and outcomes germane to the specific domain they belong to (Tables 4–6). Although competency domains, categories, and clusters are separated to make learning more manageable, they are ultimately interrelated and present understandable overlap from time to time. By remaining mindful and establishing a reflective practice, it is likely that practitioners may spend a lifetime discovering new connections between each category and cluster. Analysis also demonstrates that across all clusters, two distinct approaches to the work of OD become apparent. For the sake of classification, this author refers to these approaches as “Classic” versus “Innovative.” Those who prefer a Classic approach are more likely to enjoy a step-by-step, scientific, and objective approach to change that engages in diagnosis, problem solving, and changing behaviors. This is now referred to widely amongst OD academics and experts as the “Diagnostic” approach to OD (Bushe & Marshak, 2009), and it still has a very large following. On

Table 4. *Social Domain*

Category	Cluster
Culture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Helping leaders identify and address characteristics of organizational culture that require greater attention and alignment with the organization’s stated vision, mission, and values.</li> <li>2. Creating a safe space for employees to discuss, challenge, and transform widely shared assumptions that drive common helpful and unhelpful behaviors.</li> <li>3. Addressing common anxieties and attachments that inhibit organizational health and effectiveness.</li> </ol>
Psychology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Drawing from concepts and practices in social psychology to help motivate employees, address resistance to change, navigating complexity and uncertainty, and inspiring peak performance.</li> <li>2. Drawing from concepts and practices in social-organizational psychology and group dynamics to develop high performing, cohesive, and adaptive teams with clear charters, boundaries, authority, roles, decision making, and tasks.</li> <li>3. Drawing from frameworks and practices in group dynamics to address dysfunctional characteristics of groups including scapegoating, anti-task behaviors, sabotage, and bad politics.</li> </ol>
Humanity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inspiring, developing, and sustaining genuine and measurable characteristics of diversity, equity, and inclusion.</li> <li>2. Cultivating a mindful and ethical workplace marked by ethical decision making and citizenship.</li> <li>3. Cultivating meaningful work by aligning individual and team’s deepest sense of purpose with the organization’s mission or cause.</li> </ol>

the other hand, those who prefer an Innovative approach are more likely to enjoy a “Dialogic,” subjective, and emergent approach to change that facilitates sense-making and the transformation of mindset (Bushe & Marshak, 2009, 2014; Marshak & Bushe, 2018). The Innovative Approach includes both “Dialogic” OD and relatively newer “Conscious OD” paradigms (Brendel, 2022), which both entail perceiving the world outside of the prism we have become accustomed to and in many cases take for granted.

#### *Comparative Analysis of Job Descriptions*

Moving further into analyzing and refining the SCM model through comparison with data gleaned from job search engines, this author discovered that although competency categories remain universal to “Pure OD” positions (i.e., internal, and external consultants), not all are required by “Hybrid OD” job descriptions. Therefore,

while analyzing 500 job descriptions, the inclusion criterion was that the job description must explicitly call for at least one competency category within each of the three competency domains: Social, Technical, and Influence. In this way, analysis was able to draw a line between Hybrid OD positions and those that fall too far outside of SCM parameters to be considered OD at all. This author also discovered that for both Pure and Hybrid OD jobs, descriptions either explicitly called for knowledge across a “Broad” number of interventions versus just one or two “Specialized” interventions that have been successful in that context. For instance, a “Broad” preference would desire a job that employs a wide variety of OD approaches, including Action Learning, GE Workout, World Café, Theory U, Future Search, and Narrative Mediation. Specialized interventions might simply include Lean Six Sigma or Appreciative Inquiry.

## Discussion

### *Developing the M.O.S.T. Assessment*

Utilizing the findings discussed above, this researcher created a 45 item self-assessment, comprised of four subscales. Two “Career” subscales include *Mastery* and *Identity*, which help determine an individual’s unique blend of competency-based strengths and interests. Two “Calling” subscales, *Approach* and *Outcome*, help determine an individual’s preferred method for leading OD efforts as well as the type of impact they would like to have. *Table 8* demonstrates the connection between this theoretical framework and each subscale.

**Career Subscales.** To help identify characteristics of a successful and meaningful career, this researcher first distinguished *Mastery* and *Identity* subscales. Both utilize Likert-scale response items to measure the degree to which an individual believes they are competent and interested in utilizing various competencies. The *Mastery* subscale is designed to help identify an individual’s perceived abilities across all 27 competency clusters in our model. Respondents are asked to read and share their perceived level of competency in an honest fashion. They are reminded that their competency level refers to the degree to which they are experienced and capable of doing something effectively or efficiently. Choices for each of these items include “no ability,” “low ability,” “average ability,” “moderate ability,” and “high ability.” A respondent may be designated as having *Broad Mastery* if they score high across multiple competency categories. If they do not meet these criteria, they are instead classified as having a *Specialized Mastery*, which positions them better for positions that require some but not all OD competencies present in the SCM.

The *Identity* subscale is designed to help identify an individual’s level of genuine interest in regularly engaging in each of the 9 competency categories in the SCM model. This subscale utilizes the question stem: “Imagine your ideal career. How often would you like to engage in each of the following activities at work?” Respondents are asked to respond using

Table 8. *Framework, Common Characteristics, Preferences*

Career Calling Characteristics	OD Characteristics	Preferences
What type of change do you wish to influence?	Outcome	Organizational vs. Societal
What can you get paid for?	Identity	Pure vs. Hybrid
What are your unique talents	Mastery	Broad vs. Specialized
What interactions bring you the most joy?	Approach	Classic vs. Innovative

Likert-scale options: “Never,” “Seldom,” “Sometimes,” “Often,” or “Always.” Examples of items include: “Working on organizational strategy, including strategic thinking, planning, and implementation,” “Consulting and partnering,” and “Improving aspects of humanity through the work you do (such as ethics, diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity).” A respondent will receive the designation of “Pure” OD identity if they demonstrate a high level interest across a majority of competency categories. Respondents receive a designation of “Hybrid” OD identity if they indicate an interest level in as few as one competency category per domain.

**Calling Subscales.** To help identify characteristics of an individual’s calling, the assessment includes *Outcome* and *Approach* subscales. Both utilize a forced-choice response methodology to stimulate cognitive processes associated with interviews as they require participants to “deeply process each question and response option” (Allen, 2017, p. 1553). The *Outcome* subscale begins with the stem question, “If you could choose, which type of outcomes would you like to pursue through work?” Respondents are forced to choose between two items. For example, a respondent may either prefer to pursue outcomes that include: “Developing competitive organizational strategies and performance” or “Developing sustainable strategies that help to improve our society and environment.” Similarly, they may choose between “Developing efficient and ethical business processes” or “Dismantling structures that lead to societal problems such as racial injustice.” To score the five-item *Outcome* subscale, participants are designated as

having an “Organizational Outcome preference if they choose classic responses over 50 percent of the time. Otherwise, they are designated as having an “Innovative Approach” preference.

The *Approach* subscale begins with the stem question: “If you could choose, how would you prefer to facilitate change?” Again, the respondent is forced to choose between two items. For example, they may prefer to “Take a linear, scientific approach to change, by facilitating fact finding and objective measurement to drive new employee behaviors,” or “Take a subjective and emergent approach to change by inviting employee narratives and facilitating sense-making to inspire new employee mindsets.” Another example includes the choice between “Address common organizational challenges by planning and facilitating well-tested solutions.” To score the five-item *Approach* subscale, participants are designated as having a “Classic Approach” preference if they choose classic responses more than 50% of the time. Otherwise, they are designated as having an “Innovative Approach” preference.

Following the creation of the assessment items, this researcher conducted a content validity survey and follow-up interviews with eight experts in the field, including lifetime achievement award winners from the OD Network and other highly regarded thought-leaders from diverse backgrounds and locations throughout the world. The updated version of this assessment is now live at [opensourceod.com/assessment](https://opensourceod.com/assessment), and researchers are now conducting an initial psychometric validation study of the M.O.S.T. assessment.