

“Suddenly, what started as a good idea for adding value and providing a new line of business expressly requested by the Network’s customers became a values-level gut check of its commitment to an open and inclusive Network.”

Finally! Global OD Competencies

By Matt Minahan

Climb with me into the way back machine for a moment. Dial back to 2006. The location is the OD Network conference at the Hyatt Regency near the San Francisco Airport, the executive conference room. Attending were 15 OD and HR directors and VPs, the executive director of the OD Network, and me. The task was to find out what hiring managers want in OD professionals and what the Network can do to make that happen.

The discussion was slow to start; these people did not know each other, and in many ways, they were competing with each other for the best OD talent. Secrets to success were few and far between at first. But once they got warmed up the flip charts started flying.

They offered dozens of things they were looking for in good OD and HR people: someone they could trust to be credible with a client VP, someone who knew the dynamics of the business, someone who understood the sector and the organization’s competitors, and someone who would not go rogue.

I asked what that meant, and they said they wanted someone who would toe the corporate line and not challenge the boss (themselves). In other words, they wanted someone who would challenge the status quo and create change elsewhere in the system, but not in their own departments. You can see the problem already. Someone who is good at the former is likely not willing to abide by the latter.

Deciding that this was not the teachable moment to point out their inconsistency, I asked what the Network could do

to help them. Almost all were enthusiastic customers of the OD Network’s Job Exchange. But what they really wanted was someone to tell them who was good and who was not, who on their current staff they could trust alone with a client VP, and who could truly think systemically. Maybe some competencies. Maybe a certification.

Dial in 2007: It is an OD Network Board meeting, discussing these ideas. All seem to be clear and understand what is being asked, and at first, seem open and responsive. But then doubts arise. If we have competencies, will everyone have to have them all? (A: No.) Will everyone have to be certified? (A: No.) Will this make some people feel excluded? (A: I hope not.) But what if the competencies need to be changed? (A: We’ll change them.) What if someone like Edie Seashore can’t get certified? (A: She shouldn’t need to, or even want to.) Won’t this create a privileged “in” group of those who *have* versus subordinated people who *don’t*? (A: Uhhhh.)

Suddenly, what started as a good idea for adding value and providing a new line of business expressly requested by the Network’s customers became a values-level gut check of its commitment to an open and inclusive Network.

We had to build a business case for a competency model. We declared that the model was needed to develop OD talent, and create a practical and actionable tool for practitioners. For it to be solid and well grounded, we knew we had to conduct an environmental scan to identify current and future needs. We chose an action research

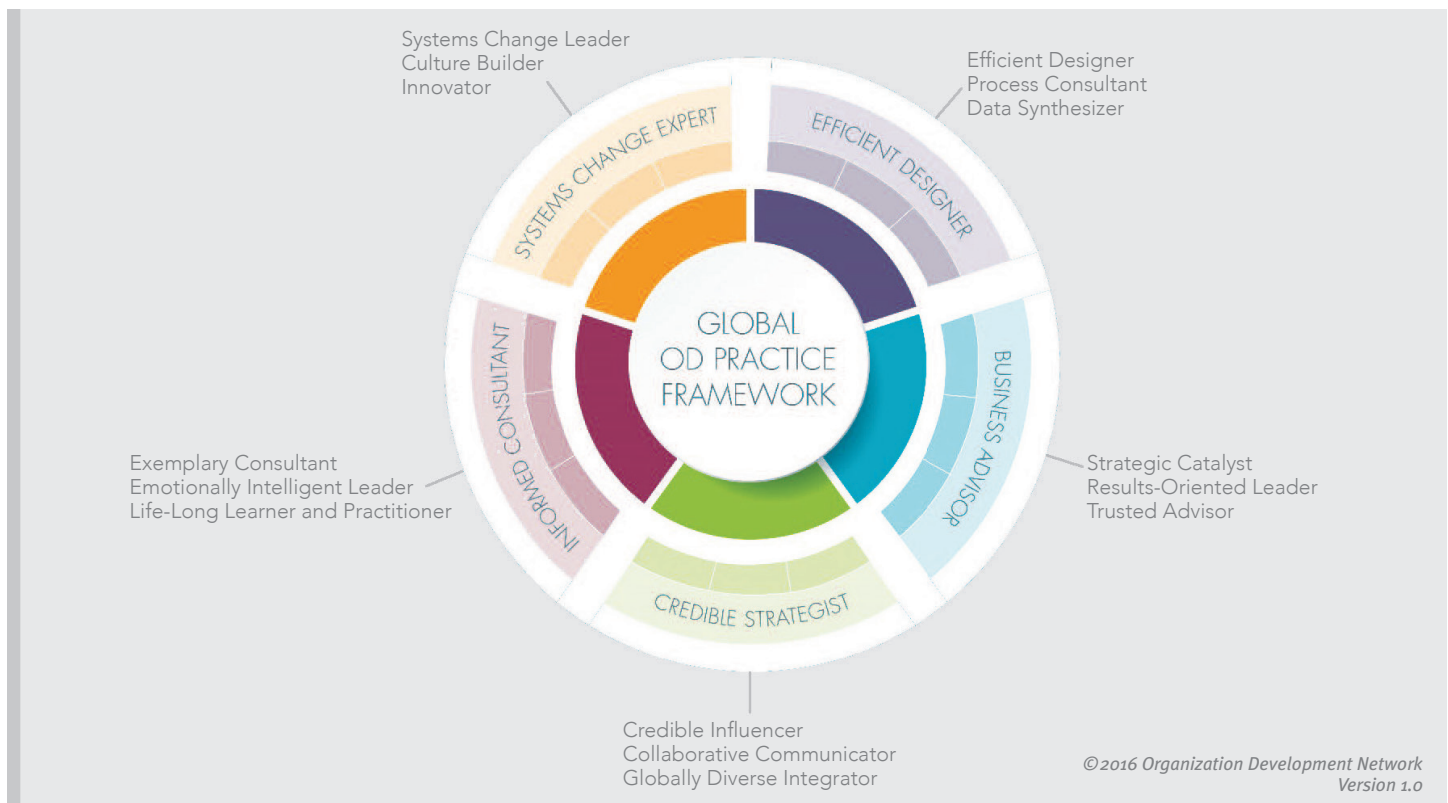


Figure 1. Global OD Competencies Framework™

approach, so we could seek out and include as many diverse perspectives as possible. And we wanted to introduce the Global Competency Framework with a Do-Learn-Do self-assessment approach so that OD practitioners can read and understand each competency and seek out avenues for self-development.

Dial in 2014: OD Network board meeting, Marisa Sanchez and I, co-chairs of the board, bring this to the board again. The proliferation of certificates for change management, project management, coaching, performance improvement, and others, had increased the pressure from Network members to offer a certification in OD. But that requires competencies.

So the board voted to authorize, and the Network commissioned a project which I led, including Sherry Duda who was certified in competency development; Jamie Kelly, an internal OD manager; and Marisa Sanchez as trusted advisor. We formed a couple of committees to review the existing competency sets.

There was a set in the Cummings and Worley OD text book which was being used by Canadian OD consultants for their certification program. And there was the long

list of well over a hundred that was too big and undifferentiated in the Rothwell and Sullivan text book. There was something adaptable in Donald Anderson's OD book, but still not what we wanted. SHRM had a set, as did Dave Ulrich, but these were too HR oriented to capture the full measure of what we all believed embodies OD. The three of us synthesized the work of the committees and came up with a survey that we sent to the members of the OD Network, regional networks, and OD groups around the world. We received almost 900 survey responses, which the three of us analyzed and summarized.

We sought out OD exemplars, both internals and externals, and interviewed them. We asked their bosses and clients about what made them great at OD and used the data to sharpen the language and focus of the competencies.

Our different roles complemented each other well. I did the drafting, Jamie did some editing and reality checking, and Sherry brought her knowledge of a competency development process to what we developed.

We struggled for ways to include as many of the comments and edits as we could. The hardest conversations

concerned how to deal with suggestions that were mutually exclusive of each other. There were some who had doubts; others complained that this was bad for the field and not the role of the Network. There were echoes of the 2007 board meeting, mainly from older, more established practitioners whose views we respected. However, in the end, it was voices of the Network's members, especially the newer members, asking for this as a key benefit of their professional association that drove our work.

Each decision forced us to revisit our intentions for the framework and make each judgement against the initial intentions. It required a common understanding and commitment to the project among all three of us. It was a true three-way partnership that resulted in one of the Network's biggest accomplishments.

Dial in 2015: The Network completes the Global OD Competencies: (Figure 1).

Dial in 2016: The Network unveils the Global OD Competency Framework™ at its annual conference in Atlanta.

Step out of the time machine now, and back into today. The model is gaining

broad acceptance, showing up now in OD education courses, and used by hiring managers, several internal OD consulting groups, and as a curriculum guide for training programs.

The purpose of the Framework™ is to provide a research-based competency model *to* the field, *about* the field, *from* the field. By scanning the literature, building this from the bottom up, and including voices and views from around the world, we intentionally used as inclusive a methodology as we could. We shared draft after iterative draft with friends, colleagues, board members, OD academic program

The Global Competency Model is used as the foundation for OD education programs around the globe. The self-assessment is developmental and provides an accessible and realistic assessment to members who want guidance about how well they measure up to others in the field, and what kinds of skills they need to develop professionally. They are using the model to determine which jobs they are qualified for.

directors, students and faculty in OD Education Association schools, leaders of other OD organizations, and then took turns writing and re-writing.

Now that there is a solid, research-based competency model for the field of OD, the Network intends it to be used for:

- » **Career Development.** Define a clear set of knowledge, skills, and behaviors to calibrate performance and plan and manage development.
- » **Professional Standards.** Develop a set of standards for the OD profession, and clarify expectations for impactful results.
- » **Common Language.** Provide a global, common language to define the work of the OD profession and better understand what is important to know and do for success. It helps answer the question “What is OD?”

There are three levels of detail to the Framework™. On the outer ring, there are five different OD Competencies, each of

which has three specialty areas, under each of which are 5 key behaviors. Outlined here are the first two layers of the model:

1. Systems Change Expert

- a. **Systems Change Leader**, who can comfortably work within a whole system and advise on strategies for organizational change, transformation, and alignment.
- b. **Culture Builder**, who fosters commitment and engagement based on an environment of trust and promotes the health and vitality of the organization.

- c. **Innovator**, who sponsors, develops, and can challenge the organization to create strategies for disruption, breakthroughs, transformation, and innovation.

2. Efficient Designer

- a. **Efficient Designer**, who strives for simplicity and designs strategies, interventions, and processes to facilitate a desired business outcome with the client and end-user in mind.
- b. **Process Consultant**, who increases leadership and organizational capacity, facilitates group dialogue and decision-making by creating a non-threatening environment.
- c. **Data Synthesizer**, who operates as an integrator connecting multi-stakeholder views and translates salient information to create clarity and commitment.

3. Business Advisor

- a. **Strategic Catalyst**, who thinks strategically, takes initiative, and acts to achieve results tied to the organization's goals.
- b. **Results-Oriented Leader**, who understands and applies the principles of customer service, sets challenging goals, and measures impact and project return on investment.
- c. **Trusted Advisor**, who effectively develops trusting relationships and partnerships through integrity and authenticity and is clear about the outcomes that are important to key stakeholders.

4. Credible Strategist

- a. **Credible Influencer**, who empathetically relates to clients, understands their needs, and has the knowledge to translate the business reality into terms that can be agreed upon and committed to by the client.
- b. **Collaborative Communicator**, who communicates clearly and concisely, and tailors communication in ways that meet the needs and motivations of client groups at all levels.
- c. **Globally Diverse Integrator**, who can effectively work within diverse cultures, and creates an inclusive environment for people of all identities to feel valued, respected, and able to contribute.

5. Informed Consultant

- a. **Exemplary Consultant**, who cultivates meaning, working relationships, and commitment with stakeholders to effect change, and demonstrates an understanding of client expectations, effectively contracting for goals, outcomes, and resources.
- b. **Emotionally Intelligent Leader**, who effectively reads stakeholders, seeks out different perspectives, and uses emotional intelligence to guide appropriate action, and understands and reflects on one's own personal values, boundaries, feelings, biases, triggers, and ethics to manage their impact on the work.

- c. **Life-Long Learner and Practitioner**, who demonstrates leadership in a specialized area of OD, stays up to date on methodologies and tools, and leverages best practices to drive results in line with the organization's needs. The website has about a dozen specific theories listed, including appreciative inquiry, culture change, diversity and inclusion, organization design, the science of decision making, systems theory, and team development.

So, how can the Global Competency Framework™ change the field, and us, and maybe you? The Network has developed a self-assessment: <http://www.odnetwork.org/page/globalframework>. For each competency, the Network has compiled a series of references and materials intended to support change agents in their desire to expand their knowledge and skills and improve in any given competency. There are webinars, readings, and articles that support each topic.

Back into the time machine. It is now 2020. The Global Competency Framework™ is used as the foundation for OD education programs around the globe. The self-assessment is developmental and provides an accessible and realistic assessment to members who want guidance about how well they measure up to others in the field, and what kinds of skills they need to develop professionally. They are using the model to determine which jobs they are qualified for. OD and HR managers are using the competencies and the certification to determine which of their staff they can safely send in alone to have a difficult conversation with a leader in the C suite.

The benefit of diversity among OD practitioners outweighs the concerns about differentiating members by skill.

And, significantly, I believe that, if she were still alive, Edie Seashore would say, it doesn't matter if I can get certified. It's not about me, it's about you.

Author's note: *Many thanks to everyone who participated in the development of these competencies, including Marisa Sanchez and the entire 2014 OD Network Board who voted to authorize this project, the dozens of people on the several committees that helped with the literature review and data analysis, the hundreds of people who responded to our surveys and gave us feedback on our drafts, Sherry Duda for her competency development knowledge, and Jamie Kelly for bringing her optimism and real world experience to the project. It was truly a collaborative effort, using OD methods embodied in OD values, for the benefit of OD Network members, OD students, and all in the community who are committed to building healthy communities in an interconnected world by advancing the science, practice, and impact of OD around the globe, building healthy organizations and communities in a sustainable world.*

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