PRINCIPLES, PRACTICES, and PERSPECTIVES

The NTL HANDBOOK

of Organization Development *and* Change

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Editors

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Second Edition

WILEY

OD PRACTITIONERS AS AGENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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Many of the things we find most intrinsically fascinating in life—the distribution of power and resources, group and intergroup dynamics, cultural differences, the role of leadership and the unconscious mind in group situations, making sense of complex human puzzles—are some of the very things we have found most useful as practitioners supporting progressive social change. But dramatic shifts in recent years have led us to recognize that the practice of social change OD itself must change. Like our clients, we are reshaping our external analysis, our organization, and our competencies to better contribute to progressive social change.

Note: This chapter is based on our experiences and those of our colleagues at the Institute for Development Research and the Management Assistance Group (social change organizations in the form of nonprofit consulting and field-building firms). While spanning generations from Baby Boomers to Gen X, we share an abiding commitment to social justice. Mark came to this work through a concern about economic justice and social development, shaped by witnessing grinding and dehumanizing poverty in the global South. Robin's commitment began as a young organizer working on issues of poverty, violence and injustice in the United States, which led her to wrestle with fundamental questions about the structure of society. Now, as colleagues at Management Assistance Group (MAG), we are fortunate to spend our work lives consulting to organizations, coalitions, networks, and leaders whose missions we passionately support.

Introduction

This chapter is addressed to both new and experienced organization development (OD) practitioners who would like to use their skills as external change agents in the service of progressive social change. For our purposes, "social change" is defined as "altering the structures, processes, and outcomes of domains larger than single organizations in ways that persist over time" (Brown, Leach, & Covey, 2005). For an OD practitioner this could mean:

- Strengthening a nonprofit advocacy group seeking to change the practices of an organization (such as the World Bank or British Petroleum), whose activities have consequences far beyond the target organization's boundaries;
- Helping a small but innovative literacy program magnify its impact by having its program model adopted as national policy;
- Creating a new multi-organizational entity around a shared social change agenda, such as revitalizing a depressed urban area, building a fair economy, or ensuring the voting rights of traditionally disenfranchised people; or
- Convening cohorts of leaders to develop their capacities, learn with and from one another, build a collective analysis, and take action.

An OD practitioner engaged in such activities is deeply involved in the organizations and systems with which he or she works, but is always an "outsider" in at least two ways. First, the immediate clients (the advocacy and policy nonprofits, activist coalitions and networks, sympathetic insiders in government or business) are themselves frequently outside of the community or constituency they are trying to influence. For example, the executive director of a street persons' advocacy nonprofit is usually not herself homeless nor is she part of the legislature her organization seeks to influence. Second, OD practitioners involved in the kind of social change work described here are often not members of the organizations to which they are contributing their OD skills. Despite this distance from the "point of impact" of the social change work, the line between consultant and activist, OD practitioner and social change agent can blur. To navigate this boundary effectively, the OD practitioner must be aware of the power dynamics at play, and of the nature of her or his role as a change agent. Ultimately, OD practitioners do not share the same level of accountability or risk as the activists, leaders, organizations, and networks with whom we work.

This chapter begins with an overview of social change organizations and the changing context of their work. A four-part typology is presented to help clarify the range of interventions, roles, and competencies needed to serve social change organizations. Recurring challenges inherent to multi-organizational systems are briefly outlined, followed by a discussion of skills and approaches required of the OD practitioner in social change.

Social Change Organizations, Systems, and Clients

Recognizing that most social justice issues are not amenable to single-sector solutions, we consider nonprofits, governments, and for-profit companies as legitimate actors in social change. In addition to these more conventional and well-bounded organizations, OD in the service of social change often requires working with multiple-organization systems—collaborations, consortia, partnerships—and with more loosely bounded systems such as networks of organizations and individuals working within or across multiple issues or movements. The range of topics, sectors, organizational actors, and levels of intervention—local, regional, national, and global—where OD practitioners can apply and hone their skills in the service of social change is almost unlimited. Where the OD practitioner chooses to operate will likely depend on the practitioner's substantive interests, values, life experience, political commitments, and theory of social change.

In traditional OD the "client" is usually the person or entity with whom the practitioner contracts and who pays the consultant's invoice. Social change OD is most effective when the "client" is defined as the mission of the organization (or multiple organizations), and the intended beneficiaries.

Current Context for Social Change Organizations

For many decades beginning in the 1940s, OD practitioners in all sectors could make substantial contributions to the achievement of organizational missions while confining their work within the boundary of a single organization. Conventional OD interventions (improving human and organizational processes, technology and structure; intervening in the organization as a whole) and skills (intra- and interpersonal skill building; consultation skills for entry; diagnosis; feedback; planned change) were usually sufficient to meet client needs.

For at least thirty years it has been commonplace to note several factors that make it difficult for a single organization to affect social change:

economic, social and political globalization; the quickening pace of change; instant global communication; and the interconnectedness of "messy" social problems. But cliché or not, these factors have significant implications for OD in all sectors, and for the social change sector in particular.

Specifically, social change organizations have come to recognize that:

- Service delivery alone will never solve problems that are rooted in deep-seated cultural and institutional arrangements that perpetuate inequalities in voice and resources. As a result, advocacy is now at the top of many service organizations' agendas.
- Even the most influential single organization typically lacks the resources, perspective, legitimacy, reach, and/or skills needed to address the problems they care about.
- Single issue social movements—if disconnected from other movements—can rarely muster the electoral power or broadly shared public narrative to effect change.

To remain effective, organizations have formed a range of multi-organizational systems, such as collaborations, partnerships, networks, consortia, and alliances. The most complex of these systems are national and international networks bound by deep and authentic interpersonal connections, collective thinking, shared long-term vision, and collaboration on short-term objectives.

These multi-organizational systems—and changing demographics—require organizations to work across differences of individual identity (ethnicity, race, class, sexual orientation) and of organizational characteristics (culture, worldview, mission, political and economic power, geography, stakeholder base). There are generational divides as well: younger staff, in particular, are shifting organizations' notions of how to effect change and exploring new tactics such as social media, personal transformation, and cross-movement collaboration.

The complexity and pace of external change leaves many organizational leaders feeling overwhelmed and "in over their heads" (Garvey-Berger, 2012; Kegan, 1994). External complexity exceeds the ability of many leaders to shape adequate organizational responses. Even when the leaders' "complexity of mind" *does* match the complexity of their environment, those leaders find themselves saddled with organizational structures, habits, and skills suited to simpler times and tasks (Kegan, 1994).

So how does an OD practitioner find his or her bearings in this swirl of competing forces and changing contexts? Clarifying the nature of the appropriate intervention is a useful starting place.

Interventions for Changing Organizations from the Outside

Four types of interventions are especially useful to OD practitioners working in social change: strengthening organizations internally; working with a single organization or multi-organizational system to scale up impacts; supporting the development of new multi-organizational forms; and supporting campaigns to reshape the context of target institutions. (Supporting campaigns is not a separate *level* of intervention, but it is such a common strategy of multi-organizational systems that it deserves special treatment.)

These four interventions span a continuum of complexity, requiring practitioner competencies in a range of skills and attitudes that are increasingly unlike those of traditional OD. Practitioners also face increasingly challenging issues of personal and professional development and boundary management along this continuum. These interventions, tasks, and OD practitioner roles are outlined in Exhibits 27.1 and 27.2 and have been adapted here from a framework originally developed by Brown, Leach, and Covey (2005).

Exhibit 27.1. Summary of Intervention Types and Tasks

Strengthen a Social Change Organization Internally

1. Clarify linkages between the organization's mission and its activities.
2. Manage conflicts over fundamental power and value differences.
3. Design complex organizational architectures.
4. Coach leaders.

Work with Existing Organization or Multi-Organizational System to Scale Up Impacts

1. Clarify social change theories that underlie organizational strategies.
2. Strengthen external relationships and multi-organizational systems.
3. Design organizational architectures and external relationships for expanded impact.
4. Support strategic thinking at alliance, network, or movement level.

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Support the Development of New Multi-Organizational Forms

1. Convene and facilitate initial dialogue among actors.
2. Build leadership for the new multi-organizational effort.
3. Create shared vision, values, analysis, and plans.
4. Design formal and informal ways to get the work done.
5. Address power dynamics within the multi-organizational system.
6. Create systems to enable multiple organization learning.

Campaigns to Influence Target Institutions: A Special Case of Multi-Organization Strategy

1. Articulate compelling visions.
2. Build theories of contextual influence.
3. Mobilize constituents for collective action.
4. Create alliances to support reform.

Strengthening a Social Change Organization Internally

At this point on the continuum, the OD practitioner is working to improve the functioning or capacity of a single organization. This work requires the most conventional OD skills and approaches, but it should not be assumed that private-sector OD skills can be simply transferred to work with social change organizations.

Typical tasks when working in this first type of intervention include:

Clarifying Linkages Between the Organization's Mission and Activities Many social change organizations are clear about their missions and program activities but have a hard time describing the strategies and goals that connect them. Given the complexity and rapidly changing context for these organizations' work, the OD practitioner's job is to help define the impacts the organization wants to achieve and help focus organizational resources and competencies toward the most promising multiyear goals. These involve helping organizations learn to map movement/issue ecosystems, understand their distinctive added value, and continually evaluate and adjust their strategies.

Managing Conflicts Over Fundamental Power and Value Differences Participants in social change organizations frequently find that small differences in positions, values, and constituencies can have real impact on strategy, culture, goals, and priorities. These differences can quickly escalate conflict. Conflict management is essential in organizations mobilized around values,

visions, and diverse constituency needs. Reframing the inevitable internal tensions as the predictable, normal consequence of the organization's mission can help. The OD task is to articulate and align values and ideology with concrete goals and strategies and make sure all the key players in the system are as aligned as possible.

Designing Complex Organizational Architectures Few social change organizations (or their boards of directors) place high value on organization and management. This is compounded when staff members seek to enact in the organization the values they espouse for the world, such as participatory decision making; flat hierarchy; low differentiation of tasks, roles, and authority; and organic systems of accountability. The OD practitioner can help make those values an explicit part of organizational structuring and help manage the polarities when organizational values (such as efficiency and inclusion) come into conflict. Knowledge of a broad range of organizational architectures and systems of decision making is an important contribution.

Coaching Leaders Many leaders of social change organizations are content experts or charismatic founders with little experience managing a growing and increasingly complex organization. Those inclined to grow can benefit from personal coaching to help them reflect on the changing context of their work and implications for their leadership. It is frequently useful to have coaching provided by someone other than the practitioner addressing systems issues. Peer coaching and team coaching are increasingly employed in social change settings.

In this typology of interventions and tasks, strengthening an individual social change organization can require the OD practitioner to play the roles of organizational strategist, mediator of conflict, organizational designer, and leadership coach. OD practitioner roles for this intervention type and others are summarized in Exhibit 27.2.

Exhibit 27.2. OD Practitioner Roles and Intervention Types

Strengthen a Social Change Organizational Internally

- Organizational analyst
- Mediator of conflict and authority relations

(Continued)

(*Continued*)

- Organizational designer and architect
- Leadership coach

Work with Existing Organization or Multi-Organizational System to Scale Up Impacts

- Social change theorist
- Network and partnership designer
- External relations facilitator

Supporting the Development of New Multi-Organizational Forms

- Convener and facilitator of multiple stakeholders
- Entrepreneur or midwife of new structures and systems
- Mediator of multi-party differences
- Catalyst of network learning processes

Campaigns to Influence Target Institutions: A Special Case of Multi-Organization Strategy

- Activist visionary
- Ability to understand and integrate different strategies—policy analysis, communications, research, organizing, citizen engagement
- Supporting alliance, network and movement-building leadership
- Conceptual-situational analyst of target institutions and external context
- Bridge-builder with institutions and sectors

Working with an Existing Organization or Multi-Organizational System to Scale Up Impacts

Small, successful organizations often find it difficult to increase the scale of their impact. Many equate increased scale with simply expanding their own operations: growing their budgets, serving more clients, offering more services, or addressing new issues.

Some *indirect* approaches can leverage greater impacts. These include training others to do similar work, spinning off new organizations, or building strategic alliances and networks to influence the policies of other social change actors.

Scaling up social change impacts may require the OD practitioner to carry out tasks not commonly included in conventional OD. These tasks may push the practitioner to introduce new ideas that may seem alien to

insiders; to temporarily assume the role of thought leader to shape the change project; to strengthen network structures or systems; or to guide difficult conversations. This kind of leadership is only useful if paired with the ability to hand it over to internal system leaders for the long term. Sometimes the leadership vision is there but a neutral, temporary convener is needed.

Some typical tasks for scaling up social change impacts include:

Clarifying Social Change Theories That Underlie Strategies Scaling up impacts by engaging and influencing other organizations requires that the OD practitioner and client accurately understand external power dynamics, the interests of key players, the forces working for or against the desired impact, and the organization's role in the movement ecosystem. Organizational knowledge is not enough: the OD practitioner must know, or be able to quickly grasp, *how* social change related to the client's mission will come about. For example, an organization seeking to change the way state Supreme Court judges are chosen will employ a very different theory of change than a group working to shift the national conversation about immigration.

Strengthening External Relationships and Multi-Organization Systems Indirect approaches to scaling up require social change organizations to be part of multi-party arrangements with external actors such as subcontractors, coalitions, partnerships, federations, alliances, and movement networks (Katcher, 2010). Conventional OD interventions such as conflict management, intergroup relations, and team building are useful but insufficient in this context. Moreover, using these conventional skills in multi-organizational settings is usually beyond most OD practitioners' experience or training. Dealing with added complexity requires new skills and frameworks (Snowden & Boone, 2007) and sometimes personal development of the practitioner (Garvey Berger, 2012).

Designing Organizational Architectures for Expanded Impact Different scaling-up strategies require different organizational designs. Conventional OD approaches to design are helpful for managing internal growth and the increased complexity typical of direct approaches to scaling up. Indirect approaches to scaling up require competence in organizational designs intended to support innovations and connections outside the organization—for example, incubating and spinning off new organizations or joining policy and advocacy coalitions. Intensive external collaboration creates powerful internal shifts in board roles, leadership models, and

roles of senior teams. These models are emergent and there is no "expert" answer to what works.

Supporting Strategic Thinking at the Alliance, Network, or Movement Level
Through deeper understanding of the players in the external environment or movement ecosystem, opportunities for aligning one organization's mission and strategies with others can become clearer. Strategy work takes on a very different sensibility at the multi-organizational or network level (Zemsky, 2008).

OD practitioners wishing to help organizations scale up their social change impacts must have multiple capacities (Exhibit 27.2). They must be social change theorists (distinct from organizational change theorists) with expertise in large-scale political and social dynamics, power analysis, movement analysis, coalition building, advocacy, and inter-organizational relations. The practitioner should be familiar with network and partnership design and be a capable facilitator of external relations. Overall, this requires a shift in focus from a single OD "client" organization to the dynamics and issues present in large constellations of organizations and complex social forces.

Supporting the Development of New Multi-Organizational Forms

The third type of intervention for changing organizations and systems from the outside is to assist in the creation of new multi-organizational forms—such as collaborations, strategic alliances, coalitions, or movement networks. Such intervention is necessary when a problem cannot be addressed by a single organization, and there is no existing system of organizations to serve as focal point for action. Examples include when multiple, historically conflicting parties must jointly manage a scarce natural resource; when gang violence is destroying communities and individual lives; or when movement actors want to shift the terms of debate and policy on deficit spending. Creating new multi-organizational forms is also necessary in situations of less overt conflict, as when multiple actors must cooperate to reduce infant and maternal deaths.

Initially in these interventions, the role and skills of the OD practitioner can look more like those of an organizational leader or movement organizer than those of a traditional OD consultant. It is at this point on our continuum of interventions that the OD practitioner role begins to blur into that of social change agent or activist, and where keen awareness of whose interests and reputations are at stake is most needed.

Typical tasks in creating new systems of organization include:

Convening and Facilitating Initial Dialogue Among Actors Sometimes an outsider such as an OD practitioner or action researcher can fill the need for a trusted, honest broker to convene disparate groups. This might include working with existing community organizations and organizers or larger-scale movement or network leaders to identify common ground, overcome mistrust, and explore possibilities for future action. In other situations (and preferably) an existing leader from a member organization plays the convening role.

Building Leadership for the New Multi-Organizational Effort When an OD practitioner takes a temporary leadership role in convening a new multi-organizational group, he or she must quickly take steps to ensure that leadership is assumed by those with the most at stake: the permanent members of the new system. This can include supporting existing leaders or broadening leadership within the system to ensure buy-in and the needed diversity of perspectives and experience.

This is a particularly sensitive time in the intervention and is a test of the degree to which participating groups are willing to trust one another with leadership and differentiated roles.

Creating Shared Vision, Values, Analysis, and Plans This standard OD task takes on a very different character when applied in newly forming multi-organizational systems. It requires extraordinary levels of deep listening, negotiating differing world views, establishing and reestablishing interpersonal and intergroup trust, complex power and movement analyses, aligning goals and actions within and across organizations, and managing high levels of ambiguity and adaptation.

At this point, partners in the new system must decide the scope and scale of their collective work. Will they work to change the framing of an issue or debate? Build the capacities of movement actors? Forge cross-sector alliances? Change a target institution? Only after deciding "how big they want to play" should the structure be considered. Until then, any structures should be considered *very* temporary.

Designing Formal and Informal Ways to Get the Work Done Once multiple organizations agree to joint work, the OD practitioner can assist in designing a structure for managing the collective tasks. Structure is shaped not only by the scale of the system's vision, but also by considerations of what

other non-member actors are involved, the degree of existing trust and power relations among members, each member's appetite for risk, and how much each stands to gain or lose. Such structures can include: a network with a central leadership forum; a steering committee with smaller working groups or teams; a coalition with a permanent membership and a cooperative or collaborative board; or a fairly traditional organization with a board of directors.

Often other basic infrastructures (staff, volunteer management, public relations systems, finance and accounting systems, fundraising mechanisms) need to be created, either anew or by tapping organizations with existing skills and infrastructure. Undergirding any structure is the need to develop clear agreements and guiding principles to help set expectations about how different players will operate together. The OD practitioner can help design ways to create this infrastructure. But most multi-organizational structures (especially movement network forms) need to be held loosely and periodically reviewed and adapted to changing circumstances.

Addressing Power Dynamics Within the Multi-Organizational System No new multi-organizational approach can be successful without consciously engaging complex dynamics of power. Such groups, to be effective, engage people with a diverse array of experience, perspective, levels of organizational resources and influence, and identities (race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, class, age). Skill in naming and managing the power dynamics that accompany such diversity include but go beyond conventional cultural competence. Moreover, the OD practitioner must understand his or her own role, identity, and power as a consultant to the process.

Creating Systems to Enable Multiple Organization Learning As many organizations have discovered, organizational learning is both valuable and challenging. The challenges of learning and adapting increase proportionately when multiple organizations share their learning and coordinate joint action. OD practitioners' experience in action learning and the use of information technology in networks and collaboration can be very useful in supporting learning and flexible adaptation.

Fundamental OD practitioner roles for creating new systems of organizations are listed in Exhibit 27.2. They include: convening and facilitating multiple stakeholders; introducing new ideas about structuring; system entrepreneurship; mediating multi-party differences; and catalyzing network learning.

Campaigns to Influence Target Institutions

This type of intervention is designed to bring external pressure to bear on the internal dynamics and policies of organizations essential to a particular social change. Examples include changing the lending policies of World Bank; influencing Home Depot to buy sustainably harvested wood; or advocating for passage of comprehensive immigration reform.

Such campaigns are among many strategies an organization or multi-organization system might use to create social change. Campaigns usually have specific goals, are time limited (although some can last for years), and the relationships among campaign actors are often more transactional (achieving specific tasks and goals) than transformational (creating long-term relationships and generative spaces for pursuit of a long-term vision) (Bass, 1990).

Here the role of the OD practitioner only barely resembles that of the conventional external OD practitioner. In most campaigns there are multiple change agents, with change leadership shifting among people from various constituency and pressure groups, depending on the immediate task at hand and the phase of development of the work.

Typical tasks of the OD practitioner in this type of intervention can include:

Articulating Compelling Visions In campaigns there is often no shortage of ideas about how the target organization should change—close down the target organization, change the composition and accountability of its board, reform its principles and practices, and so on. The OD practitioner's challenge is often to help distill a common vision from multiple and competing narratives of change.

Building Theories of Contextual Influence Once the shared vision of change is established, there is the equally challenging task of building agreement on *how* to influence the target organization (media campaigns, economic pressure, governmental pressure, public education campaigns, or working with sympathetic insiders). A valuable role for the OD practitioner in a campaign is to serve as a trusted, honest broker, preferably with experience and ideas from other similar situations, which can help point the way.

Mobilizing Constituents for Collective Action The role of mobilizing people to influence the context of a target institution usually falls to existing or newly formed advocacy or organizing groups. But the OD practitioner

involved in this kind of intervention must have a firm grasp of the role and dynamics of social organizing and mobilization—if only to understand how these groups fit into the larger influence strategy.

Creating Alliances to Support Reform Occasionally, a campaign will ask the OD practitioner to assist in crafting longer-term alliances, movement networks (Katcher, 2010) or other structural relationships. This requires the skills and roles described above for creating new multi-organizational systems. In some instances, OD practitioners help the campaign determine how best to meet its evolving staffing needs, allowing for their own roles to evolve while helping leaders match needs and skills with complex, rapidly changing tasks.

Reshaping the context of target institutions requires the OD practitioner to assume multiple roles, including visionary activism and support for network and movement-building leadership. The practitioner must also understand and integrate an array of strategies: policy analysis; communications; research; organizing; citizen engagement; conceptual and situational analyses of external context and target institutions; and bridge building with institutions and sectors (Exhibit 27.2). Rarely if ever will one person play all of these roles or have all these skills. At a minimum, the OD practitioner involved in this kind of intervention must know what is needed, know the limits of her or his own abilities, and be skilled at collaborative and shared leadership.

Recurring Challenges in Multi-Organizational Systems

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in depth specific organizational structures and practices needed to create, manage, or participate in a multi-organizational system. But for OD practitioners considering working in this area, Table 27.1 provides a glimpse into four recurring issues you may be called upon to help navigate: (1) design of the joint work; (2) leadership or coordination of the multi-organizational system; (3) governance of the multi-organizational system; and (4) funding the multi-organizational system. These are the "nuts and bolts" of multi-organizational work and they are "recurring' in two ways: every multi-organizational system must deal with them; and each is rarely settled once and for all.

Design of the joint work addresses questions such as: Who should be involved and how? What are we here for—mutually beneficial transactions or transformation? What levels of trust do we have and what levels are

TABLE 27.1. RECURRING OD CHALLENGES AND TASKS WHEN CREATING AND STRENGTHENING MULTI-ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEMS

Challenges	Tasks
Design of the Joint Work	Ensure adequate time during start-up to identify correct partners or members.
	Define joint work as "close to the ground" as possible and involve implementers early on.
	Build trust early on by providing partners opportunities to deliver on small commitments or begin where trust already exists.
	Clarify each member's value-added to the joint work.
	Proceed only when fundamental purposes, values, goals, and directions are agreed on.
	Agree on ways subgroups can move on specific initiatives without participation by all members.
Leadership or Coordination of the Multi-Organizational System	Ensure needed technical and managerial skill.
	Ensure skill and attentiveness to managing up to the governing body, down to the program implementers, and across to other governing body members.
	Ensure skill in articulating a unifying vision, inspiring loyalty to the shared mission, and handling extraordinary levels of conceptual, technical, and relational complexity.
	Authorize leaders to exercise management responsibilities.
	Clarify and hold the line between executive and governance responsibilities.
	Support member CEOs in managing organization/network boundary.
Governance of the Multi-Organizational System	Build trusting relationships with and among governance group members and with key people in each of the members' home organizations.
	Carefully manage transition from temporary to more permanent leadership; ensure leadership does not become lodged long-term with OD practitioner.
	Ensure governance group members have strategic thinking skills and the ability to make decisions and commit resources on behalf of their home organizations.
	Ensure governance group has needed authority, training, and commitment to hold the line between governance and management.
	Ensure that influence over policy and strategy is appropriately shared among governing body members.
	Create a transparent and trusted system for financial accountability among members.
	Buffer system operations from policy differences among member organizations.
	Create an operations coordination group separate from the governing body when there are significant operations and programs.

(Continued)

TABLE 27.1. (CONTINUED)

Challenges	Tasks
Funding the Multi-Organizational System	Ensure funders' support for implementer influence over design of the multi-organizational system and system program operations. Ensure fundraising and allocation agreements that build member support. Build in flexible strategy as the multi-party system evolves, learns, and matures. Provide adequate resources early on for high up-front costs of creating collaborative systems and for continual joint learning. Create formal and/or informal communication mechanisms to link funders and the governing body. Be explicit about funders' influence on strategy and policy.

needed? What do we need to agree on before we can act? A key role of the OD practitioner is to help the multi-organizational system keep dual focus on its vision as well as on the realistic capacities of leaders, operational staff and members.

Leadership or coordination of the multi-organizational system is concerned with who will advance the work of the multi-organization system on an everyday basis and how much authority that person (or persons) should have. Many multi-party systems have a leadership or strong coordinating role held by an individual or team and accountable to a larger governing body. Long-term coalitions and networks are often created by activists who both lead their own organizations and also play critical leadership roles in the multi-organization system. The skills and practices of leaders operating at this boundary—and how OD practitioners can support them—is a nascent but essential field of study and practice (see http://networkleadership.org/).

Governance of the multi-organization system is concerned with who sets overall direction, policy, and strategy and how those people are chosen and replaced. How will the governance group relate to a designated coordinator or leader? How will governance members avoid becoming bogged down in operations? If money is changing hands, where is the accountability? How do partners share equal credit even if not sharing equal responsibility?

Funding the multi-organizational system is the recurring challenge that is most often beyond the control of the member organizations. Funding structures provide obvious—and not so obvious, but powerful—incentives.

The OD practitioner has a role early on in the creation of new, multi-party systems to help members attend to the dynamics that result from funders' interests and from the acquisition and allocation of new resources. Key questions include how to reduce member competition for funds; how to raise funds when *no one* can guarantee success; and how to turn funders into partners (and knowing when not to).

Implications for OD Practitioners

Clearly, the requirements for being an effective OD practitioner in multi-organizational social change settings go well beyond what most practitioners are initially trained for. Some of the requirements are for personal attributes and approaches to the work and some are for specific skills and competencies.

Attributes and Approaches

Personal Credibility, Impact, and Sustainability One's personal values, ideological commitments, and professional focus on social change can be critical to being accepted in many systems. In ideologically charged settings, a history of previous work with some actors can either disqualify a practitioner from an engagement or clinch it. Also, previous experience actually *doing* work (organizing, funding, policy analysis) similar to that of key actors in the client system contributes to one's credibility and competence.

At a personal level, this work is very demanding and rewarding. Believing in the missions of one's clients makes it more possible to sustain the level of attention these systems require and to challenge one's clients in the service of the mission, as is frequently required. If the OD practitioner is not ready to address a hard issue or walk away from a client for the sake of the mission, this work may not be appropriate for the practitioner.

Ability and Interest in Intervening at Multiple Levels Many social change systems cannot afford multiple external consultants, so being able to function competently across levels—individual, group, intergroup, organizational, and inter-organizational—of analysis and intervention is a real asset.

Ability and Interest in "Juggling Many Balls" Providing services to most social change organizations is not as profitable as providing similar services to the private sector or to large service providers. The practitioner wishing

to serve this market can: accept a lower income; work more "billable days" per year than private-sector colleagues; have a mix of social change clients and higher paying private-sector ones; or obtain grant funding to subsidize fees. We have also successfully experimented with supporting key leaders and staff to conduct their own action learning and OD activities.

Comfort with Ambiguity and Complexity The very nature of effective social change is messy, non-linear and unpredictable. This requires OD practitioners who are willing to let go of the "expert" role and enter with their clients into spaces of curiosity, experimentation, and gladly learning from failure.

Non-Attachment to What Is Created Rigid adherence to a particular structure or strategy can ossify and cripple a multi-organizational effort. As one highly effective network leader says "I like to keep our thinking complex and our structures loose." (See MAG case studies on effective network leadership at http://networkleadership.org/, and Katcher, 2010). The role of the OD practitioner is to help evolve or iterate structures and strategies to meet the changing opportunities and needs of a multi-organization system. Sometimes, the OD practitioner has to question whether a current multi-organization form is still needed. This can clear the space for some new configuration of players to come together to meet the next set of issue or movement challenges.

Skills and Competencies

Apart from these attitudes and approaches to the work, the OD practitioner working in multi-organization social change settings must be competent in the following:

Intercultural Competence This is no longer an optional competence for an OD practitioner operating in the social change arena. Making change at a meaningful scale requires being able to function competently with people from a vast array of backgrounds, perspectives, worldviews, and learning styles. Intercultural competence extends beyond interpersonal and small intergroup dynamics and includes the ability to understand and deal in real time with structural power analysis. Competent intercultural OD is increasingly using somatic approaches, expressive and visual methods, and reflective practices, in addition to the cognitive, linear, and conceptual approaches long propagated by academic OD.

Political Skills and Sensibilities The OD practitioner must be able to ask clear strategic questions and create spaces in which different political strategies and tensions can be surfaced and a joint way forward identified. This is made easier when an OD practitioner has had exposure to multiple social change strategies and what it takes to effectively advance them.

Conscious Escalation or Reduction of Conflict as Part of Mediation A combination of interest-based negotiation and the ability to create shared understandings (of interests, visions, contributions, and limitations of social change actors, of goals and outcomes, and so on) can reduce unproductive conflict in social change systems. A competent practitioner in this arena must also know when there is *too little* expressed conflict, leading to suppression of needed ideas.

Clarifying the Organizations' Roles in Social Issues This includes conceptualizing social change initiatives, mediating and synthesizing differing values, helping to articulate shared visions and goals, and designing effective multi-party systems. The OD practitioner should be able to help organizations determine their own best contributions (and own up to their shortcomings) and to find their appropriate place, with others, in larger social movements.

Facilitating Multi-Party Dialogues and Decision-Making Processes This requires techniques and skills for working with multiple parties and with groups ranging in size from dozens to hundreds of people, both in person and remotely. A particularly tricky balancing act is knowing how and when to enact the role of content expert and that of facilitator, and knowing when not to combine the roles.

Balancing Appreciative and Critical Approaches to Diagnosis and Planning One can often build momentum and trust by highlighting organizations' strengths and accomplishments and identifying areas of shared understanding and success. However, participants are keenly aware that conflicts of ideology and interests (and of skills, resources, and potential contribution) exist. These conflicts *must* be discussible if multi-party OD interventions are to have any credibility or impact.

Ability to Take On—and Quickly Relinquish—System Leadership Making social change from the outside in multi-organizational, shared-power settings requires the OD practitioner to shift among varying roles—from

technical consultant (for example, on organizational design) to temporary leader in an under-organized system (providing entrepreneurial leadership to launch a collaboration of groups that come with high ideals but low trust) to activist for social change, to catalyst for network learning. Taking such leadership may also require practitioners to shift from the individual consultant model to temporarily being part of a team of change agents. Helping create core principles and operating agreements, coaching key system members, and establishing systems for continual learning and adaptation are appropriate and effective ways to embed leadership where it belongs: in the system members themselves.

Some Cautionary Conclusions

Social change agents usually hold very clear visions of how the world should be and of how *others* should change to help achieve that vision. However, change agents are frequently unprepared for the transformations they must undergo—personally and organizationally—to be effective externally.

At the individual level this may mean confronting one's own limitations and blind spots. And it means adapting to uncertainty. In the social change arena, patterns rarely repeat, structure and strategy is emergent, and most causality is unknowable. Adding value from one's expertise and experience in such settings while undertaking the work with a "beginner's mind" is an ongoing tension for OD practitioners operating in social change.

Effectiveness requires organizational change as well. Many leaders, activists, and funders in social change have said that one of the biggest impacts of their intensive external collaborations has been to significantly alter their own organizations. In the course of collaborations, missions, and roles in society and movements are clarified; definitions of success shift; organizational strengths and weaknesses are unmasked; and notions of leadership, organizational structure, the role of senior teams, boards and funders, and cultural notions of stability and adaptation are all significantly—and with any luck, creatively—disrupted.

Finally, as social change agents who choose to enact their activism through OD, there is and should be a compelling alignment between oneself and one's clients, around fundamental visions of the future we want to create and values of how to get there. But our role and the client's roles are different. The ultimate leadership for social change efforts must come from the constituencies served and from the trusted leaders empowered to advance organizational and collaborative missions. Our role as OD

practitioners is temporary. We meet the system at a stage and point in its development and help it along the way. Our values and vision alignment, no matter how compelling, should not obscure the reality of whose futures, power, and resources are most at risk in a consulting engagement.

On so many dimensions, one cannot make change from the outside without also changing on the inside.

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