



ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

What is Organizational Development?

Organizational development (OD) is a systematic way of responding to a business's human resources needs, to promote long-term effectiveness and accountability in that business.

OD encourages the consideration of both the production goals of a work team, and the processes by which those goals are pursued: the "how" of achieving results working within this organization of these particular people.

It provides a method for studying and changing various actions that occur among members of an organization: decision making, goal setting, continuous quality improvement, communications, project management, policy creation, inter-group relationships, managing conflict, developing a climate for team effort, etc.

How do we know if we need OD?

The OD effort actually begins when a manager at any level reviews his or her group's working objectives, activities, and problems to see which areas should be targeted for improvement.

Questions that a manager might pose in this review are:

1. Are our priorities and objectives clear? How did we arrive at them? Is the whole group aware of them?
2. What are our key difficulties in meeting the objectives?
3. What are our key strengths in meeting the objectives?
4. Could we function more effectively as a team?
5. How can we get cooperation and support from others whose help we need?
6. What is the experience that people have in doing this work?
7. Are we fully utilizing all our members in our efforts to achieve our goals?

Answering some of these questions can help a manager identify elements in the workplace that may be encouraging or interfering with the organization's being fully effective in meeting both corporate and individual needs.

How does the OD method work?

Typically the method is conducted through a series of meetings among the relevant staff members and the consultants. The first task of these meetings is to ascertain what upper management sees as appropriate focus for the OD consultation: what are their main issues of concern.

The next series of meetings involve interviews by the consultants with other members of the business that may have ideas about the issues to be addressed.

This process is also managed by the use of a simple survey instrument to solicit comments from these members. After this data is collected, the consultants will create a concise summary of the information gathered and present this to top management. At this stage, the firm is completing its own definition of the areas to be addressed in the OD work.

After there is substantial agreement on what needs to be addressed, the same members that have been surveyed are encouraged to meet together to consider what other methods might be implemented that would resolve issues of concern. These methods are then put in place and followed, to establish their effectiveness regarding the group's original concerns.

What is the OD consultant's role?

The consultant has specialized training and experience in organizational, individual, and group dynamics. He offers these skills in the diagnosing of group functioning, solving problems, creating more efficient methods, and implementing changes in a work environment.

The consultant may be expected to offer "advice" in situations in which he has expert knowledge: he may offer, for instance, various training techniques to be used to address particular issues that surface in a firm.

Working with the active participation of others, the consultant can also function as a "catalyst" to encourage, direct, and support a group to identify and solve its own problems as well. He is guided by the ethical restraints of confidentiality, helping others to be independent, and working within the confines of his stated competence.

The consultant is responsible to provide services related to the achievement of corporate goals and objectives; to assist in diagnosing organizational strengths and weaknesses; research current behavioral science concepts; assist in the application of them in the organization.

How can I learn more?

Carlton F. "Perk" Clark has been involved in organizational development activities since 1975, having studied political science and organizational change at the University of Arizona and Arizona State University. He has consulted to industrial, legal, health care, retail, and software organizations as well as non-profit community groups. He employs a combination of objective survey data, analysis and feedback methods, participative management, action-planning and task completion and assessment techniques to assist businesses to strengthen their internal methods of communication, decision-making, meeting facilitation, accountability, and responsibility.