"Our backgrounds as social scientists puts us at an advantage at understanding the true dynamics of social systems yet our potential impact on the actions taken is diminishing. It is time to enhance our skill set in these areas and direct our academic and professional programs to focus on this as well."

Four Trends Shaping the Future of Organizations and Organization Development

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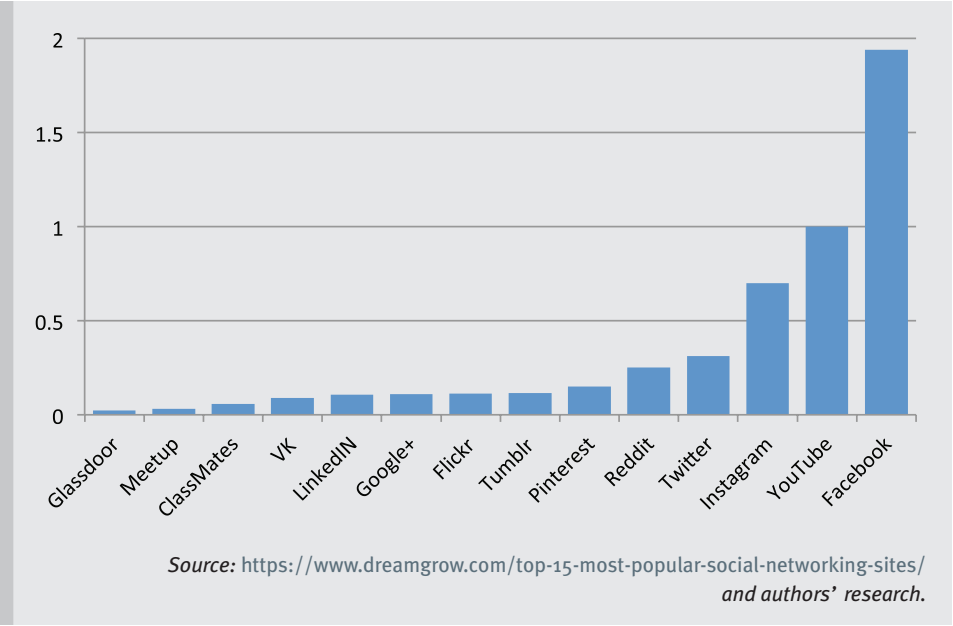
You better start swimmin' or you'll sink
like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'
—Bob Dylan

If we have learned anything during our collective years researching, practicing in, and writing about the field of organization development (OD) it is that change is a constant phenomenon. In the 1980s we had the Greek salad of change with alpha, beta, gamma, and even omega in the mix (Porras & Singh, 1986). In the 1990s it was likened to whitewater rapids (Vaill, 1989), in the early 2000s it had something to do with the diminishing supply and movement of one's cheese (Johnson, 1998), and over the past decade it has been all about managing the clash of boomers, gen xers and gen yers in the workplace (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000; 2013). It is a cliché these days to start an OD article with a statement that organizations are in a constant and/or increasing state of rapid change.

But that is because it is true. Organizations are experiencing change at rates we have never seen before. The best analogy today might be Moore's Law from the world of semiconductors. It is the assertion that advancements in technology double every 18–24 months. This law has proven accurate for the past several decades, despite several proclamations of its death (something this concept shares with the field OD) and has been applied to other domains as well such as business processes (Rawlings & Bencini, 2014) and digital marketing (Dragojlovic, 2016). In the context of organizations, we would suggest that the rate and complexity of change and the implications of those changes are accelerating at a similarly exponential pace. What matters to companies today can quickly shift tomorrow.

Moreover, much of this change is being driven either directly or indirectly by advancements in technology. It is the socio-technical (Trist, 1978) revolution all over again. For example, in 2013 there was debate over allowing employees access to social media at work (Beasley, 2013). Today many functions have hired social media experts (they are in very high demand in executive search) directed at advertising their products, watching for external media impressions, and actively staffing talent. The online traffic and opportunities for impact are certainly there. Dreamgrow reports that Facebook tops the social media sites as of 2017 with 1.9 billion visitors each month (Kallas, 2017). While more targeted professional workplace social media sites such as LinkedIn (peer to peer business connections) and Glassdoor (which features anonymous ratings and comments regarding company reputation) see fewer visitors, they are still at about 106 and 23 million respectively each month. The potential for a poor senior leadership decision or a botched change effort leaking out to the public is beyond anything ever imagined in the past.

If we think about the implications of managing complex multi-year organizational culture change vis-à-vis social media,



Source: https://www.dreamgrow.com/top-15-most-popular-social-networking-sites/ *and authors' research.*

Figure 1. Global Monthly Visitors to Popular Social Media Websites (Billions)

one could argue it might be a completely different process than in the past. The extent to which OD practitioners are leading edge regarding the impact new technologies have on the nature of organizational change is an open question. Moreover, in the context of the HR and talent management (TM) vernacular, the term organizational culture is often used interchangeably with "employer brand" and "employee value proposition" (EVP). Although not particularly new (e.g., see Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001), these are terms and related concepts nonetheless that are far less familiar to OD practitioners and probably worth some additional focus as well on our part as a profession.

In the past, we have written about change in the context of helping individuals (e.g., Burke & Noumair, 2002; Church, 2014), aligning large-scale organizational change interventions (e.g., Burke, 2011a; Burke & Litwin, 1992), and assessing the capabilities of OD practitioners (Burke & Church, 1992; Burke, Church & Waclawski, 1993; Church & Burke, 1993). We have also focused on describing major shifts in the field of OD overall (Bradford & Burke, 2004; Burke, 1976; 1997; 2011b; Burke & Goodstein, 1980; Church, 2001; Church, Shull, & Burke, 2016). Some of those changes tend to reflect perennial swings back and forth on a pendulum (e.g., centralization vs. decentralization, specialist vs. generalist capability models, industry consolidation vs. entrepreneurial and niche marketplaces), but other types of change are more significant and long-lasting.

The focus of this paper is on the latter type. The reality is we have never seen anything like the forces facing society today. New technology in the form of social media, tablets and other portable devices, new digital capabilities, and Big Data applications, coupled with the shrinking scope of the world thanks to globalization, and the subsequent shifts in how and what types of work employees desire are resulting in a sea-change. It is hard to believe these trends will not result in profound shifts in the way companies organize themselves and run their businesses.

Thus, based on the academic and practitioner literatures and our collective experience in consulting and in large corporate settings, we thought we would take a shot at describing where we are headed. Overall, and in the context of the Burke-Litwin model (1992) of organization performance and change we see three major drivers present in the external environment that are shaping the future of organizations and OD along with them. These drivers are resulting in four major trends that we see already occurring today in the business world. Our primary concern here are the implications of these four trends for both organizations, the role we as OD practitioners need to play in helping organizations manage through them, and the capabilities we need to do so going forward.

The Three Drivers of Change

Although topics such as employee engagement, organizational design, mission and strategy, human capital management, total rewards, diversity and inclusion, and workforce planning are all critically important for organizations today and will continue to be going forward depending on the strategy of the firm, we see three key universal drivers of change that generally sit above these. These drivers are shaping how organizations are organized and the skills required for success in the future. These should be familiar to most readers so we will not belabor them here but they are worth mentioning:

1. **The Changing Nature of Work**—i.e. the ways in which organizations are literally organizing themselves (e.g., setting boundaries around companies, functions, teams, and jobs), and defining how people do their day-to-day activities and connect in various social systems (Allen & Eby, 2016; Boudreau, Jesuthasan, & Creelman, 2015; Gulati, 2009; Worley, Zardet, Bonnet, & Savall, 2015).
2. **The Changing Nature of Data**—i.e. the velocity, variety, veracity, and volume (Big Data) of information both public and private coming in and out of processes, tools and systems including "the internet of things" (Bersin, 2012: Church & Dutta, 2013; Guzzo, Fink, King, Tonidanel, & Landis, 2015).
3. **The Changing Dynamics of the Workforce Itself**—i.e. the shifting ethnic and generational demographics, values structures, expectations, and social responsibility requirements of the new workforce (Deal & Levinson, 2016; Ferdman, 1999; Meister & Willyerd, 2010; Twenge, 2010; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000; 2013).

While these drivers are significant, and we have been talking about them for many years in some cases (e.g., generational differences), by themselves they are not

actionable. Rather, these drivers have produced four trends that do have consequences on the way organizations function and the requirements of doing OD work within them.

Four Trends for the Future

Trend #1: A Shift to Platforms over Products

The first major shift we see that has happened already in certain sectors is one of structure—i.e., the move to platforms over products in form. New types of organizational designs have emerged in the last 5-10 years, many as a result of the e-commerce boom, to looser, virtual, fluid, and dynamic structures (e.g., platforms) where the boundaries of what is and is not part of the "firm" are less clear (Boudreau, et al., 2015). This enables them to be more flexible and resilient in business environments. Existing brick and mortar firms are attempting to evolve as well, but some are having more difficulty doing so than others given the nature of their business models, the sophistication of their technology, and certain elements of their cultures rooted in the need for old school face-time relationships.

Those companies that are moving to platform models, however, are becoming less and less focused on a total quality management (TQM) style production mindset and directing energies instead toward an adaptive service approach. Gulati (2009) talks about this shift in terms of the need for "customer centricity" while others have focused on the concept of design thinking (Brown, 2008). Whatever the term, it represents a fundamental shift in how people conceptualize work, how they operate and involve the customer (or consumer), and the face they present externally to the marketplace (remember the EVP and employer brand ideas mentioned earlier). However, one of the cornerstones of design thinking and creating resilient organizations is embracing a systems point of view—something with which OD practitioners should be quite familiar.

Our thinking here regarding the shift to platforms over products emerged from a recent analysis of the application

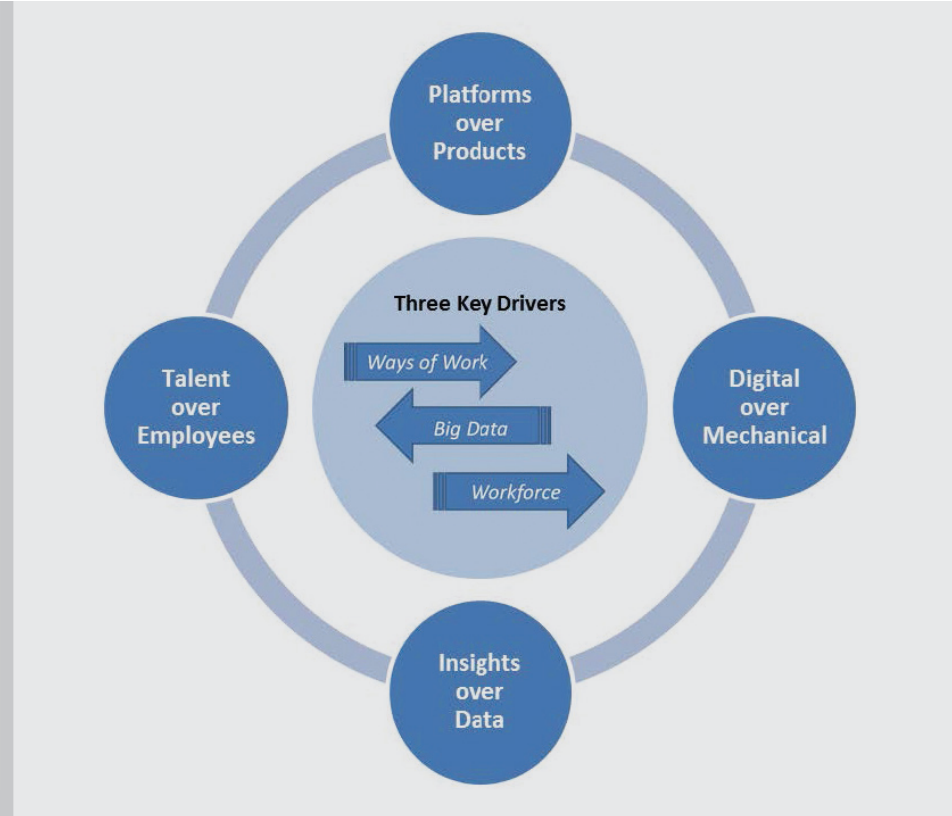


Figure 2. Four Trends for the Future

of traditional OD applications to other types of organizations (i.e., those in the government sector). In a special issue of the *OD Practitioner,* Burke (2017) wrote about "those other organizations." The question he explored was whether OD, having emerged in the 1950s and 1960s largely from business-industrial organizations such as the Harwood Manufacturing Corporation, General Mills, and Humble Oil, and therefore had (and still does) a social technology based on tightly coupled systems with top-down management, was applicable to federal and state government organizations and healthcare organizations. After a review of the relevant change literature he concluded that the process of OD, e.g., involving people in decision making that directly affects their work and degree of commitment, worked effectively regardless of organizational type. The difference was in the content. For business-industry, the content primarily for OD work is strategy—figuring out customer needs, how to beat the competitor, and supplying those needs. In government organizations, the primary content concerns time, that is, long-term vs short-term. In healthcare, the primary issue is the conflict for a physician in charge of a clinic; hospital department, etc., that is, following the professional code, e.g., Hippocratic Oath, vs. following the needs of the organization itself—achieving financial goals and matters of budget.

These organizations-business- industrial, government, and healthcare—with their variations of hierarchy and interdependence, primary characteristics of a tightly coupled system (Burke, 2014), have been around for a long time and are familiar to us. But what about the newer organizations of today, especially those in the "platform" category? Is "normal" OD appropriate for change efforts in these organizations? Let us briefly explore this question. The Internet has changed our work significantly, destroying things, e.g., the telegram, and creating others—the so-called platform organization we mentioned earlier. Even though in cyberspace, certain organizations today provide a platform, a place on the internet for transactions to occur. Of this ilk, perhaps the easiest to understand is eBay. This organization provides a site (platform) on the internet for people, i.e. eBay customers who want to sell something they no longer need or want anymore, say, a baby crib, to anyone who needs a crib (think garage sale) and will not have to pay a fortune for it. The price is

agreed to by the two parties and the seller ships the crib to the buyer. eBay makes its money from a percentage of the deal. Other platform organizations include Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Uber.

What makes these organizations unique and reflective of the future is the combination of the central headquarters, if you will, and a huge network composed of transactions on the platform provided by the company. But these transactions are independent of the company. Headquarters does not control them. A platform organization is therefore at least two organizations—a central command that attempts to operate like most any other business, that is, having a CEO at the top of a hierarchy and having interdependent functions such as finance, marketing, operations, human resources, etc., and a network of dispersed customers and constituents that has no hierarchy nor little or no interdependence. In other words, these two organizations are somewhat antithetical, one, headquarters, being a tightly coupled system, and the other, a network of customers, being a loosely coupled system. From an OD standpoint one works with these two systems very differently (see Burke, 2014).

At some level, the CEO of Uber, Travis Kalanick understands that drivers are independent. He and his colleagues at headquarters have hired hundreds of social and data scientists (see Trend #4) to entice drivers to work longer hours and have monetary targets for their work day. These enticements are, of course, based on corporate goals not those of the drivers, thus, commitment is problematical. The extensive article in the *New York Times* demonstrated quite dramatically this two-system conflict (Scheiber, 2017). Uber drivers, after all, are contractors not employees. However, they are not selected to join as contractors in any systematic way either, which has resulted in all sorts of problems (Church & Silzer, 2016). Instead, they are bound by stipulations within a contract, but otherwise they are independent, free to decide their own working hours and to some extent their geographical domain. They pay a price, literally, for this freedom, e.g., paying for their vehicle, maintenance and insurance costs, and the cost of fuel. And the long-range future is not rosy. Kalanick and his executive colleagues are moving slowly but ever so deliberately toward driverless vehicles. In the meantime, intergroup conflict will remain for the two systems.

The practice of OD for these platform organizations will need to be done with a true systems mindset. It will need to be accommodative in approach with an emphasis on common goals across the two systems. It will also need to adapt as well to different types of work contexts and constructs. For example, imagine conducting a cultural or engagement audit of such a firm. Would you include the drivers as part of the survey effort? And if so, would you expect them to be able to answer the same types of questions as the primary organization? Should they consider themselves as part of the organization or not? What if their engagement levels are lower—is that expected, is that acceptable? Similarly, how would performance management play out there? If you were focused on applying a dialogic model of OD (e.g., Bushe & Marshak, 2009) how would you account for the lack of interaction between drivers in 1000s of disparate locations and the formal organization? Communications are executed in short bursts through handheld devices. Clearly, for OD practitioners we must be more agile in our approach to working with organizations and change than ever before.

Trend #2: A Shift to Digital Over Mechanical

The second major shift occurring in organizations today is a focus on the digital over the mechanical (or the mechanistic) ways of doing business. As technology becomes increasingly integrated into our lives, the need for agility and speed in the way businesses respond to information demands that they adopt a digital mindset and set of processes. While the first step in this direction is often to create formal dedicated roles (e.g., a chief digital officer, an eCommerce group, a digital marketeering function, etc.), the bigger challenges lie in the need to transform the entire business end-to-end to reflect a truly digital focus. This means everything from integrating digital technology across all of one's existing processes (e.g., people, culture, and structure) as well as building new capabilities and infrastructure which have never existed before in their business models. Unfortunately, this is far from easy and many traditional organizations are simply not ready to make the transition. Research conducted by MIT Sloan Management Review and Deloitte (Kane, et. al., 2016), for example, has indicated that while 90% of executives anticipate their industries will be disrupted by digital trends to a great or moderate extent, only 44% say their organizations are appropriately prepared for these challenges today.

One of the most intriguing aspects for us in watching this digital transformation occur (beyond the need for greater clarity in the construct definition itself) is that it is again forcing organizations to think and operate at the systems level. While most of the authors currently writing about the challenges of going digital are not grounded in the OD space, they are in fact promoting the concept of systems thinking whether intentionally or not. In its most basic form we are simply talking about inputs, throughputs, and outputs as described in classic social psychological theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978). This is encouraging to say the least. The biggest differences that we see with the current focus, however, is in (1) the nature of those inputs (i.e. data of a completely different nature along with products and/or services), and (2) the speed and direction of that flow throughout the system.

In traditional mechanistic models of organizations, the process flow follows a more simplistic supply chain model. Raw materials enter the system, are transformed along the way into goods or services, and a product (material or knowledge) is delivered. In the digital world data is generated about the data collected along with the process itself, and the feedback loops that occur at every stage along the way are at least as important if not more so than the output itself. They represent end-to-end systems and at higher velocities, depth, and reciprocity between organizational sub-systems than ever before. In other words, fully digital organizations are in the

unique position of being able to generate, collect, synthesize, and process information real time that allows them to pivot and adjust their delivery models. This results in ultimate flexibility (or at least that is the goal most hope to achieve with a digital transformation). While feedback loops have always been a key component of process systems and double-loop learning has its roots in OD (Argyris, 1977), the digital focus has taken this thinking to the next level in organizations.

While the implications for organizations with more traditional business process models might be clear (e.g., they are facing an uphill battle and will need to retrofit their approaches and/or fundamentally rethink their designs), what are the parallel implications for our OD efforts? First, we need to help leaders better understand the transition to the digital environment in the first place, and what that means for their organizations. In some cases this may simply be a process of education and training. In others, we may need to find ways to help our clients learn new knowledge, skills, and behaviors (e.g., how to accelerate the speed of decision making, how to capitalize on information –see Trend #3). Still in others it might require assessing for fit and changing out the leaders themselves to make way for more enlightened talent (see Trend #4).

Second, it is critical that the different components of the organization are aligned to support the digital transformation. As with any large-scale OD intervention (and the shift from traditional/mechanistic to digital is arguably just another type of cultural change), the degree of alignment and congruence between the different elements of the organizational system need to be managed. The mission-vision, structure, systems and process, leadership and managerial behaviors, cultural messaging, climate, and employee value propositions must all appropriately align (Burke & Litwin, 1992). If an organization is moving toward a digital mindset and yet the leaders do not embrace technology or the use of data for decision-making, for example, there will be little belief on the part of employees that the transformation is real or supported. This is simply OD 101.

Third, we believe that OD practitioners must understand and embrace the concept of "mass customization" (Golay & Church, 2013) as it relates to our intervention sets. Mass customization in OD is all about giving employees choices within a given set of boundaries. Given the fluidity of the processes needed to support and sustain a digital organization, the OD tools and offerings that are put in place must be able to flex to the needs of individuals and their contexts. For example, and building on earlier implications from Trend #1, employees are expecting there to be choices in how their performance is managed, the ways in which they can receive developmental feedback and learning, where and how they work with others, the mechanisms for giving feedback to their managers or offering their opinions and suggestions regarding the organization as a whole, how jobs are defined, identified, and filled, etc. We as OD practitioners need to move away from being too systematic and standardized in our approach to some of these elements of organizational functioning. In information systems terms, we need to understand the difference between customization and configuration. Not every OD intervention or process needs to follow its own unique path, nor do we want all of them to follow the same exact path. The answer is somewhere in-between but we need to determine where that is. In small companies this has never been an issue, but in larger ones we have our work cut out for us as organizations constantly seek to standardize in the spirit of efficiency and effectiveness.

Finally, as with the first trend noted above, we as OD practitioners need to continue to embrace systems thinking. We also need to embrace technology. This means building new capabilities and skills in the digital marketplace by translating our traditional interventions where possible into this new medium. While neither of these should be hard, our most recent survey of OD practitioners (Shull, Church & Burke, 2014) suggests just the opposite. That is, survey responses from 388 active practitioners indicated that the value of systems thinking was ranked 13th overall (out of a possible list of 36) which was much lower than we would have expected. Clearly there has been a shift in OD away from having a systems perspective, which is concerning. More troubling, however, are the findings around our ability to embrace technology. Specifically, the item "helping organizations integrate technology into the workplace" was ranked 40th and "the development of socio-technical systems" was ranked almost at the bottom of the list at 56 out of 63 possible interventions in use today. It would seem that OD is not particularly progressive in this area.

Some might review these data and argue this is not an issue, suggesting instead that OD is all about human process and social interaction. And they would be right. However, we would contend that OD is in some ways old school and living in the past from a "technology" and data point of view. As a field we need to think bigger. We need to build our skills and develop more agile processes and interventions that can influence a new generation of data and systems like never before. That is not to say we should lose sight of the human element. If anything, we may be the last bastion of people focused on it! Imagine the day when the digital transformation reaches the next stage of its evolution and robotics become the norm even in the professional workforce. OD needs to stand at the ready to support organizations, their leaders, and their people in this transformation. Yet, if we are not part of the solution we are part of the problem. It is on us to define and embrace "doing digital OD"—whatever that might mean.

Trend #3: A Shift to Insights over Data

The third major shift concerns the use of data. As might be expected from the discussion above these new types of organizational forms (e.g., digital platforms) are producing volumes of data. While the use of data is nothing new in organizations, the expectations for how data is harnessed and used is changing dramatically. More specifically, and as alluded to earlier, the collection and processing of this information alone is not enough. In today's business landscape organizations are focusing increasingly on generating insights from

that data. Insights that will inform business decisions, drive specific actions, and help set future business directions. In fact, the combination of the digital transformation and the need to generate insights from the massive amounts of data being generated comes together in the Big Data phenomena (Church & Dutta, 2013; Guzzo, et al., 2015). This is where the science of analytics meets business strategy, statistical modeling, and workforce planning. It is no wonder then that organizations are also hiring chief data scientists (along with chief digital officers).

We believe many practitioners today are woefully ill-equipped to remain current in the Big Data digital world. This is an area we believe OD professionals need to step-up their game now, as well as ensure professional doctoral and masters programs in the field lay the appropriate groundwork for future entrants before it is too late.

The reasons for why businesses might want to link various sources of information and identify potential relationships is clear (and again is not entirely new). What is new is the sheer volume, variety, veracity, and velocity of the data available to mine, and the resulting technology infrastructure and capabilities required to appropriately model and leverage it into meaningful insights.

As for OD practitioners and their data analytic capabilities, we have raised the red flag on this gap in skills before (Church & Dutta, 2013; Church, Shull, & Burke, 2016). There is a critical need on the part of current practitioners to be able to analyze large sets of data, find the relevant and actionable insights, and weave them into a compelling story for the organization. Today this is simply not likely to be the case with your average ODer. While OD has historically been grounded in action-research and data-driven methods (e.g., Burke, 1994; Nadler, 1977; Waclawski & Church, 2002), and one could argue that qualitative or quantitative data is at the core of 50% or more of the classic OD consulting model (Church, 2017), the fundamental significance of the role of data has changed.

There is pressure from clients not only on demonstrating the ROI of our existing efforts in OD, but also to integrate and synthesize disparate data sources to find new solutions based on connections we never even thought would exist. Is much of the "values-free analytics" work done a-theoretically? The answer is yes. Just because a relationship is identified statistically does not always mean it makes sense or is the right thing to do philosophically for an organization's culture or its employees (Church, 2017). Is the lack of attention to theoretical models, frameworks, and cultural contexts stopping organizations from turning to people with deep analytical skills to determine the solutions to their problems vs. relying on others (e.g., OD) who might have a more informed point of view? The answer is no, it is not stopping them one bit. After all they are data scientists and we are OD people. We have got to fix this.

If you have not already experienced this issue, you probably soon will. We are hearing about OD (and other) professionals finding themselves competing with practitioners from other disciplines such as economics, finance, information technology, and statistics where their skills at deep analytics and modeling are significantly better. Even Industrial-Organizational psychologists, who generally have a more reliably consistent level of analytic capability are having their qualifications come under-fire when it comes to Big Data applications (Church & Rotolo, 2015; Guzzo, et al., 2015).

We believe many practitioners today are woefully ill-equipped to remain current in the Big Data digital world. This is an area we believe OD professionals need to step-up their game now, as well as ensure professional doctoral and masters programs in the field lay the appropriate groundwork for future entrants before it is too late. If we do not act soon, other professional groups will soon eclipse us as the key providers of insights regarding how organizations operate and what levers to pull to drive change. We are losing our seat at the table in this regard when in fact we have more context and knowledge about what should make organizations work than most others. Remember, in our study of current OD practitioners only 29% cited using statistics and research methods in their toolkits. As we have stated elsewhere, while this can still be done in the context of new OD philosophical approaches to collaborative and adaptive consulting efforts (e.g., Bushe & Marshak, 2009), the analysis and insights skills themselves today are lacking.

Trend #4: A Shift to Talent over Employees

The fourth and final shift we see in organizations today is one that is perhaps even more controversial than the last, i.e. the emphasis on talent over employees. This trend sits front and center of the HR and OD agenda so the implications for organizations and the practice of OD are immediately relevant. Here we are talking about the philosophical distinction first made by Church (2013; 2014) between the area of talent management (i.e. a disproportionate focus on the few) and OD (a concerted focus on the many). We all would agree that OD has deep roots in the development and growth of individuals, groups, and organizations. Following the "original" war for talent (Michaels, et al., 2001) precipitated by the dot.com boom, and more recently the emphasis placed on changing demographic trends in the workforce as well as multi-generational workplaces and how to navigate those, (e.g., Deal & Levinson, 2016; Zemke, et al., 2000; 2013) we are now firmly in what we might whimsically call a "war for talent management."

The emphasis has indeed shifted in many companies (and particularly those with large established TM functions—see Church, Rotolo, Ginther & Levine, 2015) from creating a development culture in general to focusing on methods for facilitating talent differentiation and segmentation. In short, this means directing funds and resources to the identification and

classification of people into high-potential and non-high-potential categories for decision-making. This is done to ensure that limited resources are applied to the right groups in the leadership pipeline (Silzer & Church, 2010). As a result, the data-driven OD interventions and processes we used to use for developmental interventions (e.g., 360 feedback, surveys, interviews, personality measures—Waclawski & Church, 2002) are now being deployed more consistently for assessment and decision-making.

Not only does this emphasis put more pressure on OD people to be technically adept at using these types of tools given there is now more weight associated with their application, but it also challenges the core assumptions of many practitioners. Some may simply refuse to engage in efforts of any nature that will result in the segmenting of talent into the haves and the have nots. On top of this many organizations are shifting away from OD altogether. Recent survey data (Church & Levine, 2017) from 71 large well-known companies on their functional reporting structures noted that 71% of their formal OD groups, and 68% of their culture and engagement survey teams now officially report into the Talent Management function. By comparison only 49% of the diversity teams and 12% of the total rewards (compensation and benefits) report into TM. This suggests a potential challenge when it comes to aligning resources over time and where tradeoffs need to be made. From our perspective, OD practitioners need to fully understand the ways in which our core tools can and cannot be used and what conditions are needed to build effective legally defensible decision-making (TM) vs development only (OD) processes.

Sure, OD people can choose not to work in such environments. They can boycott organizations that are emphasizing TM. But that seems like throwing out the baby with the bathwater to us. If not us, the work will get done by someone in HR, and by engaging in the efforts we remain key players in ensuring it is done well and people are treated with dignity. It is up to OD professionals to ensure that our values are manifested in how data-driven tools and processes are used for development or decision-making outcomes. That means that we are on point to ensure people are treated fairly, the process is clearly communicated, and when differentiation does occur there is transparency and accountability for the how and the why. And we can ensure that leaders are held accountable for their actions as well.

Back in the 1990s, had we been asked to design a 360-feedback system to be used to segment talent and make decisions about who would and who would not be promoted we might have said no. In fact, we did say no at least once to something quite similar. Today, however, times have changed. The process of 360 is no longer a fad but has proven to be stable as a measurement tool when done well and quite ubiquitous. Organizations are using 360 now for decision-making in a variety of ways whether that is for performance management (Bracken & Church, 2013) or talent management and the identification of high-potentials (Church & Rotolo, 2013). If the right procedures are followed in the design and execution of the process it can be done well for the benefit of the organization and the employees. After all, millennials love feedback and want to know if they are likely to have a successful career or not in their current company—transparency works for them (Church & Rotolo, 2016). From our vantage point, the keys to ensuring this type of work always aligns with OD principles are making sure: (a) feedback is always delivered to participants in some meaningful and supportive form, (b) what is measured is psychometrically valid and appropriate if used for decision-making, (c) people use the data in the right ways and at the right times, and (d) the process is clearly communicated and transparent to those involved.

Conclusion

In summary, when we look to the future of organizations and the role that OD practitioners can and should play in them we see the potential for real progress. As organizational forms continue to morph into platforms and other virtual structures, and the business processes themselves become entirely digital in their end-to-end designs, the opportunity for OD to make an impact is very tangible. Given our grounding in the social sciences and systems thinking we should be one of the best groups of professionals to help leaders think through the implications of these changes on the culture, people, processes, structure, behaviors required and other elements of the entire organizational system. While there is room to grow when it comes to OD professionals embracing technology in the digital age, as long as we do not lose sight of our higher-level systems thinking skills, there is real value to be offered from the OD perspective. This discussion does make us wonder though if it is time for a return to the socio-technical model.

Our concerns for the future of OD, and perhaps organizations as well by implication, is what happens when the data analysis and insights requirements outstrip our ability to even be part of the discussion. As leaders look to data-scientists for insights, actions, and interventions we need to be at the table and questioning the way the statistics were run, whether certain contextual variables were considered, what research methods and controls were examined, etc. Our backgrounds as social scientists puts us at an advantage for understanding the true dynamics of social systems yet our potential impact on the actions taken is diminishing. It is time to enhance our skill set in these areas and direct our academic and professional programs to focus on this as well. If we do not ensure our students have these capabilities they will be relegated to focusing only on the areas where data does not have an impact. If we follow the breadcrumbs above between platform organizations where people are loosely connected and digital networks and robotics become the norm, these changes will mean our opportunities to influence will only continue to decrease.

Finally, although the core of OD is all about development, the field is being subsumed under the TM function in many big organizations, and our processes and tools are being used in other ways. Rather than look the other way or run from these issues we should learn the skills needed

to embrace them. Specifically, who better to design a new leadership competency assessment and help the organization identify and select the best future leader to develop than an OD person? Who better to coach other talented leaders that were not selected for a given role because of their strengths, opportunities, and skill gaps, if not an OD professional? We should be the people managing both sides of the TM and OD equation. That way we know for sure it is being done with the right perspective in mind.

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