



ORGANIZATIONAL & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WHITE PAPER

Abstract

A practical leadership approach to maintaining
organizational balance and achieving desired results.

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Introduction

Organizations, much like living organisms, evolve continuously with or without input and guidance from leadership. This document aims to provide a clear overview of critical and complex organizational issues that can be effectively addressed with a straightforward and proven approach.

Why Organizational & Professional Development?

An organization's evolution can either be intentionally guided by leadership or left to happen on its own, often leading to suboptimal results. Organizational & Professional Development (O&PD) tasks are often overlooked or avoided because they seem less urgent compared to daily operations, or because leaders may lack the time or knowledge to address them. Organizations never remain stagnant; they are always either getting better or getting worse. The critical question is how leadership is influencing those changes. O&PD should be viewed as a disciplined philosophy with which to lead, and a Systems Engineering approach to managing change.

In March 2023, McKinsey & Company published a study based on data from 1,700 teams across 75 global organizations. The study found that organizations that are agile, invest in talent, foster a strong culture, and use the latest engineering practices achieve better outcomes. Specifically, they see up to a 27% increase in efficiency, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, and operational performance. Teams using agile methodologies—an important component of O&PD—reported a 25-30% boost in productivity within 6 to 12 months. This improvement was due to more intuitive decision-making, and quicker implementation of changes, with teams resolving client issues much more rapidly and effectively thanks to enhanced collaboration tools and methods. Other studies from Boston Consulting Group, The Office of Personnel Management, and Gallup support these findings.

Data from Shackleton Group's surveys over the past twenty years shows that clients implementing an O&PD strategy saw a 35% improvement in aligning work with operational goals (real traceability), a 25% increase in overall efficiency, and a 20% improvement in leadership and morale. Productivity, efficiency, morale, engagement, retention, and leadership all improve when employees feel connected to the organization, understand its direction, and believe in their contribution to its success.

Many leaders think effective solutions to organizational challenges are theoretical, overly complex, or too time-consuming. However, planning and executing O&PD can and should be practical and straightforward. This document outlines a clear, uncomplicated and proven approach to O&PD, focused not on everything, but only those methods that have proven to yield the greatest return on investment and desired results.

How to do Organizational & Professional Development

Every effective O&PD plan is built on four essential elements: assessment, framework, a thoughtful approach that integrates both, and a clear strategy for sustaining the initiatives put in place.

Assessing the Organization

Before embarking on any changes or implementations, leadership must ensure that the proposed actions are necessary.

Reshaping the organization, team, or unit to reflect personal preferences may not be what is needed, and more importantly, may not serve the best interests of the organization. Drawing on aviation experience, before every flight, pilots conduct contingency planning: “In the event of an emergency, we will first ask ourselves, ‘If we do nothing at all, can we still safely fly the aircraft, land, and address the emergency on the ground?’ If the answer is yes, then no immediate action is taken. If the answer is no, we then assess the situation further, understand the impact, and take the appropriate actions in flight.” In short, the first step any leader should take is to conduct a thorough assessment before making any decisions and use the results of that assessment as the foundation for developing a relevant and practical O&PD plan.

A well-executed assessment leverages a combination of facts, experience, and insights from those directly involved—the people on the ground—and when conducted objectively, it will reveal where and how an organization needs to adapt. This information then lays the groundwork for an O&PD plan tailored to the organization’s unique characteristics and the desired outcomes. Effective assessments require a comprehensive framework that addresses specific, tangible, and relevant core elements common to all organizations. Ultimately, the goal is to help define or validate the actions needed to achieve the desired results.

An Organizational & Professional Development Framework

Before developing a course of action to address assessment findings and desired outcomes, it is essential to establish a foundational framework for planning. This framework should incorporate key considerations, objectives, and influential factors that are common to successful organizations.

There are five fundamental components that form the foundation of any organization which can serve as a basic framework for organizational planning. Some form of a Strategy, a supporting Structure, the People who execute the work, the Leadership who plan, manage, and make decisions, and ultimately, the Results they are achieving. Conceptually, this can be represented as an equation: (Strategy + Structure + People) Leadership = Results, in which Leadership acts as a force multiplier enhancing the impact of the other key components.

A closer examination reveals the essential elements that each should encompass:



This model is truly applicable to any organization, but what thirty-five years of O&PD experience has made very clear to us is that attempting to address every aspect of each component is like trying to boil the ocean. What distinguishes those organizations that achieve higher levels of effectiveness is their focus on a select few influential factors that have the most significant and enduring impact on organizational performance.

Critical Factor in Establishing an Effective Strategy

The single most critical factor in establishing an effective strategy is to ensure traceability. This involves validating the alignment and continuity between team and individual objectives (at every level of the organization) with the overarching foundational doctrine. Traceability has consistently proven to be the most significant driver of success, exerting a rapid and profound positive influence on the overall effectiveness of an organization's strategic initiatives.

Key Features of an Effective Organizational Structure

The most critical elements of an effective and successful organizational structure are a strong orientation toward products and services, and crystal-clear definition of the roles, responsibilities, and relationships necessary for the structure's successful execution. A product and service-oriented structure is one in which resources and strategies are specifically focused on the development and delivery of the organization's offerings. That focus will drive growth, increase profitability, and help achieve the organization's overarching objectives. Many organizations attempt to codify roles and responsibilities, but only at a superficial level, and establishment of the bilateral relationships between internal functions and with external agencies is often overlooked. Establishing these relationships is essential to the successful execution of the structure, and plays a crucial role in preventing, or at least mitigating, the common issue of organizational silos.

Crucial People Elements in Organizational Success

The People element within an organization can often seem overwhelming, with numerous interconnected factors making it challenging to pinpoint the most influential aspects that can yield the greatest and most immediate impact. However, if the primary role of people is to effectively execute the organizational structure, it becomes evident that identifying the required capabilities and determining the necessary level of those capabilities are both critical to successful execution (what capabilities do we need and how much of them). The next logical focus is on continuously developing and enhancing those capabilities to sustain performance and drive growth. Finally, fostering an environment that promotes and reinforces desired organizational behaviors is essential for ensuring effective execution and supporting the overall strategy.

Leveraging Leadership for Organizational Success

There are two critical aspects of an O&PD initiative that could mistakenly be perceived as abstract or intangible, but when harnessed appropriately they can maximize the potential of both current and future leaders in the organization. First, Leadership must maintain and optimize the balance between the organization's Strategy, Structure, and People to ensure the achievement of desired results while also implementing a deliberate O&PD plan. The second, but no less important, Leadership must clearly define and articulate the criteria, capabilities, and growth (promotion) requirements at every level of the organization in order to effectively cultivate and develop leaders who are aligned with the organization's specific needs.

Understanding and Influencing Organizational Results

As the old saying goes: "it is what it is." Results represent the realization of organizational objectives and are the cumulative effect of the other four components of the O&PD model. The model illustrates that results—on the right side of the equation—are the direct outcome of the components on the left side of the equation. If the results achieved do not align with the intended or desired outcomes, the only way to alter them is by assessing the individual components on the left and making the necessary adjustments to influence and improve the outcomes.

An Effective Approach to O&PD

The culmination of a thorough assessment and a clear understanding of the organizational framework is the development of a strategic, Systems Engineering approach to executing an O&PD plan. Utilizing the established O&PD framework and concentrating on the influential factors within each of its components, a clear and logical sequence of steps emerges.



SG APPROACH TO ORGANIZATIONAL & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (O&PD)

Ongoing component/initiative of the OD Strategy designed to maintain the organizational balance between each key component of the Organizational Model to achieve the desired results established in the Organizational Strategy.

Facilitate selected leadership through the identification and planning for necessary technical and practical proficiency to meet the staffing and KSAs required (capabilities & capacity) to effectively execute AND lead the validated structure. Further establishes formal plans for promoting desired organizational culture and behaviors, and to correct undesirable organizational culture or behaviors.

Facilitate leadership through the identification of the key KSAs and optimal staffing required to execute the validated structure. Specifically, all of its key functions and their R³.

Facilitate appropriate SMEs through the capture, development and mapping of critical business or technical processes required to effectively execute the structure. This is complex exercise in facilitation involving the correct mix of SMEs to agree to a series of steps, sub-steps and potential alternatives that result in a map formally documenting a standardized approach to executing a particular process. It reflects the critical tasks and information flow between tasks that yield a process. Processes begin and end with a communication/information flow, and alternates between communication-task-communication-task, etc. resulting in a process map. The final process reflects the way a process "should" be executed based on its intended outcome/purpose balanced against the reality of resource availability and capabilities of the organization.

Start Here

Determine & Execute O&PD Assessment

Develop O&PD Strategy for Organization

Focus executive leaders and key SMEs on why they are assessing the organization (e.g., change, standup, optimization, fix, etc.), and on implementing the assessment, analyzing results, and developing recommendations for the organization.

Based on the results of the assessment, facilitate executive leaders through the development of a strategy for developing, optimizing and sustaining the organization by establishing key O&PD objectives for each component in the O&PD model (i.e., Strategy, Structure, People, Leadership). This ensures continuous development of the organization and sustenance of the OD strategy. **NOTE:** The **O&PD Strategy** is not to be confused with the **Organizational Strategy** (which identifies the Vision, Mission etc.) The O&PD Strategy focuses only on those initiatives to develop and sustain optimal organizational construct, behavior, effectiveness, etc.

Establish Foundational Doctrine

Develop and articulate of the overall organizational strategy: The senior executive's philosophy, vision, and strategic objectives; the key leaders' development of mission & operational objectives; and the further development of core functions and associated tasks of the remaining units at subsequent levels of the organization.

Validate/ Establish Structure

Develop new organizational structure or validate an existing structure. In either case, ensure the following: First, the structure should be designed to achieve the organization's vision, strategic objectives, mission and operational objectives, and oriented to deliver its products and services. Second, the structure is flexible and postured to accommodate the dynamics of your business environment, industry, market, etc., while adapting to and leveraging the capabilities and potential of its people. Further, it is driven by the organizational strategy (i.e., all elements of the structure should directly or indirectly support some element of the strategy).

Define/Establish R³

Facilitate the leaders and SMEs through the capture, development and mapping of the internal and external Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships (R³). One of the most critical elements an effectively functioning organization is a clear understanding of the R³ required to effectively execute the structure, develop and deliver the required products & services, and realize the organizational strategy. Org charts only reflect that some relationship exists between functions, but the details of the relationship are left up to the viewer's imagination. Mapping the relationships develops a diagram that clearly defines the nature of the relationships, and the communications required between functions or agencies required to ensure execution of the structure.

ID, Capture Critical Business/Technical Processes

ID, Capture Org Staffing Requirements

Establish Plan for Developing People & Leadership

Establish & Implement OD Sustainment



The reader will immediately observe that the approach depicted in the diagram is cyclical, underscoring the continuous nature of leading a development initiative within an organization.

The diagram possesses several key features:

- The SG O&PD Model is positioned in the center.
- Colored boxes adjacent to each model component represent the associated steps of the approach.
- Arrows between the colored boxes indicate the direction of the process flow.
- Callout boxes provide detailed commentary, offering additional insight into the specific actions intended to occur during each step of the process.

As with any approach, those responsible for its execution must carefully determine which steps in the process are applicable and relevant to the specific circumstances of their organization at any given time. However, extensive experience has shown that every step outlined in the approach warrants thorough consideration. Caution should be exercised before intentionally omitting, skipping, or abbreviating any of the recommended steps.

Sustaining Organizational & Professional Development

One of the greatest leadership challenges, second only to the reluctance to initiate a strategy aimed at establishing an effective culture and driving desired organizational results, is the hesitation to invest the effort required to sustain that initiative. This maintenance is often neglected because once improvements are implemented, again they may seem less urgent compared to the demands of daily operations, or because leaders may lack the time or knowledge to address ongoing needs.

This situation is analogous to undertaking a comprehensive landscaping project on a property. The homeowner invests substantial time, money, and effort to achieve the desired results, only to neglect regular maintenance such as mowing, pruning, trimming, or pulling weeds. Over time, the lack of upkeep leads to such overgrowth that these simple maintenance tasks are no longer sufficient, and restoring the property to its former state would require starting from scratch. In essence, a key to the successful implementation of an O&PD strategy lies in the inherent need to maintain and sustain the effort and investment over time.

Sustaining the O&PD at a high level is about Leadership maintaining and optimizing the balance between the organization's Strategy, Structure, People and the Results.

Taken individually, each of these elements seems fairly straightforward. When viewed in concert with one another, the ongoing interactivity that evolves as the organization grows stimulates the development of increasingly complex and dynamic relationships between these organizational components.¹

“Therefore, maintaining organizational balance is accomplished by monitoring the relationships between the components in O&PD model, and making the necessary adjustments in those various components to continue to achieve or exceed the desired results.”²

As the organization begins to execute its strategy, and results are realized, a leader should assess those results to determine if they are those that were anticipated and desired. If the assessment determines otherwise, then the components must be evaluated individually and collectively to determine where change(s) should be made to achieve the desired results and consequently maintain the necessary balance.¹

Bottom line, like in the algorithm presented earlier, the only way to influence something to the right of the equal sign is to make appropriate adjustments to the factors on the left.

O&PD Implementation and Sustainment Best Practices

- **Utilize the O&PD Model:** View the organization through the lens of the provided O&PD Model to ensure a comprehensive understanding.
- **Prioritize Key Factors:** Rather than attempting to address every issue at once, focus on the most influential factors that drive success.
- **Standardize Implementation:** Apply a standardized approach, such as the one outlined above, to guide the implementation of your plan.
- **Commit to Sustainment:** Maintain organizational balance and be dedicated to sustaining the effort over time.
- **Ensure Effective Integration:** Pay close attention to the integration process, particularly following changes, to ensure seamless transitions.
- **Continuously Assess Performance:** Regularly assess and reassess performance, allowing adequate time for changes to take effect before considering any adjustments.
- **Leverage Success:** Identify what is working well and build on those strengths, rather than solely focusing on fixing perceived issues.

1. Gillcrist, E. (2019, October 7). How To Maintain Organisational Balance. Training Journal. <https://www.trainingjournal.com/2019/business-and-industry/how-maintain-organisational-balance/>
2. Shackleton Group (2014). Organizational Assessment & Development Pocket Checklist (p. 2). Shackleton Group, Inc.