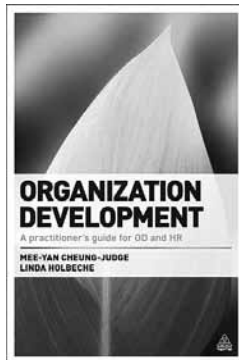


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Book Review

Organization Development: A Practitioner's Guide for OD and HR

By Mee-Yan Cheung-Judge and Linda Holbeche (2011)
London, UK: Kogan Page. 324pp. \$44.95

Reviewed by Judy Vogel

Cheung-Judge and Holbeche have given a wonderful gift to the field of organization development and to OD and HR practitioners of all levels of experience. This book offers a remarkable combination of history of the pioneers, review of important thinkers and theories about organization change and leadership, as well as a how-to resource for the practitioner, including many illuminating case studies.

Organized into two parts—first, An OD practitioner's guide to OD by Cheung-Judge, and second, HR in relation to OD practice by Holbeche—together, the book provides a valuable reference tool. The authors' goal is to present a resource that is “useful to a range of people” by writing a “basic book” that conveys the “essential core, the basic premise on principles of the OD field to help practitioners refer to, review, and affirm their day-to-day practice” (p. 5).

Cheung-Judge begins with a clear exploration of definitions and a brief history of the important founders of the field, including Kurt Lewin, Ron Lippitt, Edgar Schein, Douglas McGregor, Rensis Likert, Chris Argyris, Bob Tannenbaum, Richard Beckhard, Herbert Shepard, and Robert Blake.

Further, she recounts the births of NTL Institute (originally the National Training Laboratory) and OD Network (ODN). These grew into important institutional expressions of the new field. Both provided, and continue to provide, containers for practitioners to gather together, create new knowledge, learn from each other,

and experience being a part of a values-based community. For many practitioners, these organizations have become on-going professional Communities of Practice.

She proposes that five core theoretical roots provide the framing of OD as a system of practice: Systems Theory, Action Research Theory, Lewin's Change Theories, Complexity Theories, and Social Constructionism Theory (including Appreciative Inquiry). She defines and accessibly summarizes each and reviews their applications to OD.

With this framework, she explores the complex and ambiguous role of OD practitioners in their efforts to provide effective consulting help to their enormously complex organizations. She provides straightforward, how-to guidance that does not over simplify the actions; rather it guides with wisdom and challenge, including expressing the requirement for consultants to bring conscious, muscular accountability to their work.

Cheung-Judge lays out the OD intervention cycle taking on the dilemma of *who* is the client, and she explores the political challenges of intervening in the existing culture. She presents a particularly insightful discussion of the goal of the diagnostic phase to create engagement of stakeholders and an effective catalyst for change. Further, she applies several theoretical perspectives that can guide diagnosis.

The final three chapters of this first part of the book provide valuable insight to the OD practitioner taking up the core challenges of power and politics. She cites

the work of several thinkers, including Emerson, Salancik and Pfeffer, French and Ravens, and Mintzberg; and she offers useful applications of their thinking.

Next she makes a powerful argument for the importance of internal OD: “I am a firm believer that having skilled internal OD support is essential for organizations if they are to survive and thrive.” Further, citing Edgar Schein, she states:

All organizations, regardless of size, face two key challenges in order to stay vibrant in a turbulent environment: they need to adapt to a constantly changing environment—by adjusting strategy, mission, approach to market, competitive stance and product innovation; and to accomplish this they need to make corresponding internal changes (Schein, 1965). (p. 130)

It is the particular mission of OD, she conveys, to partner with leaders to guide these internal change challenges.

In the final chapter Cheung-Judge looks ahead to the future of the field; she states:

Because “OD magic” is so basic—by basic I mean first principle or fundamental in nature—in respecting human nature, in upholding democracy, and in commitment to an individual's agency, I know OD as a field will remain useful and relevant in the future.” (p. 182)

She concludes with a provocative “proactive strategy to build a future for OD.” It includes the following headings:

- » Become a trusted advisor to leaders.
- » Pay special attention to the people in the middle.
- » Work in polarity.
- » Keep to the basics.
- » Build a community and contribute.
- » Believe that you have the power to make a difference (pp. 188–193).

In the second section, Holbeche frames her perspective on HR in relation to OD by exploring the current challenges facing HR professionals in their role as critical supports to organization leaders. She believes:

HR, as well as line managers, could make a hugely positive difference to the effectiveness of organizations if they embraced an OD approach. (p. 3)

With its longer term and systemic orientation OD is the key that unlocks the gate to sustainable performance and engagement over time. With its powerful levers HR can help organizations develop the adaptive people capabilities that will equip them for the future. That’s why I am excited by this book; together OD and HR are a marriage made in heaven! (Pg. 5)

Her initial discussion focuses on the question of “Why is it important that HR ‘gets’ OD?” (p. 198), and it is organized into several provocative sections, which are headed as follows:

- » A challenging context.
- » The need for “change-ability.”
- » The challenges of managing change.
- » How well equipped is HR to be a change agent. (pp. 198–201)

She suggests:

HR practitioners may not be change experts but their policies and practices are a key factor in building “great places to work” that are both affordable to the business and attractive to the “right” employees. HR’s systems are a means of embedding

new behaviors. HR and OD working together offer the prospect of a new and more mutually beneficial means of developing the organization, since both organization and employees will benefit from change. This mutuality of interest is at the root of sustainable high performance, HR’s strategic mission. (p. 201).

After reviewing the history of HR’s role, she presents an overview of the essential shift to HR professional as change agent. (For more information on this subject, see the special issue of the *OD Practitioner*, OD and HR: Today’s Practice and Tomorrow’s Possibilities, 42(4)).

Her focus is on the immediate need for HR and OD collaboration in several pressing areas of change, including organization design, culture change, managing transformational change, and developing effective leadership; she offers several models and case studies that illustrate the opportunities and dilemmas to be faced.

Holbeche emphasizes how important it is for HR to not just focus on people, as it always has done, but also on the system level needs, such as developing a culture that is “change-able,” that supports “learning and experimentation,” that inspires “people to perform brilliantly,” and that builds a “healthy and ethical organization” (pp. 304–306).

In summary, Cheung-Judge and Holbeche have written a coherent, comprehensive, and practical review of thought leaders, theories, and methods of OD and HR; and they have made a compelling case for the importance of greater integration and collaboration of the two disciplines in support of their organizations’ successes.

If there is an area of concern regarding their goal to serve the needs of all readers, it is that the book, at times, is so rich and sophisticated that it may exceed the reach of inexperienced practitioners while also providing too much basic, how-to information for seasoned ones.

While some may conclude that there are really two excellent books here for two different audiences, and I tend to agree, I applaud their effort to highlight the synergies that HR and OD collaboration

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can provide to enhance organizational outcomes. *Organization Development: A Practitioner’s Guide for OD and HR* is surely a valuable companion to both OD and HR professionals as they advance in their knowledge and practical skills. I, for one, found it both insightful and useful for my practice.