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# REVIEW ARTICLE: The past, present and future of organization development: Taking the long view

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## Abstract
Organization development has been, and arguably still is, the major approach to organizational change across the Western world, and increasingly globally. Despite this, there appears to be a great deal of confusion as to its origins, nature, purpose and durability. This article reviews the 'long' history of organization development from its origins in the work of Kurt Lewin in the late 1930s to its current state and future prospects. It chronicles and analyses the major stages, disjunctures and controversies in its history and allows these to be seen in a wider context. The article closes by arguing that, although organization development remains the dominant approach to organizational change, there are significant issues that it must address if it is to achieve the ambitious and progressive social and organizational aims of its founders.

## Keywords
ethical values, Kurt Lewin, organization development, relevance, rigour, T-groups

## Introduction

Organization development (OD) has been, and arguably still is, the major approach to organizational change across the Western world, and increasingly globally (Boje et al.,

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2011; Burnes, 2007; Dent, 2002; Gallos, 2006; Mirvis, 2006; Mozenter, 2002; Piotrowski and Armstrong, 2005; Ramos and Rees, 2008; Rees, 2011; Wirtenberg et al., 2007). Despite this, there appears to be a great deal of confusion as to when it started, what it is, and whether or not it is still alive and kicking (Bennis, 2000; Burke, 2011; Dawson, 1994; Dunphy, 2000; Greiner and Cummings, 2004; Kanter et al., 1992; Marshak and Grant, 2008; Neumann, 2005; Nicholl, 1998a, 1998b; Oswick, 2009; Weick and Quinn, 1999). For example, there are those for whom OD had what we might call a 'short' history, which began in the 1950s, reached its zenith the 1960s with T-groups (training groups) and the hippy counter culture, after which it lost its relevance and coherence and fizzled out in the 1980s (Bradford and Burke, 2004; Bunker et al., 2004; Dawson, 1994; Greiner, 1972; Kanter et al., 1992; Thrift, 2005). In a related vein, there has been a tendency in recent years to write of a 'classical OD', based on Lewinian founding principles and approaches, which had its heyday in the 1960s and has now been superseded by a 'new OD', which is based on newer perspectives on organizations, notably social constructionism (Bushe, 2011; Marshak and Grant, 2008; Oswick, 2009).

Over the years, there has been no shortage of reviews of OD (Alderfer, 1977; Beer and Walton, 1987; Conner, 1977; Faucheux et al., 1982; French, 1982; Porras and Berg, 1978b; Weick and Quinn, 1999), textbooks (Cummings and Worley, 2009; French and Bell, 1999) and readers (Burke et al., 2008; Gallos, 2006). However, the reviews are now out of date, the textbooks tend to be sketchy, and the OD readers, by their nature, do not present a coherent picture. Certainly, there does not seem to have been a substantial and coherent review of the history and current state of OD for many years. This seems strange given that in the last decade there has been much debate on the health and nature of OD (Bradford and Burke, 2004; Bunker et al., 2004; Burnes, 2007; Coghlan, 2011; Heracleous, 2011; Marshak and Grant, 2008; Mirvis, 2006; Van Nistelrooij and Sminia, 2010; Worley et al., 2011).

It is also something of a lacuna given the extent to which prominent cultural theorists claim we live now in a historical moment defined by 'soft' capitalism's managerializing of the subjective self, the self-disciplining effect of therapeutic models in labour processes, and a fetishization of change (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007; Costea et al., 2008; Grey, 2002; Miller and Rose, 2008; Thrift, 2005). The only place in the canon of management knowledge that explicitly addresses these apparently epoch-defining phenomena, and makes them primary objects of research and action, is OD. The aim of this article is to provide a comprehensive and critical review of the 'long' history of OD that locates its origins in the late 1930s, sees it as still current, and which chronicles the major stages, disjunctures and controversies in its history. In particular, it will show that, throughout its history, OD has been driven by the twin forces of academic rigour and practical relevance. There has been much debate in recent years concerning the need to achieve both rigour and relevance in organizational theory and practice (Bartunek, 2007; Polzer et al., 2009). However, it was the founding father of OD, Kurt Lewin (1943/4: 169), who first made the case for this in his famous dictum, 'There is nothing so practical as a good theory', which presaged the current debate by five decades (Gulati, 2007). As new theories, perspectives and organizational needs have emerged, and as OD has sought to respond to these, sometimes its theoretical wing has been in the ascendancy, and

sometimes its practitioner wing has come to the fore. Although this clash of rigour and relevance has made Lewin's dictum difficult to achieve, it has provided the driving force that has propelled OD through successive periods of change.

Although the various manifestations of OD produced by this clash do not always fit into neatly packaged time frames, a chronological perspective makes it easier to understand its development and allows it to be seen as part of a wider context. The article begins with the origins of OD in the 20 years from 1939, and highlights the influence of Kurt Lewin and the growth of T-groups. It then shows that, in the 1960s, driven by the popularity of T-groups, OD expanded rapidly and established itself as the major approach to change in the USA. However, by the end of the 1960s, OD found itself under attack, and enthusiasm for T-groups began to decline. The next section reveals that though OD continued to expand in the 1970s and 1980s, the criticisms of OD increased. In an era of rapid organizational transformation, OD was seen as too slow, too incremental and too participative, and in response new approaches to change emerged. This is followed by an examination of OD in the 1990s and 2000s, showing that although there was a great deal of soul-searching in the OD community, this was accompanied by an intellectual renaissance, which created the conditions for OD to reunite its academic and practitioner wings and rebuff its critics. The article closes by arguing that OD remains the dominant and most widely applicable approach to organizational change, but that there are significant issues that it must address if it is to achieve the wider social and organizational aims of its founders.

## The origins of organization development

It is generally agreed that the original core components of OD were T-groups, action research and participative management (Cummings and Worley, 2001; French, 1982; French and Bell, 1999; Harrison, 1995). There is also agreement that these have strong connections with the work of Kurt Lewin (Benne, 1976; Burnes, 2007; Cooke, 2007; Dent, 2002; Freedman, 1999; Schein, 1988).

Therefore, any review of OD must not only begin with Lewin's contribution, but it must also recognize that his work is the yardstick against which later forms of OD are measured. This is because Lewin provided both the core tools and approaches of OD, and its rationale and values (Bargal and Bar, 1992; Conner, 1977; Gold, 1999; Marrow, 1969). Lewin's three major contributions to OD are:

- planned change – this comprises four interrelated elements: field theory, group dynamics, action research and the three-step model of change (Burnes, 2004b, 2007);
- showing how psychological theories and techniques developed and used in laboratory experiments to study group behaviour could be applied to studying and changing group behaviour in the real world (Dent, 2002; Highhouse, 2007);
- a set of radical values and 'utopian aspirations' (Mirvis, 2006: 77) that emphasized the need to promote democratic values and participation in order to tackle social conflict (Lewin, 1946; Marrow, 1969).

We can date the emergence of OD practices to two events in 1939. The first was the publication of Lewin's autocracy–democracy studies (Cooke, 1999; Lewin et al., 1939; Lippitt, 1939). These showed that leaders who promoted democratic participation obtained far better outcomes than autocratic leaders. Consequently, if autocratic leaders wanted to improve the performance of their followers, they first had to change their own behaviour. The second was the beginning of Lewin's long and extensive series of action research/participative management projects with the Harwood Manufacturing Corporation. These honed the tools, techniques and approaches that became central to OD (Marrow, 1969). Between 1939 and his death in 1947, Lewin applied planned change and participative management to a wide range of real-world situations (Burnes, 2007). In 1945, Lewin established the Research Center for Group Dynamics to investigate group behaviour, especially the benefits of participative management. He was also central to the establishment of the Commission on Community Interrelations (CCI), the aim of which was the eradication of discrimination against minority groups.

In 1946, Lewin was asked by the Connecticut Interracial Commission to organize a training workshop to give community leaders the skills to counter racial and religious discrimination in housing, education and jobs (Freedman, 1999; Marrow, 1969). The resultant workshop was held at the State Teachers College in New Britain, Connecticut, between 24 June and 6 July and comprised 41 participants, half of whom were black or Jewish (Bradford, 1967; French, 1982). The workshop can claim to have laid the foundations for the OD movement (Burnes, 2007; Highhouse, 2007). Lewin recruited Kenneth Benne, Leland Bradford and Ronald Lippitt to help lead the workshop (Cooke, 1999; French, 1982). Benne (1976: 28) described it as 'a project in cooperative action research' that was based on Lewin's previous research. What emerged was both an approach to change – T-groups – and an organization for promoting that approach – the National Training Laboratories (NTL) Institute (Freedman, 1999). The creation of T-groups has been described as one of the most important, and contentious, social inventions of the 20th century (Back, 1972; Campbell and Dunnette, 1968; Harrison, 1995; Highhouse, 2002; Kaplan, 1986).

The first T-groups were unstructured, agenda-less groups of strangers who learnt from their own interactions and the evolving dynamics of the group (French, 1982). The original idea was to explore the feelings and attitudes of the participants in order for them to understand and reflect on their behaviour in the 'here and now' and so improve their interpersonal skills in order to bring about change in their 'back-home' situations (Bradford et al., 1964). At the New Britain workshop, the formal training consisted of lectures, role playing and general group discussion. In the evening, the researchers and trainers would meet to evaluate the day's work (French, 1982). When some of the participants began to attend these sessions and challenge the comments staff made about their behaviour, 'Gradually, staff and participants discovered that the feedback the participants were receiving about their daytime behavior was teaching them as much or more than the daytime activities' (Burke, 2006: 14). In essence, this was an extension of Lewin's autocracy–democracy studies, which showed that leaders often needed to understand and change their own behaviour before they could change other people's behaviour. In passing, we can also note that it shows some remarkable similarities with the modern concept of emotional intelligence (Sosik and Megerian, 1999).

The T-group approach is often referred to as sensitivity training, because it sensitizes the participants to their own behaviour. Also, because the approach originally brought together groups of strangers in a controlled environment outside their workplaces and communities, it is referred to as laboratory training (Cooke, 2011; Highhouse, 2007), hence the NTL's name. After Lewin's death, the NTL was founded and led by Benne, Bradford and Lippitt, the surviving leaders of the New Britain workshop, and originally funded by the Office of Naval Research and the National Education Association (Cummings and Huse, 1989; French, 1982).

Highhouse (2002) maintains that the entire field of OD was founded and built by T-group trainers. However, this ignores the earlier work by Lewin, especially the studies conducted at the Harwood Manufacturing Corporation, which utilized and developed his action research–participative management approach (Coch and French, 1948; Cooke, 2011; Dent, 2002; Freedman, 1999; Marrow, 1969). Burnes (2004b) maintains that, rather than originating with work on T-groups, it was Lewin's Harwood work that formed the basis of OD's practices and philosophy. Highhouse's observation also ignores the work at this time by the Research Center for Group Dynamics and the CCI, which were staffed by Lewin's collaborators and students (Cartwright and Zander, 1953; Friedlander, 1976; Marrow, 1969). Similarly, it has to be recognized that the UK's Tavistock Institute of Human Relations was developing its own OD practices in parallel with, rather than derived from, US experience (Neumann, 2005).

Nevertheless, it is clear that the label 'organization development' came from T-groupers. According to Burke (2006) and Lippitt,[1] the name was coined independently but simultaneously by two groups of NTL consultants: Robert Blake and Herbert Shepard working at Esso and Richard Beckhard and Douglas McGregor working at General Mills. It is also clear that most of those who became leading figures in the OD movement were involved in the NTL and shared its zealot-like commitment to the promotion of T-groups, which created the conditions for the rapid expansion of OD in the 1960s (Freedman, 1999; French, 1982; Harrison, 1995; Highhouse, 2002, 2007; Kleiner, 1996).

In the 1950s, OD was mainly an 'intellectual crusade' driven by the progressive and anti-McCarthyite politics of the NTL leadership (Cooke, 1999, 2006, 2007). It was not seen as a money-making business but, when the research grants ran out, this began to change. The NTL moved into executive education and consultancy in order to fund itself. This led some to blend the T-group approach with other OD practices, such as action research and participative management, in an attempt to bring about organization-wide change (Burke, 2006; French, 1982). This more business-orientated mindset led some, such as Robert Blake, to establish their own consultancies and copyright their own approaches, which in turn led to a decrease in the generation and free exchange of ideas (Dent, 2002; French, 1982; Highhouse, 2002). It also exacerbated existing tensions in the NTL between those, such as Benne, Bradford and Lippitt, who saw T-groups as a radical approach to creating a better world, and those, such as Beckhard and Blake, who saw T-groups/OD more as a vehicle for creating better organizations (Beckhard, 1969, 1997; Freedman, 1999).

As can be seen, the origin of the core OD practices can be traced back to 1939 and the work of Kurt Lewin. It was the New Britain workshop and the creation of T-groups that

provided the foundations for the OD movement, though the name itself did not appear until the late 1950s. However, it was the 1960s when OD really took off.

## The 1960s – the rise of organization development

The dramatic growth of OD in the 1960s was driven by the popularity of the T-group approach, which stressed personal growth, emotional expression, and the need to challenge bureaucracy and promote democratic participation, which matched the hippy, anti-authoritarian spirit of the age as epitomized by the civil rights and peace movements (Highhouse, 2002; Isserman and Kazin, 2007; Thrift, 2005). T-groups were particularly attractive to adherents of flower power and new age religion seeking 'expanded consciousness' (Lattin, 2011). This search for personal and social freedoms was also reflected in organizational life, where new, heretical ideas were abroad and their promoters:

> … saw a truth that ran against … prevailing attitudes. They saw how, despite the power of corporate practice, something desperately desirable had been lost in everyday corporate life: a sense of the value of human relationships and community. They saw how, without that human spirit, corporations could not perform. (Kleiner, 1966: X)

Proponents of OD saw bureaucracy as choking the life out of organizations and that the solution was bottom-up, participative management and the humanizing of work (Alderfer, 1977; Beckhard, 1997; Burke, 2011). OD saw itself not as a set of tools and techniques to make organizations more efficient, nor was it any longer just a small cult evangelizing the merits of T-groups and driven by intellectuals from leading American universities. Instead it was broadening out 'into a popular "movement" intended to "democratize" life in organizations' (Greiner and Cummings, 2004: 375). OD was a crusade for individual and organizational liberation that posed fundamental questions, such as:

> Does man exist for the benefit of organizations such as industry, the state, or the market? Or, do organizations exist for the benefit of man? (Zand, 2010: 424)

> How do I help create a better society? (Porras and Bradford, 2004: 393)

Porras stated that:

> I think the basic belief at that time was that OD processes could really transform people, make them psychologically healthier … Then, through the use of these improved interpersonal skills, people in the organization would develop more powerful ways to solve problems together, increase their participation, share power and decision making, get things done more effectively and efficiently, and so on. (Porras and Bradford, 2004: 394)

That their message found a ready audience amongst many Fortune 500 companies, such as Esso, Dow Chemical and Proctor and Gamble (Bradford and Burke, 2004), showed that they were not just a bunch of 'white-collar hippies' (Highhouse, 2002: 287), but a force to be reckoned with.

In the mid-1960s OD began to embrace quality of working life initiatives and strategic change. However, as the following will show, it was action research, participative management and, above all, T-groups and the NTL that were at the forefront of the growth in OD (Burke, 2011; Cummings and Worley, 2001; French and Bell, 1973).

## *T-groups*

T-groups were built on Lewin's (1946, 1947) work on the social psychology of groups and, as such, were not about individual therapy. However, as the demand for T-groups grew in the 1950s, many of those recruited by the NTL as trainers came from a psychotherapy background rather than a social psychology one (Benne, 1964; Freedman, 1996; Highhouse, 2002; Kleiner, 1996). As a consequence, in the 1960s, T-groups were often labelled 'therapy for normals' (Schein, 1995: ix) and became more like psychotherapy sessions concentrating on personal growth and self-development for their participants, and began to lose touch with the aim of changing the behaviour of the groups to which they belonged or had responsibility for (Kaplan, 1986; Mirvis, 2006). As Porras observed:

> … in the early '60s, groups [T-groups, sensitivity training groups, encounter groups] were being used primarily to transform people without much concern for the setting the group participant came from. The idea was to make everyone more interpersonally competent so that they could interact more effectively with each other in whatever situation they found themselves. At UCLA, they were running groups mainly for all types of people with only a relatively minor emphasis on people specifically in organizations. (Porras and Bradford, 2004: 393)

Argyris (1964: 71), though, argued that managers in large American corporations, who were hindered by 'pyramidal [bureaucratic] values', could use T-groups to help them to develop leadership values that would promote innovation and employee commitment. However, he was also involved in one of the NTL's most high-profile failures when its T-group initiative in the US State Department met such resistance from staff that its in-house champion, the Under Secretary for Administration, was forced to resign (Argyris, 1967; Kleiner, 1996; Marrow, 1974).

By 1966, some 20,000 business men and women had passed through the NTL's doors, despite concerns over its effectiveness (Friendly, 1966). Such was the demand that many T-group trainers, and even people who had only attended a few T-group sessions, began to develop their own products, such as in-company or 'family' T-groups and, most famously, Blake's Managerial Grid (Bradford, 1974; Burke, 2011; Cummings and Huse, 1989; Dent, 2002; Harrison, 1995). This unregulated expansion of T-groups meant that, in many cases, therapy-like interventions were being conducted by people who had little or no training in the use of psychotherapy, and as a result, T-groups began to be criticized for damaging the careers and psychological health of participants (Harrison, 1995; Highhouse, 2002; Kaplan, 1986). Another telling criticism was that whatever individuals might have learned about themselves in T-groups, it had very little positive effect on their performance at work (Campbell and Dunnette, 1968; Dunnette and Campbell, 1970; Kleiner, 1996; Odiorne, 1963; Porras and Berg, 1978b). As Bennis (1969) noted, the values and lessons learnt off-site in T-groups did not equip people to deal with the

political dynamics of organizational life. Consequently, by the end of the 1960s, the influence of the NTL and the use of T-groups dramatically declined (Highhouse, 2002; Joure et al., 1971; Kleiner, 1996).

## *Action research*

As the influence of T-groups waned, the use of the other two core elements of OD, action research and participative management, grew considerably and began to dominate OD practice (Cummings and Huse, 1989; French, 1982; French and Bell, 1999). This was because many of the corporate practitioners who had attended T-group sessions went on to commission in-company OD programmes, and some personnel managers saw sponsoring OD initiatives as a means of creating a new role for themselves (Freedman, 1999; Greiner and Cummings, 2004;).

It is Lewin's (1946) participative, or co-operative, action research model that is most used by OD practitioners (Chein et al., 1948; French, 1982). This was developed mainly through his work with the Harwood Manufacturing Corporation, where it continued to be used for many years after his death (Burnes, 2007; Marrow, 1967, 1969).

By the 1960s, action research was seen as:

> … an emergent inquiry process in which applied behavioural science knowledge is integrated with existing organizational knowledge and applied to solve real organizational problems. It is simultaneously concerned with bringing about change in organizations, in developing self-help competencies in organizational members and in adding to scientific knowledge. Finally it is an evolving process that is undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and co-inquiry. (Shani and Pasmore, 1985: 439)

It was based on the assumption that each organization is unique, and that a change process has to be designed with that uniqueness in mind and adapted in the light of ongoing experience and emergent learning (Coghlan, 2009, 2011). It incorporated Lewin's (1947) belief that for change to be effective it must take place at the group level, and must be a participative and collaborative process of discussion, debate and experiment that involves all of those concerned (Bargal et al., 1992; French and Bell, 1990). Lewin maintained that the understanding and learning produced by this process was more important for the individuals and groups concerned than any resulting change as such (Lewin, 1946). Though action research is often characterized as a diagnostic process (French and Bell, 1999), for Lewin it was much more about creating a dialogue amongst the participants, which would allow them to reach a common understanding of the context in which their behaviours took place (Burnes, 2004b).

## *Participative management*

This was the third core component of OD in the 1960s and was sometimes also referred to as group dynamics (Bennis et al., 1969; Greiner and Cummings, 2004; Marrow, 1969). Even today, the concept that groups of workers should have a role in decision-making is a controversial one, yet it underpinned all aspects of OD from its outset (Burnes, 2009a;

Cummings and Worley, 2001; Marrow, 1969, 1972). Lewin had shown that participative management could be effective in a wide range of social and organizational settings, especially in managing and changing group behaviour (Burnes, 2007, 2011d; Lewin, 1943a, 1943b). The benefits claimed for participative management are that it leads to better decision-making, increases group co-operation, performance and commitment, and reduces resistance to change (Bennis et al., 1969; Cartwright and Zander, 1953; Marrow et al., 1967).

Participative management interventions grew rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s (French and Bell, 1999). Studies showed that most employees welcomed the opportunity to participate in decision-making, and that such initiatives led to higher productivity and more satisfied workers (Cartwright, 1951; Cartwright and Zander, 1953; Likert, 1967; Mosely, 1987; Seashore and Bowers, 1970). New tools and systems for analysing and changing management styles began to appear, the main ones being:

> (i) Rensis Likert's 'Systems 1, 2, 3 and 4' with 1 being based on extreme authoritarian principles and 4 on the greatest degree of participation; (ii) Robert Blake's 'Managerial Grid Scale,' 9:9 to 9:1, with 9:9 corresponding to equally strong concern for production and people and 9:1 a concern for production only; (ii) Douglas McGregor's 'Theory X' for the authoritarian approach and 'Theory Y' for the participative approach. (Marrow, 1967: 31)

One of the most wide-ranging participative management interventions in the 1960s was carried out by the Harwood Manufacturing Corporation (Marrow et al., 1967). Over 20 years after it first began using participative management, Harwood was still committed to this approach. When it took over another company, it embarked on an extensive and successful three-year OD effort to inculcate the Harwood culture and approach to management into the newly acquired organization.

By the end of the 1960s, the OD movement had been transformed in terms of the number of practitioners and the range of products. Though the credibility and popularity of T-groups was in decline, the action research–participative management approaches and their underlying values appeared to be growing in strength, and OD dominated the field of organizational change and development (Burke, 2011; Dunphy, 2000; French and Bell, 1973; Greiner, 1967; Krell, 1981; Tannenbaum and Davis, 1969). Though small-scale, local OD initiatives were still the norm, a number of organization-wide OD interventions were emerging (French and Bell, 1999). These strategic change initiatives were recognition that smaller-scale interventions were often hindered by divisional and company-wide structures and large-scale production and process technologies (Burnes, 2009a).

OD was also growing internationally. Whilst the US was the powerhouse for OD, similar developments were happening elsewhere (French, 1982). From the 1940s, the UK's Tavistock Institute of Human Relations had been blending its own psycho-analytic approaches with Lewinian-style ideas to develop, by the end of the 1960s, its own unique 'house style' (Miller, 1977; Neumann, 2005). The Tavistock worked with government bodies and large private organizations, such as Shell (Blackler and Brown, 1980). However, other large UK organizations, such as ICI, preferred to draw on US experience, including experts such as Douglas McGregor and Roger Harrison, the latter also working

with Volvo in Sweden (Harrison, 1995; Pettigrew, 1985). Nor was this one-way traffic: the Tavistock's socio-technical systems approach was taken up in the US by those seeking to promote job redesign and quality of working life (Davis, 1979; Greiner, 1977; Guest, 1957; Trist et al., 1963).

Similarly, the workplace democracy movement in Scandinavia, with its emphasis on the quality of working life, paralleled and informed the participative management and job redesign dimension of OD in the US (Bradbury et al., 2008; Pasmore, 2001). Therefore, OD in Scandinavian countries, as in the UK and the USA, reflected local circumstances and norms rather than following a specific blueprint, especially reflecting the unusually close relationship between employers, unions and governments (Burnes, 2009a).

## The 1970s and 1980s – profit not people

In the 1970s and 1980s, Western companies faced increasing global competition, especially from the Japanese; sharp rises in the price of oil; inflation; unemployment; recession; and dramatic technological change (Greiner and Cummings, 2004; Johnson and Ouchi, 1974; Sheldrake, 1996). After the optimism and idealism of the 1960s, the NTL went bankrupt and had to be relaunched, and large numbers of OD practitioners woke to the realization that companies no longer wanted to experiment with novel OD ideas; they wanted value-for money products that worked (Freedman, 1999). Visionary academics ceased to dominate the field, and the development of OD began to be more influenced by entrepreneurial and pragmatic practitioners who saw the need to transform it into a more hard-headed, results-focused, commercial activity that catered for what companies wanted (Burnes, 2009a; Dent, 2002; Freedman, 1999; Greiner and Cummings, 2004; Herzberg, 1968; Krell, 1981). Therefore, practitioners started to take over the driving seat from academics (Freedman, 1999), but academics still continued to contribute new ideas to the field, especially in terms of large-group/whole-system interventions, such as Beckhard and Harris (1987), Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987), Emery and Trist (1973), Lippitt (1980), Sashkin and Burke (1987) and Weisbord (1987).

This shift of power was signalled in Greiner's (1972) influential article 'Red flags in organizational development', in which he warned that:

> … disturbing symptoms of the failure of current brands of OD have been appearing frequently in research studies, in anecdotal evidence by managers, and in the literature of organizations. (p. 18)

Greiner (1972: 19) went on to say that, 'I wish to raise six red warning flags by questioning six trends that may be preventing the very changes being sought':

- Flag 1: putting the individual before the organization.
- Flag 2: putting the informal before the formal organization.
- Flag 3: putting behaviour before diagnosis.
- Flag 4: putting process before task.
- Flag 5: putting experts before the manager.
- Flag 6: putting the package before the situation.

Greiner's work drew on and reinforced the work of other scholars at this time, especially Lawrence and Lorsch's (1967) development of a contingency perspective on organizational design, Beer and Huse's (1972) systems approach to OD, and Tagiuri's (1968) work on organizational culture and climate.

The era of 'practitioner OD' saw a major attempt to shift the focus from small-group behavioural interventions to more system-wide approaches, which embraced strategy and structure, work processes, organizational effectiveness and the needs of all organizational stakeholders (Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999; Freedman, 1999; Greiner and Cummings, 2004; Pasmore and Fagans, 1992; Sashkin and Burke, 1987; Woodman, 1989). Burnes (2009a) observed that these changes were characterized by four main developments:

- building on socio-technical and contingency theories, OD practitioners came to adopt an open systems perspective that viewed organizations in their totality and within their environments;
- a change of focus from group norms and values to organizational culture;
- a shift of emphasis from group learning to organizational learning;
- devoting increasing attention to organizational transformation rather than just group change.

By the 1980s, OD had assembled a widely used range of tried-and-tested approaches, including practices developed outside the OD field such as Six Sigma, Total Quality Management (TQM) and Business Process Reengineering (BPR) (Burke, 2011; McLean, 2007; Worley and Feyerherm, 2003). However, the most popular approaches still tended to focus on group-level rather than on organization-wide change (Beer and Walton, 1987; Krell, 1981; Porras and Berg, 1978b).

In the rapidly changing organizational landscape of the 1970s and 1980s, transformational change was seen as the order of the day (Greiner and Cummings, 2004). However, OD practitioners' attempts to develop participative transformational approaches tended to be more ambiguous and vague, and less well developed and accepted than the group approaches (Cummings and Worley, 1997; French and Bell, 1995; Golembiewski, 1979; Porras and Robertson, 1987; Sashkin and Burke, 1987). Although the concept of 'getting the whole system in the room' (Weisbord, 1987) is an attractive one, the practical obstacles are difficult to overcome; for example, just because all stakeholders are represented does not mean that all stakeholders have an equal voice (Worley et al., 2011). The dilemma for OD was that its customers wanted large-scale, 'bottom-line'-oriented interventions, but these were less collaborative than its group-based approaches and as such less able to promote its core humanist and democratic values (Bradford and Burke, 2004; Burnes, 2009a; Church et al., 1994; Greiner and Cummings, 2004; Worley and Feyerherm, 2003; Worren et al., 1999). Consequently, the criticism of OD did not diminish (Franklin, 1976; Kahn, 1974; Stephenson, 1975; Strauss, 1976).

However, the fundamental issue was not that OD was being attacked per se, but that newer approaches to organizations and organizational change were emerging that challenged the validity of its democratic-participative approach and offered alternatives. In an era when swift and decisive top-down, imposed change, often involving unpalatable

actions such as closing factories and sacking large numbers of people, was becoming the order of the day, OD's attempts to argue for some element of participation in large-scale change looked increasingly outmoded (Conger, 2000; French and Bell, 1995).

The first signs of this challenge to OD appeared in the 1970s, when academics began to take an interest in the role of power in organizations, especially in terms of organizational change (Pettigrew, 1973, 1980; Pfeffer, 1978, 1981). Although the issue of power had not been prominent in the OD literature, neither was it totally ignored. Lewin's work on racial, religious and industrial conflict clearly dealt with vested interests vying for power (Burnes, 2004b, 2007). Indeed, French and Raven's Power/Interaction Model (French and Raven, 1959; Raven, 1965), on which much of the literature on power and politics is based, owes a great deal to Lewin's work (Raven, 1993). However, in practical terms, proponents of OD were more interested in power equalization than power struggles, and recommended avoiding situations where the former was threatened by the latter (French and Bell, 1973).

Nevertheless, research by Pettigrew (1973, 1980) and Pfeffer (1978, 1981) was beginning to highlight the influence of power on organizational change. Pfeffer took the view that:

> It is difficult to think of situations in which goals are so congruent, or the facts so clear-cut that judgment and compromise are not involved. What is rational from one point of view is irrational from another. Organizations are political systems, coalitions of interests, and rationality is defined only with respect to unitary and consistent ordering of preferences. (Pfeffer, 1978: 11–12)

Based on his study of strategic change at ICI, Pettigrew (1985: 17) went on to reject OD, arguing that 'planned change and innovation is both an inadequate way of theorizing about what actually happens during change processes and an overtly simple guide for action'. He maintained that OD was too rational, linear, incremental and prescriptive, did not pay enough attention to the need to analyse and conceptualize organizational change, and failed to recognize that change processes were shaped by history, culture, context and the balance of power in organizations (Pettigrew, 1985). In its place, Pettigrew (1987: 650) argued for a processualist approach, which sees change as a 'complex analytical, political, and cultural process of challenging and changing the core beliefs, structure and strategy of the firm'. He also maintained that the existing literature on organizational change was largely acontextual, ahistorical and aprocessual.

Nor was Pettigrew alone in offering an alternative to OD. The 1980s also saw a growing interest in ideas drawn from outside the organization field, most notably postmodernism and complexity theories, and the rise from within the field of the culture-excellence movement (Burnes, 2009a). For postmodernists, reality is socially constructed and for this reason they reject what they see as the modernist-rational approach to change by Lewin and the OD movement in favour of an approach that stresses multiple realities (Cooper and Burrell, 1988; Smircich and Calás, 1987). As with processualists, postmodernists also see power as a central feature of organizational change (Hatch, 1997: 367).

Complexity theories attracted the attention of organization scholars and practitioners because they offered the potential of understanding the complexity of organizational life in the same way that natural scientists could understand complex systems in nature (Wheatley, 1992). Under this view, organizations are seen as dynamic non-linear systems, the outcome of whose actions is unpredictable but, like turbulence in gases and liquids, is governed by a set of simple order-generating rules (Burnes, 2005). From this perspective, if organizations are too stable, nothing changes and the system dies; if too chaotic, the system will be overwhelmed by change. In both situations, radical change is necessary in order to create a new set of order-generating rules that allow the organization to prosper and survive (MacIntosh and MacLean, 2001).

Although the processualist, postmodern and complexity approaches to change proved very attractive to organization scholars, they have proved much less attractive to practitioners. As a number of writers, including their proponents, have pointed out, they are strong on analysis and weak on application; in essence they are approaches to understanding organizations and not approaches to changing organizations (Andriopolous and Dawson, 2009; Buchanan and Boddy, 1992; Burnes, 2005, 2009a, 2011e; Collins, 1998). On the other hand, the culture-excellence approach came out of the work of management consultants and academics with their own consulting practices and, as such, was much more geared to the needs of practitioners and managers (Burnes, 2009a). It was launched on the world through Peters and Waterman's (1982) book *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*, which rapidly grabbed the attention of the business world and became the best-selling management book of all time (Collins, 1998, 2000). By equating organizational success with the possession of a strong, appropriate organizational culture, Peters and Waterman offered Western managers a way of competing with the Japanese and re-asserting their industrial and commercial might (Watson, 1997; Wilson, 1992). For proponents of culture-excellence, the organizational world is essentially an ambiguous place where complexity is rife, detailed plans are not possible, and informality, flexibility and rapid, continuous and value-drive change is essential. Instead of close supervision and strict rules, organizational objectives need to be encouraged through loose controls and shared values that encourage autonomy and entrepreneurship (Peters and Waterman, 1982).

The advent of culture-excellence made Tom Peters, arguably, the most influential management guru of the last 30 years (Collins, 2008; Crainer, 1995; Huczynski, 1993). He argued that American organizations needed to transform themselves rapidly if they were to survive, but that this could not be achieved by continuing with past OD-type approaches to change (Peters, 1989, 1993; Peters and Waterman, 1982). Many others took a similar view (Handy, 1984; Kanter, 1983, 1989; Pascale and Athos, 1982), especially Kanter et al. (1992: 10), who argued that:

> Lewin's model was a simple one, with organizational change involving three stages; unfreezing, changing and refreezing … This quaintly linear and static conception – the organization as an ice cube – is so wildly inappropriate that it is difficult to see why it has not only survived but prospered. … Suffice it to say here, first, that organizations are never frozen, much less refrozen, but are fluid entities with many 'personalities'. Second, to the extent that there are stages, they overlap and interpenetrate one another in important ways.

Slow, incremental, and participative change went out of fashion; change had to be fast, furious, and often brutal or, as Peters (1997: 35) put it, 'Destruction is cool'. Top managers came to focus less on people-orientated values and more on 'the bottom line and/or the price of stock … [consequently] some executives [developed] a "slash and burn" mentality' (French and Bell, 1995: 351).

The 1980s saw a powerful consensus build against OD in general and Lewin's work in particular, which led to the eclipse of OD, at least in the academic world, though many managers still used it for small-scale change (Beer and Walton, 1987; Ouchi and Price, 1978). Despite there being distinct differences between the newer approaches to change, not least the prescriptive focus of the culture-excellence approach versus the analytical orientation of the processualists, there were also some striking similarities, which strongly challenged the validity of the planned approach to change. The newer approaches tend to take a holistic-contextual view of organizations and their environments; they challenge the notion of change as an ordered, rational and linear process; and there is an emphasis on change as a continuous process that is heavily influenced by culture, power and politics (Buchanan and Storey, 1997; Burnes, 2009a; Dawson, 1994, 2011; Kanter et al., 1992; Pettigrew, 1985, 1987). By the end of the 1980s, these different strands had loosely coalesced under the umbrella of 'emergent change' (Wilson, 1992).

For Weick (2000: 227), the advantages of emergent change include:

> … sensitivity to local contingencies; suitability for on-line real-time experimentation, learning, and sensemaking; comprehensibility and manageability; likelihood of satisfying needs for autonomy, control, and expression; proneness to swift implementation; resistance to unravelling; ability to exploit existing tacit knowledge; and tightened and shortened feedback loops from results to action.

Emergent change was the first substantial alternative to OD. Indeed, by the end of the 1980s, OD seemed to be in decline and psychologists appeared to have ceded the field of change to sociologists (Bunker et al., 2004; Burnes, 2009a).

To recap, in the 1970s and 1980s, OD became practitioner-driven, though its academic wing still continued to contribute new ideas and models, especially in terms of large-scale, transformational change (Bunker et al., 2004; Bunker and Alban, 2006; Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987; Freedman, 1999; Greiner and Cummings, 2004). However, large-group interventions were not as successful as OD practitioners had hoped, and they appeared to prefer the smaller-scale interventions that promoted OD's traditional democratic-humanist values (Burke, 2011; Greiner and Cummings, 2004; Hurley et al., 1992; Worley et al., 2011). Also, the new OD interventions that had appeared in this period were not supported by the level of research and theory development needed to provide rigour, credibility and effectiveness. This was not surprising in a field that had become practitioner-dominated (Golembiewski, 1979; Porras and Robertson, 1987; Robertson et al., 1993; Sashkin and Burke, 1987). However, OD did not go out of business. Small-scale, Lewinian OD interventions appeared to have become normal practice in many US organizations, and OD had expanded from its original US–UK base into mainland Europe, Japan and Latin America (Beer and Walton, 1987; Faucheux et al., 1982; Sashkin and Burke, 1987).

## The 1990s and the 2000s – the renaissance of organization development

For OD, the 1990s and 2000s saw three apparently separate but parallel developments. The first was that the OD community became embroiled in a turmoil of soul-searching, debate and dispute over the nature and future of OD and its Lewinian heritage (Bennis, 2000; Burke, 1997; Dunphy, 2000; Farias and Johnson, 2000; Hornstein, 2001; Marshak, 1993; Neumann, 2005; Nicholl, 1998a, 1998b; Worley and Feyerherm, 2003). Many commentators were asking if OD had lost its sense of direction or even still existed (Greiner and Cummings, 2004; Wirtenberg et al., 2004), and many managers considered it 'an out-of-date fad' (Porras and Bradford, 2004: 401). In looking back over the period, Korten et al. (2010: 395) summarized the key issues and debates as:

- What is OD and does it have a strong theoretical base?
- Are the values of OD strong and appropriate?
- Does OD add value to organizations?
- Are OD practitioners responsive enough to organizations' needs?
- Does OD have the balance right between 'soft' people concerns and 'hard' economic concerns?
- Should more be done to 'quality-assure' OD practitioners?

OD's crisis of confidence was starkly illustrated in 2004 with the appearance of a special issue of the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* (40/4), which is published by the NTL and has long been considered as the 'house journal' of the OD movement (Pettigrew, 1985: 4). It contained articles by leading figures with titles such as: *Introduction*: *Is OD in Crisis?* (Bradford and Burke, 2004), *Wanted: OD More Alive Than Dead!* (Greiner and Cummings, 2004) and *Ideas in Currency and OD Practice: Has the Well Gone Dry?* (Bunker et al., 2004). As Bradford and Burke (2004: 370) stated in their *Introduction*:

> We would suggest that there is no agreement about what OD is. The field lacks a central, agreed-upon theory of change − or even approach to change.

The second and more positive development was that a new generation of scholars started to take a critical and surprisingly supportive interest in the work of Kurt Lewin. The received wisdom for much of the 1980s and 1990s was that Lewin's work was at best outdated, and at worst had always been wrong (Dawson, 1994; Hatch, 1997; Kanter et al., 1992). However, in 1992 the *Journal of Social Issues* (48/2) published a special issue to mark (belatedly) the centenary of Lewin's birth in 1890. This brought Lewin's work to a new generation and argued that it was still highly relevant to the needs of organizations and society at large, claiming that, '… psychology as a field has moved much closer to Lewin's worldview than it was during his lifetime' (Bargal et al., 1992: 4). Certainly, as Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) show, over the years there have been a number of significant attempts to build on Lewin's 3-Step Model and make it applicable to a wider range of change interventions, especially large-scale ones (see, for example, Cummings and Huse (1989); Galpin (1996); Lippitt et al. (1958)). Perhaps the most

comprehensive was Bullock and Batten's (1985) four-phase model, which was derived from a review and synthesis of over 30 models of planned change. Others have attempted to build links with theories and models from outside OD, such as Peters and Waterman's (1982) work (e.g. Burke and Litwin, 1992). Even the change models of authors who might not be considered as drawing on Lewin's work (e.g. Kanter et al., 1992; Kotter, 1996) bear an interesting resemblance to his unfreezing-moving-refreezing model. This may be why Hendry (1996: 624) commented that:

> Scratch any account of creating and managing change and the idea that change is a three-stage process which necessarily begins with a process of unfreezing will not be far below the surface. Indeed, it has been said that the whole theory of change is reducible to this one idea of Kurt Lewin's …

Indeed, Elrod and Tippett (2002: 288) found support for Lewin's model from unexpected quarters:

> Models of the change process were identified in diverse and seemingly unrelated disciplines [such as bereavement theory, personal transition theory, creative processes, cultural revolutions and scientific revolutions]. Examination of most of these models revealed … most followed Lewin's [1947b] three-phase model of change.

Other writers have also made claims for the continuing relevance of Lewin's work (Boje et al., 2011; Burnes, 2004a, 2007, 2009b, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Burnes and By, 2011; Coghlan and Jacobs, 2005). Burnes (2004b), in a re-appraisal of planned change, also observed that many of Lewin's critics appear to have misread, or perhaps even not read, his work, which has generated a simplistic and misleading picture of Lewin's contribution to the field, something that can still be seen in recent publications (e.g. Thrift, 2005). Therefore, whilst many in the OD community were busy questioning its purpose and values, other scholars, often from outside the community, were rehabilitating Lewin and OD. As with the third development, which follows, this does, of course, raise the issue of where the boundaries of the OD field now lie. We return to this point at the end of this section.

The third development, or rather continuing development, was that OD did not stand still. OD practices were increasingly being incorporated into Human Resource Management (HRM) and Human Resource Development (HRD), creating strong overlaps between the three areas (Grieves and Redman, 1999; Ruona and Gibson, 2004), and the internationalization of OD continued apace (Cummings and Worley, 2009; French and Bell, 1999; Mirvis, 2006; Mozenter, 2002; Piotrowski and Armstrong, 2005; Ramos and Rees, 2008; Rees, 2011; White and Rhodeback, 1992; Wirtenberg et al., 2004). Also, long-standing OD bodies have become increasingly international in their membership and outlook, such as the OD Network, the OD Institute, the International Organization Development Association and the NTL Institute; and newer bodies have been created, including the Asia OD Network. This internationalization of OD was clearly demonstrated by the 2009 special edition of the *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science* (45/2) devoted to the topic and the Global Committee on the Future of Organization Development's survey of OD (Wirtenberg et al., 2007), both of which showed that the global demand for OD-type activities was increasing, especially in

faster-growing economies such as Brazil, Russia, India and China. Some, though, have questioned whether OD is still growing in its traditional markets (Alban, 2003). However, the issue here may be that while some organizations, especially the big consultancies, have shied away from the term OD, they have not necessarily shied away from its practice (see, for example, Human Synergistics International's 'Planned Culture Change' programme, which appears to draw on core OD practices (Jones et al., 2006)). One can also see this rebadging with some scholar-practitioners who use labels such as 'Long March' (Kanter et al., 1992) and 'Theory O' (Beer and Nohria, 2000) for approaches that have a distinctly OD flavour.

In addition, just as different varieties of OD emerged in the US and Europe to reflect differing social and economic conditions, so too is the case now in the many other countries in which OD is active (Neumann et al., 2009; Paquin et al., 2007). Just as importantly, new approaches to OD, often incorporating newer perspectives on the nature of organizational life, such as social contructionism and complexity theories, continues to emerge and be well received (Bushe, 2011; Freedman, 1999; Oswick and Marshak, 2011).

As Freedman (1999) noted, Schein's process consultation, though having been around for many years, found a new audience. Owing to its association with T-groups, it all but disappeared in the 1970s and 1980s, but in the 1990s it was advocated by the UN for use in international development projects (Cooke, 1997; Murrell, 1994). This was not just a reflection of its cross-cultural utility, but also because it was increasingly seen as a social constructionist approach to change (Lambrechts et al., 2009). Process consultation focuses not so much on a particular approach to change or a set of tools; rather it is about the consultant establishing an effective helping relationship with the client organization (Schein, 1999). As Schein (1988: 12) stated, it is based on the 'assumption that all organizational problems are fundamentally problems involving human interactions and processes'. Central to process consultation is the notion that learning and change are interrelated – the client has to learn about themselves and their organization before they can change it. In order to assist in this, the consultant has to establish a dialogue that allows the client to explore their situation and learn more about it.

This idea of dialogue as central to the change process also links process consultation with dialogic OD, which began to gain attention in the 1990s (Dixon, 1998; Oswick, 2009). Some proponents of dialogic OD see it as a transformational process, whereas others see it as a way in which the various parties involved in the change process can gain insights into each other's organizational reality (Barrett et al., 1995; Bushe and Marshak, 2009; Gergen, 1999). Where its proponents see it as distinct from classical 'diagnostic' OD is in its interpretative nature; it draws on the idea that reality is socially constructed and socially negotiated, and that organizations are seen as meaning-making systems (Bushe and Marshak, 2009; Oswick and Marshak, 2011). However, Wooten and White (1999) and others argue that the philosophy of Lewinian OD, with its emphasis on democracy and fairness, fits neatly with the egalitarian nature of postmodern organizations (see Bergquist, 1993; Daft, 1998). Also, as shown earlier when discussing action research, Lewin's (1946) view was that gaining insights and understanding was more important than gathering data and testing solutions.

It may seem strange that OD, which in the 1980s and 1990s was under attack from social constructionist/postmodernist critics (Hatch, 1997), should itself attempt

to incorporate these perspectives (Oswick, 2009). However, a number of leading OD scholars see social constuctionism as a way of providing OD with a more coherent theoretical underpinning (Cummings and Worley, 2009; Marshak and Grant, 2008; Worley and Feyerherm, 2003). As Van Nistelrooij and Sminia (2010) maintain, dialogue is one of the primary methods whereby a plurality of perspectives is created, sustained and revealed, and dialogue is central to many OD techniques. A related area in which supporters of OD have shown an interest is that of organizational storytelling (Rhodes, 2011), which has links with both dialogic OD and social constructionism (Bryant and Wolfram Cox, 2011). Storytelling is seen as enabling the exploration of the dialogic nature of organizations in which the organization is seen a 'multiplicity of discourses' that reflect different perspectives on reality (Grant et al., 1998: 7). In addition, it has much common ground with sensemaking, which has also found favour among proponents of OD (Werkman, 2010).

One of the most prominent new approaches in OD is Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987). As Bushe (2011) states, AI is based on dialogic OD and social constructionist theory. It comprises the Four-D approach: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Deliver/Destiny. Bushe (2011) describes AI as one of the first post-Lewinian OD methods; however, as will be discussed below, this may be something of an exaggeration. Another area in which OD was seemingly incorporating the work of its critics was complexity theories. As discussed in the previous section, it has been argued that organizations, like natural systems, are complex, non-linear systems whose members can shape their present and future behaviour through spontaneous self-organizing that is underpinned by a set of simple order-generating rules (MacIntosh and MacLean, 2001; Stacey, 2003; Wheatley, 1992). Complexity is, therefore, being seen as a way of understanding and changing organizations (Burnes, 2005). Though some have seen the complexity perspective as incompatible with OD, proponents of the latter have come to take a different view (Burnes, 2004a; Olson and Eoyang, 2001; Worley and Feyerherm, 2003).

OD has gone through a period where new approaches have been developed that claim to enable dialogue with multiple stakeholders, engage multiple realities and address the needs of whole systems rather than just parts of them. However, a number of writers question the extent to which these are really new approaches, as opposed to a continuation, extension or development of earlier forms of OD, such as action research, socio-technical systems, strategic change and open-systems planning (Oswick, 2009; Worley and Feyerherm, 2003). Consequently, they argue that these new approaches are not necessarily incompatible with older OD theories and practices (Burnes, 2004a; Oswick, 2009; Van Nistelrooij and Sminia, 2010). For example, AI is a form of action research (Bushe, 2001) and as such one can find strong similarities with Lewin's approach to change (Burke, 2006; Egan and Lancaster, 2005). Indeed, as Freedman (1999) notes, Lewin's original conception of the New Britain workshop bears a striking resemblance to AI.

The main issue that separates those who see these as new approaches from those who see them as extensions of existing ones is their supposedly differing views on the nature of reality. Lewin's work and classical OD are seen as being based on a modernist, unitary view of reality, whilst dialogic OD is based on the multiple-reality perspective of social constructionists and postmodernists (Bushe and Marshak, 2009). However, Van

Nistelrooij and Sminia (2010) paint a very different picture of Lewin and the early proponents of OD − one which sees them as more in line with a social constructionist view of the world. As Burnes (2009a) noted, this stems from the Gestalt psychology, which underpins Lewin's work and argues that individuals and groups see and experience the world from their own perspectives (see Köhler, 1967; Lewin, 1942; Lewin and Grabbe, 1945; Rock and Palmer, 1990). Similar linkages can be made with storytelling approaches to change, as Boje and Rosile (2010) have shown in using Lewin's field theory to develop their approach to storytelling. Finally, as Burnes (2004a) maintains, there are strong links between Lewin's formulation of organizations and that of complexity theorists.

The interplay of the three developments discussed in this section appear to have led to an intellectual renaissance in OD. It has also led to a blurring of the boundaries between OD and other approaches and given rise to a debate about whether to replace OD with a new profession-discipline of 'change management', which could incorporate both business and human needs (Farias and Johnson, 2000; Worren et al., 1999, 2000). Certainly the field of change is much broader now than it was in the 1960s and 1970s when it was almost synonymous with OD. In particular, power and politics have emerged as central concerns for many in the change field (Buchanan and Badham, 1999). In the 1990s, this began to be reflected in the change strategies organizations had at their disposal, ranging from fine-tuning to corporate transformation, and from collaborative to coercive (Dunphy and Stace, 1998; Stace and Dunphy, 1996). As Dunphy and Stace (1993: 905) argued, this did not mean that OD was no longer useful, but that it was not suitable for all change situations:

> Turbulent times demand different responses in varied circumstances. So managers and consultants need a model of change that is essentially a 'situational' or 'contingency model', one that indicates how to vary change strategies to achieve 'optimum fit' with the changing environment.

For Dunphy and Stace (1998: 330) 'the selection of appropriate types of change depends entirely on a strategic analysis of the situation'. They argued that for small-scale, slow change, OD would be appropriate, but that where rapid, dictatorial transformation was required, it would not be suitable. Earlier researchers had also suggested that the effectiveness of OD might be situation-dependent (Alderfer, 1977).

Burnes, in a recent series of articles, has explored this issue in terms of the alignment between the value system underpinning change interventions and of those of the organization undergoing change (Burnes, 2009b; Burnes and By, 2011; Burnes and Jackson, 2011). He points out that OD, with its humanist and democratic values, which promote openness and honesty, is likely to face resistance in organizations that do not have similar values (Burnes, 2009a; Burnes and Jackson, 2011). He also argues that the ubiquitousness of power and politics in the change literature may be blinding academics and practitioners to the ethical shortcomings of some of the approaches they are advocating, and the result is a surprisingly high acceptance of mendacious leadership, systemic mismanagement and greed (Burnes and By, 2011). As Buchanan and Badham (1999: 29) note, the advice seems to be that:

> If all else fails, use dirty tricks such as coercion, undermining the expertise of others, playing one group off against another, and get others to 'fire the bullet'.

Therefore, while acknowledging the difficulty of distinguishing the boundary between OD and other approaches to change, we can see that for Dunphy and Stace the issue is one of fit – OD is more suitable for small-scale rather than large-scale change. For Burnes the issue boils down to one of value alignment – OD is more suitable for organizations that share its values. These are clearly complementary rather than contradictory explanations. Taken together, they help us to distinguish what is, and is not, OD. For example, Kanter et al.'s (1992) 'Bold Strokes' seem to fit with Dunphy and Stace's rapid, dictatorial transformations, and their 'Long Marches' seem to align much more with OD values. Similarly, Beer and Nohria's (2000) 'Theory E' fits into the dictatorial approach, while their 'Theory O' seems more aligned with OD values. In other cases, such as Kotter's (1996) eight-stage transformational change process, the boundary is more blurred, though its similarities with Lewin's 3-step model and promotion of openness and participation may lean it more toward the OD camp.

This section has shown that, while OD in the 1970s and 1980s became more practitioner-driven, the last two decades have seen the baton passed back to academia. This has opened up the possibility that the varying perspectives and approaches to OD can be reconciled. However, as the final section of this article will argue, this is only likely to happen if practitioners and academics are brought back into the same OD fold.

## Conclusion: The future of organization development – to build a better world?

The 'short' history of OD sees it as having its origins in the late 1950s and being in decline by the 1980s. Yet, as we have shown, OD practices, as opposed to the label itself, go back at least to Lewin's work with Harwood in 1939, and, rather than dying out in the 1980s, it is still expanding in terms of theory, practice and its global reach. Our alternative, long history of OD has shown that, since its early beginnings, OD has grown enormously. Moreover, we dispute the claim that today's OD is fundamentally different from the past. We do not see a period when 'classical' OD existed and a period now when 'new' OD holds sway. Rather, we see a continuously evolving body of theory and practice that has proved capable of incorporating and developing new ideas, perspectives and approaches, and discarding old ones as circumstances change (Dent, 2002; Oswick, 2009; Rees, 2011). This continuous evolution is driven by the twin forces of academic rigour and practical relevance.

Competition between rigour and relevance can lead the many individuals, groups and organizations that make up the field to explore dead ends, to take paths that are not compatible with OD's values, and to create dichotomies between theory and practice. It can, and does, also lead to the incorporation of new insights and knowledge and to a recombination of rigour and relevance (Bunker et al., 2004). From the 1990s, academics appear to be in the driving seat as they seek to develop theoretically strong and rigorous approaches to change; in the 1970s and 1980s, it was practitioners seeking to develop approaches relevant to the needs of their clients who took the lead; in the 1960s, we can

see both groups vying for supremacy; but in the 1940s and 1950s, rigour and relevance were not in competition but worked together synergistically.

In the second decade of the 21st century, OD seems to be going through a process of renewal that has the potential to restore the synergistic link between scholars and practitioners. Not only are new ideas and practices emerging that are increasing OD's relevance (Bushe and Marshak, 2009; Oswick and Marshak, 2011), but also there is growing recognition of the importance and relevance of its Lewinian heritage, which is adding to OD's rigour, and symbolizes an increasing desire to learn the lessons of its long history (Boje et al., 2011; Burnes, 2009b; Coghlan and Jacobs, 2005; Elrod and Tippett, 2002). This is especially the case with the relationship between Lewin's Gestalt-based field theory and social constructionism (Burnes, 2011a; Van Nistelrooij and Sminia, 2010). It is also the case that the main challenger to OD, emergent change, seems to have faded as a practical alternative and that its successors, such as complexity theories, appear to be being incorporated into OD (Burnes, 2011b, 2011e). In addition, the various organizational and financial scandals of the past decade have highlighted the importance of ethics and values in organizational life, which gives the original values of OD a renewed relevance (Burnes, 2009b; Burnes and By, 2011; Burnes and Jackson, 2011).

Does this mean we can be more optimistic about the present state and future trajectory of OD? Yes, but − and it is a big but − there are two fundamental issues that OD needs to address.

The first is rigour and relevance. Without a strong theoretical and methodological basis, practice is likely to be flawed and sub-optimal, but without practical relevance, theory has little impact (Bartunek, 2007; Polzer et al., 2009). As this article has shown, the OD field has not stood still in terms of theoretical and practical developments; however, as Worley and Feyerherm (2003) maintain, these have tended to be fragmented and isolated rather than synergistic or co-ordinated. The separation of theory and practice did not exist in the early days of OD, when the influence of Kurt Lewin – *The Practical Theorist* – was still strong (Bunker et al., 2004; Marrow, 1969). However, as in other areas of organizational research and practice, in OD a gap did open up between those seeking a theoretically strong and rigorous OD and those pursuing a practical and relevant OD (Gulati, 2007; Hutton and Liefooghe, 2011; Robertson et al., 1993; Sashkin and Burke, 1987). Yet, as Bunker et al. (2004) and Coghlan (2011) argue, there are signs that both academics and practitioners are once again seeking to work together to promote both rigour and relevance. Certainly, as a survey by Worley and Feyerherm (2003) found, there is a great deal of support for bridging the scholar−practitioner divide. However, this cannot be achieved by a few scholar-practitioners or practitioner-scholars, important though these are (Bartunek, 2007, 2008; Coghlan and Shani, 2009).

What is needed is a genuine commitment by both academics and practitioners to restoring Lewinian rigour and relevance to OD. The credibility of OD depends on being able to demonstrate robustly the effectiveness of the various OD methods, i.e. what works, where does it work and how does it work? Although OD has dominated the field since the 1950s, convincing evidence for its impact, and indeed the impact of any approach to change, is patchy and inconsistent. For example, Pettigrew's (1985: 513) study of OD in ICI concluded with the pessimistic advice 'don't expect too much'; Robertson et al.'s (1993: 627) meta-analytic evaluation supported the 'basic validity' of

OD; while one of the findings of the Global Committee on the Future of Organization Development's survey was that 'OD is not seen as delivering tangible business results' (Wirtenberg et al., 2004: 474). A related issue is that while there are many studies that claim to show that some 70 percent of change initiatives fail, there are few that convincingly explain why this is so (Burnes, 2011c). One of the major problems with the very many studies of change is that researchers are looking at different types of OD, in different organizational contexts and using different methodologies. Evidence suggests that this has led to an over-focus on some issues, such as power (Collins, 1998; Hendry, 1996) and a lack of attention to others, such as value system alignment (Burnes and Jackson, 2011).

There have been attempts to create standard definitions of OD-change interventions and methodologies for analysing their effectiveness in practice. However, when developed by academics (e.g. Bullock and Batten, 1985; Porras and Berg, 1978a), they have not been taken up sufficiently to create the large, longitudinal databases necessary to test them. When undertaken by practitioners, who have the resources to gather such data, they tend to be open to accusations of lack of rigour and being self-serving (IBM, 2008; Jones et al., 2006).

Only by bringing academics and practitioners together in a joint programme of work is such an enterprise likely to achieve credibility and success. Although this may seem a daunting challenge, there are precedents. For example, the GLOBE study of leadership has been running for over 20 years, covers 62 countries, involves around 200 academic co-ordinators, and thousands of managers in hundreds of organizations (Chhokar et al., 2007). Many of the mechanisms necessary to bring together academics, practitioners and organizations to establish a similar OD programme already exist, such as the OD Network, the International Organization Development Association, the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, the Kurt Lewin Institute etc., as does the potential to create new mechanisms, such as 'hybrid fora' (Heracleous, 2011). The key issue is whether the various parties have the motivation to work together to develop 'practical theory'. However, this commitment is unlikely to be gained solely by pursuing the limited aim of achieving organizational effectiveness; instead, the modern OD movement, like its founders, must begin to engage with and be galvanized by the big questions of the day.

The second issue, therefore, is OD's ability and willingness to address these big questions. The origins and early driving force of OD lie in Lewin's passionate, and progressive, belief that only by resolving social conflict, whether it be religious, racial or industrial, could the human condition be improved and totalitarianism eradicated (Burnes, 2004a, b; Cooke, 1999; Lewin, 1943b). In the 1960s, OD continued to address fundamental questions about the nature of society and organizations (Porras and Bradford, 2004; Zand, 2010). Since then, OD has narrowed its ambitions to such an extent that it has been in danger of sacrificing 'the goals of the individuals within the organization' (French and Bell, 1973: xvi) in order to 'enable organizations to be effective' (Cummings, 2005: 25). This has led to accusations, especially from critical management theorists, that it is merely a vehicle for managerialist co-optation (e.g. Cooke, 2007).

Yet there has never been a time when the big questions were more important. The world is running out of natural resources and food, climate change is threatening to destroy the planet, and organizations in large and important sections of our economies seem to have decided that ethics, morality and laws do not apply to them (Burnes, 2009a;

Dunphy et al., 2007; Stiglitz, 2010). Although these developments raise questions for governments, institutions and individuals, it is organizations that are their common categorical denominator, and which therefore have the greatest ability to address them (Dunphy and Griffiths, 1998). This will involve organizations making significant changes to their purpose, operations, behaviour and, above all, the ethical values which underpin these. As Burnes and By (2011) argue, only leaders and organizations with a strong moral compass are likely to be able to resist the siren call of short-term expediency in order to promote long-term sustainability. However, as they also argue, one cannot compel or trick people into behaving ethically: they have to choose to do so. This requires an approach to change that is ethical and allows individuals, groups and organizations to assess their own situation and make their own choices.

Therefore, this is not a situation where rapid restructuring and the introduction of new rules and regulations are likely to achieve the desired behavioural changes: this has been tried in financial services over many years and, as 2008 showed, it failed miserably (Stiglitz, 2010). Kanter et al.'s (1992) 'Bold Strokes' may be necessary in some situations, but they are not sufficient to achieve and sustain behavioural change. However, OD, with its humanist, democratic and ethical values, wide range of participative tools and techniques, and experience in promoting behaviour changes, is ideally placed not just to facilitate the 'Long Marches' such changes require, but also to play a leading role in the movement to a more ethical and sustainable future (Burnes, 2009a; Burnes and By, 2011). Encouragingly, a major survey by the Global Committee on the Future of Organization Development found that: 'leaders across a wide range of industries see increasing opportunities for O.D.-related work that is critical to the future of business and society' (Wirtenberg et al., 2007). This is not surprising given that one of OD's major strengths is the 'values OD brings to practice' (Wirtenberg et al., 2004: 469). However, if it is to bring these values to practice on the scale necessary, OD needs to re-engage with the big questions concerning society and organizations and, in return, this engagement has the power to motivate the practitioner and academic wings of OD to reunite.

This recovery of OD as a progressive social movement is, of course, at odds with the view of OD offered by cultural theorists such as Boltanski and Chiapello (2007), Costea et al. (2008) and Thrift (2005). For them, the culturally managed self, which they see OD as promoting, is not just a defining feature of contemporary soft-capitalism, but one that allows larger-than-individual questions of ethics and sustainability to remain buried. While their arguments are powerful, and perhaps align with critical perspectives on management and OD per se, they are, for all their intellectual roots in post-modernism, grand narratives. One difficulty with grand narratives is that their broad-brush histories tend to eliminate inconvenient details. The question is whether these theorists' history of cultural management, when juxtaposed with our detailed history of OD in this article, is in any sense accurate; and, if not, what the consequence of this might be. For cultural theorists, OD is about making organizations more effective, i.e. profitable, but for Lewin, who lost many of his family in the Holocaust, it was about 'resolving social conflict', extending democracy and defeating totalitarianism in order to build a better world. In the present day, the challenges may be different for OD, but the need to promote ethics and democracy in order to build a better, more sustainable, world remains.

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