"We can ask whether the term 'field' still applies to the varied groups that study and practice in areas related to human beings in organizational settings of all kinds. Is there enough glue to hold us together? Are we willing to tolerate work by others who hold such different values as a representation of anything with which we wish to be associated?"

Deconstructing OD

A Closer Look at the Emergence of OD Values and Their Impact on the Field

By William Pasmore

To understand where we stand, it is often helpful to look to the past. The values held by the founders of our field and the choices that these values shaped have much to do with the ways we view our work. As noted by Burke in his opening essay and confirmed by the research undertaken by Shull, Church, and Burke described herein, we cannot speak of the values held by today's practitioners as if they are universal. In fact, there are distinct factions among us who view the purposes of our efforts quite differently and often with disdain for the actions of others.

It may be comforting to recognize that these tensions have long been a part of the discourse in our field and that they exist for practical as well as philosophical reasons.

In reviewing the then extent literature in the field, Friedlander and Brown (1974) noted that there were two very distinct streams of work that contributed to the accumulated wisdom available to practitioners. They called the first stream "human processual," which included the literature on T-groups, sensitivity training, team building, motivation, conflict resolution, and other topics related to the relationships among people in organizations and society. They named the second stream "techno-structural" as the work there reflected a focus on how organizations were designed and run, including concerns about the proper design of jobs, the optimum utilization of technology, and the creation of high performance work systems. The human processual camp was concerned about doing the right thing, while the techno-structural school was concerned about doing things right.

Friedlander (1976) later wrote about three points of view that underlie OD: the pragmatic, rational, and existential. Pragmatic concerns focus on improving business outcomes, something for which clients are willing to pay. Rational concerns are associated with scientific efforts to understand how change processes work, allowing practitioners to separate well-founded approaches from popular fads. Existential concerns are driven by the desire to contribute to a more just, fulfilling, positive culture, which often means challenging the way power was being used to pursue wealth for the few rather than munificence for all.

These multiple perspectives are reflected in the literature of the field. McGregor (1960) introduced us to Theory X and Theory Y, the latter being a more enlightened view of human beings at work. Bennis (1966) passionately advocated for more democratic organizations until a funny thing happened on the way to the future (1970); Argyris (1970) helped us understand that there could be no commitment to change without free choice; Walton (1985) described high performance work systems that were based on commitment rather than control; Trist and others brought forward the notion that no system could perform at its best unless there was joint optimization of human needs and technical capabilities (Trist, Higgin, Murray, & Pollock, 1963); Maslow (1954) made each of us wonder what we must do to achieve self-actualization; Weisbord (1987)

called for getting the whole system in the room to make decisions about futures held in common; and Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) said we spend too much time dwelling on problems instead of capitalizing on the life-giving forces that emanate from an examination of things that are working well. Blake and Mouton (1964) brought us the managerial grid; Deming (1986) and Juran (1988) introduced us to total quality; Hammer and Champy (1993) to reengineering; and Galbraith (1977) to processes for organization design. Lewin (1951), Lippit, Watson, and Westley (1958), Burke (1982), Bridges (1991), and Kotter (1996) examined change processes, while Likert (1961) and Nadler (1977) helped us understand how to collect data and feed it back to create powerful interventions.

Tools, training, and resources were provided by University Associates, CPP, NTL, the Tavistock Institute, numerous university-based programs, and individual practitioners promoting their wares. The field grew from a handful of pioneers in academia, industry, and government to a massive and highly differentiated collection of diverse scholars and practitioners making their home in everything from their individual practices, academic institutions, military and government organizations, to huge consulting firms.

At some point during this growth, people could no longer keep up with the field as a whole, nor could they ascribe to the values held by some of their contemporaries. One's definition of the field and estimation of its contributions depended on the perspective one took. Unlike medicine which also grew in size and complexity during the same period, OD no longer had a single, fundamental, easily understood reason for existence. OD had fractured to the point that some questioned whether the field still existed or could survive (Bradford & Burke, 2005).

Where we stand today is the result of this differentiated growth. We can ask whether the term "field" still applies to the varied groups that study and practice in areas related to human beings in organizational settings of all kinds. Is there enough glue to hold us together? Are we willing to tolerate work by others who hold such

different values as a representation of anything with which we wish to be associated?

The fundamental tension captured by Friedlander and Brown still exists. Those who are primarily driven by wanting to do the right thing may detest those who work for profit, while those who want only to do things the right way may question the value added by their "touchy-feely" counterparts. Regardless of whether those who want to do the right thing and those who are concerned about doing things right can stand each other's company, they must co-exist in the same space, often bumping up against

protecting individuals and societies from oppression by privileged, profit-oriented, self-protective elites. They understand that to do this, they must gain entry and remain engaged with elites. Herb Shepard's first rule for change agents was "stay alive" (Shepard, 1975). Despite the need for establishing a partnership, the humanistic faction have in mind changing their partners, helping them to learn and grow by demonstrating the value of leading with the heart rather than the pocketbook in mind.

At the other end of the spectrum is the bottom line/efficiency faction, who

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one another for clients' attention or defining the next important breakthrough in the field. The reason that this tension cannot be resolved is that each segment of the field holds attraction for different stakeholders, whose voice and influence matter.

To explore this, it is necessary to deconstruct the field so that it does not appear as unitary in its orientation as it once appeared to be. One way to do this is shown in *Table 1*, with apologies up front to each person or group who feels that I have misplaced, misunderstood, or maligned their work or intentions.

The humanistic/altruistic faction is made up of those who lead with their values first, tracing their roots to Lewin and his experiments in social justice, human relations, and leadership. Even though their work often involves efforts in the corporate sector, their primary motivation is to create a better world. They intend to make organizations safe for human beings,

put their clients' priorities ahead of their values. What is important is to help clients succeed. How clients manage people and whether they care at all about them is irrelevant unless involving people in certain ways reduces costs or improves efficiency. Usually, when there is a need to involve people in total quality or lean manufacturing, it is for what they know or can contribute rather than for their commitment or well-being. Following this path of giving the customer what they want has been enormously successful of late, as is clear from the size of the major consulting firms that do this. Lewinians may bemoan the fact that the field has lost its heart but it's undeniable that clients are making the choice to work with the bottom line folks with their pocketbooks.

In between the two extremes is a faction that borrows a bit from both and adds something unique of its own. The whole systems faction is composed of scholarly

Table 1. *Three distinct factions within OD*

	Humanistic/Altruistic	Whole Systems	Bottom line/Efficiency
Primary Objectives	Self-actualization, more humanistic workplaces, improved teamwork, self-awareness, achieving human potential, collaboration, and discovering common ground.	Improved system functioning, sustainable outcomes, high commitment and high performance, and scientific proof.	Immediate bottom line results.
Representative Interventions	T-groups, team building, coaching, survey-feedback, employee engagement, training, environmental sustainability, diversity, positive psychology, and search conferences.	Sociotechnical systems, high performance work systems, talent development/succession planning, innovation, change leadership, customer focus, rewards, vision, culture, and design thinking.	Reengineering, total quality, rightsizing, organization design, strategy, M&A, goal setting, performance management, change management for ERP installations, and selection/assessment.
Relationship to Authority	Distant, "HR types," and anti-authority.	Objective partnership in the service of finding answers.	Subordinate, project executors, and operational.
Reputation	Touchy feely, soft-hearted, people before profit, and unreliable.	Balanced, people & profit, innovative, impractical, too academic, and theoretical vs. practical.	Cold, dispassionate, profit before people, reliable but cutthroat.
Home Base for External Practitioners	Academic, individual practitioners, and small firms.	Mixed private practice and universities.	Large firms.
Knowledge Base	Group dynamics, human potential, individual and organizational psychology, and organizational behavior.	Systems, strategic HR, social sciences, and inter-disciplinary.	IT, quality, I/O psychology, business, engineering, and MBAs.
Orientation	Human development and change leadership.	Performance breakthroughs.	Change management and project execution.
Slogan	Do the right thing.	Do what is possible and proven.	Do things right.
Friedlander (1976) Designation	Existentialists.	Rationalists.	Pragmatists.

practitioners and practical scholars who are interested in how systems work, proving what works through scientific evidence, and inventing the next breakthrough. They are often critical of the work of the other factions or find ways to examine their work through another lens. Bushe and Marshak (2009) are representative of this faction. Their work on dialogic OD informs us of important underlying processes of which we were previously unaware; yet both humanists and bottom-line practitioners may carry on without insights about dialogics affecting much of what they do. The whole systems factions wants to look at things from every angle in order to understand how and why systems operate as they do, in the service of understanding how systems can be designed to produce optimal levels of social well-being and technical performance.

If, for a moment, we entertain the possibility that the field is made up of these three factions rather than one, we can understand that the question of whether the field has lost or maintained its values is really a question of your own vantage point and value preferences. The values that underlie humanistic practice still exist, but strongly embedded in a faction that speaks rarely to those with a primary concern for the bottom line (doing the right thing versus doing things right). The third faction of scholar-practitioners or practical-scholars are less concerned with what is right or how to do things right than they are with what is true and what is possible. We now see in these three factions the constituencies that Friedlander called out: the existentialists, the pragmatists, and the rationalists. While none of these factions may wish to be associated with the others, it seems that as the field has evolved, it hasn't departed from its origins very much after all.

The question of where the field should go is also open to debate and that debate will be shaped by the forces in the market, which have not changed. Where there is oppression, efforts will be made to introduce social justice. Where there is money to be made, there will be those who pursue it. And when there is a call for a new perspective to advance the field, there will

be those dedicated to providing thought leadership. In our dreams, we hope for the true integration of these factions, leading to a unified practice that could incorporate the best of all worlds, allowing us to sleep well with clear consciences while living comfortably and continuing to grow and learn. It is unlikely that that integration will take place until we are able to bring the factions into closer conversation despite their different perspectives and priorities. In the meantime, we can continue to dream.

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