Characteristics of Successful and Unsuccessful Organization Development*

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A comparison between 11 organizations with successful OD efforts and 14 organizations with unsuccessful efforts reveals characteristics identifiable with each category. Eight major clusters of characteristics served as the foci for the comparison: 1) the organization's environment, 2) the organization itself, 3) initial contact for the OD projects, 4) formal entry procedures and commitment, 5) data-gathering activities, 6) internal and 7) external change-agent characteristics, and 8) exit procedures.

Results indicated an absence of single dimensions that are either essential or sufficient to distinguish between the successful and unsuccessful organizations. Three general areas, however, did serve to differentiate organizations in the two categories: 1. Organizations that are more open to and involved in adjusting to change are more likely to be successful in their OD effort than are those that are more stable and status-quo oriented. 2. Internal change agents who are more carefully selected, did not receive training prior to the current OD efforts, and who possess assessment-prescriptive skills are most evident in the successful organizations. 3. More specific interest in and greater commitment to the OD projects are associated with successful change.

Implications for managers and consultants interested in applying these findings to increase the likelihood of success in OD projects are explored, with consideration given to the importance and alterability of each characteristic.

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The manager or consultant eager to utilize the accumulated social science knowledge to improve organizational functioning soon realizes that the characteristics of effective organizations are far better understood than are the means for imparting such characteristics to organizations. The field of research and practice devoted to the utilization of social science knowledge for organizational development (OD) has been characterized by extensive efforts in developing intervention strategies and techniques, but is nearly void of evaluations useful to managers or consultants for selecting and applying these interventions.

THE PROBLEM

The absence of knowledge involves two related but somewhat distinct issues. The first is the identification of approaches to OD that are generally more effective than others regardless of the situation in which they are applied. Such identification requires an examination of the comparative effects of several change strategies across a number of different organizational settings. Only one study of this nature has been reported thus far (Bowers, 1973). This investigation examined OD efforts in 23 organizations subjected to one of four "experimental" treatments or one of two "control" treatments. Differences were identified across strategies; however, the results also indicate that strategies may be more or less effective under varied conditions or in different situations. Specifically, Bowers noted that Organizational Climate—i.e., social-psychological conditions internal to the organization which influence behaviors and attitudes—affected the outcomes of the OD strategies.

This highlights the second issue, concerning factors having a general influence over the success or non-success of OD efforts regardless of the application of any particular change strategy or technique. That is, just as some specific *strategies* were found to be generally more effective than others, it may be possible to identify *characteristics of the organization* and the development process that influence the success of OD activities. Two studies have addressed this issue. Greiner (1967) examined 18 cases of organizational change to conclude:

1. Successful change depends basically on a *redistribution of power* within the structure of an organization.
2. Power redistribution occurs through a *developmental process of change* (p. 126).

Greiner also identified six phases serving to describe change processes in the successful efforts: 1) Pressure & Arousal, 2) Intervention & Reorientation, 3) Diagnosis & Recognition, 4) Intervention & Commitment, 5) Experimentation & Search, 6) Reinforcement & Acceptance.

In the second study, Buchanan (1971) examined 10 cases (seven success-

ful and three unsuccessful) to identify crucial aspects of the OD process. Although an initial listing included 33 issues, only three emerged as central when the successful cases were compared with unsuccessful:

1. Introducing a new model of operation which the members of an organization can consider* as a basis for formulating improvement goals regarding a dimension or operation which is central to the performance of the operation.

2. Sequencing objectives and action steps in such a way that linkage is established between the initial point of change and other persons, parts, and dimensions of operation *internal* to the target system.

3. Sequencing objectives and action steps in such a way that linkage is established between the initial point of change and other persons, parts, and dimensions of the *external* system with which the target system has important interdependency (p. 397).

Although these studies provide many useful insights, neither investigation encompasses the range of issues or type of evaluation needed to assess the importance of various factors that figure in a successful OD effort. Specifically, the issues addressed in each study focus on the processes of change, while conditions of the organizations and their environments (economic, geographical, scope of the market) are largely ignored. This seems an especially critical omission in light of findings such as those of Hulin and Blood (1968), suggesting that responses to OD interventions may be associated with such factors as the urban or rural location of the organization.

The selection of organizations included in the Greiner and Buchanan studies also is a cause for concern. Each author was largely dependent on documentation supplied by others familiar with the actual projects. This is especially troublesome in identifying and understanding unsuccessful efforts, which, more often than not, remain undocumented. And, in the cases of both reported unsuccessful and successful efforts, consideration need be given to the motivations for such documentation. Beyond the selection problem, any attempt to elicit a coherent and integrated picture is thwarted because most researchers are forced to rely on nonstandardized information supplied by a variety of individuals as a basis for comparisons across organizational settings.

Yet, while it is easy to criticize the lack of research differentiating successful from unsuccessful OD, the scarcity of such studies also is understandable. Typically, a single consultant or researcher has access to very limited numbers or types of organizations, and the nature and form of information gathered in each organization differs. This results in a lack of information comparable across organizations and useful in formulating generalizations concerning OD efforts. As Kahn (1974) notes, the outcome is that even those few characteristics which have been tentatively identified as critical to success in OD have not been carefully evaluated.

SAMPLES AND PROCEDURES

In a partial attempt to overcome these and other problems encountered in studies of organizational change, a project was begun in 1966 by staff from the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. The goals, procedures, and general organization of this effort are described elsewhere (Bowers, 1971, 1973), but a few key points are worthy of note here. These include (a) the development and use of a common questionnaire instrument (The Survey of Organizations), (b) involvement of participating organizations in OD activities (except a few organizations used as "controls"), and (c) research activities in conjunction with the OD project.

The research aspect of these efforts differed somewhat from organization to organization. At a minimum there was a questionnaire-based data-gathering activity at the outset of the effort followed by a second similar data collection near the conclusion of the projects. In addition to the two waves of questionnaire data, other research activities included a continuous monitoring of OD events and their impacts on attitudes and performance. Data were obtained through written reports supplied by external and internal change agents, tape recordings of key meetings, interviews with change agents and samples of organizational members, and personnel and performance records. There was a concerted effort in these OD projects to provide adequate resources to both the action and research activities. In some projects attempts were made to maintain a balance between the two potentially competing types of activities by separating responsibility for each area between different individuals. In other projects the same individual(s) assumed responsibility for maintaining balance between the development and research emphases.

At the time of the present study, 25 organizations participating in the original and subsequent efforts had provided at least two waves of data useful for evaluation. These were business organizations representing several industries, including insurance, paper, chemicals, petroleum refining, aluminum, automobiles, glass, and household products. The development efforts in these organizations varied from organization to organization; however, the major strategies and techniques were classified according to four "treatments" (Survey Feedback, Interpersonal Process Consultation, Task Process Consultation, and Sensitivity Training/T Groups) and two "controls" (Data Handback and No Treatment) described by Bowers (1973).

The 25 organizations were separated into two groups classified as "successful" and "unsuccessful." The "unsuccessful" included those organizations which did not change and those which changed for the worst. "Success" and "unsuccess" were based on changes in 16 survey indices tapping five major aspects of organizational conditions (climate), practices and behaviors (four measures of supervisory leadership, four measures of peer

leadership, and one measure of group processes), and satisfaction.[1] The procedure for classifying each organization into one of the two groups included five steps:

1. Each of the 16 indices in each organization was *judged as increasing, remaining the same, or decreasing* based on the direction of change from the first to the second survey.

2. For each organization, a count was made of the number of indices which increased, remained the same, or decreased and the *predominant direction of change across indices was noted.*

3. *Significance of the number of indices moving in the predominant direction* was then evaluated using the Sign Test (Siegel, 1956, pp. 68-75).

4. Where the confidence of change in a particular direction was beyond the 5 per cent level, the *organization was judged to have moved* in that direction ("increased" or "decreased"). Where the significance of the predominant direction was not established by this criterion, the *organization was judged not to have changed.*

5. The 11 organizations where the predominant direction was significant in the direction of an increase were *placed into the "successful" group.* The 14 remaining organizations were *classified as "unsuccessful."*

This procedure leads to classifications of "success" only when the change is positive across many areas of the organization (e.g., not limited to a few groups or one or two departments) and involves several aspects of organizational functioning (e.g., conditions, practices, reactions).

Comparisons were made between these two groups across several characteristics. In cases where the characteristics were scored with an appropriate scale, the Student T-test procedure was used to evaluate possible differences between the two groups. In instances where nominal levels of measurement were used and where statistical tests were desirable and useful, the Fisher Exact Probability Test was employed (Siegel, 1956, pp. 96-104). In those instances where the data did not permit or require such analyses, the distributions were explored across variables for organizations in the successful and unsuccessful groupings.

Characteristics Investigated

The characteristics investigated fell into eight major categories: 1) characteristics of the *organization's environment,* 2) *characteristics of the organization* itself, 3) *initial contact* between development/research personnel and members of the organization, 4) formal *entry* procedures and commitment, 5) *data-gathering* activities and posture of organizational members toward them, 6) characteristics of the *internal change agents* (ICAs), 7) characteristics of the *external change agents* (ECAs), and 8) *exit procedures.*

[1]The indices are described by Taylor and Bowers (1972).

Each of these categories in turn included several dimensions. These dimensions are listed with each of the major categories below:

1. *Organization's Environment*
   a. Geographical location—Northeast, North Central, West, Deep South, Other South
   b. Scope of the market—Local, Regional, National
   c. State of the market between surveys—Declining, Steady, Increasing
   d. Origin of labor pool—Rural, Town, Suburban, Large City
   e. Industrial pay rate—Low, Moderately Low, Moderate, Moderately High, High
   f. State of the industry—Declining, Established, New

2. *Organizational Characteristics*
   a. Industry—Insurance, Automotive, Petrochemical, Consumer Household Products, Forest Products, Conversion
   b. Function—Administrative/Clerical, Marketing/Sales, Continuous Process Manufacturing, Large Batch Manufacturing, Fabrication, Assembly Line
   c. Work force—Union, Nonunion
   d. Innovative reputation—Innovative, Noninnovative
   e. Total number of people surveyed at each time
   f. Per cent change in total number from first to second survey
   g. Total number of groups surveyed at each time
   h. Per cent change in groups from first to second survey
   i. Number of organizational levels at the time of each survey
   j. Per cent change in number of levels
   k. Number of line groups at each time
   l. Per cent change in line groups
   m. Number of line individuals at each time
   n. Per cent change in line individuals
   o. Number of staff individuals at each time
   p. Per cent change in staff individuals
   q. Number of persons in top group at each time
   r. Per cent change in numbers of people in the top management group
   s. Per cent change in actual people in the top management group (continuity)

3. *Initial Contact*
   a. Initiator of the initial contact from the organization to the research/development personnel—Company President, Plant Manager, Corporate Manager, Personnel/OD Director
   b. Negotiation period between initial contact and contract acceptance—Months

4. *Entry and Commitment*
   a. Reasons for organization's interest in a development/research effort—Wanted to be seen as innovative, Heard of or prior contact with development/research staff, Specific problem, General (undefined) problem, Wanted to experiment with new ideas
   b. Extent of commitment to activities other than the initial survey—Resurvey, Restructuring, Survey Feedback, Survey Feedback and Process Consultation
   c. Length of time committed to future activities—0-1 yr, 1-2 yrs, 2-4 yrs, 4-5 yrs.
   d. Extent of support received from top management—1 to 5 scale
   e. How the development/research staff were introduced to organizational members—During general presentation of development/research plan, Self-introduction, During survey administration

5. *Data Gathering*
   a. Number of total population and sample surveys

   b. Year of the initial survey
   c. Number of sample data collections
   d. Elapsed time between surveys
   e. Reasons for second data collection—Original commitment for evaluation, Benchmark
   f. Credibility of the survey instrument among organizational members—1 to 5 scale
6. *Internal Change Agents (ICA)*
   a. Responsibility for ICA selection—Management, Development/Research Staff
   b. Extent of Knowledge—1 to 5 scale
   c. Value orientation—Task, Interpersonal, Self
   d. Quality of skills—1 to 5 scale
   e. Types of skills—Presence or absence of: Interpersonal, Structural Analysis, Persuasion, Laboratory Training/T Group, Perceptual Confrontation, Diagnosis, Political Savvy
   f. Types of non-change-agent job experience—Line, Personnel, Line and Personnel
   g. Extent of change-agent experience—1 to 4 scale
   h. Posture toward research—Negative, Neutral, Positive
   i. Change-agent style—Catalyst, Transducer
   j. Prior training as change agent—Yes, No
7. *External Change Agents (ECA)*
   a. Responsibility for ECA selection—All selected by the research institution
   b. Extent of knowledge—1 to 5 scale
   c. Value orientation—Task, Interpersonal, Self
   d. Quality of skills—1 to 5 scale
   e. Types of skills—Presence or absence of: Interpersonal, Structural Analysis, Persuasion, Laboratory Training/T Group, Perceptual Confrontation, Diagnosis, Political Savvy
   f. Type of previous job experience—Line, Personnel, Line and Personnel
   g. Posture toward research—Negative, Neutral, Positive
   h. Change-agent style—Catalyst, Transducer
8. *Exit Procedures*
   a. Pace and planning of termination—Gradual/Planned, Abrupt/Planned, Gradual/Unplanned, Abrupt/Unplanned
   b. Reasons for termination—Lack of Support from key managers, Change in organization's priorities, Change in research institute priorities, Organization's perceptions of project failure, Phobic reaction to prolonged involvement with outsiders, Organization internalized change activities
   c. Attitude of organization at termination—Negative, Neutral, Positive

Ratings of each area were determined by a compilation of records kept by the development/research staff, and the accumulated memory of key development/research personnel. No rating was provided where records or memories were unclear or information was not available.

RESULTS

Each dimension in the eight major categories was evaluated to determine characteristics common to the total array of 25 organizations and to compare differences between the 11 successful and 14 unsuccessful organizations. In this section we will provide summaries to identify those characteristics

which do and do not differentiate between the two groups of organiza-
tions. We will also note cases where trends exist but statistical differences
did not reach the designated level ($p < .05$) of significance.

Organization's Environment

Of the six characteristics included in this category, three exhibited differ-
ences between the successful and unsuccessful organizations and three dem-
onstrated no differences between the two groups. Those with no notable dif-
ferences included the 1) geographical location, 2) state of the industry, and
3) scope of the market (however, the successful organizations were somewhat
more evident in the larger—i.e., national vs. regional—markets). Differ-
ences were found in 1) the state of the markets, 2) sources of labor, and 3)
industrial pay rates (see Table 1). These differences indicated the following:

- Where change was unsuccessful—i.e., negative or neutral—the organ-
  ization was more likely to be in a steady than an increasing or decreas-
  ing market (11 of 14 cases), whereas successful organizations—i.e.,
  those changing in the positive direction—were slightly more likely to
  exist in an expanding market (6 of 11 cases).
- In successful organizations the labor pool was most likely to be from
  suburban areas near large cities (6 of 11) while other organizations
  were most likely to draw their labor from towns (11 of 14).
- The industrial pay rates of successful organizations was higher than
  that for unsuccessful organizations ($\overline{X} = 3.67$ vs. 2.59).

Organizational Characteristics

The majority of organizational characteristics revealed differences be-
tween the successful and the unsuccessful organizations. An exception was
in the area of organizational size, where only one significant difference
between the two groups was revealed. Even in this area, however, there was
a strong trend indicating that larger organizations were more likely to be
successful in their OD endeavors than smaller ones.

Statistically significant differences indicated the following:

- Insurance organizations were overrepresented in the unsuccessful group
  (10 of 14) and underrepresented in the successful group (1 of 11).
- On the average the successful organizations had more levels of hier-
  archy than the unsuccessful organizations (5.33 vs. 4.21).
- Successful organizations were most strongly represented in heavy in-
  dustry (9 of 11) and unsuccessful organizations were most evident in
  office and sales functions (11 of 14).
- Union and nonunion organizations occurred with approximately equal
  frequency in the successful grouping (5 vs. 6); however, all 14 organ-
  izations in the unsuccessful group were nonunion.

- More organizations with innovative reputations fell in the successful group (8 of 11) than the unsuccessful group (3 of 14); and more organizations with noninnovative reputations were associated with the unsuccessful (11 of 14) grouping than the successful (3 of 11).

Initial Contact

Neither the position of the individual initiating the contact between the development/research staff and each organization nor the length of the time in negotiations varied significantly between the successful and unsuccessful organizations.

Entry and Commitment

Most aspects of the entry procedure and extent and type of commitment did reveal differences between the successful and the unsuccessful categories. Those that did not differentiate were an interest in a development/research effort based on a desire to be seen as innovative, and commitment at the outset to (a) resurvey (all but three organizations were committed), (b) restructuring of the organization (only one made such a commitment), and (c) survey feedback combined with process consultation (only one of 10 successful organizations was committed to this type of intervention, but unsuccessful organizations were split about evenly between those committed and those not committed).

Those factors demonstrating statistically significant differences between the successful and unsuccessful organizations included:

- Having had prior contact with the development/research staff was characteristic of the successful organizations (8 of 11) and was not typical of the unsuccessful organizations (2 of 14).
- Wanting to experiment with new ideas was about equally split among successful organizations (5 of 11) but was only present in one of the 14 unsuccessful organizations.
- The expression of a general problem was a reason for interest in 11 of the 14 unsuccessful organizations but was not evident in any successful organization.
- Having a specific problem was a reason for interest in development activities in only one of the unsuccessful organizations, but this was a prime motivator for 8 of the 11 successful organizations.
- A commitment to Survey Feedback activities was present for 10 of the 11 successful organizations but only for 2 of the 12 unsuccessful organizations.
- No successful organizations were committed to more than 4 years of development/research activities, but five in the unsuccessful group were committed for more than 4 years.

- Top managers extended greater support to the effort in the successful organizations than in the unsuccessful organizations ($\overline{X}=4.40$ vs. 3.36).
- In 9 of the 11 successful organizations the development/research staff was introduced to members of the organization as part of a presentation describing the total development effort. In 10 of the 12 unsuccessful organizations this took the form of self-introduction by members of the development/research staff.

Data Gathering

Neither the number of total or sample data collections, the time elapsing between waves of data collection, nor the reasons for the second wave of survey data collections revealed significant differences between the successful and unsuccessful organizations. Slight differences were found in one area indicating that the survey instrument enjoyed a bit more initial credibility in unsuccessful organizations than in successful organizations.

One significant difference indicated:

- Organizations beginning their development/research projects (i.e., having the first survey data collected) more recently were more likely to be in the successful grouping and less likely to be in the unsuccessful grouping.

Internal Change Agents

Most of the 25 organizations had members of the organizations designated as "internal change agents" (ICAs). These individuals helped guide the development efforts through a variety of activities including the administration of surveys, scheduling and facilitating group meetings, and training other members of the organization in various areas. Not all participating organizations had individuals in this role and others had several such individuals. Eight of the successful organizations and 12 of the unsuccessful organizations included one or more internal change agents. In those instances where an organization had two or more such persons, a rating was assigned to represent an average.

The majority of areas investigated with respect to internal change agents revealed no distinctions between the successful and the unsuccessful organizations. These areas included: 1) who selected the ICAs, 2) the extent to which they were knowledgeable about organizational functioning and change agentry, 3) their overall skill levels and most of the specific skill areas, 4) basic value orientation, 5) previous non-change-agent experience (however, 80 per cent of the unsuccessful group had ICAs with experience only in a personnel department), 6) previous change-agent experience, 7) posture toward research activities, and 8) preference for catalyst or transducer change-agent styles.

However, some areas did provide distinctions between the successful and

unsuccessful organizations. These indicated that *internal change agents in the successful organizations*:

- Were more carefully selected ($\overline{X}$ = 2.75 vs. 1.71)
- Had assessment-prescriptive skills whereas ICAs in the unsuccessful organizations did not (7 of 8 vs. 2 of 8).

In contrast, it was found that *ICAs in the unsuccessful organizations:*

- Received more change-agent training previous to these development efforts than did the ICAs in the successful organizations (11 of 12 vs. 3 of 8).
- Had more previous work experience in personnel departments (8 of 10).

External Change Agents

Ten of the 11 successful organizations and 10 of the 14 unsuccessful organizations had, in addition to ICAs, one or more external change agents (ECAs). These were all management consultants and change agents not directly employed by the organizations. No significant differences were revealed between the successful and unsuccessful organizations on the bases of examining various characteristics of the ECAs.

Termination Procedures

None of the aspects of project termination (e.g., disengagement of the development/research staff from the organization) distinguished well between the successful and unsuccessful organizations. This is perhaps surprising in light of the differences in project success as indicated by the survey measures. Most notable are the *lack of differences* in: 1) the attitude of upper level managers toward the projects and 2) termination on the basis of perceived project failure.

Caveats Concerning Interpretation

Any attempt to integrate and interpret these data must be recognized as a formidable and somewhat risky endeavor. Beyond the more common problems including measurement error and the limited sample sizes are two potentially troublesome issues concerning (a) the lack of differentiation between more and less important characteristics distinguishing between successful and unsuccessful organizations (although it is recognized that some characteristics may be important ingredients of successful change while others simply add a small degree to the probability of success, this issue is not faced in the current research); and (b) most characteristics have been treated more or less independently even though it is evident that they are not totally independent of one another (e.g., office and sales organizations can not really be disassociated from insurance companies).

These and other issues suggest caution in drawing conclusions from the results. Yet the risks inherent in attempts to extract meaning from these

data are warranted by the lack of empirically supported knowledge, or even formal theory, regarding characteristics associated with successful and unsuccessful utilization of the existing body of social science knowledge for the improvement of organizational functioning.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

To facilitate a summarization of the results, two separate groups of characteristics have been identified on the basis of whether or not they serve to differentiate between the successful and unsuccessful organizations. Table 1 presents the characteristics that did not serve to distinguish between the two categories, in conjunction with those that did. At least three reasons may explain why some characteristics did not differentiate.

1. In some cases the variance for the characteristic was greatly limited across the organizations [e.g., the preponderance of organizations in a "stable" state (N = 21) as opposed to "declining" (N = 3) or "new" (N = 1) industries].[2]

2. Strong trends indicative of differences may have existed but the statistical analyses did not produce the designated level of significance.[3] In this vein it is prudent to remember that although the use of statistical tests for separating important from unimportant characteristics simplifies the effort and is convenient, it is also somewhat artificial and the choice of levels of statistical significance is arbitrary. This issue is further compounded in the present study by (a) the levels of measurement available for some characteristics and (b) the relatively small number of cases (N = 25) and large number of variables (characteristics).

3. The final possible reason for finding no difference is that the particular characteristic in fact has no strong association with one category at the exclusion or near exclusion of the other; that is, the characteristic truly is not associated with successful or unsuccessful OD efforts.

The main function of Table 1 is to present those characteristics that served to differentiate between the successful and unsuccessful organizations, for they hold the most interest; but in attempting to produce a coherent picture from all of the data, it is important also to keep in mind the characteristics from Table 1 (see footnote b) showing strong *trends* toward differentiating the successful from the unsuccessful organizations.

Three major areas of differences result from an examination of Table 1: 1) *the stability of the organization and posture toward change,* 2) *the specificity of interests and commitment to the development/research effort, and* 3) *characteristics of the internal change agents.*

[2]Noted by an "a" in Table 1.
[3]Noted by a "b" in Table 1.

Several of the characteristics indicating significant differences and sug-
gesting trends toward differences in Table 1 show that those organizations
which are more stable or status-quo oriented are less likely to be successful
in their OD efforts than are those which are expanding and more open to
and involved in adjusting to change. These differences are indicated by the
facts that the unsuccessful organizations were associated with steady market
situations, noninnovative reputations, and a lack of motivation to experi-
ment with new ideas. In contrast, the successful organizations were charac-
terized by involvement in expanding markets which tended to be more na-
tional than regional in scope and which possessed more innovative reputa-
tions. In addition, the successful organizations tended to be larger and to
have more levels of hierarchy than those in the unsuccessful group.

The second area of major differences between the successful and unsuc-
cessful organizations is in the specificity of interest in and commitment to
the development/research effort. Various characteristics indicated that more
specific interests and greater commitment were associated with the success-
ful organizations. The specificity of interest in the successful organizations
included having identified a specific problem (e.g., increasing quality rejec-
tions, decreasing productivity, increasing grievance rates), having previous
contact with and knowledge of the development/research staff, and being
committed to at least one specific development strategy. In the unsuccessful
organizations motivation for involvement in the OD efforts arose from iden-
tification of a general problem (e.g., poor human relations, antiquated prac-
tices and procedures); and there was neither prior contact with the develop-
ment/research staff nor commitment to any specific development strategy.
Beyond these differences in specificity, various indicators, including the
amount of support received from top management, suggested that commit-
ment to the efforts was stronger in the successful than in the unsuccessful
organizations.

In addition to support from the top, the format for introduction of the
development/research staff to members of the organization in the successful
group (e.g., as part of a presentation describing the project) indicated great-
er commitment to a specific, and possibly a better understood, effort than
the introduction format in the unsuccessful organizations (e.g., self-intro-
ductions). One further characteristic from Table 1 indicated a trend for ne-
gotiations in the successful organizations to be somewhat longer (although
not statistically significant) than in the unsuccessful organizations. This
may be an indication of more care taken in the planning stages of the suc-
cessful efforts leading to what Friedlander and Brown (1974) have termed "a
shared conception of problems and appropriate action steps" (p. 331).

The final major area differentiating between the successful and unsuc-
cessful organizations focuses on characteristics of the internal change
agents. In the successful organizations the ICAs were selected with greater

Table 1. Characteristics of Successful and Unsuccessful Change in Organizations, Including Nondifferentiating Characteristics

Category	Nondifferentiating characteristics	Successful	Unsuccessful
ORGANIZATION's ENVIRONMENT	Geographical location State of the industry[a] Scope of the market[b]	Expanding market Labor drawn from suburban areas Higher pay rate	Steady market Labor drawn from towns Lower pay rate
ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS	Size[b] Changes in size	More levels of hierarchy Heavy industry organizations Innovative reputation	Fewer levels of hierarchy Office and Sales organizations Noninnovative reputation Nonunion Insurance industry
INITIAL CONTACT	Position of contact person Negotiation period[b]		
ENTRY AND COMMITMENT	Desire to be seen as innovative Commitment for a resurvey[b] Commitment for a restructuring of the organization[b] Commitment to Survey Feedback plus Process Consultation	Interest based on prior contact with research/development staff Commitment to Survey Feedback Strategy Greater support from top management Research/development staff introduced as part of general presentation Expression of a specific problem	Interest not based on prior contact with research/development staff No commitment to Survey Feedback Strategy Lesser support from top management Self-introductions by research/development staff Expression of a general problem Not motivated by a desire to experiment with new ideas
DATA GATHERING	Total population data collections Sample data collections Time between waves of data collection Reasons for second wave of data collections [a] Credibility of the survey instrument[b]	More recent initiation of development/research effort	

Table 1. (Continued)

Category	Nondifferentiating characteristics	Successful	Unsuccessful
INTERNAL CHANGE AGENTS	ICA selection Knowledgeability of organizational functioning and change agentry[b] Skill levels Value orientations[b] Non-change-agent experience[b] Previous change-agent experience Research posture Change-agent style	ICAs possessed assessment-prescriptive skills More care taken in ICA selection	Did not possess assessment-prescriptive skills Less care taken in ICA selection Previous ICA training More previous work experience in a personnel department
EXTERNAL CHANGE AGENTS	ECA selection [a] Care of ECA selection [a] Knowledge base [b] Value orientation [b] Skill levels Types of skills[b] Non-change-agent experience Previous change-agent experience Change-agent style Research posture		
TERMINATION PROCEDURES	Pace and planning of termination Reasons for termination (includes several dimensions)[a,b] Attitude toward effort at termination		

[a]Indicates limited variance among organizations included in this study.

[b]Indicates the existence of trends (not statistically significant) suggesting differences between successful and unsuccessful organizations.

Table 2. Alterable and Unalterable Characteristics

	Differentiating Characteristics[a]	Characteristics with Differentiating Trends[b]	Nondifferentiating Characteristics
ALTERABLE CHARACTERISTICS	Support from top management Introduction of research/development staff Specificity of problem expression ICA's assessment-prescriptive skills Care of ICA selection	Negotiation Period Commitment for a resurvey Commitment for a restructuring of the organization ICA knowledgeability of organizational functioning and change-agentry ICA value orientation ECA knowledge base ECA value orientation ECA skill types Credibility of survey instrument	Position of the contact person Total population data collections Sample data collections Time between waves of data collections Reasons for second wave of data collections[c] Responsibility for ICA selection ICA skill levels ICA research posture ICA style Responsibility for ECA selection [c] Care of ECA selection[c] ECA skill levels ECA change-agent style ECA research posture Pace and planning of termination
UNALTERABLE CHARACTERISTICS	State of the market Origin of the labor pool Industrial pay rate Levels of hierarchy Type of organization Innovative reputation Prior contact with development/research staff Early vs. late involvement Previous ICA training	Scope of the market Size ICA non-change-agent experience	Geographical location State of the industry[c] Changes in size Desire to be seen as innovative ICA previous change-agent experience ECA non-change-agent experience ECA previous change-agent experience

[a]From the "Successful" column of Table 1.
[b]This column includes characteristics noted with a "b" in Table 1.
[c]Denotes limited variance in the present study.

care and possessed assessment-prescriptive skills not present in ICAs asso-
ciated with the unsuccessful organizations. These assessment-prescriptive
skills include the ability to identify problems and their causes, to select
appropriate interventions, and to sequence these interventions such that ex-
isting problems are solved without creating new ones.[4] The unsuccessful
organizations were characterized by ICAs receiving previous change-agent
training while the successful organizations were represented by ICAs both
with and without such training. One other difference was that in the success-
ful organizations the internal change agents had primary responsibility for
the interventions while primary responsibility in the unsuccessful organiza-
tions mainly fell to external change agents. This is in contrast to Buchan-
an's (1971) finding that "the location of the change agent was not . . . a
crucial factor" (pp. 396-397). Several other trends toward differences in this
area are noted in Table 1. These trends suggest that the successful organiza-
tions were characterized by ICAs who were more knowledgeable about or-
ganizational functioning and change agentry, were more task oriented and
less interaction or self oriented, and had less previous work experience in a
personnel department.

ISSUES, CONSTRAINTS, AND CHOICES FOR MANAGERS AND CONSULTANTS

Two general but potentially important conclusions emerge from this study.
Although some characteristics are associated more strongly with either suc-
cessful or unsuccessful change, only rarely were they associated *exclusively*
with organizations in either the successful or unsuccessful group. Thus, it
appears that a strong case cannot be made for characteristics that are either
absolutely necessary or in and of themselves sufficient to determine success-
ful or unsuccessful change in organizations.

Openness to Change; Managerial Support

The second major indication arising from the results of this study is that
characteristics differentiating between the successful and unsuccessful organ-
izations fall into three general areas, as follows: 1) Organizations that are
more stable and status-quo oriented are less likely to be successful in their
OD efforts than those which are expanding and more open to and involved
in adjusting to change. 2) More specific interests and greater commitment
to the OD efforts are associated with successful change. 3) Internal resource
persons who are more carefully selected, have not received change-agent
training previous to the OD effort, and who possess assessment-prescriptive
skills are most apparent in the successful organizations.

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[4]One framework for conceptualizing such activities is provided by Bowers, Franklin, and
Pecorella (1975).

The differences concerning stability and adjustment to change simply may be an indication of overall organization success, which includes success in OD efforts as one element. Although the present data cannot be used to evaluate cause/effect sequences, it seems safe to assume that a prime reason that organizations within the successful category are larger, contain more levels of hierarchy, and are involved in broader and expanding markets is that such organizations respond appropriately to technological, economic, and social changes in their environments. It is hardly surprising to find that organizations which are responsive in these ways to other facets of their environments also are effective in utilizing social science knowledge to improve their functioning.

Differences regarding specificity of interests and commitment are generally consistent with other findings indicating support, involvement, and commitment from top management to be associated with successful OD projects (Buchanan, 1971; Friedlander & Brown, 1974; Greiner, 1967). It should be noted, however, that high levels of such support are neither absolutely necessary nor sufficient for successful change to occur. In the present study, for example, stronger average support was found in the successful organizations; however, the range of support received was identical for the successful and unsuccessful groups of organizations. Further, Buchanan noted the presence of support in the form of active involvement from top management in both successful and unsuccessful cases, and Friedlander and Brown concluded that "support of top management by itself is not a sufficient condition for success" (p. 333).

ICA: Selection, Training, Behavior and Success

The final area of differences focuses on internal change agents and is probably the most intriguing of all the results. Although efforts have been made to describe what change agents should do or actually do (Argyris, 1970; Steele, 1975; Tichy, 1974), empirically based knowledge linking change-agent characteristics or behaviors to successful or unsuccessful OD is notably lacking. Further, not all the differences revealed in the present investigation mesh well with prior expectations. Probably the least surprising difference indicates that success is associated with those change agents who are most skilled at identifying the forms and causes of problems and who are most skillful in selecting and planning for appropriate interventions. This supports the arguments of Bowers, Franklin, and Pecorella (1975), suggesting that greater success in OD will accompany better matching and sequencing of interventions to correspond with problem causes.

Some discussion is appropriate on the selection data. Why were more carefully selected ICAs associated with more successful OD efforts? On the one hand, we may simply conclude that the projects' selection procedures

did lead to the identification of more effective change agents. On the other hand, one questions *how* selection can be effective considering the lack of tested criteria for making such decisions. For the projects included in this investigation, the answer seems to lie somewhere between these two views. Little formal knowledge has been available to facilitate the selection of change agents; however, those responsible for these OD projects did have theory, experience, and intuition to guide the selection process. Some basic considerations led to the selection, where possible, of individuals who were 1) considered knowledgeable of the organization and its basic productive processes, 2) not associated with past failures in similar areas (e.g., poorly received training sessions), 3) not in present positions that were primarily evaluative (e.g., responsible for promotions, raises), 4) not involved as primary parties in adversary (e.g., union/management) relationships, 5) generally regarded as future leaders of the organizations, 6) interpersonally competent. Clearly, these different criteria varied in their bases, clarity, and action implications. The first four criteria suggest the desirability of selecting line personnel rather than those from staff areas. The third and fourth criteria especially suggested that individuals from personnel departments were not to be chosen for these roles when selection was possible. In fact, as the results from this study indicate, in the unsuccessful organizations, the internal change agents were drawn largely from personnel departments. Much of the data needed for decisions based on these four criteria were easily attainable and subject to minimal distortion. For the fifth criterion senior members of the organizations and others responsible for career decisions were called upon to submit their judgments on various candidates. Such evaluations were, of course, more subjective and speculative than information for the first four criteria. (The criterion concerning interpersonal competence had even less basis in trusted and proven evaluation procedures.) Such judgments rested upon reactions of the individuals responsible for coordination of the OD efforts. As weak as these procedures appear, the results of this study do suggest that the combination of informal knowledge and intuition did facilitate the selection of effective internal change agents when care was taken in this process.

The last issue indicates that those internal change agents who received more training previous to the current efforts were associated with the least successful OD projects. Several factors might account for these findings (e.g., quality of the previous training, content of such training); however, additional detail concerning this training serves to eliminate most of these alternatives. Those ICAs who had received prior training were exposed to a variety of activities ranging from seminar presentations to active participation in other OD projects. The diversity of their experiences prevents a characterization of the training that could be applied fairly to the total group. In fact, the variety of training experienced by the internal change agents

suggests that the differences related to previous training probably are not a simple function of the extent of such training.

An alternative explanation emerges from an exploration of training and coordination issues in the projects themselves. The training received in conjunction with the current projects usually was designed and provided by the project manager (most often the *external change agent*). Such training was diverse both in nature and intensity, spanning a range from only a general orientation to the OD project to role-playing sessions designed for the development of specific skills. Thus, the training received by the internal change agents in conjunction with these projects was as diversified as the training preceding these efforts.

A related issue was the problem observed by project managers and researchers concerning a lack of coordination in the unsuccessful efforts between the goals and procedures of the project managers and the behaviors of some internal change agents. In some of the unsuccessful efforts, the internal change agents did little or nothing at all. This was apparently due to insufficient direction from the project manager, inadequate knowledge or skill on the part of the ICA, or the lack of acceptance of project goals by them. In other unsuccessful efforts, actions were taken by the internal change agents but the goals and activities conflicted with those of the project manager. In these cases the internal change agents apparently drew on their previous training and experience as a basis for action.

These factors suggest that different combinations of previous and current training may result in different probabilities for success in current efforts. To simplify this explanation, we can envision four possible situations based on the extent of previous and current training experiences. Two of the situations most probably are identified with little or no success. These include instances where there has been a great deal of both previous and current training, and instances where there has been essentially no training. In the first instance, the lack of success would be attributed to conflicting goals and behaviors on the part of project managers and the internal change agents. In the second instance the lack of success would be the result of an absence of constructive activities. A third situation likely to produce project failure exists when previous training has been extensive and current training is absent; in this case it is likely that the internal and external change agents will each pursue their own goals and methods, resulting in confusion on the part of organizational members and failure in the OD project. It appears from this argument and the results of the present investigation that successful outcomes from OD projects are most likely when previous training has been minimal and current training is extensive. In these instances the internal change agents appear to accept and be capable of acting consistently with goals and methods established by project managers. These coordinated OD efforts tend to result in project success.
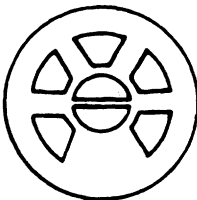
ON THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF RESEARCH

How can the individual manager or consultant profitably utilize the information reported here to maximize the likelihood of success in OD efforts? Clearly, the most desirable situation would be one where all such characteristics matched or were altered to match those of the successful organizations. However, while such alteration is possible for some of these characteristics, for others it is not. For example, the individual manager or consultant has little if any control over such characteristics as the state of the market or industrial pay rate. On the other hand, characteristics such as selection of internal change agents or support from top management may be significantly affected by the actions of the manager or consultant. Table 2 indicates which characteristics in this study might be altered and which are usually considered unalterable from the point of view of an individual manager or consultant. Each characteristic is classified to indicate both alterability and potential importance in differentiating between success and nonsuccess. The ideal outcome of such a classification from the standpoint of being able to influence successful change would include all "Differentiating" characteristics and most of those exhibiting "Differentiating Trends" in the "Alterable" category. As Table 2 reveals, this did not occur.

Unfortunately, few managers or consultants enjoy the luxury of picking and choosing among unalterable characteristics until they have encountered the ideal situation. Most often one must begin with the situation as defined by some of the unalterable characteristics and attempt to maximize chances for success by influencing those characteristics that can be changed. In these situations the challenge posed to the manager or consultant is to develop effective means for bringing about such changes in the alterable characteristics.

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