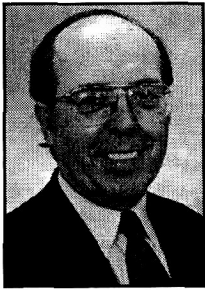# New OD: An Integrative Perspective

Robert E. Levasseur

**Robert E. Levasseur,** a doctoral faculty member at Walden University, received his Ph.D. in Applied Management and Decision Sciences from Walden. A Registered Organization Development Consultant (RODC) since his early days in OD at Digital Equipment Corporation some 25 years ago, Dr. Levasseur has worked with a wide variety of private and public sector clients on transformational change projects, and has taught leadership and organizational change courses for numerous universities.

**Contact Information**
Robert E. Levasseur
Vista Cove Road
St. Augustine, FL 32084-3069.
Phone: (904) 819-5501
Email: Robert.Levasseur@waldenu.edu

## Abstract

This article addresses the need for a new form of organization development. It includes a comparison of several approaches to facilitating change, a discussion of how perceived weaknesses of organization development influenced the development of alternative approaches to planned change, a description of the concurrent evolution of related leadership concepts, a proposed set of criteria for measuring effective change, and a core set of elements of an integrated methodology for enabling positive social change.

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What is the state of organization development (O.D.) today? It is hardly robust if you can believe its critics. Some (Boyd & Bright, 2007; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008; Egan & Lancaster, 2005) have argued that because O.D. is problem-centered and thus inherently negative, a more positive, opportunity-centered approach—appreciative inquiry (AI)—has superseded it. Others (Worren, Ruddle, & Moore, 1999) have claimed that O.D. has morphed into a new, more relevant form—change management (CM), deserving of professional status and a new name. According to Cox (2005), still others have gone so far as to argue that O.D. is dead or dying. These arguments beg the question: If not traditional O.D., then what approach to planned change will best serve the needs of leaders and other change agents in the new millennium? Is it AI, CM, or some other method of facilitating planned change?

To answer this question, I critically examine several approaches to facilitating change, discuss how perceived weaknesses of O.D. have influenced the development of alternative approaches to planned change, describe the concurrent evolu-

tion of related leadership concepts, propose a set of criteria for measuring effective change, and recommend a core set of elements of an integrated methodology for enabling positive change in the future.

## Comparison of Major Change Models

The three major change models examined in this article are: (a) Kurt Lewin's action research (AR) model (Burke, 1982), which is the approach used in many classic O.D. interventions; (b) Kurt Lewin's three-stage change model (Gold, 1999), which is the foundation of many change management (CM) models (Elrod & Tippett, 2002); and (c) the appreciative inquiry (AI) model (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008), which when coupled with O.D. methods (Karakas, 2009; Lewis et al., 2006) is used for positively-focused, opportunity-oriented interventions.

Do the O.D., CM, and AI models of change differ in important ways? Definitely, say their respective proponents and critics. For example, AI proponents have alleged that O.D. is too negative because it is problem-focused (Boyd & Bright, 2007; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008; Egan & Lancaster, 2005); CM proponents have argued that O.D. is irrelevant because it is too humanistic (Worren, Ruddle, & Moore, 1999). Others, such as Vaill (1996), believe that Lewin's three-stage change model has serious flaws, if it is not in fact obsolete, because there is no time for refreezing in today's fast paced, rapidly changing organizations. This, they argue, invalidates the many O.D. and CM models based on Lewin's model. The top-down, profit focus of many CM interventions concerns some (Cummings & Worley, 2009). Others find fault with the AI model's intentional disregard for organizational problems and its weaknesses as an intervention approach (Karakas 2009, Miller, Fitzgerald, Murrell, Preston, & Ambekar, 2005;).

But what are the real similarities and differences in the O.D., AI, and CM models? From this scholar-practitioner's point of view, there are some obvious ones.

Important similarities shared by all three approaches are:
- They focus on planned change.
- They view the process of change systemically.
- The change models they advocate are essentially variations of Lewin's classic three-stage model.

Key differences among them are:
- O.D. is generally problem-focused.
- AI is generally opportunity-focused.
- CM is generally bottom line-focused.

Other important commonalities and differences among O.D., AI, and CM are:
- O.D. and AI are more humanistic in focus; whereas CM is more pragmatic.
- O.D. and AI are generally more participatory; whereas CM is more often top down driven.

Both AI and CM have emerged over the past several decades as alternatives to O.D. for reasons that we will examine shortly. However, we first need to focus on several important trends in leadership that have emerged over this same time period to provide a context for the creative synthesis of O.D., AI, and CM (based on these essential similarities and differences) needed to effect positive change in the future.

## Evolution of Planned Change

Arguably, leadership and change are two sides of the same coin (Burns, 1978; Kotter, 1996). Hence, developments in leadership have shaped developments in the field of planned change, and vice versa. Two trends that have had a significant impact on the models used to plan and guide

change since the 1980s are (a) the development of modern leadership, and (b) the spawning of AI and CM based on perceived shortcomings of O.D.. We will examine the former, the trends in modern leadership and organizational change, first.

**Leadership trends.** Burns (1978), who may be the father of modern leadership, wrote, "Leadership is nothing if not linked to collective purpose . . . the effectiveness of leaders must be judged not by their press clippings but by actual social change measured by intent and by the satisfaction of human needs" (p. 3). Burn's articulation of transforming leadership led others to focus on what they called transformational (Bass, 1990), visionary (Senge, 1990), and charismatic (Carl & Javidian, 2001, Howell & Frost, 1989; ) leadership, all of which some people believe are simply different ways of describing the same (transforming) leadership style (House & Shamir, 1993).

Two key elements of modern leadership related to planned change are (a) vision and (b) organizational learning. Like Burns (1978), Bass (1990) and Senge (1990) were among the many who emphasized the paramount importance of vision to leadership. Most modern change models incorporate vision as a key aspect of the initial, unfreezing stage of change (Bradford & Cohen, 1998; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008; Garvin & Roberto, 2005, Kotter, 1996). Senge (1990) also coined the term organizational learning and noted its key role in a world characterized by constant pressures to innovate and adapt. Interestingly, Schein's (1999) description of organizational learning as the essence of the third and final refreezing stage of change is the apparent answer to critics (such as Vaill, 1996) who claim that any form of refreezing is impossible in today's fast-paced world.

**Change model trends.** In parallel with these developments in modern leadership theory, O.D. spawned two major and different models of change: CM and AI. Ironically, the former was in reaction to what might be described as a perceived *softness* of O.D. due to its people-focus and values (Worren, Ruddle, & Moore, 1999); while the latter was in reaction to a perceived *hardness* of O.D. due to its lack of people focus (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008).

Whether these criticisms are valid or not is, of course, moot. The proponents of AI and CM used them as motivation to create offshoots of O.D. whose persistence is proof at some level of the validity of their claims. The crucial issue with respect to the future of O.D. is not which approach (O.D., AI, or CM) is better, but whether there is a creative synthesis of their best elements that can serve as a model for effecting positive change in the 21st century. Before we can answer that question, however, we need to step back and discuss the needs of organizations and other social systems in the future.

## Future Needs

While no one can predict the future , several important voices in the field of planned change have expressed relevant, although differing, opinions on what needs to happen in the future to make O.D. and its derivative change methodologies, such as AI and CM, viable. O.D. traditionalists have argued for a "return to O.D.'s traditional values and practices . . . driven by long-established values of human potential, equality, trust, and collaboration" (Cummings & Worley, 2008, p. 693). Conversely, the founder of AI has for a long time advocated a role for the O.D. profession as an instrument of social innovation (Cooperrider & Pasmore, 1991), recently supporting its application to the triple bottom line of "people, profits, and planet" (Salopek, 2006, p. 22).

What we really need is a creative synthesis of O.D., AI, and CM that retains the advantages of each (i.e., the traditional values of O.D., the positive focus and advocacy of AI, and the bottom line focus of CM) and yet meet the needs of the new millennium. This new focus must draw on the primary strengths of O.D., AI, and CM as shown in Table 1, while adding the new focus for planned change efforts that is already emerging as a concern of many organizations — sustainability (Savitz, 2006). In addition, it must overcome the major perceived weaknesses (a) of O.D. by focusing on the opportunity to effect positive social change by making organizations more sustainable, (b) of AI by ensuring that the need for profitability and the problem solving required to achieve it are built into the change model, and (c) of CM by demanding a simultaneous focus on people and planet in addition to profit.

*Table 1.* Sustainability Criteria and the Components of the New O.D.

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|---|---|
| Social (People) | O.D., AI |
| Economic (Profit) | CM |
| Environmental (Planet) | AI |

**Elements of the New O.D. Model**

To meet these criteria and bring about this type of sustainable positive change, the New O.D. Model must incorporate the elements shown in Table 2. Lewin's classic three-stage model, enhanced by a focus on organizational learning in the refreezing stage to ensure that the changes are institutionalized in a modern way that optimizes their persistence, will provide the essential backbone of the New O.D. Model. Lewin's action research cycle

will ensure a solid evidence base for each action taken while providing action-tested ideas for refining the New O.D. Model. Finally, developing a shared vision of a future based on organizational excellence in sustainability, and using collaborative processes that engage, empower, and inspire the participants in the change process, will provide the energy needed to fuel the engine of organizational change and ensure the achievement of the vision.

*Table 2.* Elements of the New O.D. Model

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|---|
| 1. Based on Lewin's three-stage change model (Unfreezing, Moving, Refreezing) |
| 2. Emphasizes organizational learning in Stage three |
| 3. Uses the Action Research cycle to enable systemic change |
| 4. Guided by a shared sustainability vision (People, Profit, and Planet) |
| 5. Employs collaborative processes in all three stages |

These core elements represent the building blocks of a New O.D. Model. Hopefully, O.D., AI, and CM practitioners will enhance their current planned change models by incorporating or modifying elements of them to reflect these essential elements of the New O.D., thereby enabling the type of positive social change needed in the future.

## Conclusion

We in the O.D. profession have a choice to make. We can either continue to fractionalize and, thereby, weaken the discipline. Or we can join together to develop and practice a new form of change enablement, a New O.D., which retains the best

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and most relevant aspects of classic and current theory and practice while addressing the needs of a new, more integrated world. The purpose of this paper has been to identify the essential elements of a creative synthesis for achieving this vision of a New O.D..

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