10th Edition

Organization Development & Change

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A number of definitions of OD exist and are presented in Table 1.1. Each definition has a slightly different emphasis. For example, Burke's description focuses attention on culture as the target of change; French's definition is concerned with OD's long-term focus and the use of consultants; and Beckhard's and Beer's definitions address the process of OD. More recently, Burke and Bradford's definition broadens the range and interests of OD. Worley and Feyerherm suggested that for a process to be called organization development, (1) it must focus on or result in the change of some aspect of the organizational system; (2) there must be learning or the transfer of knowledge or skill to the organization; and (3) there must be evidence of improvement in or an intention to improve the effectiveness of the organization.[1] The following definition incorporates most of these views and is used in this book:

Organization development is a system-wide application and transfer of behavioral science knowledge to the planned development, improvement, and reinforcement of the strategies, structures, and processes that lead to organization effectiveness.

This definition emphasizes several features that differentiate OD from other approaches to organizational change and improvement, such as management consulting, project management, and operations management. The definition also helps to distinguish

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TABLE 1.1

Definitions of Organization Development

Organization development is a planned process of change in an organization's culture through the utilization of behavioral science technology, research, and theory. (Warner Burke)[2]

Organization development refers to a long-range effort to improve an organization's problem-solving capabilities and its ability to cope with changes in its external environment with the help of external or internal behavioral-scientist consultants, or change agents, as they are sometimes called. (Wendell French)[3]

Organization development is an effort (1) planned, (2) organization-wide, and (3) managed from the top, to (4) increase organization effectiveness and health through (5) planned interventions in the organization's "processes," using behavioral science knowledge. (Richard Beckhard)[4]

Organization development is a system-wide process of data collection, diagnosis, action planning, intervention, and evaluation aimed at (1) enhancing congruence among organizational structure, process, strategy, people, and culture; (2) developing new and creative organizational solutions; and (3) developing the organization's self-renewing capacity. It occurs through the collaboration of organizational members working with a change agent using behavioral science theory, research, and technology. (Michael Beer)[5]

Based on (1) a set of values, largely humanistic; (2) application of the behavioral sciences; and (3) open-systems theory, organization development is a system-wide process of planned change aimed toward improving overall organization effectiveness by way of enhanced congruence of such key organization dimensions as external environment, mission, strategy, leadership, culture, structure, information and reward systems, and work policies and procedures. (Warner Burke and David Bradford)[6]

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