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Membership in the OD Network
Design lies at the heart of OD practice. Whether we are designing a team development process, a learning curriculum, a strategic change initiative, a new framework for service delivery, an organization’s work and reporting structure, something as simple as a meeting, or an offsite retreat, OD professionals are always required to use “design thinking.” But how explicitly do we and should we think of ourselves as “designers”?

This has become a more contentious question over the last few decades as “organization design” seems to be emerging as a discrete, focused activity that can be clearly differentiated from “organization development.” Members of the Organization Design Forum, the association of practitioners who position design as distinct from development, currently tend to espouse the view that these domains represent connected, but distinctly different activities. The friction in this debate appears to reflect the assumption that structure is separate from process and that strategy is separate from human relationships. Is this a useful dichotomy at this stage in our understanding of the evolution of learning and change in human systems? Or could design, in fact, be a creative, essential dynamic that unifies structure and process in ways that could collapse the dichotomy we seem to be currently defending?

While this debate has important implications, we want to pursue defining and exploring the larger role of design in the field of human systems guidance—purpose, change, strategy, culture, development, values, transformation, learning, sustainability, and so on. The formal role of traditional organization design remains important, of course, and yet we need to push our thinking beyond that boundary. Why, for instance, is there a sudden surge of interest in the relationship between the formal discipline of design and the work of OD professionals? How can we leverage leaders’ current fascination with design?

We asked this question openly during the 2011 OD Network Conference. In his keynote address, Tom Lockwood, the former head of the Design Management Institute and now an independent design consultant, noted that:

There is no doubt about the buzz around design today. But what lies below the surface of cool products and thoughtful services is an amazing ability to drive change in organizations, in customer experiences, and even in business models. Design is, in fact, an agent of change. Because we don’t design what is, we design what is to come. Design is about creating preferred futures, and the influence of designers and design managers is more than one might initially think.

This is where OD and the design communities clearly overlap. Lockwood also shared some specific insights about the role of design in business, the process of design thinking, and how design can be a catalyst to help move an organization to desired outcomes. Most importantly, he pointed out potential connections between the design and organization development communities and invited
us to explore the potential power of a stronger collaborative relationship.

This special issue of the *OD Practitioner* will bring the possibilities for partnership between design and organization development into sharper focus. We invite contributions that explore these possibilities directly, and that respond to questions such as:

» What is design thinking, and how is it related to effective OD practice?

» What might the design and OD communities learn from each other, and how might a stronger relationship influence both professional roles?

» How and where does design influence OD practice, and how might OD practitioners become more consciously skilled as designers?

» Where have organization development principles and practices been used by design professionals, and how have they affected design practices, perspectives, and outcomes?

» What are the key design principles and challenges OD professionals confront when they are asked to design strategic change initiatives?

» How might design be used to develop even more effective organizational structures, work processes, relationships, or performance? Where are examples of innovative organizational design thinking?

» Are there design principles and practices that can influence the development of organization culture, and where are the points of intersection?

» How might the design and OD communities collaborate when the goal is support for innovation?

» Is it possible to intentionally design physical spaces and work environments that help people do their best work? What have we learned from past attempts? What are future possibilities?

» How might design and OD professionals best learn from one another and build truly collaborative relationships?

And we welcome any article that illuminates the relationship between design and OD.

**Submission Deadline**  
*is April 14, 2015*

Articles should be sent to the *ODP* editor, John Vogelsang (jvogelsang@earthlink.net). Submissions should follow the *OD Practitioner* Guidelines for Authors, which appear on page 56 of this issue of the *ODP*. The special issue editors will screen the articles and provide feedback. Final articles will be reviewed by two members of the ODP Editorial Board.

**Guest Editors**

Lisa Kimball, PhD, is CEO, Group Jazz. She is an actionary known for her ability to help organizations tackle complex challenges by changing the conversation about problems and potential solutions. She has worked for more than 30 years with clients including government agencies, corporations, nonprofit organizations, and educational institutions to design and facilitate organizational change and development efforts involving diverse stakeholders. Kimball has a deep interest in designing processes that engage stakeholders, and she pioneered the development and application of Liberating Structures, a mash up of open source methods that make high engagement practical, exciting, and fun. She served on the Board of the Organization Development Network from 2006-2011 and is currently on the Board of the Organization Design Forum. She can be reached at lisa@groupjazz.com.

Peter Norlin, PhD, Principal of Change Guides, and formerly Executive Director of the OD Network, has spent over 30 years in the field of OD, serving a range of customers from two-person partnerships to Fortune 100 companies. A graduate of The Johns Hopkins University Master’s Degree Program in Applied Behavioral Science/Organization Development, he also has an MA and PhD from Northwestern University. His teaching experience includes faculty appointments at Vanderbilt University, Johns Hopkins University, and Georgetown University. Based in Ann Arbor, Michigan, he is also a professional member of the NTL Institute, and treasurer of the International OD Association (IODA). He can be reached at peter@peternorlin.com.
This special issue of the OD Practitioner attempts to capture the nonprofit sector’s current challenges and opportunities and some of the distinct approaches and practices OD practitioners are developing within the sector.

The Nonprofit Sector

The nonprofit sector includes a wide variety of organizations with a wide range of sizes and structures: hospitals and universities, environmental advocacy and civil rights organizations, family and children services, community development and antipoverty organizations, community health agencies, professional associations, foundations, community chests, orchestras, opera companies, theatre companies, religious congregations, and many more. The sector itself also has many identifying titles: social sector, third sector, independent sector, civil society, voluntary sector, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

In the US alone there are 1.6 million nonprofits including 501(c)(4) social welfare and lobbying organizations and 501(c)(3) public serving organizations, the largest category of nonprofits.

- **Nonprofits account for 10% of the entire US labor force, making them the third largest employer; only surpassed by retail trade (15.4%) and manufacturing (14.1%) (Salamon, et al., 2012).**
- **17% of nonprofits have budgets ranging from $1m to $10m+; 83% have budgets under a million.**
- **The total assets for the US nonprofit sector in 2011 were $2.9 Trillion.**
- **An estimated $836.9 billion was contributed to the US economy by the nonprofit sector in 2011, which is 5.6% of the country’s gross domestic product.**
- **The major sources of revenue are fees for services and goods from private sources, 46.6%; payments (e.g., Medicaid and Medicare) and contracts/grants from government sources, 32.7%; and philanthropy 12.6%. (Pettijohn, 2013)**

Table 1. Values Most Important to the Nonprofit Sector

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<th>Values</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>Effective — providing programs and services of the highest quality at reasonable cost; making a difference in the lives of individuals and the community.</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive — responding to clients, patrons, and communities; meeting needs that the market and government do not meet; pursuing innovative approaches when needed.</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable — resilient and demonstrating staying power both in good times and bad; operating in a trustworthy and accountable manner.</td>
<td>98%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caring — serving underserved populations; providing services/programs at reduced or no cost to disadvantaged populations; community focused.</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriching — giving expression to central human values; providing opportunities for people to learn and grow; fostering intellectual, scientific, cultural, and spiritual development; preserving culture and history; promoting creativity.</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering — mobilizing and empowering citizens; contributing to public discourse; providing opportunities for civic engagement for the public good.</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productivity — creating jobs and economic value; mobilizing assets to address public problems; enhancing local economic vitality.</td>
<td>87%</td>
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Even with the sector’s diversity, many nonprofits share basic agreements about the sector’s core values. The John Hopkins Nonprofit Listening Post Project heard from 731 US nonprofit organizations in the fields of human services, community development, and the arts about the sector’s core values (Salamon et al., 2013). Table 1 lists the core values; the percentages are how many of the respondents indicated the value was important to very important.

The Challenges and Opportunities for the Sector

Although these common values are strongly held, a vast majority of nonprofits are dealing with persistent challenges as they attempt to enact these values. The interviews we conducted with nonprofit leaders in preparation for this special issue and the literature we reviewed identified three major challenges: Financial Sustainability, Increased Demand for Accountability and Assessment, and the Shifting Structure of the Sector.

Financial Sustainability

The nonprofit leaders we spoke with talked about the challenges of constant fund raising, trying to motivate and reward an often underpaid and over-worked staff, and the increasing demand for their agency’s services with diminishing resources to provide those services.

Wilson and Taylor (2004), Miller (2008), and the Nonprofit Finance Fund (2014) describe the constant challenge of most donors and foundations funding projects but not funding the administrative expenses needed to manage the projects. There is also limited funding to help nonprofits build their capacity to effectively...
meet the needs of their current clients and the growing demands for their services. The Nonprofit Finance Fund’s 2014 survey of nonprofits found that 53% of the 5,019 respondents from 50 states and Puerto Rico said funders were interested in supporting program expansion and never or rarely interested in covering the full cost of programs. NFF also found:

- 80% of respondents reported an increase in demand for services, the 6th straight year of increased demand.
- 56% were unable to meet demand in 2013—the highest reported in the survey’s history.
- Only 11% expect 2014 to be easier than 2013 for the people they serve.
- More than half of nonprofits (55%) have 3 months or less cash-on-hand.
- 28% ended their 2013 fiscal year with a deficit.
- Only 9% can have an open dialogue with funders about developing reserves for operating needs, and only 6% about developing reserves for long-term facility needs.

According to the NFF survey, nonprofits indicated they would respond to this financial sustainability challenge in the following ways:

- 31% will change the main ways in which they raise and spend money.
- 26% will pursue an earned income venture.
- 20% will seek funding other than grants & contracts, such as loans or other investments.

Another way nonprofits are responding to the financial sustainability challenge is through initiatives that bring together funders (e.g., individual donors, foundations, and government), local communities, and other nonprofits to agree on specific changes and develop collaborative processes for achieving those changes. Some examples are:

- In the 1990s, when new HIV/AIDS drugs became available, New York City funders representing corporate, individual donor funds, and private foundations came together with a nonprofit consulting group to fund and facilitate capacity development for HIV/AIDS services organization to make the cultural and structural transition from providing services for “dying with dignity” to services for “living with dignity.”
- The Centers for Disease Control’s Healthy Communities Program worked with the National Association of County and City Health Officials, the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, the National Recreation and Park Association, and the YMCA of the USA to assist in the local development and implementation of needed health-related environmental change strategies; provide linkages to resources and other funding opportunities; and connect local communities to national partners and experts (www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/).
- In spring 2014, the Hispanic Federation, Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, and New York Urban League formed an alliance to provide capacity-building support to Black, Latino, and Asian-led community-based nonprofit organizations throughout New York City’s five boroughs. These three organizations, along with the Asian American Federation and Black Agency Executives, developed this initiative to generate new levels of support for the city’s community-based organizations. The New York City Council has allocated $2.5 million for this alliance (www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/).

Increased Demand for Accountability and Assessment
Scandals about use of funds have threatened public trust in the sector and increased the call for greater accountability and performance measures (Aviv, 2004; Strom, 2008; Chan & Takagi, 2011). However, tracking the relevant data and producing the required reports can strain the organizational capacity of small nonprofits (Campbell, 2003; Gammal, 2006). Respondents to the NFF survey said that more than 70% of their funders requested impact or program metrics. While 77% of the respondents agreed that the metrics funders ask for are helpful in assessing impact, only 1% reported that funders always cover the costs of impact measurement; 71% said the additional costs were rarely or never covered.

Emphasis on performance measures can also contribute to mission drift. “On the one hand, performance measures drive nonprofits to focus on outcomes, instead of just inputs and outputs. On the other hand, an obsession with particular measures can lead to mission drift and the cherry-picking of services and clients, such that performance looks best along just the dimensions measured” (Brooks, 2003, p. 504). In order to be accountable, community development agencies focus on what can be measured and not on what effects long term change. There are also limited methods and resources for measuring long-term social change efforts (Taylor & Saol, 2003).

Shifting Structure of the Sector
The traditional boundaries that have divided the three sectors: private (for-profit), public (government), and nonprofit are becoming blurred (Guo, 2004; Shoham, et al., 2006; Martin & Osberg, 2007; Paton et al., 2007). Many nonprofits are depending more on fee for services, and many for-profits are providing services that have traditionally been the purview of nonprofits, such as health care and job training (Guo, 2004). Social entrepreneur approaches are producing organizations that utilize for-profit business methods and income generating strategies with mission driven ways to affect social change (Martin & Osberg, 2007; Phillips, et al., 2008).

The nonprofit leaders we spoke with want to be mission focused and business smart. They want to develop organizational structures that exemplify their mission and values and support their services.

Many nonprofits are experimenting with various organizational designs and income generating business approaches. They are becoming social enterprises whose primary purpose is to directly deal with a social need as either a nonprofit using earned income strategies to pursue its mission or a for-profit that pursues a...
social good using commercial strategies (Social Enterprise Alliance, www.se-alliance.org).

» In New York City, Housing Works provides integrated services for those living with HIV/AIDS. Besides receiving government grants, individual donations, and Medicaid reimbursement, there are linked but separate (with their own boards) for-profit enterprises that help financially support the work. Those enterprises include a bookstore café, 12 upscale thrift shops around New York City, and a catering service.

» In Los Angeles, Chrysalis offers a pathway to self-sufficiency for homeless and low-income individuals by providing the resources and support needed to find and retain employment. In order to help individuals with the greatest barriers to employment, Chrysalis provides transitional jobs through social enterprise businesses that include a professional street-maintenance and cleaning service and a full-service staffing agency (Social Enterprise Alliance).

Harish Hande co-founded Selco Solar in 1995, to bring renewable energy solutions to India’s poor. His approach has been to not just sell solar lighting solutions, but create an entire ecosystem around it, including relations with banks, NGOs, and farmer co-operatives for innovative financing, creation of income generation activities using solar, high-quality products, and superior after sales service. Hande has also started Selco Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Selco, which seeks to provide the rural poor with renewable energy services that can be leveraged for income generating activities (Social Enterprise Alliance).

Some large nonprofits/NGOs are experimenting with heterarchy. Stephenson defines heterarchies as “an organizational form somewhere between hierarchy and network that provides horizontal links permitting different elements of an organization to cooperate while they individually optimize different success criteria” (2009, p. 6). Anita Singh, in this issue, describes one heterarchy that is decentralized at all levels so that each unit can better serve its constituents, anticipate and plan for change, and respond to increasingly uncertain and complex external environments.

In order to prepare people to be leaders in this shifting nonprofit sector, nonprofit leadership development and education could benefit from a “greater emphasis on leadership in complex inter-organizational settings, where authority may be ambiguous; a focus not only on boards but also on multilevel governance relationships; a greater recognition of the limits of rational management techniques and an appreciation of ‘post rational’ approaches to management and organization using ideas such as complex adaptive systems, sense making, emergence, and managing paradoxes and dilemmas” (Patton, Mordaunt, & Comforth, 2007, p. 160).

The Articles in this Issue

Miguel Bonilla discusses key theoretical models and practices that are essential to strengthening small nonprofits in times of adversity. Using two case studies, Bonilla provides examples of how to design interventions at an individual, group, or organization level. He also discusses evidence-based resilience assessments that can help uncover organizational strengths that can be cultivated and developed.

When it comes to the real work of social change, are we asking the right questions? Doug Reeler offers seven important questions and lines of inquiry that guide his organization’s work with a wide variety of community groups, local and international NGOs, donor agencies, and government programs. He cautions that as we desperately seek for answers, we have to recognize that in the sheer complexity of being human and working with change, so much remains that is unknown and even more that is unknowable. He argues for diverse, collaborative, learning-based approaches to change.

Pat Vivian and Shana Hormann share their experiences of working with organizational trauma in highly mission-driven nonprofits. They explore the often unnoticed effects of traumatization on nonprofits and provide important insights about what interventions work. They also describe a set of characteristics for traumatized organizations and draw implications for effective OD practice.

The Episcopal Church is one of the early adaptors of OD. As the church applied OD it needed approaches that took into account the unique dynamics and issues of the parish church, was expressed in its own language, and drew upon the central process for which it exists. Heyne and Gallagher review the history of how OD has been integrated into parish life and how it has been modified to produce a form that enables consultants to work within religious systems.

Mary Hiland offers a study of how the relationship between board chairs and executive directors can influence the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit leaders need to recognize that the board chair and executive director relationship is an important and powerful resource that can be leveraged in support of the organization’s mission. The board chair and executive director need to promote and engage in dialogue about how to best develop and nurture their relationship, recognizing that building the relationship itself is an important component of their work together.

Anita Singh describes the heterarchic structure of an Indian development organization that promotes the rights of women and the marginalized. This emerging organizational design consists of loosely coupled entities within a hierarchy that is held together by a common organizational mission, vital information generation and diffusion through lateral communication, processes and forums where staff from different projects meet frequently either at the headquarters or the project office, and a standardized accounting system across all its decentralized organizations.

Rebecca Slocum shares her experience of working in a consulting team with a school in Johannesburg, South Africa. As a result, she returned home with a new orientation to imagery, enabling her to attune herself to a world rich in metaphor and full of meaning. She was more aware of language patterns and how she can join the
client’s use of metaphor and ask questions such as: How do these symbols resolve or spread confusion? How do they provide direction or mislead action? How do they perpetuate identity?

The summer 2015 issue of the *ODP* is dedicated to Design and Organization Development. Further information is contained in the call for articles on page 1 of this issue. Submit all articles to the *ODP* editor, John Vogelsang (jvogelsang@earthlink.net). Submissions should follow the Guidelines for Authors, which appear on page 56.

*John Vogelsang and the Guest Editors:* Michael Brazzel, Anne Gordon, Amber Mayes, Cathy Royal, and Annie Viets.

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**Anne Garden**’s consulting focuses on strategy, leadership, and organization change with diverse nonprofits, businesses, and communities around the world, and principally in metropolitan New York City. She is a leadership coach for Executive Education programs at Columbia University. Gordon is fluent in Spanish and has worked on large-scale change projects in Mexico, Latin America, and Mongolia. She is currently living in Madrid, Spain and can be reached at anne@strategiesforChangeNow.com.

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**Cathy Royal, PhD,** is the owner and senior consultant of Royal Consulting Group. She is a System and Organizational Development professional with specialties in educational leadership, diversity, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and organizational transformation. She presented her work on affirmative identity, gender, and Appreciative Inquiry at the 2009 AI World Summit in Katmandu, Nepal. Royal developed the Quadrant Behavior Theory (QBT)©, a dynamic theory that supports inclusion and social justice. She served as the Dean of Community Affairs and Multicultural Development at Phillips Academy, Andover, MA. She is a member of the ODN and a Ken Benne Scholar for the NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science (NTL). She has been honored by the US Congress for her work in gender and equality. She serves as an adjunct faculty member at Colorado Technical University. She can be reached at mroyalc@yahoo.com.

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References


There is no doubt small nonprofits innovate where government and corporations cannot, they provide accessible, community-based services and employ the largest proportion of people in the nonprofit sector, making them critical contributors to our country’s development. Unfortunately, they are also the most vulnerable during tough economic times.

Building Resilience in Small Nonprofits

By Miguel Bonilla

Resilience is accepting your new reality, even if it’s less good than the one you had before. You can fight it, you can do nothing but scream about what you’ve lost, or you can accept that and try to put together something that’s good.

—Elizabeth Edwards (National Public Radio, December 8, 2010)

Nonprofits have always been a big part of my life; I was a Boy Scout as a child, I volunteered for Junior Achievement in high school, and I was active in Amnesty International in college. We all recognize the names of these large national nonprofits, but for each established nonprofit, there are hundreds of local, emerging nonprofits. After two decades in the nonprofit sector, I see small nonprofits as hidden gems with so much potential. I have worked in small nonprofits in Los Angeles, New York City, and Washington, DC. I have served on boards, volunteered and consulted with small nonprofits. There is no doubt small nonprofits innovate where government and corporations cannot, they provide accessible, community-based services and employ the largest proportion of people in the nonprofit sector, making them critical contributors to our country’s development. Unfortunately, they are also the most vulnerable during tough economic times.

Nonprofits are dealing with severe government and private foundation funding cuts (McCambridge, 2009; McCambridge & Cohen, 2010; Chen, 2010; Souccar, 2008), even though 80% anticipate an increase in demand for services (Nonprofit Finance Fund, 2010). Small nonprofits (budgets under $1 million), in particular, constitute 82% of the nonprofit sector (Wing, Roeger, & Pollak, 2010) and are more likely to struggle with inconsistent program delivery, inexperienced leadership, unstable operations, and cash flow problems (Simon, 2001). The culmination of these disruptive environmental changes place small nonprofits in the onerous position of deciding whether to eliminate positions, programs, or close down.

This article discusses key theoretical models and practices that are essential to strengthening small nonprofits in times of adversity. The focus of this article is on building resilience, the process of maintaining positive adjustment under challenging conditions. Throughout this article, I will bring in the true stories of Diego and Andrea (not real names); two executive directors searching for ways to bring resilience to their organization. Their challenges, typical for small organizations, demonstrates the interrelationships between leader behaviors and organizational resilience. This article also discusses the use of appropriate individual, group, or organization-level interventions. Often times, organization-level interventions, such as scenario planning, can be strengthened with the support of group and individual-level interventions, especially for small nonprofits. Finally, I will discuss various evidence-based resilience assessments that help uncover strengths that can be cultivated and developed.
Case Study 1: Space to Grow

Our first leader, Diego, exudes the boundless energy and passion for his work you would expect in a small business entrepreneur. Diego, like 70% of nonprofit executive directors, is new to his position. A year ago, he joined New York City Leaders, a small leadership development nonprofit that trains and places smart, energetic women and people of color in community organizations.

During his first week, he was given the challenge of doubling the number of participants in a three-month period without increasing his five-person staff. To make matters worse, he had to reinvigorate a disengaged board with poor group dynamics and address poor staff morale impacted by constant leadership changes and resignation of a key employee. He had to find a way to keep his staff motivated, recruit an unusually large number of participants and organizations to place them in, and ensure they were fiscally sound.

Luckily, Diego had two elements of resilience that I will discuss in more detail later: he had overcome similar challenges in the past and he found himself with unexpected resources—his own internal resiliency and changes in the economy that necessitated his nonprofit’s services. Although he was a new Executive Director, he had been in senior leadership positions at other nonprofits where he had to deal with severe budget cuts, organizational changes, and low staff morale. He knew from past experience that the best way to lead staff during tough times is not by limiting information or micromanaging their work, but to help them grow as leaders.

“I’m very committed to organizational health,” said Diego. “I think it’s important to have resources for staff and to focus on their development. As much as possible, I provide increased training opportunities, meet with staff regularly, and coach them to grow their roles, but, not necessarily responsibilities.”

Case Study 2: High Expectations

Almost three years ago, Andrea, our second leader, was hired as executive director of a small national organization in New York City. She had several years of senior-level corporate experience and worked as executive director for organizations ten times larger than her current one. Accustomed to more financial resources and access to discretionary funds, she found herself leading a very lean eight-person staff through the economic downturn.

“When I was president of a $50 million nonprofit, we struggled through the recession in the 1990s,” said Andrea. “At the time, we had to focus on quick cost reductions. At the same time, we had to expand programs. The difference is that this was a very different organization from the one I work in now. There is little room to breathe in a smaller organization.”

When she first began at the new organization, she was able to leverage past relationships with funders to invest in the organization. When the recession hit, she immediately developed contingency plans, enacted furloughs, and ended their 403b match, a retirement savings plan for nonprofits, to keep the organization afloat. Although these decisions were hard to make, her past experience managing during a recession taught her not to falter.

“You just have to do something,” said Andrea. “That is the only thing that is similar to a large organization because reality requires action.”

She attributes her personal resiliency to her attentive husband, a non-judgmental board chair, and an obsession with lists, yet, she admits she could do more to help her staff become more resilient.

“I’m not the touchy feely type. I consider myself a high expectations leader,” said Andrea. “Staff should already be resilient. I’m very open regarding our financial situation and encourage staff to take advantage of classes for their edification, but ultimately how they interpret our circumstances is their choice. They have to choose what they want to do with the information I give them.”

She acknowledged she encourages risk-taking, but felt it must be tempered.

“You can’t let it go too far, especially during tight times. I’ve seen how some leaders use laissez-faire management as an excuse for poor decision-making. There simply isn’t a lot of room for errors in this economy.”

Even though it has been a challenging year, Andrea believes “everybody’s got something that can help them through a recession.”

How are Andrea and Diego’s actions indicative of behaviors that either promote or prevent resilience? Where are the opportunities for an OD practitioner to intervene?

Resilience Theory and Practice

The study of resilience began almost 40 years ago when Lois Murphy, a noted child psychologist, decried the vast “problem literature” on children despite our country’s vast technological and scientific achievements (Masten & Reed, 2002). Most research tended to focus on the impact genetics or environments had on children, such as offspring of schizophrenic parents, premature births, or poverty. Ten years after her remarks, researchers began to study more closely how some children were “resistant” despite being at-risk for serious problems. Several of the studies found these children had unique assets or resources that fostered their ability to adapt in hard times (Masten & Reed, 2002).

For example, children from impoverished neighborhoods whose circumstances would have predicted otherwise, had good grades, were involved in age-appropriate activities, had few symptoms of internalizing or externalizing behaviors, and maintained healthy peer relationships.

Resilience has since been studied in adults, groups, and organizations, although most research still continues to be focused on individual resiliency. The study of individual resiliency has many implications for organizational resilience, yet applying individual learning concepts to organization-level systems and processes is not necessarily correlated (McCann, 2004). A strong, resilient leader may not be able to build organizational resilience because he/she may not know how to change the structures and processes needed to build resilience. For example, Andrea, from our case study, had great personal resiliency, but, did not feel the need to transfer that trait to
the rest of the organization. In her opinion, staff should come to work with the capacity to recover from significant changes and make their own decisions based on the information she shares with them. She expected her staff, many of whom were young and new to the nonprofit sector, to quickly develop the experience, resources, and knowledge she gained from her years of service.

Aside from distinguishing individual and organization-level resilience, it is also important to define the difference between resiliency and resilience. Resiliency is an individual personality trait (derived from ego-resiliency), whereas resilience is a process. Making this distinction helps the OD practitioner focus on structures and processes needed to make resilience possible rather than subjective judgments on a leader’s ability to adjust or lead in changing conditions.

Given these distinctions, there are at least two building blocks contributing to an organization’s ability to be resilient, according to Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn (2003): resources (social, emotional, material, etc.) and past experiences with similar challenges. Leaders can provide resources through training, flexible work structures, or even respectful interactions. Leaders can develop experiences of resilience by fostering practices where staff are able to exercise judgment, such as making or recovering from mistakes, experiencing success, or providing process feedback.

Diego, from our case study example, used a combination of these strategies to keep his staff energized and engaged. He increased training opportunities, he coached each staff member individually, and he worked with them to grow their roles. Collectively, these strategies had the impact of maintaining morale, keeping staff focused, and building organization-level resilience.

Another research study argued that organizations must also adopt agile practices in addition to resiliency. McCann, Selsky, and Lee’s (2009) study of 471 companies revealed how turbulent environmental challenges, such as an economic recession, are debilitating for organizations that do not build sufficient adaptive capacity to meet their new conditions. Agile organizations are open to change and quickly execute new strategies. For small nonprofits, this may mean strategic alliances with other nonprofits to share costs, outsourcing administrative roles, or refocusing their mission. More importantly, it means making sense of emerging conditions and redeploying resources in a new direction. Both Diego and Andrea were able to execute on new opportunities that arose at the time. Diego’s organization provided a low-cost staffing alternative to organizations struggling to maintain services. He was able to meet his chal-

Aside from distinguishing individual and organization-level resilience, it is also important to define the difference between resiliency and resilience. Resiliency is an individual personality trait (derived from ego-resiliency), whereas resilience is a process. Making this distinction helps the OD practitioner focus on structures and processes needed to make resilience possible rather than subjective judgments on a leader’s ability to adjust or lead in changing conditions.

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Andrea was in charge. She said, “It was comforting to have someone in charge who’s been in a similar situation.”

The values, norms, and shared beliefs underlying Diego and Andrea’s organization are emblematic of the most critical component supporting an organization’s ability to be resilient: the organization’s culture. Meyer’s (1982) study of hospitals in the bay area impacted by a doctor’s strike showed that “organization ideologies explain responses better than their slack resources.” Even though a couple of the hospitals in his study had the financial or administrative resources to help them rebound, it was their ability to make strategic decisions linked to their shared beliefs that best supported their ability to thrive during a downturn. One of the hospitals, for example, did not have reserves to help them rebound but did have a very fluid, entrepreneurial culture. Units were encouraged to actively seek out new opportunities and functioned with relative independence, and top administrators spent the majority of their time developing external relationships. When the strike decreased the number of clients, administrators leveraged external relationships to quickly launch new programs and services, which were aligned with their existing, shared values. Hospitals who reacted against their shared beliefs, for example exhibiting a higher level of distrust during the crisis, did not fare as well.

As I reviewed the research on organizational resilience, a model began to emerge that brings together several recurrent themes (See Figure 1: Model of Organizational Resilience). Most researchers agree that central to an organization’s resilience are its core values. Agility, past experiences, resources, and flexible structures are meaningless without the engine, the core values, that keeps these components in motion. Resilient systems, like DNA in a cell, are diverse in their edges, but simple at their core. The fuzzy, evolving components of the model include:

- **Resources**: the social, emotional, material slack reserved and used when needed;
- **Experiences**: the exposure, involvement or insight individuals or groups gained through similar encounters;
- **Agility**: openness to change and the capacity to move quickly; and
- **Structures**: the activities such as task allocation, coordination, and supervision, directed towards organizational goals.

To add to our understanding, stage-based theories of organization development, such as Adizes (1979), can help OD practitioners identify common organizational challenges in small nonprofits. Adizes concluded that organizations exhibit predictable patterns based on the size of the organization, when it was founded, and its infrastructure needs. He argued that “People, products, markets, even societies, have lifecycles—birth, growth, maturity, old age, and death. At every lifecycle passage a typical pattern of behavior emerges” (p. 4). Decision-making in the startup stage, for example, is more similar to the human relations model of managing organizations; decisions are informal, flexible, rapid, and increasingly linked to external support. Small organizations can more easily adopt a new strategic direction than larger organizations constrained by bureaucratic processes or dense political struggles.

Although the driving force for small nonprofits is growth and vitality, their efforts are stifled by the founder’s need for control. Adizes claims that start-up organizations are dependent on their founder’s vision and leadership for their survival, leaving staff with limited information. As staff attempt to establish formal policies and procedures, they may be challenged by an administrative system written on the back of an old envelope in the founder’s vest pocket. This makes them more vulnerable because access to information is what researchers, such as Dutton and McCann, claim help organizations become more resilient.

According to Adizes, the amount of time spent on developing administrative behaviors during the beginning stages must exceed the amount of time spent on entrepreneurial activities. These entrepreneurs usually struggle to delegate responsibilities, meet with boards less often, or are less likely to set board term limits (Cameron & Quinn, 1983; Block & Rosenberg, 2002).

Oftentimes, founders’ command and control tendencies combined with tough
environmental circumstances create what Dutton, Sandelands, and Staw, (1981) call “threat rigidity.” Threat rigidity is defined by behaviors that are triggered by adverse environmental conditions that push a leader to behave in ways they might not ordinarily behave. Under threat rigidity, leaders are more likely to restrict information, increase control, or conserve resources. Although small nonprofits are naturally resilient, founders may not be able to remain open and may be stuck in the same patterns for years.

Andrea and Diego have since moved on to other organizations. They were not the founders of their organizations, which can be a detriment when attempting to make substantive changes and struggle with challenging board relationships. They continue to develop their resiliency, which kept their organizations from closing during a tough economic time. What could an experienced OD practitioner have offered to strengthen their resilience? Below I explore some possibilities.

Developing Tools and Practices

In the past few pages, I have alluded to the importance of having right-sized interventions based on individual, group, or organization-level needs. Given the wide diversity of nonprofits, groups, and leaders that exist, knowing which intervention is appropriate for which level would require more time than is allotted in this article. A first step would be to use a diagnostic tool, such as the Comprehensive Model for Diagnosing Organizational Systems (Cummins & Worley, 2008), to capture key information at each level. At the organization level, practitioners can work with the client organization to look at environment, industry, strategy, structure, and culture. For groups, learning about group norms, team functioning, group composition, and goal clarity can be a good starting point. At the individual-level, the model proposes that OD practitioners look at autonomy, personal characteristics, task identity, and feedback on results.

If the organization's leadership is open and ready for more system-wide discussions, Large Group Interventions that support an organization’s potential, such as Future Search or Large Group Scenario Planning, can create organization-level commitments to a desired future and actions steps to get there. These interventions have been proven successful in utilizing the social, emotional, and material resources available to help people and organizations build a greater future state together and can be customized to help organizations think through what will be needed in order to become more resilient.

As mentioned earlier, nonprofit founders can present specific challenges for smaller organizations. Tools that measure the degree and need for control, such as the Competing Values Framework (Cameron, et al., 2006), can help the practitioner identify organizational dynamics that may be indicators of threat rigidity or an absent resilience response. This survey instrument measures whether an organization’s culture leans towards hierarchical, collaborative, or creative. Another instrument, called the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI), provides a quick snapshot into the organization’s core values, beliefs, and assumptions. For instance, if I were working with Andrea from the case study and found that the organization scored high for a controlling, authoritarian work environment through the use of the OCAI instrument, I could use those results and one of the models mentioned earlier to influence leadership to create more opportunities for staff to take risks so they may learn how to be more resilient.

Another useful diagnostic tool used to measure latent resilience in organizations is the Organizational Resilience Potential Scale (ORPS). Developed in 2009 by Somers, it measures the degree to which organizations have inherent behaviors that

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**Figure 2. Example of a Multiple-Level Intervention**

- **Organization needs to adopt more flexible structures.**
  - Senior staff coached to new roles/responsibilities.
  - Consultant works with teams on a Work Redesign to align roles with chosen structure.
  - Organization hires consultant to conduct Scenario Planning to explore multiple futures.

1. **Organization**
2. **Group**
3. **Individual**

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Table 1. Possible Resilience-Building Interventions at Multiple Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resilience Skill</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build Resource Slack</td>
<td>McKinsey Capacity Assessment Grid—can help identify the social, emotional, financial resources.</td>
<td>Develop contingency plan with defined crisis response roles.</td>
<td>Adopt lean administrative structures, for example, have senior leaders make their own copies to save money on staffing.</td>
<td>Cross-train and move staff around to broaden skill/knowledge base.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen Agility</td>
<td>Organizational Resilience Potential Scale (ORPS)—measures extent to which managers exhibit behaviors that make them resilient, which includes openness to environmental risks.</td>
<td>Coordinate strategic planning with a well-researched environmental scan.</td>
<td>Set clear priorities and deadlines. Hold teams accountable for meeting them.</td>
<td>Provide financial rewards and career incentives towards action bias.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalize on Past Experiences</td>
<td>The Resilience Benchmark Tool—measures various indicators including staff’s ability to access various types of experiences.</td>
<td>Create knowledge sharing system to leverage various viewpoints/experiences.</td>
<td>Provide diversity training to reinforce idea that multiple viewpoints make an organization stronger.</td>
<td>Use Appreciative Inquiry to help uncover relevant experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop Flexible Structures</td>
<td>Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI)—helps identify core values.</td>
<td>Scenario Planning to explore multiple futures.</td>
<td>Work Redesign to support new flexible structures.</td>
<td>Coach senior staff to new roles/responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

make them more or less resilient according to proven indicators of resilience. The indicators measure the extent to which managers perceive or seek information on environmental risks, the structure of the organization, or the degree of participation in community planning activities.

Feedback from these diagnostic tools is a helpful start, but perhaps, a promising intervention with great impact could be coaching the client. Nonprofit funders are continuing to take an interest in coaching as a means to help nonprofit executive directors deal with organizational challenges (Howard, Blair, & Kellogg, 2006) because of its proven ability to help leaders identify solutions to problems, increase organizational learning, and develop better self-awareness. As McCann, Selsky, and Lee (2009) suggest, leaders need help in making sense of their circumstances, creating and sustaining an openness to change, sharing knowledge, creating an action bias in the organization, and developing resources quickly.

Appreciative-Inquiry based coaching, for example, can help leadership identify strength-based possibilities that might otherwise be concealed. Powerful questions such as “describe a situation in which you’ve observed resiliency in your organization,” or “tell me how you used new ideas to help your organization adjust to changing environmental conditions,” can help leaders recognize new ways of leading and growing the organization.

An example of how coaching helped an executive director make shifts in her mindset came from a small grief counseling nonprofit that originally asked for help building a new strategic direction for the organization. After interviewing their staff, our team of consultants discovered the founder struggled with letting go of key decisions and opening the board to people outside of her network. After receiving this feedback during her coaching meetings, the client realized how her behavior was impacting the organization and decided it was more pressing to build a stronger, more professional board with outsiders in order to grow her organization and leave a legacy of her work. As the founder of the organization, she still struggles with letting go, but has increasingly become more committed to the idea that others need to be a part of the decision-making process.

If the organization’s leadership is open and ready for more system-wide discussions, Large Group Interventions that support an organization’s potential, such as Future Search or Large Group Scenario Planning, can create organization-level commitments to a desired future and actions steps to get there. These interventions have been proven successful in utilizing the social, emotional, and material resources available to help people and organizations build a greater future state together and can be customized to help organizations think through what will be needed in order to become more resilient. Large Group Scenario Planning in particular, can build organizational agility by allowing multiple stakeholders to have a voice in determining the organization’s future, which, as discussed earlier, also leads to resilience.

Conclusion

Research on resilience is still a burgeoning field, especially when it comes to understanding how to support small nonprofits. What is certain is that OD practitioners have to build on the organizational culture to develop slack resources, a flexible...
References


Exploring the Real Work of Social Change

Seven Questions that Keep Us Awake

By Doug Reeler

The important thing is the relationships, not the agenda . . . eventually they will call me to a meeting. I will not call them to a meeting. Participation means that we participate with the village people, not that they participate with us . . . the first thing is to make relationships, not to make projects.—Meas Nee (1999)

People have to be seen as being actively involved, given the opportunity, in shaping their own destiny, and not just as passive recipients of the fruits of cunning development programs.—Amartya Sen (1999)

This paper is written out of the work I and my colleagues have done over the past 20 years as activists and social change facilitators. We work out of an NGO based in Cape Town, SA called the Community Development Resource Association (www.cdra.org.za), with a wide variety of people, from rural and urban communities and movements to networks and alliances, local and international NGOs and donor agencies to government, in almost every sector and with a wide range of issues. We are dilettantes in the finest sense of the word. Our practice is essentially about designing and facilitating transformative practices and processes of social change and the kinds of organization and leadership required to support these.

This article is about exploring questions that matter. We see ourselves as “action researchers” and so we like good questions, constantly working with them to improve our observations and learnings, and to guide our next actions. We put good effort into encouraging the people we engage to continually improve their own observational and questioning powers and processes. Empowerment does not begin with the ability to find right answers but to continually develop more powerful questions, out of real experience. Questioning is the yeast of social change.

Sometimes there are no answers, only continual questioning into the future. As Rilke implores:

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves... Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer. Rilke (1929)

Our important questions seldom have ready answers. Consider the question: How do we bring communities and government together into a co-creative relationship? The answer to this complex question is not only different for different contexts but in each of these contexts the response cannot be simply cooked up in a strategic planning session or a logframe1 with a fixed budget under a donor’s deadline. The answer to

1. Logical Framework Approach (logframe) is a management tool used for designing, monitoring, and evaluating international development projects.
this question must be discovered through continuous cycles of doing, observing, reflecting, learning, and replanning, each requiring its own process of disciplined questioning, and the more participative the more likely to succeed. And it is likely that the question itself will change, perhaps to: How do we support communities and local government to prepare themselves for engagement? This is the practice of social change, continually searching for better questions and able to meet the intricacies and nuances of life.

One of the disciplines we teach in our work revolves around an exercise that helps people to improve their important questions, based on looking again at the experience out of which their questions come, reflecting on that experience, stimulating the developing of improved or new questions, and then deciding what our next most fruitful step might be, not looking for quick answers, but continually deepening our understanding, and framing better questions and the next right steps forward.

This is not an easy stance to take in a world that demands answers in the form of a solid plan up front, a budget that can be accounted for, and proof that this was the right plan, if the funding is still to flow. It takes a certain humility to say, “we don’t yet know,” to say that we want to experiment our way forward. Yet without this humility we are unlikely to approach the future as learners and should not be surprised when the right answers continue to elude us.

Are we asking the right questions? We offer seven important questions and lines of inquiry that guide our work. The questions are conceptually posed and we offer conceptual takes on them, hardly answers because these are ongoing inquiries and serve to guide the asking of these in the field of practice. When these questions are asked in a particular context, they take on an entirely different character, serving to guide a process of observation and experimentation. The seven questions are:

Question 1 – What is social change and how do we approach it?
Question 2 – What is our primary role as development practitioners?
Question 3 – How do we see and work with power?
Question 4 – How do we work with uncertainty?
Question 5 – What social change strategies work best?
Question 6 – What kinds of organizations and leadership do we need to face the future?
Question 7 – How can we have conversations that matter?

People cannot be changed from the outside as if they are pieces on a chess board. Indeed to apply an external stimulus for change is more likely to provoke resistance or further passivity. If women in a community are stuck, seemingly passive and unable to break out of dependence and subservience to the patriarchy, it is not because they are internally passive, but because their will and capacity to change is held back by a series of constraints both internal (psychological and cultural) and external. If they can be helped to remove or lower these constraints they will be able to change themselves and their (power) relationship to the world.

Seen in this way, living beings, social or individual, do not change via cause and effect but by the release of the inner and outer constraints that are holding them in a particular state. If they can be supported to

why, if things seem stuck, is change being constrained?” In this way we are able to acknowledge and work with the innate forces for and against change.

The development sector tends to conceptualize change as a cause and effect process – “this effect (e.g., poverty) is the result of this cause. Therefore, I must change the cause to have a different effect.” Sounds logical, but this is only a useful conception of change for the world of inanimate objects and technical systems. Living, animate, social systems are different in that they are already in a constrained flux of change from within (Franzetta, 2010). People cannot be changed from the outside as if they are pieces on a chess board. Indeed to apply an external stimulus release the right constraints they can move themselves in the right direction.

In the Limpopo Province in South Africa the CDRA has been working with scores of self-organized women’s groups who come together to see to the needs of their young children. The program is called Letsema (the Sotho word for a universal tradition of working together to reach a common purpose). Until we started work with them they were stuck within their own worlds, unaware of their own interesting and useful experiences and capabilities. We supported them to start visiting each other in horizontal learning exchanges, sharing how they live and what they do, learning from each other’s innovations and from that mutual appreciation developing the
self-worth and confidence to see a different future for themselves in which they are active participants.

In our work we have identified three dominant kinds of change that people, communities, and societies go through (Reeler, 2007):

» Emergent change describes the day-to-day unfolding of life, adaptive and uneven processes of unconscious and conscious learning from experience and the change that results from that. This applies to individuals, families, communities, organizations, and societies adjusting to shifting realities, of trying to improve and enhance what they know and do, of building on what is there, step-by-step, uncertainly, but still learning and adapting, however well or badly.

Emergent change conditions exist most strongly in unpredictable conditions. These may be a result of external uncertainties like an unstable economy or a fragile political dispensation, or from internal uncertainty.

In peri-urban areas around Cape Town, like many cities of the South, rural migrants arrive every day seeking work and access to health services and schools for their children. They gather and group on spare pieces of land, illegally occupying them. Some are connected through rural ties and some make new connections, for protection and support. They are emerging communities, still fragile and fractured and vulnerable to rivalries and exploitation. With time and experience leadership and a sense of place, trust and identity begin to form. Patriarchal and tribal rifts are still prevalent.

It is an emergent process of people learning to get along, to know and trust each other and to become authentically organized. What are the external support approaches that connect with this, enabling the emergent community to strengthen itself?

The Federation of the Urban Poor, built over time from organized shack dwellers, allied to the Shack Dwellers International, and supported by some NGOs, often begin work in such emergent communities by suggesting that the women form “daily savings groups” through which they elect trusted collectors (emergent leaders) to collect from each member of a block of shacks a small amount of change each day. This provides a seedling foundation of local organization and leadership on which larger programs of change can be built in the future.

» Transformative change. At some stage in the development of all social beings it is typical for crisis or stickiness to develop. This may be the product of a natural process of inner development; for example, the crisis of the adolescent when that complex interplay of hormones and awakening to the hard realities of growing up breaks out into all manner of physical, emotional, and behavioural problems and issues. Or a pioneering organization reaching the limits of its informal structuring and relationships, unable to grow without a qualitative shift, a transformation of the way it works. Crises may also be the product of social beings entering into tense or contradictory relationships with their world, prompted by shifts in external political, economic, cultural, or environmental contexts.

Crisis or stickiness sets the stage for transformative change. Unlike emergent change, which is characterized as a learning process, transformative change is more about unlearning, of people letting go of those leading ideas, values, or beliefs that underpin the crisis, that no longer suit the situation or relationships that are developing.

South Africa is riven by conflict and protest. Every day in scores of townships residents block the roads and march on their local councils, sometimes violently, to protest the lack of service delivery (water, housing, electricity). They feel excluded and expect the government to deliver. But the government cannot deliver on its own – its attempts at top-down delivery on the back of a bureaucratic infrastructure inherited from the Apartheid regime is failing amidst corruption and lack of capacity.

A key transformation that needs to take place revolves around challenging the top down nature of the system and the assumptions that a passive citizenry must have its services delivered by an active government. Even the language of “rights,” so beloved of Development Aid, which separates “rights holders” from “duty bearers” encourages the conception that local government and community have separate interests, and feeds their mutual alienation. The endless cycles of protest and failed delivery will not end until communities and government let go of these notions and transform the way they see each other, and their roles, to discover more co-creative ways of communities bringing their resourcefulness and initiatives to meet the collective resources and larger systems of support held by the government. The conception that active citizenship is only about holding government to account is itself impoverished and even dangerous.

How can we strengthen impulses to let go of these attitudes? What can we do to help either side to begin to see past this fruitless cycle?

Working with resistance to change is at the heart of transformation. In our heads we may know we have to change but deeper down we are held captive, frozen in the current state and unable to let go. Three things stand out here:

• Fear of losing power, privilege, and identity, of being hurt or worse. Fear of the dark and unknown that will disrupt what we have become used to, even if these are just coping strategies for what has not worked;
• Doubt and self-doubt that they or I cannot be better or do what is required, that we and our ideas are inadequate, and that we do not have the capability; and
• Hatred or self-hatred. Where there has been conflict, abuse or trauma we can be consumed by bitterness, resentment, and revenge or paradoxically blame or even hate
ourselves for what we have done or not done or even what has been done to us.

All of these constrain the will or imprison the innate flux of change. There are no easy methods for working with these deep resistances. We look for ways to surface and share them, to bring them to light, either intimately or socially, to give them perspective, to enable them to be expressed, and through that comes the possibility of release, of freeing ourselves from what is constraining us. Helping people to share their stories is a well tried approach. Asking ourselves what we fear, doubt, and hate and supporting honest answers and conversations may be what is required. From our experience we know that people start to free themselves when they are able to speak more honestly about themselves and their experiences and directly describe their fears, doubts, and hatreds. We see it working when they start to become more physically energetic, when they are able to look each other in the eye, and when their will to move on is activated.

On the other side of fear, doubt, and hatred we can find courage, faith, and love. Good ideas for change are flimsy without courage, and central to our work is to face fear and more consciously and collectively decide what we have to do about it, to encourage each other. Love is one of the least spoken words in the books and workshops on social change. But there can be few transformations that are not centred on the transformation of the heart.

How do we work with doubt and faith, fear and courage, and hatred and love more consciously in our practice?

Projectable Change. Human beings can identify and solve problems and imagine or envision different possibilities or solutions for the future. We can project possible visions or outcomes and formulate conscious plans to bring about change. This is the essence of development projects.

Where the internal and external conditions or environments, especially the relationships of a system, are coherent, stable, and predictable enough, and where unpredictable outcomes or risks do not threaten desired results, then the conditions for projectable change arise and well-planned projects become possible.

The fact is that many of us, especially those who control and are responsible for finances and resource allocations, tend to like Projectable Change approaches because they give the illusion of control and accountability, even when the conditions for projects simply do not yet exist. Indeed few situations of marginalization, impoverishment, or oppression are projectable, by definition. Other work needs to be done before projects make sense.

Of course, many practitioners only know of one way of doing things, most often by projects. Abraham Maslow said in 1966, “I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail” (p. 15).

Projects, if they are to be sustained, must come at the right time and take root within the people who will sustain them.

Out of the savings groups (referred to above) the women become members of the Federation of the Urban Poor and are then supported to undertake enumerations—door-to-door research to collect the information about themselves needed to better understand who they are and to be better understood by their context, especially local government. The enumerations lead to small visioning processes where they envisage and plan possible water supplies or good sanitation, or eventually their own houses. These are projects, in the best sense of the word, homegrown, owned and, therefore potentially sustainable. Local government is invited in to observe these preparation processes and their support is sought. The savings that communities have made are revealed and can be offered as a contribution. The question put to government by the community leaders is: “How can we help you to help us?”

There may be many more kinds of change, but the key is not to rush into any particular approach, but rather to observe what kind of change or changes are already at play and to see if there are ways to work within and out of these.

How can we build a sensibility in ourselves and those with whom we work to more accurately read the nature of change conditions and formulate approaches to change that can work with these?

Question 2 – What is our primary role as development practitioners?

The need for change in marginalized and impoverished communities the world over are widespread and vast. But the ability and resources of governments and NGOs to work with these needs, in helpful ways, are extremely limited.

Yet those same communities, who appear to outsiders as needy victims, have reservoirs of hidden and potential capacities and resources, and resourcefulness from hard-learned experience that vastly outweigh what can be brought in from the outside. Once surfaced and validated by people themselves these are the seed-beds out of which change can be nurtured.

But most Development Aid Projects we have seen unthinkingly dump capacity-building, technology, and funding onto communities, structured around the idea that people lack capacity, resources, and organization and conclude that is what must be provided. And in doing so they further bury the hidden reservoirs of community potential.

And, of course, in burying what people have and know and bringing answers and resources from the outside, inevitably people’s own will, confidence, and ownership are also buried and the projects continue to fail to sustain themselves once the capacity and resource bringers leave. This is the grand narrative of the Development Aid Industry.

We must recognize that people have been developing long before the Development Aid came into their lives and will continue to develop long after it leaves. The will to develop is innate, inborn. It is an inside-out and a continuous process.
It may not be happening in a healthy or productive way in this or that community and it may be that its potential is blocked or buried by a series of constraints, but it is the only game in town to work with.

Development is already happening and as an outsider I cannot deliver development to anyone or indeed bring change to anyone. Our role must be to work with what is already developing in the community, not only with what they have but with how they do things, to help people to strengthen and build on what is healthy and to let go of or change what is not. But these things women suggest, increasingly facilitating themselves and setting the agendas. They are continually encouraged to reflect on themselves, to draw strength, forgiveness, and learning from lives that, without exception, are filled with experiences of hardship, trauma, sacrifice, initiative, and triumph. In a few days they start to look at themselves and each other differently, each a bit taller, their eyes filled with hope and courage and their minds with new ideas.

**Question 3 – How do we see and work with power?**

But the word or notion of “power” in many cultures is difficult to work with. In collective cultures power is often veiled and hidden behind seemingly collective processes, where those with power use their influence, experience, and ability to steer decisions in directions they like. To even suggest that there are power differentials and that they constrain development is regarded as disrespectful to the culture.

are seldom visible to practitioners or even the people themselves. And so a key task is to bring to light peoples’ own hidden resourcefulness, their untapped potential.

So the question is what can those of us who are intervening from the outside do to help communities to surface, unlock, mobilize, share, and organize their own resources and resourcefulness in order to develop and transform themselves and their relationship with the outside world? Do we have the patience and faith to let them do this in their way and in their own time?

In the Letsema Program we support the rural women’s groups to bring their leaders together for five day workshops. These are not training sessions but development sessions where the women are encouraged to tell their life stories, to listen to each other, to experiment with asking better questions, to inquire into the power relationships they are caught in, and to build trust and solidarity between them. There is very little teaching, just the odd concept or two, and no fixed curriculum. The workshop moves as the We live, learn, and develop within three differently experienced kinds or levels of relationships: relationship with self, interpersonal relationships with people around us, and external relationships with the rest of the world. These three levels span the inner and outer experiences of human beings and so it is at these levels of relationships that we find the work of helping people to free themselves. Power is held in relationships, whether it is the struggle we have with ourselves to claim our inner power, or the power we have over others, or the power we hold cooperatively with others, or the power the State wields in relation to its citizens – without relationship power means little, it has no force, for bad or for good. If we want to shift power, we have to shift relationships.

It is within each and all of these three levels of relationships that people are free or unfree. If in our view of ourselves we have self-doubt or self-hatred we become inhibited, entrapped, or unfree. A stuck, abusive relationship with a partner may be as great a hindrance to development as a lack of social opportunity or (relationship of) political oppression. These kinds of “unfreedoms” at the three levels of relationship mutually reinforce each other and add up to a recipe for entrenched marginalization – the core target of development interventions.

But the word or notion of “power” in many cultures is difficult to work with. In collective cultures power is often veiled and hidden behind seemingly collective processes, where those with power use their influence, experience, and ability to steer decisions in directions they like. To even suggest that there are power differentials and that they constrain development is regarded as disrespectful to the culture.

Power does strange things to the best of us. Those of us who do confront power directly, violently or non-violently, often find that the harder we push, the more we struggle, the stronger becomes the resistance to change, the more we bolster the forces we had sought to weaken. Power is paradoxical and can seldom be approached in a straight line.

In the third learning week of the network of civil society organizations we ran a day-long role-play on power. We put the leaders in government positions and those with the quietest voices were asked to play the community organization leaders. Others played the role of NGOs and the media. A contentious scenario was developed and the day unfolded in an exciting and disturbing way. We were amazed at how those put into government roles resorted to defensive and avoidance behaviour, how they shut themselves away from delegation to civil society, how they sought to continue to keep power for themselves, how they would distort and constrict and make trustworthiness through exaggerations and even lies, and how they spoke down to the “little people” they were supposed to serve. In the reflective debrief afterwards none were more horrified and disturbed by their own behaviours than the directors themselves.

The corrupt and powerful, who are addicted to power and money, and fearful and dismissive of others, will have to be confronted with the truth of their destructive and self-destructive obsessions and fears, and either persuaded or toppled. Sometimes the powerful undermine themselves, blinded by their egos and often
hiding or denying what their power manifests. How can we engage them in ways that do not burn down the country?

When the powerful are unseated by force, how often is their place taken by people who adopt the same behaviours, using the old regime’s laws and institutions to secure their new regime? Or worse, rival pretenders to the throne rush into the political vacuum and new wars begin. It did not take long for the hopeful and unstoppable “Arab Spring” to degenerate into several nightmare scenarios.

Clearly there are distinctions to be made. Some good people lose themselves in their power and can be persuaded away from dysfunctional uses and be helped to share. But more often the powerful will only change when confronted by a crisis, a transformative challenge where the perceived costs to themselves of holding onto power are greater than the perceived risks of letting go. Calculating and communicating perceived costs and risks can be where some of the key work lies in weakening the resolve of the dysfunctionally powerful. The fall of the Berlin Wall and Apartheid both happened when a point of sanity was reached and the regimes were helped to see the writing on the wall.

Some people would focus on building alternatives rather than confrontation:

You never change anything by fighting existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete—R. Buckminster Fuller (see http://bfi.org)

This choice does not always exist and can be naïve in many situations. Modern-day slaves cannot wait for alternatives to their bondage to develop. But as a part of a sustainable approach, developing alternatives can be critical. Facing climate change will require the development of alternatives but these will only flourish as viable investments when the causes of global warming are tackled and made more politically, morally, and financially costly than the powerful can stomach. Is there a different way to reach the powerful?

The complex and paradoxical nature of power requires that we have diverse and layered approaches to change when obstrinate and brutal power is being faced. But still many more questions remain.

Question 4—How do we work with uncertainty?

Most of what is happening inside a change process is invisible not only to outsiders but also to communities themselves. We are all stumbling around in the dark pretending that we can see, imagining that we have or can find the answers, desperately trying to create enough certainty to feel safe and in control and to show we are accountable. But the future, like the skies over our biggest cities, is hazy more and more so it seems each year as global economic instability and environmental crises lay waste to our best laid plans.

So what do we do? First of all we need to recognize that uncertainty cannot be wished away and nor can it be brought under control by more planning. The mind-sets that shape the planning, monitoring, and evaluation systems that frame and shape Development Aid Projects usually emphasize control and accountability above learning and adaptation. To get the funding everything needs to be thought through, activities and budgets agreed upon upfront, and monitoring and evaluation checks put into place to ensure that people do what they have promised to do. The pre-analyzed causes and effects are solved by project planned causes and effects. A little failure and some learning is tolerated but not much. Miss enough targets and your funding is cut and you may get fired.

This is a significant problem for two reasons. First, the tendency is to do the big planning upfront back in the NGO or government offices and then to sell the plans to the communities, again undermining authentic processes of ownership and the surfacing of hidden resourcefulness. Second, the promise and illusion of control and accountability that the logframed, bureaucratic development project brings undermines the thoughtful and continual adjusting of practice and plans based on ongoing experience required to learn our way into an uncertain future.

Our critical capacity to honestly learn from our mistakes is hobbled by our fear of losing funding or position. We dare not be too honest. We find results where there are none and ignore failures that could, if analyzed hold the key to learning and innovative ways forward. Logframed projects, when implemented, as they usually are, in emergent or transformative change conditions, promise success and accountability, but deliver failure and cultivate corruption.

How can we actually reward honesty about “failure” and learning above accountability for results? We know that in uncertain times it is only through honest learning and the innovation this enables that sustainable results become possible. This is not a new question and many readers are probably tired of hearing it. And therein lies the real question. Despite our doubts about bureaucratic accountability for results, what keeps holding us captive?

Too often we box our questioning and learning processes into our Monitoring and Evaluation systems, outsource them to experts and effectively rob the stakeholders of the one thing that may enable success: the ability to learn our way forward through continuous processes of action learning.

But it would be wrong to simply view learning as a way to better navigate complex change, or something that should occasionally or periodically accompany the work we do to improve it. In our view learning is far more important than that. In our view social change is fundamentally a learning and unlearning process best met by a learning practice. Indeed change, development, and learning can be seen as virtually indistinguishable.

The challenge is to recognize and work with learning and unlearning in every aspect of a change program, to see in its DNA the spirals of learning that describe the reality of how we actually do learn and unlearn our way into the future.

2. Some twenty years ago we used the phrase Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation, seeing it as a continuous cycle. The dropping of Planning from common discourse reflects this outsourcing to M&E experts.
What does this actually mean for practice and how does it link to results and impact?

There can be many results, but the most critical result, the foundation of sustainability of any social change initiative, is that communities have become better learners, continually improving on their experience, and continually enhancing their ability to respond creatively to whatever life throws at them – their response-ability. This is real evaluation, not in the form of the deadening M&E systems that we attempt to use to account for and control our precious plans, but as the living processes of feedback that throw light and perspective on the hidden depths of our evolving endeavours for all stakeholders.

It should be clear by now that many M&E systems have little to do with real learning, and as such, they are more often an impediment to good practice than a support. The things that matter most are the least visible, the least measurable, and if we insist on certainty in our plans and if we demand the achievement of contracted results, then we will learn even less. Continual observation, listening, reflecting, and questioning, within a learning orientation provide the only keys to the locked doors that we are continually confronted and confounded by.

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There are three types of learning to recognize here:

» **Action Learning.** Simply put this involves continual reflection on experience, drawing learnings from those reflections, and building the implication of those learnings into future actions. Most NGOs I know, through their M&E systems try to draw learnings immediately from experience without deep observation and reflection, resulting in shallow and misleading learnings. Action Learning is a nuanced change process that requires a disciplined approach (see *Barefoot Guide to Learning Practices in Organizations and Social Change*, http://www.barefootguide.org/barefoot-guide-2.html).

This connects strongly to emergent change discussed earlier.

» **Unlearning.** Sometimes, in order to move forward, learning does not help because we are constrained by ideas, beliefs, or attitudes that are too close to us to easily let go. Before we can continue to learn our way forward we have to pause to unlearn these things, i.e., how White people see Black people, how men see women, how women see themselves. These prejudices have to be unlearnt. But usually, unless there is the force or pain of a crisis, people are unwilling to do so. Fear, doubt, and self-doubt, as well as resentment, hatred, or even self-hatred are the predominant factors for this kind of resistance to change. Helping people to surface and face these can be the key work of social change. This connects strongly to transformative change discussed earlier.

In the Letsema leadership workshops, through telling and listening to each other’s life stories, not only do the women learn from each other, but they begin to unlearn many assumptions about themselves that constrain their ability to change – that they must fear those who are in charge, that they are just women and not able to lead, that their role is to respond and not to initiate, that they are not as worthy as men to enjoy their lives. Each woman has had turning points to relate where they have, despite the odds, stood up for themselves and claimed some power. Through sharing they reduce their isolation and begin to unlearn the inner constraints that are holding them back, sparking a critical process of personal transformation.

» **Horizontal Learning.** Since time immemorial people have learnt from each other, informally sharing stories and wisdom, trading innovations and recipes, teaching each other techniques and technologies, neighbour to neighbour, farmer to farmer, parent to child. This horizontal learning has always been a powerful motor of social change.

When Education arrived in the form of expert teachers, doctors, nurses, lawyers, agricultural extension workers, etc. – for many people as part of colonial domination – the result was that people’s belief in the value of their own and their neighbour’s experiences, knowledge, and ideas became increasingly diminished. Cultures and practices of horizontal, community learning and knowledge have become half-buried and vertical dependencies have emerged over the past few generations, continually reinforced by modern society. Knowledge and learning have become external commodities increasingly removed from the organic life of communities, robbing people not only of access to their own local knowledge and potential, but weakening the accompanying age-old interdependent relationships of community. Restoring or renewing cultures and practices of horizontal learning, hand-in-hand with
action learning, surely becomes central to a developmental practice.

But horizontal learning can take us even further. If we want to work together collaboratively and fruitfully we might best begin this by learning together, horizontally. The powerful housing and farmers movements of Shack Dwellers International and Via Campesina use horizontal exchanges at the heart of their mobilization and organization. In South Africa the Letsena program uses horizontal learning exchanges not only to share innovations but also to build relationships and solidarity (Reeler, 2005). Horizontal learning exchanges are, arguably, the most powerful motivator of engagement between the women in the program, so much so that after the first few were stimulated and supported from the outside, they now happen regularly and without any external support.

From this we see that horizontal learning also begins to provide an answer to the conundrum described earlier that the need for change in marginalized and impoverished communities the world over is widespread and vast. But the ability and resources of governments and NGOs to work with these needs in a helpful way are extremely limited (Reeler, 2005). Indeed through horizontal learning processes, communities can stimulate and support change in each other, with minimal external help, with development spilling from village to village, or even of change catching fire as good ideas and innovations spread widely and generously by word of mouth, as they used to before modern times.

In the Limpopo province a group of 60-odd villages revived a traditional practice of meeting once a year for a seed-sharing festival. This had fallen into disuse since the agricultural industry, ushered in by government extension officers, began showing small farmers the modern way, creating deep and worrying dependencies on corporate-controlled seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides. An awareness workshop by a local NGO on the looming dangers of genetically-modified seed finally tipped the scales and provoked the renewal of the old practice.

Now, at a different village each year, the farmers once again send representatives of each village to gather and congregate for several days, each bringing bags of their beans and grains to cook and taste and then to freely share as seed, with advice on how best to plant and grow. And all of this generates the revival of other cultural practices, of songs and dances and stories that express a renewed identity of community and interdependency (Reeler, 2005).

The question that we continue to ask is how can we cultivate support for open-ended horizontal learning practices and approaches that cannot guarantee this or that outcome, but that prepare the soil for working together through learning together?

**Question 5 – What social change strategies work best?**

In our experience there is seldom one strategy that is sufficient to meet the complex processes of social change. And quite often several consecutive or concurrent strategies are called for. Some of the different strategies are described or implied in the text above, but here I would like to spell them out more clearly:

» **Top-down strategies.** Democratically elected governments, legitimately appointed leaders, and skilled managers may find call to implement changes from above, particularly those that meet initiatives from below. Universal health-care, sanitation, education, transport and communication infrastructure, and police forces to combat criminality may all be top down initiatives. Of course how they meet the varied needs of communities and at what point they require community engagement from below must be considered, but there are valid aspects of social change that are legitimately and developmentally brought from above.

» **Bottom-up strategies.** Sometime change begins from below, where stuck power above cannot move, whether in its own interest or because of external uncertainties. Marginalized and oppressed people must free themselves. Communities cannot wait for a collapsed local government to deliver water before it takes matters into its own hands.

» **Inside-out strategies.** All sustainable change begins as an inward journey. Before people can free themselves from their oppressors they must free themselves from their own self-identification. This is transformative change, of individuals and communities, unlearning what they have held to be true and seeing themselves with new eyes, before embarking on changing the attitudes and even the laws and practices of society.

» **Sideways strategies.** This is closely connected to horizontal learning, as a powerful motor of change, where people connect across boundaries within and between communities, perhaps involving some unlearning, to create new communities to face their problems and take advantage of new possibilities.

» **Do nothing strategies.** Sometimes a situation needs the space and time to sort itself out, for a crisis to ripen, or for the will to change to gain sufficient strength. We may need to spend time to simply observe to see if we do have a role and what that role might be. We should not assume that the kind of change that we can support is always needed or possible. Be wary of the change merchants posing as social change practitioners who always assume they can be helpful!

Complex or comprehensive change agendas, programs, and interventions quite often contain several of these strategies, running concurrently, or the one set of actions paving the way for the next. Horizontal exchanges (sideways strategies) have proven to have surprising success in creating foundations of learning and solidarity for collaborative or co-creative initiatives. Top-down or bottom-up strategies seldom succeed unless they provoke some transformative inside-out change in key actors.

But no planned strategy can account for the full story nor anticipate what will
prevail. The complexity of change can only be met by diverse approaches that learn their way into the future.

**Question 6 – What kinds of organizations and leadership do we need to face the future?**

Communities can discover their own agency, develop their own organizations and leadership required to take initiatives and to meet government and social-minded business in co-creative partnerships.

Sovereign, local organizations and leaders, able to express what people think, feel, and want are key building blocks of social change, without which little is sustainable. Projects are not organizations, and too often substitute for them because donors, government, or practitioners are too impatient to support their development.

But in this post-modern age the conventional and traditional hierarchical forms of organization and strong leaders at both community and local government level are less and less appropriate. Young people, in particular, are emerging en masse, informed and empowered by education, the TV, and the internet as never before, yet unwilling to meekly follow strong leaders. Through social media they have become easy to mobilize but more difficult to organize in conventional forms.

The world is starting to experiment with less controlling, more participative, less hierarchical, more networked forms of organization but these are tentative. What is clear is that they are not so easily held together by formal structure and rules but rather by new kinds of relationships, conversations, and understandings. Their ability to be agile and to learn may be a determining factor in navigating the uncertain future ahead.

**A word on leadership.** Leaders are only one form of leadership. Conventionally they are the dominant form. But increasingly, as people demand participation and joint decision-making, it is through conversations, in meetings and workshops, that leadership is taking place. As this grows, the role of leaders becomes more facilitative, paying attention less to the decisions and more to the quality of process and the conversations that lead to good decisions.

In the organization I have worked with over the past 18 years the idea of a particular “leader” always felt strange. Indeed for a number of years we had no one who was called “the Director.” People would call us and ask for the Director and the receptionist would reply, “Please hold on, I will see who is in.” Eventually we did designate a Director because this answer was too disturbing for the outside world. However, leadership is essentially and mostly held in our monthly learning days, when we gather to reflect on the issues and experiences of the month to learn our way forward and to make important strategic decisions. The process is the leader.

How can we re-imagine leadership as intelligent learning processes, in many possible forms, to meet the complex and diverse challenges we face?

**Question 7 – How can we have conversations that matter?**

How different are we from the conversations that we have with ourselves and with each other. In many ways we are conversations. If we were to stop conversing we would find that we would soon stop living. Human conversation, in human relationship, lies at the very heart of the processes of social life.

Good social change happens from good conversations. Almost all change takes place through conversations of one kind or another. Conversations that lead to change are in themselves processes of change and in paying attention to the quality of our conversations we are determining the kind of change that emerges. This is an obvious and simple truth but one that is easily forgotten in all the clever change strategies and complicated project plans that we construct to drive the change we seek.

The first conversation is the one that each of us has with ourselves, if we allow it, between the different voices that live in our heads and hearts. We are social beings, continually influenced by the people with whom we grow up and live. How often do we hear the voice of a parent, a friend, or teacher pop up into our heads in response to a situation? We debate and argue with ourselves when faced with a dilemma, using some points of view of two or more of the influential people in our lives. Holding and allowing different voices can be a healthy thing because this working with diversity inside us helps us to prepare for and meet the diversity and complexity of life outside, to prepare for conversations with others. As a social facilitator I know that to get good participation I often need to support these inner conversations to surface in one way or another before bringing people into conversation with each other.

The second conversation is the one each individual has with another or others, engaging to chat, share, confront, and resolve the issues of life, bringing the voices of each together. In doing so, and in issues of social change, we may or may not find common ground. But we are also changed by these conversations – we continually learn and unlearn, emerge and transform. To the extent that we do move closer together, we prepare ourselves for the third type of conversation.

Several years ago I assisted with an action learning program in West and Central Africa. Its purpose and logic were quite simple – to introduce the action learning cycle into the formal conversations of disability movements and town councils to improve their processes, to help them to be more learningful. They were shown how to use the action learning cycle as a conscious and more disciplined frame for conducting their meetings. In the program evaluation a year later the mayors from two town councils in Cameroon related stories of how their meetings, previously over-formalized, dry and unproductive, had become transformed as more people participated, of how honestly they spoke and how their reflections and learnings led to action.

The third type of conversation is the one we collectively have with others. It might be a group of parents engaging their children’s teacher, or a community speaking to their councillor. What it carries through is social power and the potential to spark or pave the way for social change.

As social change practitioners we must
pay attention to each of these levels of conversation as each level prepares people to engage at the next.

In all these conversations that involve change there may be those voices of fear, of doubt, and self-doubt, of resentment or self-hatred, moving from individual to the group. How these are surfaced and met will determine whether the individual or the group are able to act, to find the will to be part of the change.

Out of the diversity of “voices” we find the richness of conversations, and out of our rich conversations spring the relationships, ideas and impulses for change. We are social beings and it is through our many voices in many conversations that we are most social. How authentic voices are brought, received, engaged with, and supported makes a world of difference to the quality of conversation, to human engagement, and to the contribution we each can make to processes of change.—Nomvula Dlamini (2013)

Concluding Thoughts

As we look for better questions in deeper conversations, continuously observing and learning, and as we desperately seek for answers, we have to recognize that in the sheer complexity of being human and working with change, so much remains that is unknown and even more that is unknowable. And so, I have argued in this paper for diverse, collaborative, learning-based approaches to change that can meet the learning-based nature of change.

Social transformation can happen in a simple conversation that leads to a change of heart. Or it can take decades of strife and hardship. So much hinges on the human qualities of questioning, observing, learning, relating, and conversing amongst the role-players. Up to a point several of these can be consciously acquired, even taught, but the human trust and commitment required to carry and sustain change are the less tangible and malleable qualities that need to be unblocked and cultivated.

But we are all still in the thrall of obsessively detailed planning, monitoring, evaluation, and other technical systems to manage and control social change, all instrumental manifestations of our fear of losing control and power. This is perhaps our greatest challenge, to let go of our need for certainty and control and to have more faith in our collective ability to humbly learn our way forward in messy but creative, human, and real processes.

One question each of us needs to keep asking is: In what ways are our own needs, doubts, and fears hindering the ability of people we work with to learn their way into the future?

References


Persistent Traumatization in Nonprofit Organizations

By Pat Vivian and Shana Hormann

Introduction

Through consultation, research, and training we have been studying the phenomenon of organizational trauma in highly mission-driven nonprofits for nearly 15 years. In this article we first define highly mission-driven nonprofits and organizational trauma, then explore often un-noticed effects of traumatization on nonprofits. We share important insights about intervening in traumatized organizations and important lessons about what works in such circumstances. Specifically, we offer new awareness about what happens to an organization that has suffered from traumatization over time without recognition of the symptoms and the effects that hinder it. We acknowledge the toll taken on leaders of these entrenched traumatized systems. We also name and describe a set of characteristics and draw implications for effective OD practice.

Highly Mission-Driven Organizations

A highly mission-driven organization is one whose mission is compelling and pervasive, defining not only the nature of the work but also the approach to the work and the nature of the internal relationships. Examples are nonprofits that deal with sexual assault, domestic violence, women’s health, runaway youth, homelessness, and victims of crime (Vivian and Hormann, 2002). Nonprofits whose missions are to serve traumatized individuals, groups, or communities open themselves to the effects of trauma and traumatization.

Mission-driven nonprofits that do not serve traumatized populations still may be at risk of traumatization for other reasons.

Organizational Trauma

Howard Stein defines trauma at any level as “an experience for which a person-family-group is emotionally (not only cognitively) unprepared, an experience that overwhelms one’s defensive (self-protective) structure and leaves one feeling totally vulnerable and at least temporarily helpless” (personal communication, September 28, 2004).

Trauma and traumatization may result from a single devastating event, from the effects of several deleterious events, or from cumulative trauma arising from the nature of the organization’s work. Trauma and traumatization overpower the organization’s cultural structure and processes and weaken the organization’s ability to respond to external and internal challenges (Kahn, 2008). These experiences leave the organization feeling vulnerable and helpless and create lasting impact on the organizational psyche and culture (Stein, 1991).

While all organizations might have dysfunctional patterns, trauma-genic organizational cultures, cultures that reproduce traumatizing dynamics and circumstances so that the entity never completely heals from traumatic events, exacerbate that dysfunction. These cultures harbor effects of unhealed sudden traumatic events as well as insidious cumulative traumatization.

Unless the effects of organizational trauma and the resulting dynamics are
addressed effectively, organizations are doomed to repeat them (Vivian & Hormann, 2013; Kahn, 2003). Without developing approaches that work in these persistently traumatized systems usual OD interventions, even those developed for use in nonprofits, are less effective or not effective at all.

Rural Crisis Agency (RCA) Story

We continue with a story from our practice. A request came into our website from Jan, an experienced executive director who had taken a new position at an agency providing services to victims of crime, including sexual and domestic violence survivors. On her second day Jan knew she had entered a traumatized system and was feeling overwhelmed.

In our initial assessment we discovered deeply rooted patterns of harm, discouragement, and distrust among staff. For example, several staff members were initially unwilling to speak with us because they feared reprisals for sharing information. On the other hand board members reported relief about being on the road to recovery and expressed eagerness to proceed with strategic planning.

Six months into our work, the new executive director left. She said, “Even if this new opportunity had not come along, I knew I would not last much longer. I have continued to be overwhelmed by the depths of problems and effects of trauma in this agency.” Jan’s leaving signaled to an important funder that an already precarious situation had become more serious. The funder informed the agency it was at risk of losing all the money for a vital program. In addition to Jan’s leaving, a second staff person had been fired and a third had left for another job, a staff turnover of almost 50%.

Sonya, who had been working in a leadership capacity with Jan, was offered the executive director position and accepted. She started her new role with an optimistic sense that she could turn the organization around. Less than three months into her tenure, she confessed to us that she was feeling discouraged and doubted that the agency had the capacity to stabilize itself enough to survive.

The lack of stability had taken on a life of its own. The agency’s probationary status meant grants were approved for no more than six-month periods and funder representatives were monitoring closely. In Sonya’s first three months staff turnover continued, undermining progress toward programmatic improvements and worsening a sense of impermanence among the staff. At the beginning of our consultation many staff worried that the agency would close. For a brief period that worry subsided. Then it erupted again and settled in as an underlying malaise about the future of the agency, work with clients, and individuals’ jobs. Staff vacillated between faith in Sonya’s ability to hold the agency together and depression that things would never change.

Board members gained understanding of the depth of harm and distrust experienced by staff and fully supported the second executive director in her progress towards stability. Unlike the staff, the board had stayed together as an intact group throughout the tumultuous two years. Though not unaffected, board members had been distanced from the worst dynamics; they came through much of the year’s turmoil unified and strong.

Seven months into this project we heard about two other sudden departures of executive directors from agencies they deemed extremely traumatized. Personally drained of hope and energy, they felt as though they were “escaping” from dysfunctional systems that had no capacity left to recover. As in RCA these individuals were asked to come into an organization to “fix it.” They entered to find the organization in worse shape than they thought, with more deeply ingrained patterns of trauma and dis-ease. As these other instances of leaders and organizations in serious trouble surfaced, we began to reflect on what was going on in these systems.

Table 1. Characteristics of Traumatized Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Closed boundaries between the organization and environment</th>
<th>Environment is perceived to be hostile with little outside information or feedback accepted. Organization becomes isolated.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centrality of insider relationships</td>
<td>Stress becomes a central lens through which the work is experienced. Anxiety spreads among members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress and anxiety contagion</td>
<td>The organizational identity begins to unravel. A constricted worldview distorts interpretation of events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression expressed through fear or anger</td>
<td>Spirit and optimism are exhausted. The organization is left with insufficient energy to keep going.</td>
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Description of a Persistently Traumatized System

As described in Organizational Trauma and Healing (2013) and shown in Table 1, we noted repeating characteristics in traumatized systems.

Interconnections strengthen the six characteristics, however presence of one or two of the characteristics does not signify traumatization. These characteristics provide one concrete way for leaders and members of nonprofits to examine and to understand the dynamics of their systems, to “see” patterns that are present
but un-noticed. The characteristics also provide guidance about what to watch for in an organization’s health and wellbeing. Finding that several characteristics are pertinent to their organization makes many leaders nervous, while some minimize the relevance of this information or receive it skeptically. Others ask for additional information, coaching, or consultation.

Opportunities to work with traumatized systems led us to reexamine our belief that organizations experiencing despair or an inadequate identity would be at risk for failing. Yes, we saw examples of organizational closures involving severe despair or crises that crippled already weakened entities. However, over the past couple of years we began to see chronically traumatized nonprofits that continue to function. They had suffered from a variety of harmful situations and events: death of a leader, sudden loss of significant funding, abusive leadership actions, cultures of meanness and blame, widespread undiagnosed secondary traumatic stress among staff, rapid and sudden staff turnover, etc. These organizations displayed deeply rooted patterns of dysfunction, sometimes despair and hopelessness, and were limping along in the fulfillment of their missions. Harmful conditions were so pervasive and deep that entities ended up with cultures organized around a set of dysfunctional dynamics. RCA was such an example. Put simply, organizational members became inured to trauma and traumatization. Collectively as well as individually they accepted their condition as normal and unchanging and persevered in serving their clients.

Continued consultation with clients and leaders and discussion with each other resulted in insights about “persistent traumatization” and its characteristics. We noticed we were at the edge of our practice, facing situations in client organizations that were not responsive to our usual tools, skills, and interventions. Facing these situations over and over again began to take its toll on us as practitioners. We realized how messy and daunting these situations were. We needed to better grasp the additional and different dynamics in order to have effective ways of responding.

We discovered that these situations were fraught with:
» Compromised ability to see that trauma exists – denial occurs and perceptions are distorted;
» Almost universal emotional content – tone is intense, language is extreme, collective “pile on” of emotional material occurs quickly and easily;
» Experience of two steps forward and one step back – progress feels tenuous at best;
» Profound uneasiness – widespread doubt about efficacy of any help and pessimism about the future;
» Stunted perspective – there is reinforcement of group thinking and reactivity and little evidence of insight; and
» De-skilled organizational members – usual abilities, e.g., communication skills, cannot be counted on.

We now turn to describing the characteristics of a persistently traumatized system.

Characteristics of a Persistently Traumatized System

A persistently traumatized system is one in which a pattern of traumatic events and impacts occur over time and are addressed incompletely or not at all, resulting in a system organized internally around trauma and creating a trauma-genic pattern. Often long-term chronic impacts become invisible. Individuals inside these systems may not perceive the patterns, and cannot change their behavior easily. They are suffering not only from a workplace with very dysfunctional ways of operating, but also from their inability to take in new information and change their behaviors. We offer the following list of characteristics of persistently traumatized organizations:
» Inadequate emotional containment;
» Ongoing instability;
» Shame and guilt;
» Deeply rooted lack of trust;
» Regularity of re-traumatizing triggers;
» Anxiety-based interactions;
» Cycles of discouragement and hope; and
» Inadequate and/or unsafe organizational processes.

Inadequate emotional containment

The environment is one of high drama. Staff never know what to expect, are extra sensitive to others’ emotional moods and outbursts and describe “walking on eggshells” because of feeling unsafe. Either no one speaks up about his or her experiences, or they do so with intense reactivity. Events are blown out of proportion and no one provides a tempering and safe arena for conversation. Staff report widespread stress, sickness, and time lost from work. Sometimes the physical setting seems gloomy and tired. Many staff report feeling physically ill when they approach their workplaces.

Ongoing instability

Leadership and staff turnover from firing and quitting interfere with building an effective team and reinforce a sense of impermanence about the organization. Staff remain unsure of themselves in their roles, and programmatic progress feels tenuous. Probationary status with funders and loss of funding destabilize the organization’s finances and undermine its self-esteem. The temporary nature of commitments and revolving door experiences with staff fuel serious questions about the organization’s survival.

Shame and guilt

Frequently, thinking the problems are caused by their shortcomings or fault, individuals suffer in silence. Favoritism and misplaced loyalty further separate staff from each other. In a system with escalating conflict, staff describe being hunkered down and looking out for themselves, maybe even trying to figure out ways to leave. Often these dynamics result in individuals leaving with a sense of failure and betrayal.

Deeply rooted lack of trust

Because of past experiences organizational members find it safer to stay quiet rather than assume trustworthiness and risk speaking honestly. Chronic ineffective
change efforts mean few staff trust leaders (executive directors and boards of directors) to move the organization forward. They become cynical about decision-making and the future. In addition staff worry about the security of their jobs in an unstable economic climate and avoid risking that security.

Regularity of re-traumatizing triggers

Systems with a deep history of trauma have used up countless resources and are depleted rather than resilient. Regularly events occur that re-trigger past fears and anxieties. With few resources to respond calmly these re-triggering events pull organizations backwards into negative patterns. The organization is re-harmed in the moment and becomes overcome by negativity and hopelessness. A hopeful future seems out of reach.

Anxiety-based interactions

Communication has been severely compromised by longstanding patterns; frequently members employ communication skills to protect themselves and keep safe rather than to speak openly and honestly. Staff blur the differences between reaction and response. Already anxious about speaking out and showing emotions, they react in intense and defensive ways. Colleagues are left wondering about co-workers’ reactions and frequently misinterpret them. With constrained sharing it is hard to have open and meaningful discussions. It is nearly impossible to respond creatively to their situation.

Cycles of hope and discouragement

Cycles of hope and discouragement develop. A new leader comes into the agency with positive energy and lifts everyone’s spirits. That person provides relief to the serious atmosphere and sense of worry. She or he embarks on changes and soon discovers the enormity of the task. So many things need to be fixed. After jumping in with enthusiasm and assurance the leader begins to feel tired. As others feel buoyed to be no longer carrying the burden, the leader begins to feel overwhelmed. He or she becomes discouraged and loses energy. Other workers sense the change and begin to temper their feelings of relief and enthusiasm.

This cycle also fuels burnout. New staff arrive to find that they have to pick up the pieces of a program left in disarray by previous staff or start from scratch. Then they discover their executive director has no time and energy to support them. After a few months the pressure and burden take their toll on the new hire and she or he gets discouraged. That pattern repeats as individuals come onboard or leave. Staff unity disintegrates and adds to a discouraged atmosphere. Worry and concern replace positive feelings, and staff begin to think again that little will ever change.

Table 2. Characteristics of Persistently Traumatized Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Persistently Traumatized Systems</th>
<th>Details</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate emotional containment</td>
<td>There is an environment of high drama – intense reactivity, widespread stress, and sickness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing instability</td>
<td>The systems are destabilized and there are serious questions about organizational survival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame and guilt</td>
<td>Individuals feel at fault and isolated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deeply rooted lack of trust</td>
<td>Staff fear speaking up and are cynical about any changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularity of re-traumatizing triggers</td>
<td>Past fears and hurts are retriggered, fostering a sense of hopelessness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety-based interactions</td>
<td>There is widespread anxiety and severely compromised communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycles of hope and discouragement</td>
<td>The pendulum swings between enthusiasm and relief – and discouragement and worry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate and/or unsafe organizational processes</td>
<td>Fair and transparent systems are lacking to support safety and trust.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inadequate and/or unsafe organizational processesPoor or no performance appraisal systems, lack of effective accountability mechanisms, inadequate financial controls, and too few policies and procedures hamper organizational functioning. Inadequate and unfair processes harbor an over-reliance on personal relationships. No one believes that there are fair and transparent systems in place to protect the individual. Lacking effective internal systems, it is easy for a personality-based style of operating to develop. Competition for favored status with leaders and favoritism flourish. Some staff feel lucky or entitled while others feel unsafe and aggrieved. With too few safeguards deeply ingrained hurts from the past surface and color current organizational functioning.

The interplay of these dynamics (Table 2) worsens until the whole agency is awash in them. The dynamics become the organizational context and influence the entity at a profound level. The organizational culture becomes inured to traumatic history, except in a common retelling of its wounding. Dysfunctional dynamics destroy normal processes and structures and exacerbate inadequate ones. New members are swept up into this reality. With these factors present agencies exhibit an “on the brink” demeanor that is physically palpable.

One analogy comes to mind. These trauma-genic entities experience rabbit holes, like in Alice in Wonderland. Staff converse about something occurring in the present. A comment made by one person triggers a fall (not necessarily recognized) by the group down the rabbit hole into the past. The situation quickly becomes unreal as the words being used relate to a past trauma and bring up unresolved
pain. The conversation stays “in the hole” – the past reality – where the outcome is a reinforcement of old bad feelings and/or a re-wounding of people and relationships. There is no obvious way out of the rabbit hole.

Here is another analogy. When an organization suffers from persistent traumatization, it is at the bottom of a muddy hole. There are no footholds or ladders, and what can be seen above is only a small circle of sky. The bottom of the hole is muddy, making it slippery and unsafe. Those in the bottom of the hole are stuck, literally and figuratively. They cannot see beyond the edge of the top and have no footholds to start climbing out. If they move too much they make the ground muddier. Anyone who jumps in the hole to help runs the risk of being stuck like everyone else.

Furthermore, in a figurative sense, the group does not know that it is in a rabbit or muddy hole until it tries to problem-solve its way out. To see more than the small circle of sky, to begin to climb up, to have some hope that they will not fall back down again require assistance from outside the hole. Those in the bottom need tools and perspective. Outside resources can provide encouragement, scaffolding, ropes, and reports on what the environment is like beyond the top of the hole.

Implications for OD Practice with Traumatized Systems

In our interventions we rely on a set of principles grounded in the values, skills, and assumptions of organization development. Our core philosophy and values include:

» Stance of compassion, optimism, and hope;
» Understand that a system can be traumatized;
» Continual attention to the emotional life of the organization and its members;
» Structured and easily understood methods of change;
» Persistent and ongoing support to leaders;
» Clarity about an organization’s readiness to continue healing on its own; and

» Graceful and affirming exit strategies.

Specifically we use the following guidelines in working with organizations that have unresolved trauma or are traumatized systems.

» Make help accessible and nonthreatening.
» Ensure and reinforce containment, safety, and stability.
» Collectively acknowledge, name, and talk about the trauma.
» Normalize what members are experiencing.
» Make sense of what has occurred in meaningful ways.
» Identify priority actions.

Our philosophy and guidelines are relevant to all interventions in traumatized systems. Working with persistently traumatized systems requires additional sensitivity to be successful. These additions take into account the special conditions of persistent traumatization and acknowledge impacts on those consulting with traumatized systems.

For example, all consultants run the risk of being inducted into a system, that is, being swept up into the system’s internal dynamics and losing perspective. With traumatized systems the risk of induction increases as exposure lengths and the work deepens. Interveners need to be committed to the client without being swept into the organization’s dynamics. To be effective they extend empathy to everyone in the system, including those who are suspicious of outsiders trying to help. Interveners importantly advocate for the entity as a whole. During the RCA consultation we, Vivian and Hormann, were able to keep the health and future of the whole agency front and center by repeatedly affirming the common commitment of staff and board to the agency mission and clients. By not getting swept into conflicts we helped estranged staff repair relationships and enabled the board to show more patience and support of staff who had borne the brunt of harmful behavior.

Uncovering patterns and probing past history requires sensitivity and pacing. Interveners demonstrate trustworthiness and empathy to encourage everyone to share their perspectives. Keen listening in the discovery process allows the consultant to use intuition to understand deeper patterns. In a consultation with an anti-violence agency, Vivian was surprised to notice staff offer excuses for and minimize a departed leader’s actions that had been described as harmful, hurtful, and abusive. She thought this was due to long-term wounding and acceptance of dysfunction. She named the pattern in her summary to agency leaders. Creative use of graphics and metaphors (like the rabbit hole and muddy hole descriptions) allows client members to grasp patterns and see the organization in different ways. Sharing the “rabbit hole” metaphor early on allows for interventions with a common language. For example, when group members appear triggered by one member’s comments and escalate the conversation until many are quite upset, the consultant can intervene, “I just saw you fall down a rabbit hole into your memories. No one seemed to notice this was happening.”

Re-wounding or triggering during an intervention is always a possibility. Consultants need to be aware of the potential for unforeseen consequences and ready for emotional reactions. In one consultation Vivian asked staff to share their motivations for joining a social change effort. Unbeknownst to her this team had never shared in this way, and they became fearful and upset. Luckily one member let Vivian know that many did not feel safe enough to share. This introductory getting-to-know-you exercise ended up being an intervention about trust and risk taking in this team.

Achieving enough forward progress and confidence to overcome fear about backsliding seems to be a longer, slower process in persistently traumatized systems. It is easy for staff and leaders to retreat into old feelings of fear, hurt, and isolation. Consultants need to address this dynamic directly with patience and empathy. With honesty and kindness they can help members see what is going on and regain traction on forward progress. For example, staff turnover in RCA re-kindled everyone’s worries about program
ineffectiveness and agency closure. Staff lost focus on agency progress as they were swept back into fear-based conversations. We patiently listened to their fears, normalized their recurring feelings, and helped them remember the progress they had made.

Leaders need continuous support and attention. They feel vulnerable and unsure of themselves but hesitate to reach out for help. One leader needed assistance to crystallize and understand her deep ambivalence about remaining in her ED role. As she distinguished her own needs from the organization’s needs, she was able to consider her options more dispassionately. Leaders in their busyness may be infrequent and erratic communicators. We find ourselves reaching out over and over again to leaders before we receive a response. Vivian developed creative ways to stay in touch with several executive directors who were too far away to visit informally. She used travel for other client work as opportunities to visit. Those leaders responded with appreciation for the extra effort of staying in contact with them.

In any consultation, follow-up activities include support of leaders; this is especially important for a leader in a persistently traumatized system. A leader was mired in her organization’s unhealthy patterns and feeling stuck. With support she was able to set priorities for her attention and develop strategies to continue her change efforts.

Often dysfunctional patterns get in the way of interventions. Communication can be sporadic, follow through on tasks intermittent, and focus easily lost. Consultants can be left wondering about an organization’s motivation and readiness to do the work. Intermittent or sporadic behavior does not necessarily mean that leaders and staff are unmotivated or unready. It often means they are overwhelmed by their circumstances and stuck. It is important for interveners to have a personal reservoir of energy, compassion, and patience.

Outside helpers can be seen as lifesavers to the organization and its members. They act as an oasis of safety in an unsafe world. The more effective outsiders are, the more the organization trusts and depends on them. Consultants need to remain aware of dependency dynamics and stay ready to offer confidence in their clients’ ability to move forward on their own. We have had clients express desire for more frequent access to us and joke about our moving closer to them. We have learned to balance supporting client independence while showing ongoing interest in the organization’s progress.

Effective intervention happens when consultants understand strategies and techniques that work: they know when to enter an organization, what to do when they are inside, and when to leave. Practitioners who have the energy, compassion, and stamina for this work can assist traumatized organizations to transform by moving beyond their trauma. We interveners need to be ready for the depth of work required to help organizations heal from damage and wounding. Otherwise helping persistently traumatized systems is doomed to failure or superficial Band-Aid fixes. Even if we are knowledgeable about trauma and traumatization, practitioners need to be ready personally and professionally to work at a profound level to help nonprofits recover and heal.

References
“We seek to understand and appreciate the values and deeper underlying assumptions of the groups we work with. For us that process is an eclectic mix of Edgar Schein’s work on organizational culture and the systems-oriented approaches found in pastoral and ascetical theology.”

Understanding from Within

Working with Religious Systems

By Michelle Heyne and Robert A. Gallagher

We practice OD “from within” church systems. In the most obvious sense that is because we are practicing Christians in the Anglican tradition. We participate in the Eucharist each Sunday and in the daily prayers of the church. We engage in practices of reflection and community. We seek ways to serve. That we are relatively proficient practitioners in our religious tradition does help us gain entry and trust with client parishes and dioceses.

There is also a less obvious way in which we practice OD “from within.” We seek to understand and appreciate the values and deeper underlying assumptions of the groups we work with. For us that process is an eclectic mix of Edgar Schein’s work on organizational culture and the systems-oriented approaches found in pastoral and ascetical theology.

After sharing a case example of how OD can be applied from within church systems, we describe what influenced churches to consider OD, the Episcopal Church’s particular relationship with OD, and what is a pastoral and ascetical theology-based OD approach.

A Case Example

When its rector retired in 2003, St. Paul’s had reached a plateau marked by attendance decline, low energy, and moderate financial difficulties. During the subsequent interim period, these difficulties were exacerbated. The parish then hired a new rector who had completed training in the Church Development Institute (CDI) and had obtained a certificate in OD from NTL. Within the first two years of the new priest’s leadership, the parish experienced significant changes:

» From average Sunday attendance of 89 to 150; in 2014 pressing toward 300;
» From an operating deficit of about $70,000 and in default to the diocese, to a balanced budget and current on diocesan obligations;
» From ambivalence about identity to a widely-shared commitment to its identity as a progressive “Anglo-Catholic” church; and
» From a deeply prayerful parish beset by anxiety and inertia, to a parish grounded in both prayer and hope and beginning to confidently set a path forward.

The new rector began work on several fronts in building the capacity of the whole system. She used her OD skills and knowledge in a manner that connected with the spirituality of the Anglican tradition. She quickly identified the parish’s fuzzy identity as a key area for change. While well-known for the beauty of its liturgy and operating out of an Anglo-Catholic tradition, segments of the parish were ambivalent about that identity.

During the first two years of her tenure, she implemented initiatives to strengthen the inclusion and formation of members, the sense of community, and the life of common prayer. These initiatives were developed using standard OD methods and knowledge in combination with the use of pastoral theology models such as those discussed later in this article.
Here is some of what was done:

- Parish-wide listening/conversation sessions identified strengths, clarified priorities, and built shared commitment. Survey feedback processes were used that kept the data real-time and tangible, avoided bureaucracy and delay, and built trust and commitment by openly sharing valid and useful information. The process capitalized on energy generated in the room and moved quickly to recruit volunteers for working groups.

- Improved quality of Sunday worship by training members for a more proficient participation in the Eucharist and increased the training of servers and readers. Music was further integrated into the flow of liturgy.

- Experiential and participative educational methods were used to help members explore and make decisions about how they would shape their spiritual life. The Benedictine tradition’s emphasis on community was combined with OD skills to improve two-way communication and have focused conversations around community issues.

- Community life was improved by facilitating connections with others, attending to early inclusion, and reinforcing the general culture of acceptance and invitation. This took shape in the coffee hour after Sunday mass, groups going to a local pub after evening classes, and regular newcomers’ gatherings in the rector’s home.

We will revisit the case later in the article.

**Coming to a Willingness to Understand Itself in New Ways.**

What brought Saint Paul’s Parish, Seattle, and other churches to make use of OD? There are two parts to this backstory. First, there’s what came out of the Second World War; and second, there’s the particular relationship of the Episcopal Church with Organization Development.

**The Context after the Second World War**

The general context for churches’ use of OD emerged out of the Second World War. There were five threads:

- A questioning of the usefulness of the parish as the primary structure for the church’s work. There were experiments of many kinds—house churches, worker priests, and inner-city missions.

- Parish churches faced a new social arrangement. Before the war people tended to live in the same community and work for the same employer all their lives. After the war that shifted to a society in which there was more mobility. The sectors of life became more fragmented, with work, family, religion, civic life, leisure, and education in competition for the person’s time, money, and energy.

- The failure of the church in Germany was a moral and institutional crisis for large segments of the church. There was a sense of shame in the recognition that the baptized Christians in the institutions of the military, courts, police forces, and business community rarely did anything significant to oppose, and in many cases colluded with, the Holocaust and a war of aggression. That failure was seen in contrast to the work of Lutheran Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church. Bonhoeffer was executed because of his resistance activities. His thinking was that what mattered was that people take responsibility for their world; that we are to enter into the struggles of life and history and accept the uncertainty and possible guilt that comes with responsible action.

- Philadelphia there was MAP (Metropolitan Associates of Philadelphia) conducting action research on how Christians might influence the institutions in which they worked. “During its last 5 years, MAP focused its energies on trying to better understand the change process within institutions, and the way in which local churches might offer support for laity committed to serving as change agents within the organizations where they worked” (Specht, Broholm, & Mosel. 2001).

A sixth thread emerged in the 1960s. The church began to experience a loss of membership and the need to reduce the costs of maintaining so many buildings.

This historical and sociological context caused church leaders of all
denominations, including the Episcopal Church, to seek new ways to address institutional life.

**OD and the Episcopal Church**


In 1971 Loren Mead defined the church’s OD role in a position paper, “The Parish is the Issue.” Mead was the director of Project Test Pattern (PTP), an Episcopal Church action research project learning about how parishes might be renewed. Mead wrote about his contact with consultants working with parishes, “It became obvious quickly that the consultants in the field were in touch with information that the Church did not have about the way that parishes work” (p.13). Mead identified the work of parish development consultants as based in the descriptions found in the Addison-Wesley Series on Organization Development and in Process Consulting by Edgar Schein. He differentiated parish development from other models of change in congregations, such as the crusade or revival, clustering parishes in common effort, and leadership development.

This direction took institutional form quickly. PTP launched a series of action research consultations in parishes. The Mid Atlantic Training Committee (MATC), an ecumenical agency with strong Episcopal involvement, offered dozens of labs each year in human relations, group development, and experiential education design skills. MATC also launched Organization Development in Volunteer and Religious Systems, a year-long program with three weeks of workshops, application, reading in between workshops, and the use of an experienced practitioner as a coach. The Association of Religion and Applied Behavioral Sciences was established, offering a recognition process in OD and other fields. Loren Mead convened a Conference for Managers of OD Networks (most from Episcopal dioceses) creating a common base of “best practices” and generating interest in the development of diocesan consulting networks.

Today in the Episcopal Church it is routine to hear of a parish using Appreciative Inquiry and methods for increasing participation and listening in meetings. You also hear words and phrases that suggest familiarity with OD, along with various diocesan and national programs offering brief introductions to theory. Mostly it is thin stuff.

There are however three training programs offering a more comprehensive, competency-based approach. All have integrated OD in training parish teams—

- the Church Development Institute (CDI), Shaping the Parish, and the College for Congregational Development. All share core elements such as 6–8 workshop weekends, a course of reading in the field, and the completion and critique of 3–6 developmental initiatives in parishes.

- Shaping the Parish also includes coaching for each parish team and an early T-group weekend with a focus on group dynamics and feedback skills.

- Over the last 20 years 18 US dioceses (of 99) and one Canadian (of 34) have made use of these programs. There have also been hundreds of individuals attending national expressions of the programs. Around half of those dioceses have engaged the programs for enough years to see a significant impact on their parishes.

Leaders in parishes that have been through one of the programs are more likely to understand the consequence of doing survey feedback rather than a mass survey. Most have read large sections of Cummings and Worley’s *Organization Development & Change* and Schein’s *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide*. They have used models from OD and pastoral theology to help their parishes assess, plan, and act. They have used the MBTI in regard to emotional intelligence, organizational leadership, and group dynamics. They have learned group participation and facilitation skills.

In the late 1980s the Diocese of Connecticut required all of its small, struggling, financially-aided parishes to participate in processes of self and peer reflection and assessment, meet together on a regular basis, and make use of a trained consultant. As new priests were appointed they were required to complete an early form of CDI, in addition to the other requirements. Over a five-year period parishes with leaders participating in the CDI training program experienced 80% average pledge increase (vs. 68% for non-participants) and 24% in attendance (vs. 15%). All these parishes reported increased satisfaction with the central elements of parish life, e.g., worship, formation, service, evangelization, etc. This occurred while the state’s population was declining and as the percentage of the diocesan budget allocated to financial aid to these was also declining.

**Drawing on the Church’s Self Understanding**

**Using OD in Combination with Pastoral/Ascetical Theology**

During the 1970s and into the 1980s the church’s use of OD was largely grounded in the MATC program, Organization Development in Volunteer and Religious Systems (which had learned from a variety of NTL and university-based programs). The program did not, however, make very useful connections between OD and the unique dynamics of the parish church.

The shared experience of many church members was that while the skills and methods were seen as valuable, there was not an explicit exploration that related it to the church’s faith and practice. Some participating in the 1976 MATC program found themselves wanting a direct, rather than presumed, connection between spirituality and OD. That connection was developed in the early CDIs of the Dioceses of Pennsylvania (1976-1981) and Connecticut (1982-1988) and again at the General Theological Seminary (1983–2000). Models grounded in Anglican and Benedictine spirituality were used to explore the spiritual life of parish churches. It was a beginning.

The church faces a significant problem in that few people in parish leadership (and even fewer non-leader members) receive any significant training in the practical theology of the parish church or in how to effectively partner with one another. On the
whole, the seminaries and first-two-years-out programs fail in what they could do to work on increasing emotional intelligence, basic group and OD skills, and an understanding of the parish church grounded in a systems approach to pastoral and ascetical theology.

OD, by its nature, is complex and implementation of OD processes is demanding. A lack of shared theological conception and language by the parish’s members and leaders—what amounts to a misunderstanding, often not articulated, of the parish’s primary purpose—can exacerbate the challenges commonly experienced in organizations that embark on OD improvement processes.

This means that while it is true that the parish church could make use of all the same basic OD theory and methods as any other organization, as OD established its value in church systems we also needed ways that took into account the unique dynamics and issues of the parish church, and provided quickly-accessible pathways to shared understanding of its purpose and highest expressions. For the church, the parish was a microcosm of the Body of Christ and was also a nonprofit organization.

The need was for “understanding from within.” The church needed a way of using OD that was expressed in its own language and from the perspective of its self-understanding. The nature and mission of the church needed to play a role in the conversation. The practices of the church needed to be seen by the OD practitioner as interventions that advanced or hindered the health of the parish. Pathways to increased health needed to be based in both the common prayer and spirituality of the church, and OD understandings of the parish as a system.

The fields of pastoral or practical and ascetical theology came into play. The part of pastoral theology that most directly connects with parish development is the work to understand society and human need, and from that to shape parish communities that will effectively address that society and those needs. The question is: What kind of oversight and leadership, structure and spiritual life, do we need in a parish church to equip Christians, in our tradition, to address the pressing social issues and needs of this age?

Ascetical theology is about spiritual practice. It is concerned with the on-going task of living the Christian life and reflecting upon it. The questions are:

- What kind of person and human community do we want to shape?
- How might the parish contribute to that task?
- How do we foster practices that increase emotional intelligence and spiritual maturity; practices that assist people in being responsible participants in their workplace, civic life, families, and friendships?

**Under the Tip of the Iceberg**

The starting place in pastoral and ascetical theology, as with OD, is to look at what “is.” We begin with what is already happening rather than with what “should be.” The task is not to offer an idealized image of the “best” but to ground the improvement of the parish system in what already has life in the culture and tradition. We begin there even if that life is weak and distorted, as is the case in too many parishes.

In each of the three models offered below we begin with what already exists.

- People engage spiritual practices and return to the routines of daily life in family, with friends, at work, and in civic life.
- A parish expresses forms of common prayer, community life, ways of reflection, and service to others.
- The parish church is a community that includes people in various stages of their spiritual life and provides resources for change. The parish is made up of the disciplined and proficient along with the tentative. It consists of people present every Sunday along with those coming only on Christmas and Easter.

The models work from within the church’s self-understanding. They also suggest an approach to what we are to measure.

Leaders and members most commonly understand the parish’s success in terms of attendance at programs and worship and whether people are “satisfied.” In some parishes, satisfaction is achieved as long as they are not producing hurt, unhappiness, and depression; in others they seek harmony, contentment, and occasional enjoyment. It is as though it would be an adequate measure if General Motors sold no cars and made no money but the employees were satisfied and usually showed up at the plant and office.

**Primary Task**

“Every organization has some central process for which it exists” (Albrecht, 1983, p.4). Albrecht called it the “prime axis.” In the church a common way of conceptualizing that process is as a cycle, or oscillation between two poles: active—contemplative, gathered—scattered, extradependence—intradependence, consolation—desolation, renewal—apostolate, inward nurture—outward witness.

One point of confusion comes when people pull apart the oscillation. Instead of its being an integrated process it becomes a preference between the poles (I’m more activist vs. I’m more contemplative) or a seeking of balance (we need the right amount of attention to renewal and the right amount to apostolate).

**Renewal-Apostolate Cycle**

In our work we have looked upon facilitating that central process as the primary task of a parish. We call the process the Renewal—Apostolate Cycle (Gallagher, 2008).

This cycle describes a central dynamic of the individual’s and parish’s life. It focuses attention on the movement between being renewed in baptismal identity and purpose and living our daily life—in our families, with friends, in the workplace, and in our civic life. The cycle is between a conscious and intentional attention to our renewal in the spiritual life, and a subconscious reliance upon that spiritual life. The parish is to offer the climate, structures, and processes that assist in that renewal and contribute to the oscillation. In its own understanding it is to provide the climate, prayer life, and other resources that renew baptized members in their faith.
and practice so they may be instruments of the Divine Compassion in daily life.

**Primary Elements of the Parish System**

What are the key elements that relate to the organization’s functioning? There are many OD models that identify the key elements of a system, such as Weisbord’s Six-Box Diagnostic Model. We have used models like these to help parishes get a picture-side-by-side—Community and Reflection. We participate in imperfect communities that we allow to nurture and influence us, including a parish church. Reflection includes developing our capacity to be silent and still, to listen, and to learn from our experience. The final element is Service. Individuals serve in ways that fit their gifts and temperament. The parish develops an expression of common and shared service. The assumption is that such service will be more fruitful and authentic, and less self-serving, when it sits upon the base of the other four spiritual practices (Heyne, 2011).

**Critical Mass: A Shape of the Parish Model**

Critical mass models are an important OD tool used to assess the organization’s need for enough weight—enough commitment and competence—at the center to accomplish the organization’s work. We assume that people are in many different places in regard to spiritual life: some more disciplined, others more lax; some with an “owned” faith, others more tentative. There is a two-fold strategy implied—accept people were they are and invite them to grow. There is also an assumption that a parish is healthier when there is a critical mass of people proficient in the practices of faith. That more proficient group grounds the parish and creates a climate conducive to growth (Gallagher, 2008).

This is a mental model that serves to replace two others not based in what “is.” One ignores the differences among people—“we’re all the same”—and a second would pretend everyone is fully committed and competent.

**Returning to Saint Paul’s, Seattle**

The Renewal—Apostolate Cycle was strengthened with a three-year cycle of experiential and participative educational modules and training members in spiritual practices. The Shape of the Parish model was used in formulating a strategy to strengthen the center while accepting people in all stages of their spiritual life. And the community, daily prayers of the church, and service elements of the system were made stronger.

**The Experience of Using OD in the Church System**

Between the two of us we have trained hundreds of Episcopal Church parish leaders in this fusion of OD with pastoral/ascetical theology in CDI or the Shaping the Parish programs. The programs include both formal and informal assessment processes. There are three phrases we have heard again and again:

» “This is hard.” That is said early in the training programs. Part of it is that the programs are demanding and require focused time and energy. But as the participants begin to engage change projects in the parishes, we hear about the need for persistence, wisdom, and, at times, courage. They talk about how complex interventions are and how challenging the work is intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

» “This works!” That’s the second statement we hear about one year into the training. The feelings of being overwhelmed and disoriented have passed. Interventions have been planned, implemented, and reflected upon. Some of the “this works” response rises out of a sense that the parish system is more understandable. They are learning to look under the tip of the iceberg. The other part is they are beginning to see some initial success or, if not...
success, some understanding of why their interventions did not go as they intended. As the training comes to an end we hear comments about changes in parish culture—more trust, more openness, and more competence in the core practices. As parishes send additional teams through the training that sense of “this works” increases and becomes more internalized; the competency is now within the parish, rather than simply within those attending.

“This is inspiring.” This one comes later; maybe during the last workshops, sometimes after that. People have seen themselves, others, and their parish change. It is a kind of reasonable hope about their future together. A confirmation of the investment they have made.

The phrases we have heard from others are also our own. It is what we experience. Of course that is not unique to church systems. Heyne knows it from her work in the financial services industry and Gallagher knows it from his work with a variety of nonprofits.

Conclusion

The use of both church-specific and secular OD models highlights the fact that the parish is a nonprofit organization like any other nonprofit, with many of the same issues and dynamics. It is also unlike others in its purpose, dynamics, and primary task. This provides a reality orientation and an energy catalyst grounded in connecting to the parish’s mission in light of its actual functioning and actual potential.

References


Michelle Heyne and Robert A. Gallagher have developed approaches using OD in religious systems that, in combination with the church’s disciplines of pastoral and ascetical theology, have offered an innovative approach grounded in the church’s tradition. Heyne’s day job is as a Managing Director with Precedent Consulting, providing OD-based consulting services for financial services companies. Gallagher has moved between OD work with church systems and a variety of nonprofit organizations in the fields of affordable housing, domestic abuse, and poverty law. Heyne has received certificates from the NTL OD Program and the Church Development Institute. Gallagher has an MA in OD from Goddard College. His core faculty person was Elsie Cross, then president of NTL. Heyne can be reached at michelle@precedentconsulting.net and Gallagher at ragodct@gmail.com. Their web site is CongregationalDevelopment.com. On that site you can find PDFs on the models mentioned in this article; see the section “Understanding from Within.”
“Nonprofit leaders need to recognize that the board chair–executive director relationship is an important and powerful resource that can be leveraged in support of the organization’s mission. They need to promote and engage in dialogue about how to best develop and nurture it.”

The Board Chair–Executive Director Relationship

Dynamics that Create Value for Nonprofit Organizations

By Mary Hiland

Conventional wisdom emphasizes the importance to a nonprofit organization of its core leadership: a “healthy” board chair–executive director relationship (Eadie, 2001; Howe, 2004; Lechem, 2002; Light, 2002). Organizational effectiveness is at stake when this relationship is weak, or worse, dysfunctional. While such an assertion may seem intuitively correct, there is limited empirical work that explores the dynamics of this key relationship or its influence, if any, on the nonprofit organization (Brown, 2000; Miller-Millesen, 2003).

In the nonprofit governance literature, consultants and practitioners prescribe the roles and responsibilities of board chairs and how those roles and responsibilities are shared with, or distinct from, those of the executive. These typically “one size fits all” job descriptions fail to consider the incredible diversity of the sector. In addition, beyond “to do” lists and role clarifications, there is very little that helps board chairs or executives anticipate and effectively manage the complexities of their relationship. The roles, as typically assigned, create a paradox in which the board chair is at once providing both support and oversight. This paradox, coupled with the real possibility that both the board chair and the executive are experienced leaders, highlights the importance of learning more about the dynamics of this relationship than simply who should do what.

The Study

To learn more about the dynamics and influence of board chair–executive director relationships, a study was conducted in 2005 with board chairs and executives from 16 nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations in Silicon Valley, California. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were done individually with each volunteer participant to elicit descriptions of the dynamics in their relationship and its effect on the organization.

Participants and their organizations were selected on a first come, first served basis so their characteristics were unpredictable. Fourteen of the 32 study participants were female (44%) and 18 were male (56%). Half (8) of the study pairs were of mixed gender and half were the same. The lack of ethnic diversity among participants was disappointing: 94% were Caucasian.

There was diversity among the organizations in the study. The fields of service ranged from recreation to the arts to organizations that provide services to other nonprofits. The largest cluster was human service—25% (4) of the organizations. Study nonprofits ranged in size (measured by annual expenditures) from less than $500,000 to over $10 million. Time in the board chair and executive director relationships ranged from 6 months to 5 years.

Social capital is the resource that is created as a result of interpersonal relationships within a social structure (Coleman, 1990). Social capital theory explains how relationships can add value to organizations and is, as yet, under-explored as an

1. A version of this article appeared in the Journal for Nonprofit Management.
Based on study participants’ descriptions, five types of interpersonal dynamics characterized the board chair–executive relationships: facts-sharing, ideas-sharing, knowledge-sharing, feelings-sharing, and give-and-take.

**Characteristic Interpersonal Dynamics in the Relationships**

Based on study participants’ descriptions, five types of interpersonal dynamics characterized the board chair–executive relationships: facts-sharing, ideas-sharing, knowledge-sharing, feelings-sharing, and give-and-take.

**Facts-sharing**
Facts-sharing was defined as a one-way giving of information that did not involve the engagement of the other party in the exchange. This interpersonal dynamic type was primarily demonstrated in reports of how much information the executive shared with the board chair and if it was experienced as enough. Facts-sharing was the most basic of the interpersonal interactions and was evident in all study pairs.

**Ideas-sharing**
The ideas-sharing dynamic represents brainstorming, problem solving, and/or thinking things through together. In contrast to facts-sharing, ideas-sharing involved the engagement of both parties in the interaction—a two-way exchange. Initiated by either party, the focus of board chair–executive ideas-sharing ranged from a quick check-in to consult each other about organizational issues to the board chair serving as a “sounding board” for the executive.

**Knowledge-sharing**
The third interactions type was knowledge-sharing—defined as learning and/or coaching interaction. This type was distinct from sharing facts or ideas in that there was a teaching component and identifiable content learned about the organization, something outside the organization, or about the person him/herself. The most common examples were coaching of the executive by the board chair and the executive teaching the board chair about the organization or nonprofits in general.

**Feelings-sharing**
The participants’ descriptions of support, reassurance, caring, and/or appreciation were defined as the feelings-sharing type of interaction, which varied in intensity among the pairs. Expressions of support most often came from the board chair to the executive; expressions of appreciation were exchanged by both.

**Give-and-take**
The give-and-take dynamic reflected the board chair or executive’s adaptation to the other person’s style, personality, and/or preferences and their process of working out differences. It is understood that executives need to adapt to new board chairs as they may transition several times over executives’ tenure and the give-and-take dynamic included, but went beyond, the executive adapting to a new board chair. It was quite evident that both parties in the relationship made changes or concessions to accommodate the other or to achieve alignment in a variety of circumstances.

Examining these types of board chair–executive interpersonal interactions from the perspective of trust building provided a framework for understanding their implications. Like Mishra’s findings, the more diverse the interactions in the pair, the stronger the trust built. The interactions provided the contexts in which trust building behaviors were enacted and the pairs with the strongest trust demonstrated all of the interaction types. It is interesting to note, though, that the frequency of interactions and the amount of time spent together did not relate to the “Good to Great” framework that characterized the other study findings. It was the quality, not quantity, of interaction that mattered.

**The Strength of Trust**
There are numerous, different conceptualizations of trust in the organizational and social science literature (Bigley & Pearce, 1998). These varied concepts reflect trust’s complexity. Most address trust in the context of personal, as compared to working, relationships. Integrating and adding to the work of Lewicki and Bunker (1996), Reina and Reina (1999), and Mishra (1996), a model of trust building in organizations was formulated.

Nineteen different trust-building behaviors were identified. Each was linked to one or more of the interaction types discussed above and each fit within one of three levels of trust in the model: calculus-based (weak trust), knowledge-based (moderate trust), and identification-based (strong trust). These levels are cumulative, i.e., knowledge-based trust builds on calculus-based trust; identification-based trust builds on knowledge-based trust. Drawing on Mishra’s research, the level of trust assessed in each study pair was determined by the type and number of different trust-building behaviors they experienced.

The lowest level, calculus-based trust, exists to the extent that punishments and/or rewards motivate someone to invest in a relationship or to remain trustworthy. There is a calculation of the value of trusting in a particular relationship and interactions in the relationship reflect a cost-benefit evaluation. Though this is a weak level of trust it is important to note that it is not “bad.” It is still trust and in some working relationships this level of trust is more than adequate to accomplish...
goals. Only one study pair did not build trust beyond this level.

The next level, knowledge-based trust, results from knowing each other to an extent that facilitates predictability. This level includes trust that built as board chairs and executives gained confidence in each other’s competence, showed respect, communicated effectively, and honored agreements and commitments. The executive’s willingness to be vulnerable and the board chair creating safety for the executive also exemplified behaviors that built knowledge-based trust. As the model reflects, knowledge-based trust incorporates the behavioral categories most readily associated with trust-building: communication, meeting commitments, and demonstrating competence. Knowledge-based trust was the most common level of trust evident in the relationships. Nine pairs’ built trust to this level. Six pairs built trust beyond this: those six also built identification-based trust.

Identification-based trust, the highest level of trust, is not as evident in organizational contexts as calculus-based or knowledge-based trust (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Identification-based trust results from going beyond knowing each other to identifying with each other. It is built less on predictability of behavior than on the internalization of each other’s preferences (Sheppard & Tuchinsky, 1996). Pairs with identification-based trust act on behalf of each other and can substitute for each other in other interpersonal interactions. The dynamics in pairs with this level of trust included a more personal dimension.

In addition to the levels of trust evident in each pair, the study revealed different patterns in what each pair focused on when they worked together on behalf of the organization. It is the integration of the trust levels and these “working-together” patterns that provide the “good to great” framework the study revealed. The working-together patterns are discussed next.

The Focus of Work

Study participants were asked to describe experiences that were characteristic of what they worked on together. Findings indicated three patterns of the scope and type of work the pairs engaged in together: managing, planning, and leading. These patterns, like the levels of trust, were cumulative, that is, all pairs planning together were also managing; all pairs leading were also planning and managing.

Managing

All the pairs indicated they worked together on some aspect of the internal operations of the organization, for example finances, personnel, facilities, and fundraising. This pattern was categorized as managing. Also, pairs were managing when they worked on or about the board, e.g., developing board meeting agendas together, working on recruiting new board members, or identifying board leaders to head committees. Six
study pairs worked together only at this level and are referred to as the managing pairs. These managing pairs did not describe working together with the board or anyone else. This was an important distinction.

**Planning**
The planning pattern of working together was characteristic of pairs who engaged with the board to determine direction and strategy, as well as doing other activities directly related to organizational strategic focus. In contrast to the managing pairs, planning pairs described building relationships with board members and interacting with board committees. There were three pairs, the planning pairs, whose work together evidenced only the managing and planning patterns.

**Leading**
Six study pairs were managing, planning, and leading. These are the leading pairs. They described working with engaged boards on mission-related and strategic matters. They also described a web of board, staff, and community relationships. The labeling of this pattern as leading is not intended to imply that the other study board chairs and executives were not leaders. The distinction is the level of engagement the pairs had with the external community as well as the level of engagement they helped to create between their boards and the community. Neither was evident in managing or planning pairs.

**Levels of Trust and the Working-Together Patterns**
The study found three levels of trust and three patterns of how pairs worked together. Was there a relationship between these two dimensions? There was. Using Mishra’s approach to measuring the strength of trust (i.e., the number of different trust-building behaviors evident) revealed that the strength of trust in the leading pairs was 67% higher than in the planning pairs and 133% higher than in the managing pairs. The planning pairs had stronger trust levels than the managing pairs. Only the leading pairs had achieved the highest level: identification-based trust. The following reflects these findings using a “Good to Great” framework:

- **Good: managing pairs**
  Managing focus + low to moderate knowledge-based trust

- **Better: planning pairs**
  Planning focus + moderate to high knowledge-based trust

- **Great: leading pairs**
  Leading focus + identification-based trust

A final question explored in the study was what, if any, influence did the board chair–executive relationship have on the organization from the participants’ experience? Given the framework, was there a relationship between the nature of that influence, if any, and the good, better, or great pairs?

**Board Chair–Executive Relationship’s Value: Social Capital Creation**
As noted earlier, social capital theory was used to understand if and how the study pairs’ relationships influenced their organizations. Social capital is the asset created through relationships. It is “the stock of active connections among people” that makes productive action possible in organizations (Cohen & Prusak, 2001, p. 4). Leaders have a critical role to play in creating social capital that is useful to the organizations they serve (Cohen & Prusak, 2001; King, 2004).

All study participants believed that their relationship mattered to the effectiveness of the organization, but, prior to the study few had reflected on how. The study was not structured to specifically measure social capital. However, when participants were asked how their relationships affected the organizations their responses were characteristically about key relationships and networks, and other benefits associated with social capital. The primary elements of social capital are resources and relations (Lin, 2001). Individuals come to relationships “with resources over which they have some (possibly total) control and in which they have interests” (Coleman, 1990, p. 300). They engage in various exchanges and transfers of control; that is, they form social relationships toward the goal of achieving their interests. These interactions take place within a social structure. Unlike other forms of capital (physical, human, intellectual), the resources that are social capital are only accessible through social ties – they are not the possessions or specific attributes of the individual (i.e., not human capital).

The Good to Great types of board chair–executive director relationships are discussed below in terms of the social capital created and the benefits that accrued to the organizations as a result. The pairs’ strength of trust, focus of work, and the benefits of social capital creation all aligned within each type.

**The Good Relationships**
As the leadership team for the nonprofit organization, the board chair and executive director have the opportunity to build social capital with each other, the board, the staff, and other stakeholders. By definition, managing pairs were not working in an engaged way with their boards or other stakeholders. However, a trusting board chair–executive relationship alone can generate social capital if that trust facilitates cooperative work relevant to organizational goals. “Even when social capital investments are made solely by individuals who develop ties with one another, many real advantages accrue to the organization as a whole” (Cohen & Prusak, 2001, p. 4). The level of trust in the managing pairs, whose engagement with others was minimal, was a source of social capital but there was no evidence that these pairs influenced any social capital creation outside of their relationship. These pairs created social capital within their own relationship by building trust, stating expectations, and working cooperatively on agreed-upon goals. The benefits for the organization they reported were improved information sharing and better decision making.

**The Better Relationships**
In addition to developing social capital within their own relationships, the
planning pairs created social capital by strengthening relationships with and engaging the members of their boards of directors. They described doing this by jointly meeting with each board member, appreciating and tapping into board members’ individual skills, leveraging board members’ networks, and focusing on opportunities for strategic discussion. Planning pairs described influencing their boards to be more productive and operate on a strategic versus operational level. These pairs clearly valued the board as an important resource and worked together to tap that resource through purposeful relationship building, thus, creating more social capital. As a result, per their report, the organization benefited from a well-performing board that generated better information, additional resources and connections, and access to expertise.

The leading pairs worked together, with engaged boards, on issues of organizational vision, mission, and strategic focus. They described energy and synergies in their relationship and with the board and the staff that catalyzed organizational productivity and engagement with the community.

The Great Relationships
The leading pairs worked together, with engaged boards, on issues of organizational vision, mission, and strategic focus. They described energy and synergies in their relationship, and with the board and the staff, that catalyzed organizational productivity and engagement with the community. They reported leveraging the relationships and expertise of the board as a result of how they worked together and how this enabled them to make many connections with key people in the community such as funders and legislators. One leading pair reported increased engagement with local ethnic communities around strategic issues that the board chair directly attributed to their relationship and how they worked together.

Sources of social capital among the leading pairs included board relationships with staff. One executive director described how the energy of the board had spread to the staff and that the quality of the board members that he and the board chair attracted contributed to high staff morale. Another board chair described significant involvement between the board members and staff in working together on key projects and sharing expertise in the organization.

Leading pairs worked with engaged boards on mission-related and strategic issues. Their boards were active and lent their expertise to the organizations in ways that went beyond their board roles. These pairs described a web of board, staff and community relationships. The social capital built in these relationships facilitated access to a variety of resources—intellectual, financial, and social—needed by the organizations. The reach of relationships touched by these board chairs and executives spanned organizational boundaries. They reported attracting more people to the organizations (e.g., volunteers) and emphasized that relationship resources were more fully utilized. The leading pairs noted powerful impacts on the organizations that resulted from their relationships, how they worked together and the social capital created. Leading pairs described the influence of their relationships on the organizations as motivating, energizing, and engaging others (staff, board members, and stakeholders) on the organizations’ behalf. They described their own involvement with an engaged board of directors—individuals who were giving “work, wealth, and wisdom”—and the valuable personal connections their relationship and their board members’ relationships yielded.

Leading pairs conveyed that, together, they helped to create the confidence and synergy that permeated the whole organization and improved effectiveness. These findings are reflected in Figure 2 (next page).

Discussion
This study provided a closer look at the dynamics of the board chair–executive director relationship in nonprofit organizations and asked if and how this relationship matters to the organization. Consistent with the literature (Light, 2002; Howe, 2004; Millesen, 2004; Carlson & Donohoe, 2010) study participants responded with a resounding “Absolutely” when considering whether the relationship mattered. Despite this strong consensus, or maybe because of it, there has been limited empirical exploration of why or how this relationship matters to the nonprofit organizations executives and board chairs serve. By exploring the interpersonal dynamics of the relationship and its impact, this study took a step toward understanding the powerful potential of this important leadership pair.

Trust-building was the primary dynamic in the board chair–executive relationships studied. The nonprofit governance literature emphasizes the importance of trust for an effective board chair–executive relationship but falls short of detailing the interpersonal dynamics and specific behaviors that actually build trust. General statements that information sharing and/or communication are important to the board chair–executive relationship do not reflect the nuances of the relationship dynamics. The great relationships all demonstrated identification-based trust. Identification-based trust reflects a closer, more personal relationship. Understanding these nuances can give board chairs and executives the tools they need to build a great not just a good relationship; to value, not avoid, a more appropriate personal dimension to their interactions. Building a personal connection between the board chair and the executive director is not only desirable, but contributes to creating social capital.

The leading board chairs were very involved and had frequent, direct contact with staff with whom they worked on specific and varied projects. Contrary to the common view that this type of hands-on,
board involvement is characteristic of younger, less sophisticated nonprofits, these participants chaired some of the largest, oldest and best-known nonprofits in the study. Open access to staff was cited several times by board chairs as a source of trust in the executive.

The social capital generated by study pairs resulted in numerous benefits for the organizations. These included: energy, productivity, synergy, links to numerous networks, access to information, and improved decision-making. This study reinforces those who note that nonprofit organizations are uniquely suited to maximizing the potential and promise social capital offers organizations (Chait, Ryan & Taylor, 2005; King, 2004). From generating more productive work within the organization to building critical, richly resourceful, relationships with stakeholders, nonprofit organizations have the opportunity to offer meaning and connection that attracts and builds social capital.

Purposeful attention to relationship building can increase social capital. It was interesting that the majority of study participants indicated that they did not think about working on the relationship—as compared to working on the business of the organization. In the words of one executive, “You forget it’s a relationship.” This is particularly surprising given the adamant affirmations of the importance of the relationship to the organization by almost every study participant. If, as the findings suggest, the creation of social capital was an unconscious byproduct of a high-trust relationship, it suggests that the potential for social capital creation in the study nonprofit organizations was even greater and unrealized.

Relationship building takes time and skill. Failure to recognize the potential and value of social capital for the nonprofit organizations they serve, results in the investment of board chair and executive’s energies and attention elsewhere. The multiple, competing demands they encounter require purposeful, strategic thinking in considering where to invest for the best social capital return. This study highlights that one of the first places to invest is in their own relationship.

Implications for Practice

Nonprofit leaders need to recognize that the board chair–executive director relationship is an important and powerful resource that can be leveraged in support of the organization’s mission. They need to promote and engage in dialogue about how to best develop and nurture it. Board chairs and executives should focus on their relationship, recognizing that building the
relationship itself is an important component of their work together.

Nonprofit leaders need to ensure that the importance of this leadership dyad is reflected in the practices of board chair selection, terms of office, expectations of executives, and board leadership development. Several board chairs interviewed indicated that their boards spend more time concerned about who to bring on the board and how, than they spend on determining leadership succession—who will be the next board chair and why? And, what is the executive director’s role in the process? Although board chairs and executives alike felt positive about their current relationships, the study yielded over twenty stories from them about the times the relationships of the past had not worked and what a negative impact it had for the organization.

Nurturing relationships and establishing and sustaining trust is strategic work essential to organizational effectiveness. The power and potential of relationships must be more broadly recognized and promoted. The importance of connection, caring and meaning should not be lost in an over-emphasis on more “business-like” practices and claims of harried busyness. Trustworthiness is the basis of effective leadership. Nonprofit leaders are stewards of the well-being of individuals and our communities: board chairs and executive directors comprise the key leadership fulcrum of nonprofit organizations. It is a myth that what is personal is not professional and what is professional is not personal. The potential to leverage the board chair–executive director relationship and increase nonprofit organizations’ stock of meaningful, productive relationships, (i.e., social capital) is great and unrealized. Building and nurturing this relationship must be a priority.

References

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“The historical support of political and social scientists, might lead us to believe that hierarchy is the natural way to organize and that without it, organizations could be subject to the choice between hierarchy and anarchy... However, there is ample evidence that hierarchy and centralized control is not necessary for discipline and systematic ways of working.”
And, since this is difficult in a hierarchical top-down organizational structure, new models are needed.

Stark (2000) argued for the heterarchy model as “it represents a new mode of organizing that is neither market nor hierarchy: whereas hierarchies involve relations of dependence and market involves relations of independence, heterarchies involve relations of interdependence” (p. 6). Driven by a set of radical changes in the internal and external environments, Bartlett and Ghoshal (1993) showed evidence for the emergence of this new organizational form.

The emergence of the globalized, liberalized, and privatized twenty-first century has posed unprecedented challenges for nonprofits as well as for-profits. Nonprofit organizations working with marginalized communities face the daunting challenges of dwindling donations and fickle availability of funds. In addition, they are often expected to perform better with depleted funding. Reports on the misuse of funds and power by some nonprofits have led to donors and the public losing trust in them (http://indianexpress.com/tag/ngo-funds-misappropriation). With advances in information technology, greater transparency on their part is not only possible but essential. Under these circumstances, the hierarchical model with its long chain of communication, delayed response times and inflexibility is no longer appropriate. Organizations engaged in development work must therefore embrace alternative structural models.

This case study shows evidence of an emerging heterarchy in the organization being studied, an interrelationship across units (under the same banner) at three levels. The “subunits” simultaneously play the role of “center,” a nodal link as well as critical coordinators of discrete and distinct activities. While technology facilitates coordination, trust plays a crucial role in integrating the heterarchy of hierarchies. Though there are formal control mechanisms, a key role is played by informal and more subtle control and integration mechanisms. This study contributes to organization development theory and practice by describing an actual heterarchy and its evolution and by defining the process of deestructurization.

Literature Review

The concept of heterarchy was introduced in 1945 by McCulloch, a biologist, who discovered that the human brain was heterarchically organized. This revelation had a profound impact on neurology and information technology but less on social science that viewed societies as essentially hierarchical (Crumley 1995). In 1977, Ogilvy introduced the concept of heterarchy to the discourse on decentralization and on the governance of large corporations. Understanding its potential for studying ancient societies, Crumley, an archaeologist, defined heterarchy as a system of relations “in which each element possesses the potential of being unranked . . . or ranked in a number of different ways, depending on systemic requirements . . . . Elements in a hierarchical structure are most frequently perceived as being vertical . . . whereas heterarchical structure is most easily envisioned as lateral, emphasizing the number and variety of connections among elements and the varying circumstantial importance of any single element” (Crumley, 1979, p.141–173). A heterarchy thus has a balance of powers, where no one person or group is dominant, and decisions are reached by dialogue.

Heterarchies are “an organizational form somewhere between a hierarchy and a network that provides horizontal links permitting different elements of an organization to cooperate while individually optimizing different success criteria” (Stephenson, 2009, p. 6). Heterarchies typically operate more informally than hierarchies, with relations among modules that are operationally more horizontal and less functionally differentiated. Finally, since different organizations in a heterarchical model can be aligned for a common purpose, its structure enables greater participation among its members at both the individual and organizational levels (Stephenson, 2009).

It has been argued that both technology and trust, facilitated by technological drivers—such as the Internet, Web platforms—and by “concrete collaborative planning,” or strategic design are important for the success of a heterarchy (Hellingsrath and Küppers 2011, p. 1). “Long ago, when the world was local, trust enabled our primordial ancestors to cooperate and overcome overwhelming odds. As our world became more globally interconnected, technology trumped trust” (Stephenson, 2009, p. 4). However, a heterarchical structure enables interdependencies among different elements of organizations to be supported by trust. “As the world continued to shrink . . . interdependencies began to grow and trust was again recognized as the missing link in free-trade agreements, civic-engagement initiatives, and financial markets” (Stephenson, 2009, p. 4).

Since the 1980s, heterarchical structures have been used in large, often geographically dispersed organizations, in cross-functional teams (Aime et al., 2014), in multinational enterprises (Hudlund, 1986; Williams & Lee, 2011), and in intergovernmental responses to large public problems (Mars, 2013). Researchers have argued that heterarchical organization structures allow nonprofit organizations to make real changes in the world and act in responsible ways (Fairtlough, 2005). They have pointed out that shared power allows adaptability and flexibility to grow and enables organizations to refine their missions over time and to evolve along with the community they serve (Schumacher, 2010). It can therefore be a useful structure where organization members operate in “an environment of institutional uncertainty” (Stark, 2001, p. 21), potentially leading to efficiency gains through collective leverage of the complementary competencies of members (Mars, 2013).

Despite the intuitive sense of many practitioners that heterarchy may be a preferred structure to hierarchy in nonprofits, research on the topic is scant. Schumacher (2010) argued for a heterarchy model for a volunteer-driven nonprofit community arts gallery and arts advocacy organization, but few other researchers have studied this alternative model in nonprofit organizations.

In this study, the term deestructurization is used to describe the process of taking
the elements of an organization structure apart, rearranging them, and integrating them back together. Destructurization has been defined as rethinking, redesigning, and bringing a radical change in organization structure. Taking the elements of an organization structure apart destroys the hegemony of hierarchy. Reintegration adds value for stakeholders, so there is “multiple rule” (Fairtlough, 2005), and redistribution of hierarchy, power, and decision-making authority throughout the organization.

Case Study

The case study, which is part of a larger research in Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (Myrada), covers the time period from November 2009 to March 2011. It is based on meetings and discussions with twelve Myrada staff and electronic correspondence with another staff person from the head office (HO) in Bangalore. In Myrada Kollegal Hill Area Development Project (MYKHADP) the author had meetings and discussions with a program officer, the training director, and another staff from the Centre for Institutional Development and Organisational Reform (CIDOR), and six Community Managed Resource Centre (CMRC) managers. Several pieces of electronic correspondence were also exchanged with the training director at CIDOR.

To undertake this study, the author made three one-day visits and another five-day visit to the Project Office (PO). During these visits Myrada assigned a CIDOR staff person who served as interpreter from English to the regional language of Kannada and vice versa to facilitate an understanding of the organization and enable interactions with CMRCs managers and members from the base level Community Based Organizations (CBO). This primary qualitative data was supplemented with secondary research from publicly available documents on Myrada.

Myrada: A Nonprofit Development Organization

Myrada was founded in 1968 in India by Captain William Davidson to assist the Indian Government in resettling Tibetan refugees. When the resettlement program ended in the early 1980s, Myrada started focusing entirely on promoting the rights of women and the marginalized to build and manage their own institutions, develop their own livelihood strategies, lobby effectively to change oppressive relations, access resources, and build linkages (Myrada, 2010). It is presently managing nineteen projects, in twenty poor and drought prone districts in the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh in South India.

The Evolution of Myrada's Structure


During the first phase, from 1968-mid 1980s, Myrada undertook the Tibetan resettlement program, and since the mid-1980s has been concentrating on building poor people’s institutions. Myrada had a hierarchical structure with unitary control, whereby all strategic decisions regarding settlement and development programs were centralized in the HO and communicated to the PO, which in turn implemented them. During the second phase, Myrada decentralized decision-making, and encouraged financial sustainability at every level of the organization (Myrada, 2010) by creating (since mid-1990s) legally independent and autonomous organizations, Myrada Promoted Institutions (MPIs), which were registered as societies, trusts, and companies. By 2005, the HO resembled a holding company (Myrada, 2010) that also gave greater autonomy to POs in the districts, which increasingly raised resources on their own, building corpus funds and institutional assets. This was reflected in the organization’s organogram which placed Myrada at the center of the institutions it promoted (Myrada, 2010). During the third phase, the agency coordinated the activities of its numerous projects and MPIs spread over three states, and by 2007 it was just one among many institutions which it helped to promote (Myrada, 2010). This integration was also achieved by federating the Self-Help Affinity Groups (SAGs) under CMRCs during 2007–08.

Myrada’s structural evolution can thus be described as moving from the first phase of dependence of its entities on the HO, to the second phase of independence of its entities, though Myrada continued to play a major role in managing its projects and institutions (Myrada, 2010), and finally to the third phase of interdependence of its various entities.

The New Organization Structure of Myrada

This section describes in detail Myrada’s new organization structure with the head office, project offices, and Myrada Promoted Organizations intertwined and interdependent.

In this new structure, there are many autonomous institutions sharing the same vision as the parent organization. These MPIs are:

1. Myrada Kaveri Pradeshika Samsthe (MYKAPS);
2. Soukya Samudhya Samsthe (SSS), an association of sex workers at the district level;
3. CIDOR;
4. They are homogenous and membership groups (Self-Help Affinity Groups, Watershed Development Associations, and Soukya Groups of sex workers) of poor people at the village level, federated at the second level, under a resource centre managed by the community itself (Singh et al., 2011).
5. See website http://Myrada.org/Myrada/
6. The acronym Myrada has become the organization’s logo.

1. Mysore State has become Karnataka.
2. One of the 19 Myrada projects; it is in the Southern State of Karnataka.
3. CMRCs are comprised of 100-120 base level CBOs that are integral to Myrada’s withdrawal strategy. The role played by Myrada in mentoring, monitoring, and supporting these CBOs is taken over by the CMRCs. The CBOs seek out membership in the CMRC and the latter levies fees for the services they provide to non-members.
4. They are homogenous and membership groups (Self-Help Affinity Groups, Watershed Development Associations, and Soukya Groups of sex workers) of poor people at the village level, federated at the second level, under a resource centre managed by the community itself (Singh et al., 2011).
5. See website http://Myrada.org/Myrada/
6. The acronym Myrada has become the organization’s logo.
4. Mahila Abhivruddhi Mattu Samrakshanaya Samasthe (MASS), an association of Devadasis;8
5. CMRC;
6. Sanghamitra—a micro finance institution;
7. Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), a center for agricultural research and training;
8. Management of Enterprise and Development of Women (MEADOW); and

As can be seen in Figure 1, there is still an element of hierarchy in the new structure as the program officers in the POs directly report to the HO. Myrada also has a presence on the Board of Directors in MYKAPS, Sanghamitra, MEADOW, CIDORS, KVK, and NFTTC. The second line of hierarchy involves the CMRCs, CIDOR, MASS, SSS, and NFTTC reporting to the PO in the district. And a third line of hierarchy is the CMRC that has the informal base level CBOs – SAGs, Watershed Management Associations (WMAs), and Soukhiya Groups (SGs) – under its umbrella.

Figure 1 depicts these hierarchical linkages by vertical bold lines at the three levels. The interconnectedness of lateral communication and the linkages among POs, MPIs, and PO and MPIs is depicted by broken lines. A close examination of the organizational structure thus shows that Myrada has a heterarchy model similar to what Fairtlough (1994) describes as representing a balance between the need for some hierarchy, combined with the need for lateral, horizontal links in a network of relations. In essence, it is a structure with a seamless balance of hierarchies and networks of interconnected organizations sharing a common vision.

Heterarchy: A Structural Marvel for Myrada

This section discusses why the new model is a structural marvel of interrelated hierarchies and networks arranged in such a way as to form a single, integrated heterarchical organization structure.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Myrada reexamined the long-standing principle that “HO always knows the best” and called for radical change in the way the entire organization was managed. Until then, the flow of funds, information, and decisions was top-down from the HO to the MPIs and projects. Destructurization initiated by the organization began a process of breaking the hegemony of the HO. It created legally independent, autonomous institutions, and gradually linked and integrated them for interdependence. This process changed Myrada’s structure from a hierarchy to what Marschan (1994) has called “an integrated network of horizontally structured institutions” in which the flows are multi-directional (as illustrated by the broken and bold lines in Figure 1).

Myrada’s heterarchical structural form recognizes different kinds of “centers” apart from that which has traditionally been referred to as “headquarters.” It also recognizes that competitive advantage does not necessarily reside in any one center, most often the headquarter (Hedlund, 1986). To spread managerial capabilities throughout the organization, senior Myrada staff joined the MPIs.

Each entity/organization makes its own strategic as well as operational decisions regarding raising funds, planning, implementing, accounting, monitoring, and evaluating. This is evident even at the base level where the SAGs articulate their vision for 3–5 years and develop their operational plan.

The PO and MPI “subunits” were created to allow for increased autonomy to enable them to respond more effectively and efficiently to the local and specific needs of CBOs. Institution development training and agricultural research and training for both men and women are centralized in CIDOR and KVK respectively. These centers generate their own funds by providing training to the immediate and extended Myrada organizations as well as to government officers, and other NGOs.

Figure 2 illustrates that these subunits coordinate discrete and distinct activities. CMRCs created in 2004, for example, coordinate activities by developing linkages with Myrada institutions as well as with external organizations to ensure the development and sustainability of its member CBOs (PC with CIDOR). Specifically, it forges internal horizontal linkages among (a) the CBOs; (b) Sanghamitra; (c) CIDOR; (d) KVK (which promotes the Rosemary Oil Farmers Association [ROFA]); (e) Kabini Organic Producers (KOP) and garment units; and (f) Myrada projects (PC with HO). CMRCs simultaneously forge external vertical linkages with (a) banks (private, national, grameen,9 and cooperative); (b) insurance companies; (c) government departments (revenue and records, ration cards, agriculture, horticulture, forestry, and health); (d) local councils or Panchayat (at the Gram, Taluk, and Zilla10 levels); (e) private individuals (doctors, advocates),

8. It is a religious tradition in which girls are “married” and dedicated to a deity or temple. Considered religious prostitution, it has been banned by law.
9. Of or related to village
10. Gram and Taluk are the administrative sub divisions of a district, i.e., Zilla.

Figure 1. Myrada’s Heterarchical Organizational Structure
and marketing institutions; and (f) other nongovernmental (NGOs) and voluntary organizations (Rotary and Lions Club) (PC with PO). The CMRCs, as endogenous change agents (Singh & Babu, 2012), are also part of Myrada’s withdrawal strategy as they create institution-specific advantages by building the capacity of internal as well as external stakeholders of community development. They provide services, and gather and disseminate information to the community (PC with PO); lobby for the rights of women, poor and marginalized; and monitor other informal institutions under the Myrada umbrella. CMRCs thus perform a strategic role in the sustainability of the community.

In Figure 1, especially notable are the intricate crisscross and levels of network relationships. The heterarchy illustrated by crisscross entails a “many-to-many” relationship between different nodes, while the levels of hierarchy imply a “many-to-one” form of structural aggregation (Kontopoulus, 1993). MPIs such as MYKAPS as shown in Figure 3, act as nodal units linked to clusters of satellite organizations. In addition to linking with Myrada, from which it is a spin-off, MYKAPS serves as a (nodal) link to the Organic Farmers Association (OFA), KOP, and the Rural Technical Training Unit (RTTU) (PC with HO), and at the same time coordinates with CIDOR and CMRC. Such MPIs are now “centers” and can no longer be considered peripheral.

Upon close examination, Myrada’s organization structure presents as a marvel because there is not just dyadic interaction between HO and other organizations under the same umbrella but inter-organizational relationships take place across levels as shown in Figures 1 and 3. Myrada therefore has a powerful integration mechanism to ensure that the entire organization benefits from the specialized resources, knowledge, and expertise developed in these units. Figure 1, shows this integration at three levels: CMRCs at the lowest supra-community level; the PO at the next level networking with the CMRCs and other MPIs; and the overall integration by the HO. Such a multi-organizational network supports the seamless exchange of information laterally in a heterarchy among hierarchies in Myrada.

Though there is a fair use of information communication technology (ICT), there is not the same in the MPIs and POs in more remote districts. As for the knowledge management (KM) system, trust trumps technology. Facilitated by strong personal relationships and trust, knowledge is constantly created, shared, and transferred formally in weekly and monthly meetings of the MPIs and the projects at the HO, and informally during discussions among the members and at training sessions. Case studies and best practices are documented and shared with the HO (PC with CIDOR). The environment throughout Myrada supports the creation of knowledge in all of these specialized subunits and its application in other units. Tacit knowledge sourced from any of these “centers,” is 

codified in reports, case studies, papers, and articles written by the HO. The HO compiles explicit knowledge and along with other field staff identifies innovations emerging from the field, tests them, develops future plans, and influences government policies.

Besides ICT and knowledge sharing platforms, Myrada employs a formal, standardized accounting and staff remuneration system across all organizations. Skilled and experienced personnel also play important roles in supporting the heterarchical linkages. Selecting the right staff, their continuous training and mentoring has resulted in commitment, professionalism, innovation, participatory work, and cross-functional competence, all with the ability to listen and interact closely with people. Trust, transparency, and feedback are essential features of the organization culture that nurtures a leadership style that can cope with failures, take risks, and try new approaches. Moreover, senior managers deputed across different Myrada organizations act more as catalysts, architects, and mentors. Myrada’s common reporting language also plays an integrating role. The regional languages of Kannada, Tamil, and Telugu, are used among the staff and in their work with the members of the community. While these languages serve as glue binding all the stakeholders, they also help to build trust among them, which, in turn, facilitates the work of Myrada. Across all subunits, however, reporting and documentation is done in English. This language standardization facilitates the control and coordination of different projects and MPIs spread over three states.

The philosophy of building poor people’s institutions, the core of which is shared by all Myrada units keeps the loosely associated entities together under Myrada’s umbrella and facilitates their working to realize a common mission. This
common vision “to promote livelihood strategies, local governance, environment and natural resource management, health and education systems through institutions designed and managed by the rural poor in an equitable and sustainable manner” (Myrada, 2010, p.8) unites these organizations as a federation. Networked Myrada also fosters vital information generation and diffusion through lateral communication and more precisely through personal relationships. The resulting trust is an important ingredient in building lasting, collaborative structures. The agency has also developed processes and forums where staff from different projects and MPIs meet frequently, either at the HO or the PO, to report, plan, assess, interact and share, fostering closer personal contacts and knowledge creation. Moreover, training and development programs also create an environment where staff from the subunits, located in different districts and States interact, and build closer ties. Myrada’s shared philosophy and vision, and personal relationships thus play a crucial control and integrating role in making heterarchy, a structural marvel.

Conclusion

This inductive study concludes that Myrada’s new and evolved structure is heterarchical. There is now a greater and conscious move to interconnect not just different projects but also the legally independent MPIs that were created earlier for the purpose of decentralization. This case study illustrates that heterarchy is not an enormous fishing net-like mechanical organizational structure imposed by headquarters. Used for integrating Myrada’s complex multi-level and interconnected heterarchical organization structure, it allows control to be less reliant on top-to-bottom hierarchical mechanisms and more on informal mechanisms. Previous research (Hedlund & Rolander, 1990; Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1993; Marschon, 1997) also observed the vital integrating role played by informal control mechanisms. Finally, Myrada’s structural marvel, its heterarchy, exemplifies the finest points of nonsummativity (Stephenson, 2009) where synergy and trust among different subunits makes the integrated whole structure greater than the sum of its parts. While White and Poynter (1990) were convinced that heterarchy is not for every business, this study, suggests this structure has great potential for nonprofit development organizations. Myrada’s organizational structure consisting of hierarchies and networks exemplifies Stephenson’s (2009) ideal heterarchy as a collection of entities “each with its own raison d’etre, but which in turn, do collaborate with each other to accomplish a collective good more complex than any one hierarchy can manage on its own” (Stephenson, 2009, p. 6). This study explains how heterarchy can be a loose union of entities that requires a change in managerial perspective on decentralization at all levels; shared philosophy and vision; skillful human resources, strong personal relationships, and common reporting languages.

In this study, though trust is important, the role of information communication technology (ICT) cannot be overlooked, as it “links together people and institutions to solve a complex task and/or achieve a grand design” (Stephenson, 2009, p. 6). This is consistent with the findings of Stephenson (2009), Rocha (2000), and McAfee, Bettiol, and Chiarvesio (2007) who emphasized the need for technology to enable interconnections among different subunits of a geographically dispersed organization. This makes heterarchy a distinct organizational structure, which, though it has its origins in the for-profit realm, can be successfully utilized in nonprofit organizations as well. Finally, consistent with previous research by Mars (2013), this study has shown that heterarchy is a viable structure which is supple enough to enable coordination among multiple levels of organizations and external stakeholders. Myrada’s successful implementation of a heterarchical organizational structure helps make a case for its adoption by other nonprofit organizations.

Further study of international nonprofit organizations should answer even more questions:

» Is heterarchy an appropriate model for organizations with geographically dispersed subunits across countries?
» What is the optimal role of information technology in an international heterarchy that wants to facilitate the interactions of its geographically dispersed staff?
» Does information technology complement trust?
» What are the challenges of international Human Resource management in terms of recruitment, selection, training, compensation, and reward of staff in heterarchical organizations?
» How would the cultures and languages of different countries facilitate or inhibit coordination and integration in a heterarchical nonprofit organization?

This study was limited in that it was conducted in a project of one development organization. The nature of this nonprofit’s work and its geographical dispersion made trust more important than technology in its structure change. This may not be true in an organization that is widely dispersed in different countries. Building trust requires frequent, often face-to-face meetings. Building trust across different national and organizational boundaries can be an added challenge. Can ICT help in building trust by shrinking time zones and distance? Future researchers may find trust and technology are equally important in widely dispersed organizations.

Previous discussions of heterarchy have tended to deal with theoretical models only. This study, on the other hand, examines an actual organization structure, its destructurization and its evolution into an alternative form that is termed a heterarchy. For Myrada, a heterarchy is not a seamless balance of hierarchies and networks, characterized by “organizational heterogeneity” as Stark (2000) has described, but rather a decentralized federation of organizations with a shared philosophy and vision; skilled human resources and strong personal relationships; and a common reporting language. This study suggests that changing to a heterarchical organization structure can be time-consuming and complex. However, this study demonstrates
that a heterarchy can successfully evolve from a hierarchy. It paves the way not only for further research into the efficacy of hierarchies but for other nonprofits seeking alternative, decentralized ways of delivering their goods and services.

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Being a consultant on foreign soil can be a bewildering experience. The skills, techniques, and strategies that serve you well at home rarely make it through airport customs. You arrive at your first client meeting with the wrinkles ironed out of your suit, but completely underdressed in terms of language, business etiquette, and cultural norms.

This is how I felt when I arrived in Johannesburg, South Africa to be a part of a consulting team working with a local Christian school. I was there with the American University Master of Science in Organization Development program. My time in Johannesburg was part of an international residency, an experience designed to strengthen cross-cultural consulting skills. In my luggage I had carefully packed the tools that served me well in Washington, DC, where I had been working with a government agency for the past three years. One of those tools was Bolman and Deal’s (2008) four-frame approach to looking at organizations. Using this approach, consultants analyze clients from the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames.

The structural frame focuses on organizations as goal-achieving systems; it emphasizes the scaffolding of rules, roles, and policies and the appropriate differentiation and integration between these parts. The human resource frame considers organizations as systems that support and interface with human needs. This frame emphasizes employees’ skills, sense of fulfillment, and alignment with the broader system for business success. The political frame characterizes organizations as arenas for decision-making, conflict, bargaining, and negotiation. In this sense, navigating power dynamics and patterns of alliance and authority brings about the best results. From the final frame, the symbolic, organizations exist as meaning-making systems. To understand a client’s challenges and bring about change, consultants must look into the organization’s culture, narratives, symbolism, and soul.

For me, the structural, human resource, and political frames were as tried and true as my favorite black suit jacket. I used them frequently and to great effect in my work. The symbolic frame, however, was not my favorite travel item. I rarely used it and frankly did not understand how it could work in a meaningful way with clients.

Consulting in a High Context Culture

Once in Johannesburg, I began working with two classmates on an action research project in a private Christian school. Our mandate was simply to meet with the principal, scope a purpose for our work, and develop a clear plan for how to help her in a meaningful way in just a few short weeks. From my consulting work in the United States, I was expecting a fairly straightforward client entry meeting. Usually, within an hour the client and I clearly identify what we will focus on and sketch out an initial timeframe for our work. Given this standard of comparison, after our first meeting with the principal (which lasted over two hours) I felt we had completely
failed. Instead of using the time to scope the work, we spent our time listening to the principal's stories and biblical references. My notes were cluttered with images of rotten fruit, financial shortage, broken children, dilapidated buildings, and the looming specter of a Bishop. None of those images fit into my framework of the political, structural, or human resource frames.

In high context cultures, such as many parts of Africa, little in communication is explicit (Hall, 1976) and information is conveyed in a relational and associative manner (Weaver, 2000). In low context cultures, such as the United States, communication is often direct, logical, and linear (Hall, 1976). What I was experiencing illustrates some of the differences between high and low context cultures. Through the lens of Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frames, this explains the predominance of the structural, political, and human resource frames in my work in Washington, DC. Many clients in the United States clothe their challenges in the language of structural dysfunctions (i.e., unmet goals, inefficient processes, broken communication), political dysfunctions (i.e., power distance, coercive decision-making, “in” groups, and “out” groups), or human resource issues (i.e., employees without adequate skills, misalignment to organization outcomes). The principal, in contrast, was speaking out of the symbolic frame. Instead of stating forthrightly her struggle to build trust and collaboration in the school, she told the story of a woman picking fruit who was unable to discern what was bruised from what was rotten. She was using symbolism and narrative to describe her world to us.

Although I struggled to follow the conversation in our first meeting, my colleagues’ careful attention to the principal’s use of symbolism led to the realization of an image whose transformation would become the heart of our work: a fist. While describing her relationship with the Board of the school, the principal stuck out her clenched fist – a non-verbal illustration of conflict and closed communication (Givens, 2010). One of my colleagues quickly mirrored the gesture and held out her own fist. Slowly unfurling her fingers to expose an open palm, she posed the question: “how do we get to this?” At the time none of us realized how powerful this image would become.

Surfacing a New Image for our Client

After the initial meeting, my team and I brainstormed our approach to data collection, relying primarily on the structural, political, and human resource frames. We designed questions to interview the school’s teachers, parents, board members, and students in order to surface data on the school’s hierarchy, power dynamics, and relationship patterns. When conducting the interviews, however, we heard images again. Many of the images were similar to those painted by the principal: broken windows, worn equipment, shards of glass, drugs, and violence. These were the same themes of shortage, brokenness, dilapidation, and conflict. However, this time the questions we used also surfaced strong images and metaphors of beauty and wealth: a growing library, student paintings, close friendships, play in sunshine, and flowers in a garden.

After we completed our interviews, my teammates and I sat down to find ourselves in a sea of symbolism. This was the moment when we forsook the frames we had brought in our suitcases and tried on a new way of thinking. We decided to join with the client’s use of imagery and seek meaning in the metaphor. As we began to peel back the layers, we found that beneath the scarcity and brokenness was resilience, connectedness, and hope. The more we sunk into it, the more we realized these images – the play, the friendship, and the possibility – outweighed the presenting image of disrepair. How could we show this to our client? This was when we remembered the fist. In our initial meeting the principal had focused on the closed fist of the world around her, the scarcity of resources, and the absence of transparency and communication. We decided to package our recommendations around a transformation in imagery. We would invite her to see the fist as a flower instead, a flower that – when nurtured – could blossom and open.

In our final meeting with the principal we presented our findings around this image transformation. We introduced the flower as a symbol of positive possibility. Each petal represented an opportunity identified by the school’s teachers, parents, board members, or students to build collaboration, unity, and resources. There were short-term maintenance projects, the beginnings of an expansion plan, fundraising activities led by teachers, sporting events organized by students, and concrete ideas for a resource and growth strategy. The people we had interviewed saw the scarcity and brokenness too, of course, but they also saw potential. And they wanted the principal to know it was there and she was not alone.
We delivered our presentation to the principal with an outstretched palm. It was a success. The principal readily stepped into our imagery and soon began to mirror our gesture of the opening flower.

Given the nature and time constraints of the residency, I do not know if and how the ideas and recommendations we surfaced were implemented or changed anything. But I do know the hope and positivity I saw on her face — and felt in the entire school — represented a rebirth of the hope, possibility, and energy that can ignite change. And it was only in using the symbolic frame that we were able to do this.

Attending to Symbolism in Client Systems

From my work with the school in Johannesburg, I now have a new understanding of and appreciation for using the symbolic frame in client systems. While attending to symbolism and narrative carries special weight in high context cultures, the power of imagery translates across many different traditions (Slocum, 2013) and can be used by consultants in countless cross-cultural settings. Reflecting on his study of theology, Robert Slocum describes how images can bring about transformation and expanded awareness: “new images are needed for living truth that transforms faith, and changes us” (p. 3). He continues to describe how new images can: “provide new awareness for the whole of our lives, and the world surrounding us... new eyes to see” (p. 4). Bringing this mindset into client systems expands the use of Bolman and Deal’s (2008) symbolic frame and uncovers a new mandate for the consultant: to seek out a rebirth in image. By surfacing and nurturing new images, the consultant and client can work together to find and transform truth.

This perspective aligns with current discussions in the field of organization development related to appreciative inquiry and organizational discourse. Drawing on David Cooperrider’s foundational work on appreciative inquiry, Watkins, Mohr, and Kelly (2011) describe how bold imaginings into the positive can transform mindsets and lead to innovation. For example, questions such as: “What is your dream for the future of this organization?” or “Imagine that what is most special about this organization is flourishing, what does that look like?” can inspire images of a desired future and mobilize energy toward that goal.

Marshak and Heracleous (2005) parallel this point by describing how attention to metaphor and symbolic meaning in discourse can lead to organizational change. From a social constructionist perspective, discourse creates reality and, as a result, encourages life-giving conversations that can liberate and transform a client system.

I now notice language patterns — such as the repeated use of metaphors related to hunger and running — and extrapolate them into a bigger change context — a system that is “undernourished” in its capacity to take on a project and struggling to keep up with demands and deadlines. In response, I now join the client’s use of metaphor ask questions such as: “Imagine a day of work felt like a good, hearty meal — what would that be like?” or “What would need to change for you to feel like you are running at a comfortable pace?” In using this approach, I have found an immediate metaphor recognition and resonance.

In search of imagery, there are many ways consultants can attune themselves to a client’s use and demonstration of symbols. As Bolman and Deal (2008) describe, look and listen for a client’s myths, legends, displayed images, and rituals or ceremonies. How do these symbols resolve or spread confusion? How do they provide direction or mislead action? How do they perpetuate identity? Through exploring questions such as these, consultants can surface new opportunities to shift a client toward appreciative imagery and grow life-giving forces.

Similar to what I have incorporated into my practice in Washington DC, consultants can also find predominant imagery by attuning themselves to hear conversation patterns. These patterns often point directly to inherent organizational mindsets (Ford & Ford, 2008; Marshak & Heracleous, 2005). For example, I often see metaphor patterns that illuminate mindsets of either scarcity or abundance, mistrust or partnership, and isolation or community. Even the specific words (and the tone and delivery of those words) can reveal organization culture and symbolism (Kegan & Lahey, 2001). And, of course the world of non-verbal communication is also rich and filled with data (Givens, 2010). By looking for gestures, micro-expressions, and movement, a consultant can notice new meaning and possibility.
So, to return to my own metaphor of the traveling consultant, what does this mean the cross-cultural consultant should pack differently in his or her suitcase? I still advocate for luggage full of the tools and tactics that serve us well in our home environments. That said, I now also recommend bringing an extra empty bag to safeguard space for the client’s image and metaphor culture. In doing so, you will almost always find an opportunity to transform a closed fist into a blooming flower.

References


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The ODP follows the guidelines of the American Psychological Association Publication Manual (6th edition). This style uses parenthetical reference citations within the text and full references at the end of the article. Please include the DOI (digital object identifier), if available, with references for articles in a periodical.

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Graphics that enhance an article are encouraged. The ODP reserves the right to resize graphics when necessary. The graphics should be in a program that allows editing. We prefer graphics to match the ODP’s three-, two-, or one-column, half-page or full-page formats. If you have questions or concerns about graphics or computer art, please contact the Editor.

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About the Editors:

OD PRACTITIONER is the quarterly journal of the Organization Development Network, an international association whose members are committed to practicing organization development as an applied behavioral science.

The Handbook for Strategic HR is edited by: John Vogelsang, Maya Townsend, Matt Minahan, David Jamieson, Judy Vogel, Annie Viets, Cathy Royal, and Lynne Valek

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