

Unused Resource: Organization Development*

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Organization Development (O.D.) is a rapidly expanding field involving the application of behavioral science to organizational problems through programs of planned change . . . There is an authentic role for the utilization of O.D. in Jewish communal service. Regardless of the various reasons for the neglect, O.D. concepts, strategies, skills and methods should be added to practice.

THIS article suggests the potential for enriching Jewish communal service skills offered by the behavioral sciences, with particular reference to Organization Development — (O.D.). Over the decades, this very *Journal* has mirrored trends, developments, emphases, experimental programs, and so forth, in the Jewish communal field. Through this interchange of papers, professional practice has been significantly enhanced. Interestingly, the burgeoning scope of skills and developments derived from the behavioral sciences has been virtually missing from the pages of the *Journal* as well as from the platforms of the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service. The reason for such omissions is no mystery; Jewish communal practice itself, seems to have given scant attention to the knowledge and skills exploration in the behavioral sciences.

The beginning professional is equipped through graduate training with an array of basic skills and a body of knowledge. Sooner or later, the knowledge and skills become stale and need updating. New skills are available, new information may expand and enrich previous data, and may perhaps correct or even invalidate earlier knowledge. Obviously the experience of others also needs study. The alert, conscientious professional must be open to growth and should seek it.

The application of new techniques

and knowledge may require a degree of calculated risk-taking. This, in turn, involves exploring, testing, a willingness to experiment, to break new ground. Knowledge and skills are not static. One either grows or atrophies by being "hung up" on yesterday's agenda.

The person with a new idea often is considered a pest, a crank, a crackpot. When the new idea wins understanding and acceptance, the sneers become accolades. Since the behavioral sciences and Organization Development are wellsprings, what is startling is the apparent lack of information, as evidenced by articles in the *Journal* and the program sessions at the annual meetings of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, as to the body of knowledge, tools and skills for professional practice derived from the behavioral sciences.

The behavioral sciences can be defined as the study of human behavior by scientific means.¹ With this definition in

* Presidential Address, 78th Annual Meeting, National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Boston, May 30-June 2, 1976.

¹ *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1968), p. 41. [The behavioral sciences, as that term is usually understood, includes sociology, anthropology . . . psychology . . . and the behavioral aspects of biology, economics, geography, law, psychiatry and political science. (Interestingly enough, the very concept of behavioral science evolved out of a study project in the early days of the Ford Foundation. The term may have

mind, an illustration of the application of behavioral science is useful.

Running a meeting is an experience common to professionals on several levels of authority and in many areas of communal service. The staff responsibilities for the specifics, the step sequences, agenda development, briefings, background memoranda and the like are all familiar. Writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, Anthony Jay conveys the inter-relationships of behavioral science research with the practical operational steps of how, why, and when to do what — and with whom — in preparing for and running a meeting. The editor's introduction to the article further illuminates the behavioral sciences' thrust.

Why is it that any single meeting may be a waste of time, an irritant, or a barrier to the achievement of an organization's objectives? The answer lies in the fact, as the author says, that "all sorts of human crosscurrents can sweep the discussion off course, and errors of psychology and technique on the chairman's part can defeat its purposes." This article offers guidelines on how to right things that go wrong in meetings. The discussion covers the functions of a meeting, the distinctions in size and type of meetings, ways to define the objectives, making preparations, the chairman's role, and ways to conduct a meeting that will achieve its objectives.²

Knowledge, per se, coupled with appropriate skills and tools and seasoned with practice wisdom, is the key to the development of professional expertise.

been coined by John Dewey, but it was minted by the Ford Foundation. The distinguished scholars brought together under the auspices of the Ford Foundation found themselves needing to factor out from the enormous range of human learning those disciplines and studies to which they then gave the name of "behavioral sciences." The Ford Foundation concluded that "the most important problems of human welfare now lie in the realm of democratic society, in man's relation to man, in human relations and social organizations.")]

² A. Jay, "How To Run A Meeting," *Harvard Business Review*, March/April 1976.

The major channel through which the behavioral sciences have become operative has been the training and development function.

A recent article notes that "the American people spend more than \$100 billion for formal education every year and then industry and government employers spend another \$100 billion on training for "adult jobs."³ These are staggering amounts, but the research findings and new methodologies being put into practice by business, industry, government, etc., are scarcely to be found in the field of Jewish communal service.

What's really new? Is there any background to be studied? To respond to the inevitable question: "what's the Jewish component?" an answer is found in the Book of Exodus. Moses achieved a Jewish "first." He introduced a leadership style which was a precursor of an application of the behavioral sciences. After the Israelites had wandered in the desert for 39½ years but had only gone half the distance to the Promised Land, Moses was cautioned by Jethro that what he was trying to do was too much for him to undertake: he needed a set of captains of 1,000, captains of 100, captains of 50 and captains of 10.⁴

This particular excerpt from the Holy Scriptures was cited by Rensis Likert (who has been called "the Picasso of Organizational Research"). As Likert in effect suggests, Moses had to apply the span of control, basic concepts of organization and needed staff. Likert reports that Ernest Dale developed an organization chart that shows the way Moses ran things for the last half of the

³ "\$100 Billion Annual Cost Estimate for Job Training," *National Report for Training and Development* (Vol. 2, No. 6), April 15, 1976, p. 1.

⁴ *Exodus* 18:13-23, 27.

⁵ "Conversation: An Interview with Rensis Likert," *Organizational Dynamics*, Summer, 1973, pp. 32-49; *Exodus*, op. cit.

distance from Egypt to the Promised Land. The last half took only six months!⁵

In other words, Moses can be credited as the original Jewish manager: he made the first application of organization development, of managerial conceptualization, delegation of authority, performance evaluation, etc.

Every discipline, every science, every profession, every skill develops its own vocabulary, its own founding fathers and Hall of Fame. Organization development (O.D.), derived from group dynamics, nourished by behavioral science research, tested in thousands of industries, business, governmental bodies, and so forth, has evolved in the last thirty years. OD is a rapidly expanding field involving the application of behavioral science to organizational problems through programs of planned change. Since change is inevitable, OD is concerned with the process of assessing probable change, probable consequences and optional strategies; of managing such change, and so on. Coping responsively — and responsibly — with change requires the development of effective mechanisms to compensate for failures in predictions, to provide for modification and corrections of anticipated "fail-safe" procedures, and the like. OD programs share three goals: 1) the improvement of organizational effectiveness, 2) the enhancement of the quality of working life within the organization, and 3) the effective management of change.⁶

The term, "management" is viewed by some social workers as the antonym of labor, with the result that management is thought of in negative terms. From the OD perspective, all who manage are decision-makers. The assump-

⁶ Adapted from 1976 Announcement. "The Cutting Edge," Division of Management Education, Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Michigan.

tion is being made in this article that one who supervises one or more persons is a manager even if the usual term in Jewish communal work is supervisor. Executives in Jewish communal service are managers, and their effectiveness is reflected in the results of their managerial decisions — whether they make satisfactorily more "right" than "wrong" decisions. "Right" decisions often reflect whether or not the executive or supervisor has utilized the right person or persons in the right ways in helping in the solution of the problem. In short, decision-making is a social process.⁷

Many tasks in organizational activity can only be successfully accomplished by bringing together the talents of many departments, specialists or other resources in a collaborative effort. The OD methodology to accomplish this is called "team building."⁸ The team building group is more likely to operate effectively if the following factors are recognized, understood and utilized:

1. Group has (or will have) a life together. May have lots of past history.
2. "There and then" (both past and future data must be dealt with).
3. Accountability is also to a larger system.
4. Group has reasons other than training to get together.
5. Members have differing authority, status, power and accountability.
6. Power to reward and punish is unequally distributed, and controls are often external to the group.

⁷ Victor H. Vroom, "A New Look At Managerial Decision Making," *Organization Dynamics*, Spring, 1973.

⁸ The material on team building is taken from the article on "Team Building" by Billie T. Alban and L. Irving Pollitt, from *OD: Emerging Dimensions and Concepts*. Edited by Thomas H. Patten, Jr., 1973, OD Division, The American Society for Training and Development.

7. Agenda can be work- or task-centered issues. Interpersonal or intrapersonal issues are relevant only to the extent they affect task.
8. Required awareness of larger system of which group is merely a part.
9. Sub-groups may form and constant activity is always occurring outside group.
10. Reality is measured against factors in the larger system, and feelings are only part of the data.
11. It is questionable whether an organizationally sponsored activity focused on increasing task effectiveness can be viewed as voluntary even when so intended by the manager or consultant.

The executive who is considering utilizing team building must be aware of those behaviors or issues which can block and distort the process. Examples are:

- Dependent or rebellious attitudes toward authority
- Different feelings of equality of membership or influence in the team; feeling in or out of the group
- Financial and other rewards which are seen as unfair
- Varied perceptions of the task to be performed
- Difficulties in inter-personal relationships
- Lack of clarity about roles
- Lack of effective means of planning, problem solving, and decision making
- Inability to manage the inevitable conflicts between groups

Team building calls for the skills of an OD consultant. Part of the process which may lead to the decision to engage an OD consultant involves thinking through the following cautions:

- It should not be tried unless the group really has the opportunity to influence its own future.
- It should not be tried if other parts of the system are likely to undo, or prevent, the changes the group determines to be desirable.
- If there is no change for dialog or negotiation with the rest of the organization, then team building can generate aspirations and enthusiasm which can only lead to increased disappointment.
- If decisions have been made to phase out a group, it is not likely to be helped by team building — either the problems are so deep they require different solutions, or external forces have already precluded survival.
- If the executive is planning to fire a number of people, or if he sees the team building activity as a therapy group for subordinates he can't manage or motivate, then he should not start.
- There should also be a belief that the group has the resources to manage its destiny. If the executive and the consultant don't believe the group has sufficient competence to grow and change, they should discourage team building.

There is more to team building than is described above, and OD is more than team building.

There is an authentic role for the utilization of OD in Jewish communal service. Regardless of the various reasons for the neglect, OD concepts, strategies, skills and methods should be added to practice. But for OD to be utilized, first it must be understood and studied. Appropriate training must be provided to staff. The Jewish field has been in the vanguard of a vast array of disciplines, procedures, practices, but OD is not yet one of them.