

CHANGING PARADIGMS IN OD – A PRACTITIONER’S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This article is based on the author’s own learnings, observation and experience as a manager, internal change agent, facilitator, external consultant, and coach. This article highlights a few major organization development initiatives over a time span of two decades. It talks about some examples of transformation and holistic change efforts that he has experienced, noticed, facilitated and observed. Using these insights the author explores the changing paradigms of OD. To the author, an OD practitioner, consultant, trainer and student, the various cases above over two decades are indications of the multiple OD approaches adopted by the organizations operating in India and the varying outcomes delivered by OD.

About the author



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Changing Paradigms of OD - A few Caselets

Case 1 PSU becoming business focused

One cannot but remember this great organization two decades back. Prior to experiencing liberalisation and globalisation in India, a large public sector undertaking (PSU) was organised as a functionally driven hierarchical working setup. It was functioning well, getting the desired revenue, growth and profitability. At that time, a very seasoned unit head took over the CEO role. In addition to grassroot level employee involvement, he focused on a number of corporate level initiatives to move the organization into future. To name a few of the initiatives with

an OD focus: creating vision/mission, restructuring the organization from a functionally oriented organization to Business oriented/SBU type of organization, wages for productivity drive for employees, growth strategies for productivity, building up of managers and future leaders, fast track career dev and potential appraisal and the like.

A couple of decades on, the author is aware of the corporation not only going places, but the current top management continues the thrust on strategising, organization capabilities/competencies building along with Leadership development and performance management. This PSU commands a lot of respect today

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in India for its technological, professional excellence with progressive business practices.

In summary, the case of a proactive organization, able to foresee change and steer ahead.

Case 2 Enabling civil servants for future

As faculty member in a reputed business school, the author had the opportunity of handling HRD sessions for some of the top and senior civil servants of the country. Two decades back, this initiative by a progressive political leader to initiate a move to build the civil servants for the current and future roles ahead of globalisation is noteworthy.

Government machinery reorienting the civil servants (IAS Group A services - training in HR) is a journey that continues on the lines of Kennedy Public Administration. The author remembers a politician almost in the stature of a statesman who took the initiative in the early 80's of the last century. Those days Indian bureaucracy was evolving still and possibly the statesman politician felt the need for recalibrating these set of highly talented civil servants to take on intense general competency enhancement as well function specific e.g. HRD, public administration, finance type of courses.

These courses were delivered at the leading B-schools, the civil servants came, stayed, did pre work, classroom sessions and used instruments, cases, text books etc to reorient themselves. The author, who was a faculty member of HRD in a leading business school, saw this as a major capability, culture building and transformational effort by the central government of India to prepare the civil servants to the globalization ahead. Prior to that, it was the privilege of a select few civil servants to go on a fellowship to USA, UK Canada and do a two-year course.

Realising the value, it is observed that in India many B-schools, specially, IIM Bangalore, has opened a centre for public policy to foster and build on the strengthening the service, which to the author is like strengthening the backbone of the nation.

Case3 A multinational proactively redefining its way of working for changing times

Initiating change when the organization is doing well is quite a challenge. The author clearly remembers the case of a multinational company (MNC) proactively redefining its way of working for far ahead of changing times.

This MNC has been in India for more than four decades and was known for its management practices including employee relations, work culture, occupational health, safety etc.

A new CEO, who was a functional expert, took over the mantle of leadership. He was a radical thinker and known for his aggressive approach. In the yearly management retreat, he and the top management team evolved a couple of focus areas to take the organization forward.

Though it was a cost-focused company and was doing well, the CEO drove the quality route to take the organization to the next level of national and global competitiveness.

The CEOs adopted a multipronged OD approach the components for which are elaborated below:

- I. Creating a special steering committee to lead the initiative
- II. Launching it as an integrated Organization Development journey without naming it so; through initiatives like: TQM, ISO, IT Enterprise Enabling (through Oracle), HRD and corporate communication.

III. Involving internal change sponsors, enablers, facilitators at multiple levels of the organization with the required inputs and support of leading management, quality, HRD, IT and related consulting firms and institutions.

It may be worthwhile elaborating a couple of specific programmes, which resulted in long-term capability enhancement and also lead to culture change.

- a. Employee satisfaction and organization health survey across all the units of the organization
- b. Dept purpose analysis and quality improvement programmes (QIPs)
- c. TQM Facilitator and Awareness Programme

The author is aware that **more than 60% of the managers and executives who played a leading as well as active role in the TQM and related initiatives are today holding prominent leadership positions in strategic mgt, general management, HR and quality.** The entire journey appears to have sharpened their employee involvement, quality, and change management-orientation capabilities visibly.

In addition, the author is clearly aware that this organization, prevented obsolescence, brought in multiple changes leading to energy and enthusiasm in the organization at all levels, indicating signs of enhanced organizational effectiveness (OE).

Case 4 A pioneer service organization becoming more customer and growth focused

In the early years of liberalisation, there was a large family managed group, with a young and dynamic CEO. The young leader wanted to make a difference to his organization.

This he did, in a span of 7 years or so, evolving in the process a very empowered and value oriented organization in the

service sector. The author could clearly remember the pioneering efforts by the second-generation entrepreneur along with a professional MD and senior management team.

The process was initiated with a HR audit at the corporate and the units to prepare the organization for its journey into the future to TQM. What evolved are the organization's shared vision, mission and the various strategies to drive them.

Multiple management initiatives that were successfully evolved, discussed and executed were: Long-term strategy, customer satisfaction surveys, and employee satisfaction surveys. In addition, the senior management created a brand communication document.

On people front, progressive HR policies, flat organization, employee involvement, organization day, family day, unionless organization symbolised by direct relations, high focus on safety, were put in place.

What's still remembered today by many professionals is the talent pipeline developed through graduate diploma/engineer and management trainees, who grew up to be the subsequent engineers, managers and top executives of the company. Very futuristic training, projects, assignments, progressives, performance planning dev systems, job rotations etc helped establish the company's image as the best place to be though size wise, it was very small indeed.

What followed after very successful operation of the organization was the divestment of the shares by the promoter to an MNC.

Initiating management activities far ahead of time and making an integrated plan that is realistic for business operations can help in creating a great global enterprise.

Case 5 A Consumer durables company exploring multiple interventions

The case in point is that of a consumer durables company. Beginning small as a technical entrepreneur with high nationalistic/patriotic values manufacturing equipments for limited use, this company grew up in a decade or so to be a very large consumer durables organization with multiple manufacturing units and large employee strength.

The company in its second phase of growth took multiple interventions; which are given below:

A. Customer service focus

- a) Focused on building and strengthening the customer service organization, separate from the product manufacturing organization
- b) Carefully built a national organization with multiple branches.
- c) Developed a very good service team, trained them up and built up a franchisee organization at remote places where branches were not there.
- d) Appointing key employees, building team with high quality and service orientation ensured the brand and product went further in the value chain
- e) Continuous training and retraining of the highly technical staff which was the benchmark of the industry

B. Strengthening the marketing organization and brand

The homegrown brand in an evolving economy in India during early years of liberalisation was a great experience. Focused brand building furthered this.

The organization though was strong in sales, market research and marketing areas

and commanded respect. But as the organization was growing further, some bottlenecks in growth and breakthrough were perceived. Hence, the organization with the help of Head HR did a major consulting on the marketing organization by engaging a leading mgt consultant. Outcome was a more de-layered market driven organization - from a central marketing organization (CMO) to a regional and branch office organization. This structure was provided strong support from the CMO in terms of product management, service delivery, market research, brand building, supply chain management, benchmarking, etc. The author also has observed strong brand building and recall during the decade.

C. Strengthening the manufacturing and key components availability

A great company in consumer marketing also needs good products too. The top management was tech savvy and heavily invested in state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities. There were matching investments in manufacturing technology, and innovation. This got supplemented by tech mgt, R&D, innovation, collaborations, JIT, Kanban and many more progressive technologies with internal team and supplementing it with TQM JIT, Alkaline.

D. Building up the culture and leadership pipeline

For strengthening the culture and people management, this organization invested heavily in attracting and retaining some of the top talent with rich technical and managerial competence.

In addition to investment in the service management, the organization also invested heavily in the areas of culture and competencies dev; e.g. areas of leadership development with help of internal infrastructure, tie up with premier B-schools including Indian Institute of Management, TAPMI and other tier II B-schools.

To strengthen leadership by assessment and focused development, assessment and development centre (ADC) was organised at the senior, middle, and junior management levels.

Focused performance management, BPR and R&D capability building through concurrent engineering, patenting and IPR initiatives took place to strengthen organizations capability to prepare for the future.

Focused competencies building also happened at the regional and branch level of the marketing setup as well as unit level for the manufacturing setup. The unit management took ownership of self-development of workmen, engineers, and staff.

E. Sustained top management commitment but the decline

There was sustained commitment, demonstrated by the top management as demonstrated by interest, investments; time, resources as well as periodic review.

Though the growth was noticeable for more than a decade, since the new millennium, the company appears to have gone through reversal of fortune on most fronts including growth, marketing, manufacturing and people management. From an organization enviable for most consumer and marketing organization it has almost reached the status of no-existence leaving the question of 'sustainability' for the OD professionals.

Case 6 A large ITES builds further ...

In the early years of liberalization, a set of entrepreneurs set up an IT Enabled Services (ITES) organization in India. Though the promoters initially were involved in management, later on took the help of a team of the senior consultant/organization in multiple interventions; some of them include:

- 360-degree feedback, followed up with vision, team building and managerial capability building

- Top management team continued with employee engagement followed by coaching

- Fun at work continued with the patronage of leaders with high engagement

To the author it indicated, all the above helped in taking the organization forward in spite of competitiveness and rebuilding up of the organization in to future

Case 7 Help in enabling health services organization

Another case in point was a large healthcare organization. The second generation entrepreneur having the vision of making the organization global, invested heavily in acquiring and nurturing top talent from leading MNCs, performance management systems strengthening as well as undertaking the following OD/HR initiatives like: HRD audit, post audit action plans, competency mapping for employees including assessment and development centres as well as scaling up the number of health service business units across the country.

The organization has experienced multiple growths in revenue, employee numbers, and other business and customer service parameters; indicating focused OD efforts can lead to growth and sustainability as well.

Case 8 Post BPR & follow-up activities

The last case in point is that of a leading automobile accessories manufacturer in the early parts of the millennium. Though third-generation entrepreneurs were running it, as part of an old family-managed business, they had recruited some of the top managers from other organizations. A professional top management initiated BPR to enhance global competitiveness and take

organization in to next level of efficiency and effectiveness. BPR was piloted in one of the acquired sick units that had turned around.

The Vice President Corporate office HRD played a proactive role during after the BPR. In fact, the BPR expert, VP HRD played a role in bringing post-BPR smoothening and integration efforts. They employed a senior OD/HRD consultant with rich and diverse experience.

The consultant did a fairly intense integration and team leadership with plant management followed by the second level managers. The VP of the plant played a critical enabling role subsequently to take it forward. Similar team leadership and integration work was followed at other units' leadership too.

Overall, the post BPR OD efforts seemed to have strengthened the company's market competitiveness and success.

Inferences and Conclusions

To conclude, OD, is a complex and evolving profession that is currently at the

stage of breakthrough. From the above experiences one can conclude that

1. It has moved from being the domain of a few global experts and a few thought leaders to a large body of qualified, experienced catalysts, and transformation experts.
2. While many OD efforts have resulted in large-scale organizational changes, quite a few are known to have failed with high costs.
3. The process of strengthening in organization building has moved from *ad hoc*, piecemeal changes to holistic organizational transformations and breakthroughs,
4. With globalisation, fierce competition, many times, long term becomes short -term & short term becoming long term, posing challenges to experts about the popular theories and their changing relevance.