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Revitalizing Work Teams: A Researched- Base Approach

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Abstract

Most organization development (OD) programs geared to revitalize work teams overlook the first and most important step in the scientific method of inquiry: namely, objective definition of the problem. OD specialists usually ask the members of the client team to identify the problems that impede more effective interpersonal competence. Instead of being formulated through the objective analysis of the OD

expert, group problems are thus articulated in accordance with the perception of the members involved. Perception being a highly complex and subjective process -- which often yields unique impressions strikingly at variance with reality -- all too often OD efforts are misdirected toward the symptoms rather than the causes of the team's problems. This article proposes a researched-base approach which provides an analytical tool that can be employed to investigate the major processes of a work team as an organized

problems, they proved "not particularly adept at making a thorough intellectual analysis of these problems, which were extremely complicated, interwoven with both emotional and technical aspects."²

The purpose of this article is to present a model which could serve heuristically in formulating objective methods to identify problems which deter effective teamwork. Although these methods have been designed to reduce the subjective dimension brought into play by the team's

"The first of three factors which inhibit organizations from learning from OD programs is that 'the introduction of such a package is rarely preceded by a diagnosis of the problems of the organization.' "

social system. By implementing the model for the researched-base approach, the OD technician can delineate and define team problems more effectively.

Introduction

Although organization development (OD) programs designed to improve enterprise excellence through team-building are scientific, most behavioral scientists/change agents seem in practice to be violating one of the most important principles of the scientific method of inquiry: namely, objective definition of the problem.¹

When an OD specialist undertakes an intervention process in the client organization in order to revitalize a work team, identification of the problems is frequently determined by the team members alone. Since problems delineated through the perception of the members may not represent the real issues at all, the OD expert must first verify the team's identification of its problems, or risk wasting his energies on the treatment of symptoms rather than directing them towards eradication of their causes.

An awareness on the part of the agent of the nature and extent of the problem and an ability to put this awareness into operational terms are critical to the entire OD process. L.E. Griener has observed with regard to a particular OD effort aimed at team problem solving, that when the managers involved were asked to locate their

participation in the articulation and solution of its own problems, they make no claim to circumvent this dimension entirely.

Currently there are many OD techniques, based on the findings from organizational behavior and small group analysis, which are implemented to build and/or revitalize work teams. Whereas building a work team denotes establishing a team from scratch, revitalizing connotes improving the functioning of an ongoing work team, the efficacy of which could have been strained by any number of small group dynamics.

In launching an intervention session, the usual practice of the OD consultant is to interview each of the team members and the leader prior to the problem-solving phase, asking them what their problems are, how they think the team functions, and what obstacles are in the way of improving team performance. All too frequently, team members report symptoms rather than causes of team ineffectiveness. These problems -- as defined by the team members -- form the basis for future intervention activities.³

Accurate problem definition is essential: at the heart of successful OD intervention lies the technique of objective identification of problems. Subjective, introspective methods of defining group problems should not be entirely supplanted, however, but rather supplemented by heavily-researched, objective means of delin-

eating the problems. One writer recently stated that the first of three factors which inhibit organizations from learning from OD programs is that "the introduction of such a package is rarely preceded by a diagnosis of the problems of the organization."⁴

In order to avoid a lopsided analysis, the OD practitioner might utilize the model presented in the following section to facilitate scientific investigation and identification of team problems. Before presentation of the researched-base model to analyze the fabric of a work team, two types of processes pervasive within teams will be discussed as an aid in understanding the model.

Homeostatic and Morphogenic Processes

Since a work team is an ongoing, open system which already has a defined boundary and functions in the way of any organized social group, the two major processes operant in a team can be collectively categorized as either homeostatic or morphogenic.⁵

The study of the work team as a unit is in part an investigation of the homeostatic or self-maintaining process. To maintain a 'steady state', the unit acts to counter disruptive forces

originating in its external environment or internal membership. The team thus has a built-in defense mechanism which maintains its institutionalized attributes against external stresses and internal strains. These attributes are regarded by team members as important for survival. Some of the activities that contribute to the system's survival goals are exhibited in the patterns of internal order, decision-making procedures, communication channels, control, and power loci.

The other important type of process operative in a work team is morphogenesis. A work team is morphogenic since it supports inherent activities conducive to rendering the system organic-adaptive. For that matter, any open system is morphogenic (or developing) if it moves toward a higher level of organization. The various activities in which the system engages lead to increased order, complexity, adaptability, unity and operational effectiveness. Collectively, these activities contribute to the team's viability (growth) goals, although a system's viability is not necessarily dependent on the development

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Figure 1

**Two Major Processes Operating in a Work Team
And Their Concomitant End Results**

Type of Process	Inherent Activities	End Result
Morphogenic	Engages in activities to foster increased order, complexity, adaptability, cohesiveness, operational effectiveness, and growth of the system to a higher level of unity.	Team Viability
Homeostatic (Self-Maintaining)	Undertakes activities which help protect and/or maintain a system in a "steady state" through such actions as maintenance at the system's boundary, internal order, decision making procedures, communication channels, and power distribution.	Team Survival

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS: A FORWARD LOOK

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS: A FORWARD LOOK

By Earl S. Beecher, Ph.D., C.L.U., C.F.A.
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GNP

Recent economic data indicate GNP reached the level of \$2,583.0 billion for the third quarter and is estimated to be running at the level of \$2,607.0 billion for the fourth quarter of 1980 on a current dollar basis, and it is still rising.

However, on a constant (1972) dollar basis, another picture is revealed. GNP began dropping during the second quarter of 1980. It fell from \$1,444.7 billion for the first quarter to \$1,408.6 billion for the second quarter. This means that in terms of real production, when the effects of inflation have been factored out, the national economy has declined 2.3% between the spring and fall of 1980. (See Table 1).

5. Consumer Durables
6. Federal Government Expenditures
7. Net Exports
8. Consumer Non-durables
9. Consumer Services
10. State and Local Government Expenditures

The components numbered from 1 through 4 are the ones included in Gross Private Domestic Investment. They differ from the remaining six items because they resemble investment-style accumulations of wealth within the economy. The others are items that are consumed or are transfers of funds of flow-type nature. The four GPDI components are the most volatile among the ten listed. Their volatility is the key to the rate of accumulation or reduction of wealth within the economy. As the GPDI to GNP ratio suggests, they vary in contribution from approximately 12% to 17% of the total GNP.

The Ratio of GPDI to GNP

The magnitude and direction of movement of the ratio of

Table 1

FORECAST: Through second Quarter, 1981 -- Selected Economic Indicators -- 12/5/80

Item	1979.4	1980.1	1980.2	1980.3	1980.4	1981.1	1981.2
GNP (Current \$)	2,456.9	2,520.8	2,521.3	2,583.0 ^p	2,607.0	2,730	2,804
GNP (1972 \$)	1,440.3	1,444.7	1,408.6	1,412.1	1,413.0	1,425	1,440
GPDI (Current \$)	1,432.9	1,470.1	1,467.4	1,466.5 ^p	1,444.0		
GPDI (1972 \$)	846.3	848.0	822.5	820.0	816.0		

p = projected

It appears that the national economy is not as yet in a Recovery phase of the business cycle. The chances of it getting there sometime within the first quarter of 1981 are slim.

It is expected that the national economy will experience no large economic boom, but rather strong steady growth with high corporate profits toward the end of 1981. The annual level of GNP for 1980 should be about \$2,551.0 billion. The rate of growth in 1981 is expected to be about 2.5%.

GPDI

GPDI stands for Gross Private Domestic Investment. In order to define GPDI it is necessary to list, classify and clarify the roles of some of the major components of Gross National Product within the economic framework. They are:

1. Construction: Residential (non-farm)
2. Construction: Commercial, Industrial, Governmental, etc.
3. Changes in Business Inventories
4. Producers' Durables

Gross Private Domestic Investment to Gross National Product is a key indicator as to which phase of the business cycle prevails at any given point in time.

There are four phases of the business cycle as defined by this ratio: Expansion, Recession, Contraction and Recovery.

Expansion

The Expansion phase is when the ratio of GPDI to GNP is greater than 15% and rising. Once the Peak is passed and the ratio begins to fall, the Expansion phase has ended. Since 1972, Peaks in the ratio have ranged from a moderate one as low as 16.0% in the fourth quarter of 1972 at the top of a shallow intermediate-size cycle, to a high Peak of 17.0% in the second quarter of 1979. (See Table 2.)

Recession

Beginning in mid 1979 there was a great deal of verbal and written rhetoric about Recession in our economy. Was it justified at that time? The GNP measured in constant dollars confirmed it in the second quarter of 1980. The ratio of GPDI to GNP expressed in current dollars con-

Table 2: RATIO OF GPDI TO GNP

Year/Quarter	I	II	III	IV
1972	15.1	15.5	15.7	16.2
1973	15.7	15.6	15.5	16.0
1974	15.8	15.7	14.7	14.5
1975	12.0	11.4	13.1	12.7
1976	14.0	14.4	14.7	13.8
1977	15.0	15.6	16.2	15.9
1978	16.2	16.7	16.5	16.6
1979	16.3	17.0	16.4	15.7
1980	15.4	14.5	13.3	

firmed it in the third quarter of 1979. Even though the GNP expressed in terms of current dollars may continue to rise past the Peak, as it indeed has, if the ratio falls Recession becomes recognized as the phase that is prevailing.

Contraction

When the ratio of GPDI/GNP goes below 14.0% and continues to fall, the economy is in Contraction. The lowest point in the cycle is reached at the end of the Contraction phase and is called the Trough. Ratio levels at the Troughs since 1972 have varied from slightly below 14.0% to an unusually deep low of 11.4% the second quarter of 1975.

Recovery

Once the Trough has been reached and the ratio begins rising, the economy has entered the Recovery phase. This prevails until the ratio passes 15.0% and continues to rise. Having passed the 15.0% benchmark, the cycle is considered to have started over again in the Expansion phase.

Secular Trend

Because the basic trend of the U.S. economy has traditionally been an upward one, the Expansion and Recovery phases in each business cycle have been of longer duration than the Recession and Contraction phases. This means that eventually business cycles will be continually on higher and higher levels than the previous ones in terms of total sizes of the variables included such as GNP and GPDI. Since the ratio is a relative thing, the value of the ratio should continue to be a meaningful indicator of the phases of the business cycle.

Current Status

Data for GNP and GPDI are published quarterly, usually six months late. Therefore, the most recent data available at the time of this writing are for the third quarter of 1980 on a preliminary basis.* The ratio indicates that the economy entered a Recession in the third quarter of 1979 and has continued to decline. In the third quarter of 1980 the ratio reached 13.3% indicating the economy entered the Contraction phase during that quarter. Also in the

second quarter of 1980 it stood at 14.5%. There is no indication as yet whether 13.3% is the Trough of the current business cycle. Further decline is likely to follow for the reasons cited below.

Interest Rates

The recent rapid increases in the prime interest rates have brought about declines in the construction and consumer sectors of the economy. On the other hand, Business Loans reached a record level of \$170.2 billion in early December. On the surface the business loans figure appears to reflect optimism on the part of businessmen. Closer observation suggests this record high level can be due to the need to borrow because of financial difficulties businesses are experiencing which may not be tied to optimism or expansion. Business Inventory Adjustment and Business Capital Consumption Adjustment have been declining at an increasing rate over the past three years. At the same time Corporate Profits Before Taxes have sharply decreased, particularly in 1980.

Industrial Production has shown a steady decline since March 1980. A recent survey conducted by Merrill Lynch Economics indicated that manufacturers were planning to spend 11% more for increases in plant capacity in 1981 than they did in 1980. This would apparently keep pace with the rate of inflation. However, the 11% rate is an average based on expectations that the petroleum industry will be advancing at a rate of 29% while most other industries will lag behind with only 5% to 8% increases.

Last spring the Federal Reserve stated that their money supply target figure for the end of 1980 was \$412 billion. However, during the recent months, prior to the presidential election, they permitted money supply to run up to \$415 billion. This, accompanied by a deficit spending program of \$23 billion by the federal government, caused the rate of inflation to heat up again. As a result, the Federal Reserve is attempting to bring the money supply down to their announced target level. Interest rates have again reached and even surpassed the all time high they reached in March of 1980.

Forecast

The new administration faces a serious problem in trying to develop a program that will successfully slow the rate of inflation.

*Economic Indicators, October, 1980.

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The economic forecast for this journal was prepared by Dr. Earl Beecher and Dr. Darshan Sachdeva. They are Professors of Finance at California State University, Long Beach.

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of every area. By nature a morphogenic system tends to manifest increasing capability to handle its constantly changing environment and/or the deviant behavior patterns of its own subsystem(s).

The processes of morphogenesis and homeostasis do not necessarily involve purposeful goal-striving. A system engages either intentionally or unintentionally in activities which promote survival and/or viability. A system's attainment of its survival and viability goals is analogous to the biological process of natural selection, in which random occurrences that prove beneficial to the system are adopted, while nonbeneficial occurrences are rejected--although it is important to note that many of the morphogenic and homeostatic processes of a social system are consciously and rationally undertaken.

By assuming that homeostatic or morphogenic processes constitute the major areas of the team's underlying survival and viability, team problems can be located and classified in terms of the characteristics of either the homeostatic or morphogenic process. Figure 1 portrays the two major processes operant for the purpose of a team's viability and survival through morphogenic and homeostatic activities, indicated respectively.

Most sciences find it useful to construct models as heuristic, analytical tools designed to facilitate the entire scientific process from the formulation of problems to the design of research. A scientific model is only a conceptual and analytical tool which should be evaluated solely in terms of utility, not validity, since proof in a social context is illusive. Such models serve to help the scientist introduce rationality into the investigation.

Researched-Base Approach to Problem Identification

A model for a researched-base method of identifying team problems is presented in Figure 2. This is an analytical model which can be applied to any type or size of organized social entity, from a small work team to a large organization. The researched-base approach provides the OD specialist with a tool for scientific analysis. The four main factors which distinguish a scientific method from a nonscientific method are: the objectivity of the in-

vestigator, the procedures followed in the investigation, the accuracy of measurement, and the continuing and exhaustive nature of the investigation.

The proposed researched-base approach to problem identification is simple to understand, although somewhat difficult to implement. According to this approach, in order to analyze the

"The process of morphogenesis and homeostasis do not necessarily involve purposeful goal-striving."

work team as an organized system and to explain its real problems, the OD specialist must apply the two major categories of system processes previously referred to as morphogenic and homeostatic. The consultant may actually employ a variety of different analytical techniques; only the four most commonly used analytical approaches are presented in Figure 2. These approaches, used by social scientists in studying a social group's homeostatic and morphogenic processes, are: structural, functional, interactional, and causal analysis. These represent various types of scientific analyses which are not, by any means, mutually exclusive. Each raises distinctive questions about the social dynamics of the work team and provides special kinds of insight and understanding. For an efficient diagnosis of the situation, all of these techniques should be utilized simultaneously by the OD agent with the help of the team members.

To analyze morphogenic processes, the OD specialist will examine the structural and functional aspects of the team, as shown in Figure 2. Through structural analysis, the behavioral scientist/change agent will attempt to describe such variables as the distribution of power in the work team, the positions of the members, authority relationships, and the extensiveness of the division of labor. Key questions need to be asked, such as "What kind of structure does the team have?" These questions will afford the OD change agent basic information pertaining to the structure of the team.

Structural analysis is the fundamental step in the total, researched-base approach of scien-

Figure 2

**A Researched-Base Model for Analyzing Objectively and Systematically
A Work Team's Major Processes In Order to Locate Team Problems**

Type of System	Type of Analysis	Key Question	Fundamental Information
Morphogenic	Structural	What is it like?	Describe the structural characteristics of the work team
	Functional	What are its social consequences?	Discover the consequence of a social phenomenon for the work team in which it occurs
Homeostatic	Interactional	How does it occur?	Investigate the actions and interactions (the social processes) through which a social phenomenon occurs
	Causal	What caused it?	Determine the social factors that produce a social phenomenon

tifically analyzing the processes of the work team, since the structure of an organization provides the vehicle through which meaning is bestowed upon human activity directed towards the attainment of social and individual goals. Because, then, of its great importance, structure "has become the major cause of dissatisfaction and destructive conflict."⁶ Figure 3 presents questions which may form the nucleus of a checklist to be used by the change agent in facilitating the structural analysis suggested.

Simultaneously, through functional analysis, the OD agent will attempt to determine the consequences of a given activity or phenomenon for the work team in which it occurs. He or she will study the effect of designated activities upon team operational requirements. Each activity will be judged on the basis of whether it satisfies or obstructs the achievement of functional requirements of a work team or its members. By raising key questions, such as "What are the social consequences of the team's function?", the OD expert will gain fundamental information regarding the vital functions of the work team.

Questions pertinent to functional analysis are presented in Figure 3.

In like manner, the OD specialist will use the same procedure to obtain fundamental information concerning the homeostatic processes of the team, analyzing the causal and interactional relations of the team.

Through causal analysis, the OD analyst will raise key questions, such as "What caused certain social phenomena to come into existence? What are the probable areas that are causing a social rift in the group or stifling group effectiveness?" The aim will be to determine the social factors that produce certain situations which thwart teams' interpersonal relations. (See Figure 3 for other questions relating to causal analysis.)

Through interactional analysis, the behavioral scientist/OD specialist will attempt to gain an understanding of the way in which activities are undertaken by the work team, and what activities function or dysfunction so as to enhance or hinder team survival. In this way, the OD specialist will investigate the actions and interac-

Figure 3
Questions to Assist in the Location
of Team Problems

Structural Questions

1. What is the formalized authority structure of the group?
2. Is this structure adequate or inadequate?
3. To what degree is delegation of authority practiced?
4. Other than through formalized authority, in what ways have organizational members gained their authority?
5. In what ways do informal relationships differ from formalized ones?
6. Are there any rigid social class boundaries in the group?
7. What are the major paths of communication among the organization's members?
8. How extensive is the division of labor within the group?

Functional Questions

1. Do group activities have a positive or a negative effect upon organizational survival?
2. Is cooperation resulting or is competition being fostered? What factors are the critical influences?
3. How well are group tasks contributing to group cohesiveness?
4. If participative management is practiced, does it serve as a vehicle for involvement or as a source for feelings of incompetence?
5. If job enrichment is practiced, what is the attitude of the group members toward its major functions?
6. Does each member know the functional requirements of his team members?

Causal Questions

1. Is behavior induced by the group or by individuals within the group?
2. Do majority groups and minority groups exist among the members of the team? On what basis is the group divided (race, religion, sex, etc.)?
3. What roles are played by the members of the group? How do the roles that are played influence the performance and behavior of the group?
4. Are there social cliques in the group? What effect do these groupings have upon the actions of the complete team?
5. Which members are the most influential in determining the group's goals and behavior norms?
6. Are the technological requirements of the tasks causing any feelings of incompetence among the group members?
7. Are individuals encouraged to participate or are they discouraged from active involvement?

Interaction Questions

1. Do people communicate directly with each other or is the process one in which key individuals spread the information to other members?
2. On what basis is consensus reached--through persuasion, coercion, formal authority, charisma, or some other basis?
3. Do all members conform to group goals or are there several significant deviants?
4. How are protest actions channeled?
5. What happens during a group discussion? Who shows solidarity? Who shows antagonism? Who gives suggestions? Who asks for suggestions? Who moderates the discussion?
6. How are internal conflicts resolved?
7. How are conflicts with external forces handled?

tions of the work team responsible for creating team cohesiveness or divisiveness. Figure 3 suggests interactional analysis questions.

For purposes of clarification, it should be noted that the proposed model treats a work team as a social system, but does not explore its psychological aspects. Thus the 'why' questions used in analyzing the major processes are inadvertently avoided in the model. Also, it should be emphasized that the scientific aspects of the researched-base approach represent a marked departure from the speculative, introspective, and clinical methods currently prevalent in OD methodology.

Conclusion

Teams are the building blocks of organizations; yet, most OD intervention programs, far from alleviating team problems, merely verify their existence. Often the real issues remain dormant, likely to erupt in the future. Such OD efforts could be referred to as examples of an 'iceberg' approach, whereby identifiable disruptions are addressed, while causes and underlying tensions are ignored. All the scientific baggage of most OD programs--including solutions which seem workable in theory--is useless unless the expert can expose the roots of the problem he has been hired to treat.

A researched-base approach is proposed in this article to focus upon the base of the 'problematical iceberg' of the real team problems. In the attempt to locate key problems so as to proceed in revitalizing a small work team, the OD specialist should treat the work group as a dynamic social system. For analytical purposes, the phenomena underpinning an ongoing work team should be classified generically, as belonging to the two most important operating processes, referred to as morphogenesis and homeostasis.

The morphogenic processes can be best studied through structural and functional

analysis, the homeostatic through interactional and causal analysis. Structural, functional, interactional, and causal analysis are four distinct but interrelated methods of examining a social system. Each method raises different questions and provides particular kinds of information to the OD analyst. In order to gain a healthy understanding of the workings of any given team, one must employ all four of the complementary approaches. Granted, investigation through such a model is difficult and time-consuming to operationalize, but it meets the rigorous requirements of the scientific approach, which always requires discipline and hard work.

More time and care need to be expended in identifying the real problems than are currently allotted to OD intervention programs. A team-revitalizing session often zooms in on the problem-solving phase right after the team members define some of their problems through their own perceptions. It is suggested that the crux of the researched-base approach lies in the OD consultant spending some time to explore methodically the essential processes of the team. Raia very aptly points out that "the external person can often see blocks to effectiveness that have become so much a part of the culture that organization members are blind to them."⁷

A researched-base approach to problem identification provides a way to render the programs of the OD practitioner more accurate and objective. Only when the OD expert incorporates the information gleaned from team members into the larger scheme of the scientific method of inquiry will OD be launched on the road to professionalism.

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Notes

¹Fred N. Kerlinger, **Foundations of Behavioral Research** (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 14.

²Larry E. Greiner, "Red Flags in Organization Development," **Business Horizons**, IV (June 1972), p. 21.

³Wendell L. French and Cecil H. Bell, Fr., **Organization Development: Behavioral Science Interventions for Organization Improvement** (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), pp. 114-115.

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