Vital Organizational Development and Change in Transforming Times

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WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

The practice of organization development and change (ODC) dates in its origins to the World War II era and in the decades since then ODC has continued to survive and thrive while also itself changing and growing with the times. In this interactive workshop participants will learn about why ODC as a practice is relevant to every type of organization that wishes to remain viable, and what current practices within ODC are trending in these transforming times. In an historical moment of monumental change occurring locally, nationally and globally, leaders and managers of organizations as well as ODC practitioners will benefit from learning about what makes this decades-old practice vital for doctoral learners regardless of field or concentration. The learning environment in this workshop will include facilitator presentation, small group discussion, and group report out of important takeaways.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

As a result of participating in this workshop students will be able to:

- Identify the most important competencies to cultivate (or to look for) in an effective ODC practitioner
- Name some of the biggest challenges ODC practitioners face in the era of ‘strategic HR’
- Recognize emerging practice areas in ODC, including diversity and inclusion, organizational sustainability, employee engagement, individual assessment, talent management, coaching, and use of big data to improve organizational effectiveness
- Understand “positive” ODC tools such as dialogic OD, appreciative inquiry, and transformational scenario planning
**ORIGINS – PRECURSORS AND EARLY OD**

**1911:** Frederick Taylor and the principles of scientific management (see Taylor, 1911)

**1922:** Max Weber and bureaucratic organization (see Gerth & Mills, 1946)

**1926:** Mary Parker Follett and the giving of orders (see Metcalf, 1926)

**1927-1932:** The Hawthorne studies (see Mayo, 1933)

**1938:** The functions of the executive (see Barnard, 1938)

**1939:** Lewin, Lippitt and White research on superiority of democratic leadership over authoritarian and laissez-faire leadership in regard to group climate and performance (see Lewin, et al.)

**1940s:** Kurt Lewin and students began experimental research on group dynamics (see Cartwright & Zander, 1953)

**1946:** Laboratory training movement (‘T Groups’) to improve interpersonal relations, increase self-understanding, awareness of group dynamics (see Schein & Bennis, 1965)

**1950:** Systems theory and its application to biology and physics was introduced by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1950) and extended more broadly to general systems theory (1956) (see von Bertalanffy, 1950, 1956)

**1951:** Tavistock studies introduced concept of organizations as sociotechnical systems (i.e., organizations are both social and technological systems and change in one system produces change in the other) (see Trist & Bamforth, 1951)

**1954:** Abraham Maslow offered a new view of human motivation with his hierarchy of needs that posited lower-level needs must be satisfied prior to people being able to reach for higher-level needs (see Maslow, 1954)

**1957 & 1962:** Chris Argyris asserted the inherent conflict between organizational needs and the needs of healthy adults (see Argyris, 1957, 1962)

**1960:** Douglas McGregor’s Theory X (people are lazy, lack ambition, dislike responsibility and need to be led) and Theory Y (people have the capacity to develop and assume responsibility depending on the opportunity and social environment) (see McGregor, 1960)

**1961:** Rensis Likert offered theory and data to support the superiority of democratic leadership style (i.e., leader is group oriented and uses forms of group/shared decision-making) over the authoritarian style (see Likert, 1961, 1967)

**1966:** Katz and Kahn published the first application positing organizations as open systems (see Katz & Kahn, 1966)

**VALUES**

Since its early beginnings the field of OD has been based on various normative beliefs, assumptions, values and goals. These developed on the basis of theory and research honed by people trained in the behavioral sciences as they applied what they were learning from their interactions with practicing managers. Because of the era in which OD emerged (beginning in the late 1930s and early 1940s) the founders of the field had been strongly influenced by social scientific findings from the Hawthorne studies, leadership research, and studies on individual motivation and group dynamics; applied developments observed from the laboratory training and human relations movements; the growing awareness of the dysfunctions of bureaucracy;
and the larger sociopolitical context of the World War II battle between fascism and democracy.

According to French and Bell (1999) these values are:

- **humanistic** (i.e., importance of the individual, respect for the whole person, treat people with dignity, see the intrinsic worth in all people, regard everyone as capable of growth)
- **optimistic** (i.e., people are fundamentally good, progress is possible and desirable, reason and goodwill are the tools that make progress possible) and
- **democratic** (i.e., sanctity of the individual, people have a right to be free from the arbitrary misuse of power, everyone should receive fair and equitable treatment).

Taken together the espoused values could be seen as applying to working with individuals, groups, and for understanding how to design and improve organizations. Although they date to the late 20th century, many ODC practitioners and scholars writing today argue that these values remain at the core of their practice and research about the field of ODC. At the same time, however, many of these same members of the profession lament that as organization development has become more institutionalized it has become easier to see these values “slip” to the side as the profession has become more dependent upon its alliances with various kinds of clients who may not espouse these same values.

**DEFINITIONS**

[OD] is a planned, organization-wide process managed from the top, designed to increase organizational effectiveness and health through planned interventions into the organization’s processes using knowledge gained from the behavioral sciences (Beckhard, 1969).

[OD] is a response to change using a complex educational strategy designed to change beliefs, attitudes, values, and structures of organizations so they can do a better job of adapting to new technologies, markets, and challenges, and the even the dizzying rate of change (Bennis, 1969).

[OD] applies behavioral science knowledge to “a system-wide application and transfer of behavioral science knowledge to the planned development, improvement, and reinforcement of the strategies, structures, ad processes that lead to organization effectiveness” (Cummings & Worley, 2015, p. 2).

[OD] is the use of behavioral science theory and research as part of a planned process for changing an organization’s culture (Burke, 1994).

Many of these and other definitions informed the one crafted by French and Bell beginning in the mid-1970s. As stated in the 6th edition of their seminal text *Organization development: Behavioral science interventions for organization improvement*: “[OD] is a long-term effort, led and supported by top management, to improve an organization’s visioning, empowerment, learning, and problem-solving processes, through an ongoing, collaborative
management of organizational culture – with special emphasis on the culture of intact work teams and other team configurations – using the consultant-facilitator role and the theory and technology of applied behavioral science, including action research” (French & Bell, 1999, pp. 25-26).

**HISTORY**

Note that marking the beginning and end of OD generations is more about shifts in trends and applications than it is about an abrupt appearance or disappearance of specific approaches. The history is cumulative and not everyone would classify these generations in exactly the same way you see represented here. For the most part this is a reflection (with the help of many publications) of your workshop facilitator’s experience from entering the field of OD in around 1976 and having never really left it.

**First Generation (roughly 1945-1979)**
- Laboratory training
- Survey research and feedback
- Action research
- Sociotechnical and socio-clinical

**Second Generation (roughly 1980-1995)**
While including many aspects of first-generation OD, second-generation OD emphasizes techniques that help guide adaptive and incremental change. These techniques or tools include action research, a focus on teams and team building, the use of facilitators/process consultants, survey feedback, group and intergroup problem solving, participative management, and sociotechnical systems approaches to job design
- Organizational culture
- Process consultation
- Learning organizations
- Intensified interest in teams
- Total Quality Management (TQM)
- Visioning
- Whole system change that involves people at all levels of the organization
- Organizational transformation

**Third Generation (roughly 1996-today)**
As with the shift from first generation to second generation OD, the transition to the current third generation encompasses many of the techniques and strategies that have remained in use since the early days. However, there has also been a shift in orientation for many OD practitioners and scholars away from a constant focus on problem solving to an emphasis on an opportunity orientation; away from thinking that is centered on development towards an emphasis on dynamics, discovery, emergence, and innovation.
• “Positive” OD as opportunity for discovery (as opposed to problem orientation)
• Change as emergent
• Presencing (built on ‘Theory U’ as well as organizational learning)
• Narrative or dialogic OD
• Scenario planning, both adaptive and transformative
• OD as part of strategic HR
• Large-scale organizational and social transformation

ARGUABLY THE CORE OF OD: ACTION RESEARCH

French and Bell (any edition, but see 1999, pp. 130-132) posit that action research is a “generic process” that can be used in roughly any kind of organization development, and characterize it as an iterative activity that includes collection of data about a social system (e.g., organization) in relation to an objective, goal or need, and then feedback is given to enable decision makers to take action and then evaluate results. Thus, it is a cyclical process for continually working through problems the organization identifies as needing to be addressed. The process/model generally includes these steps, typically engaged in by an ODC practitioner working with key individuals within the organization: (1) diagnosis (“what is wrong here”?); (2) data gathering; (3) feedback to the client; (4) data discussion with the client; (5) action planning; and (6) action taking. Then, the process can begin again if “fine tuning” is necessary and/or to address yet another problem deemed significant by the client. Another feature of this process is that it is set up to accomplish two objectives: (1) solving immediate problems (practical), and (2) contributing to scientific knowledge and theory (scholarly). Note that a variant of action research known as participatory action research (PAR) follows basically this same series of six steps and can have the same two objectives; however, in PAR emphasis is placed on ensuring that all of the people who will be responsible for implementing an action have been involved from the beginning in the entire action research process (see French & Bell, 1999, pp. 137-138).

This process has been widely practiced by the OD profession nearly since its beginning in the mid-20th century. Now, in the 21st century, with a possible paradigm shift underway (e.g., from problem to opportunity, from deficit to ‘positive core’), is the action research process still relevant today? We will revisit this question later in this takeaway.

KEY ODC COMPETENCIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

• Skill in facilitating change processes of various kinds at individual, group, and system levels utilizing ‘self as instrument’ along with appropriate technologies
• Commitment to constant learning and growth, including use of self as an instrument of change
• Development of a consultative mindset and way of working that demonstrates ability to partner with others in your environment who are involved in change and innovation projects with you
• Ability to work cross-culturally and inclusively in increasingly diverse work environments
• Ability to work with others (e.g., HR professionals, project managers, organizational leadership) to help an organization adapt to, anticipate, and manage change as well as to discern elements in the environment that require the organization to transform itself in order to remain viable
• Knowledge of complexity science, nonlinear systems theory, chaos theory, and self-organizing systems
• Awareness that sometimes things have to fall apart for profound shifts to occur – concentrate on creating the new rather than fixing the old
• Ability to focus simultaneously on individual/group/organization/system as well as immediate goals/longer-term impact
• Ability to facilitate the acquisition of higher level and more diverse stakeholder inclusion and participation in change efforts, coupled with a facility for hearing, surfacing and valuing differences (e.g., of opinion, of perspective, of experience, of diverse demographics)

(Note that this list is a compendium of observations from several resources, complete citations for which are listed in the ‘References and Resources’ section of this ‘takeaway’ document: Rothwell, et al., 2016; Vogelsang, et al., 2013; Wheatley, et al., 2003. Also, for a more “down-to-earth” take on ODC competencies, see Cady & Shoup in Rothwell, et al., 2016, pages 117-133.)

RECOGNIZING EMERGING ODC PRACTICES

At this moment in the history of the ODC field it becomes ever more important for individual practitioners of ODC to read widely, study a greater variety of perspectives, talk to more diverse groups of fellow professionals, take time to reflect on one’s own growth and development, and establish one’s own ethical and professional core for practice.

The resources referenced in this ‘takeaway’ are intended to offer a representative number of sources that can help round out the reader’s understanding of both the history that has informed ODC practice and what is emerging now that contributes to the field of the future. Please do not regard this as an all-inclusive set of resources, but rather as a place to start.

CHALLENGES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The 21st century opens on the profession of OD taking a number of different directions, and perhaps one of the more important trends is what has been termed “strategic HR.” In the
“old days” many organizations had “personnel offices” and the staff most often participated in hiring, managing benefits, maintaining job descriptions and riding herd on compensation systems. More recently (let’s say the 1990s) “personnel” began a shift to “human resources” and also to a role much more identified with being a higher-level service provider (e.g., business partner, advisor to management, consultant in strategic decision-making). In the 2007 HR Competency Study (discussed by Hanna, in Vogelsang, et al., 2013, pp. 17-23) six key competencies were identified as essential for any HR professional who wants to be regarded as adding value to their organization. Each of these are competencies often thought of as OD skills: (1) being credible (i.e. respected, listened to) and active (i.e., giving a point of view, challenging assumptions; (2) capable of flawlessly executing operational aspects of managing people and organizations; (3) acting as an ally to the business (i.e., knowing the social context in which the business exists, how it makes money, and how to help it make more money); (4) being both a talent manager and organization designer (i.e., master of theory, research and practice in both of these areas); (5) acting as a “strategy architect” (i.e., having a vision of how the organization can succeed; actively shaping the strategy to fulfill this vision); and (6) having a stewardship role (i.e., recognizing, articulating, and shaping the organization’s culture; facilitating change processes needed to keep the culture aligned with business needs).

As ODC practitioners find themselves in OD and change roles from within an HR department there are some pertinent issues to reflect on about how this “trend” for OD may impact the field in terms of how, if, and whether the historically central values of OD at its founding (i.e., humanistic, optimistic, democratic) may shift in this newer landscape. (See the Vogelsang, et al., 2013 reference for 600+ pages of articles related to OD best practices in the context of the strategic HR era.)

In addition to these somewhat more typical competencies shown above, the era of today – one of dynamic and disruptive social, political, economic and technological evolutions – a newer type of skills and understandings of the role of a change agent in the 21st century have emerged, as seen in the reflections below of practitioners in the field:

“Complexity is the new reality....” [we have to balance] the strong need for security – job security, organizational survival, and environmental safety (terrorism, ecological damages and so forth) – while at the same time there is just as strong if not a greater need for risk taking, innovation, and creativity.” (Burke, in Wheatley, et al., 2003, p. 127)

“‘Development’ implies an end-determined state. The individual, the team, or the organization is assumed to be moving through a developmental process from the immature past to the more mature (and presumably more perfect) future. In this state [the job of the ODC practitioner] is to help clients determine their preferred states, design and implement interventions to move them and their organization toward the goals, and evaluate their performance and ours against some imagined standard. When [ODC practitioners] frame our work in this way, we believe a more perfect state can be defined; we assume there is one ‘best’ developmental pathway; we force ourselves to choose between the development of the individual and the development of the institution.... Complexity science offers a different way to think about change in highly
diverse and loosely coupled systems called ‘dynamics’ [that] are not end-determined. No predetermined path shapes the emerging behavior of the individual or system. Rather, the significant differences in each moment play themselves out and evolve into something entirely new.” (Eyoang, in Wheatley, et al., 2003, pp. 127-128)

“OD is not a toolkit filled with canned tricks, piecemeal programs, gimmicks, techniques, and methodologies…. OD involves people in change and does not coerce them into doing that which they vehemently oppose. Ideas for what and how to change come from everyone and not just managers. OD is not a mindless application of someone else’s best practice. It uses one’s whole self, encountering the full and quantum living system. Living systems comprise vibrant communities and changing networks (formal and informal) that practice feedback, self-organization, continuous change, and learning. OD is not about short-term manipulation to achieve immediate financial gains. Instead, OD is interactive, relational, participative, and engaging…. Facilitators of organization change are not in control of the change effort. Instead, they facilitate collaboration with internal partners.” (Rothwell, Stavros & Sullivan, in Rothwell, et al., 2016, p. 13)

**POSITIVE ODC PRACTICES FOR TRANSFORMING TIMES**

Note that four “emerging trends” are identified in this section. Each has been associated with particular author-practitioners. These are not the only “trends” and these are not the only people working with these four approaches to organization development and change.

**Dialogic OD (Bushe & Marshak)**

“Classical OD assumes that a team or organization can be studied using empirical methods before intervening. Starting with Lewin the commitment to scientific inquiry may well be why OD is one of the few fields of consulting practice to also be recognized as a scholarly discipline. In many writings, and virtually all OD textbooks, the purpose of data gathering is described as ‘diagnosis’ – the organization exists as an entity that needs examination prior to prescribing remedies. That formulation links with another element of classical OD, the emphasis on the organization as an open or living system. Classical OD assumes that like real living systems, if we can understand the interdependence between all parts of the organization and its environment, we can identify how it all ought to work together to produce the best outcomes…. Without denying the utility of open systems theory, a dialogical narrative has supplanted the organic one. Intervening into the meaning making process is the objective. In any large group there are multiple realities so any data collected is used not to identify the problem, or the truth, but to raise collective awareness of the multitude of perspectives at play in the system and/or the meaning making process itself…. [Dialogic OD] practices focus on changing what people think, instead of focusing on changing behavior, with the assumption that once people change how they make sense of things they will change their own behavior.” (Bushe & Marshak, in Vogelsang, et al., 2013, p. 250)
“Dialogic methods seem to be especially effective when dealing with two types of contemporary issues. One is when the prevailing ways of thinking, talking about, and addressing organizational dilemmas traps an organization and its leaders in repetitive and futile responses. The other is when facing wicked problems, paradoxical issues, and adaptive challenges, where there is little agreement about what’s happening and where there are no known solutions or remedies available to address the situation. Dialogic approaches work by fostering generativity to develop new possibilities rather than problem-solving, altering the prevailing narratives and stories that limit new thinking, and working with the self-organizing, emergent properties of complex systems. Dialogic OD offers a viable alternative to create a vision, plan a path to it, and implement through action teams the practice of organizational change, and is better able to meet some of the challenging complexities of twenty-first century organizing.” (Bushe & Marshak in Rothwell, et al, 2016, pp. 407-408)

“Dialogic OD invites us to revisit the early spirit of OD, when we saw ourselves more as the conveners of processes of inquiry whose outcomes we did not control that led to answers we did not already have.” (Schein, in Bushe & Marshak, eds., 2015, p. x)

Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney)

“...Begin to influence from a positive core.... [If we ask] deficit questions (what is not working), then deficit gets the attention. If we ask questions that are choicefully affirming and life giving, we will understand what excites or enlivens creativity for people.” (Diana Whitney, in Wheatley, et al., 2003, p. 119).

“Appreciative inquiry is the cooperative, coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives life to an organization or a community when it is most effective and most capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. In AI intervention gives way to inquiry, imagination, and innovation. Instead of negation, criticism, and spiraling diagnosis, there is discover, dream, and design. AI involves the art and practice of asking unconditionally positive questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential.... Human systems grow in the direction of what they persistently ask questions about, and this propensity is strongest and most sustainable when the means and ends of inquiry are positively correlated. The single most important action a group can take to liberate the human spirit and consciously construct a better future is to make the positive core the common and explicit property of all.” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, pp. 8-9).

Transformational Scenario Planning (Kahane)

“I have worked with hundreds of teams of people who are working together to change the future....Through these experiences I have learned that it is possible for people who are in a situation they want to change – people who need one another in order to get unstuck and move forward but who don’t understand or agree with or trust one another – to work together cooperatively and creatively to effect that change....My colleagues and I call this new way of
working *transformative scenario planning*. Its purpose is to enable those of us who are trying to change the future collaboratively, to *transform*, rather than adapt to, the situation we are part of. It involves a transformation of the situation – like a caterpillar into a butterfly – rather than only an incremental or temporary change. We bring this about through transforming our own thoughts and actions and our relationships with others. Transformative scenario planning centers on constructing *scenarios* of possible futures for our situation, but it takes the well-established adaptive scenario planning methodology and turns it on its head – so that we construct scenarios not only to understand the future but also to influence it. And it involves *planning*, not in the sense of writing down and following a plan, but in the sense of engaging in a disciplined process of thinking ahead together and then altering our actions accordingly.” (Kahane, 2012, pp. xiv-xv.) There are five steps to the process: “convening a team from across the whole system; observing what is happening; constructing stories about what could happen; discovering what can and must be done; and acting to transform the system” (Kahane, 2012, pp. 22-23). [Note: these steps, the heart of which is ‘copresencing’ is based on Scharmer’s Theory U process.]

“Presencing is based on an inner change of location. Presencing means: liberating one’s perception from the ‘prison’ of the past and then letting it operate from the field of the future. This means that you literally shift the place from which your perception operates to another vantage point. In practical terms, presencing means that you link yourself in a very real way with your ‘highest future possibility’ and that you let it come into the present. Presencing is always relevant when past-driven reality no longer brings you forward, and when you have the feeling that you have to begin again on a completely new footing in order to progress. For example, my colleagues Adam Kahane, Joe Jaworski, Katrin Käufer, Ursula Versteegen, and I use the presencing approach to facilitate profound innovation and change processes both within companies and across societal systems.” (Otto Scharmer, interviewed in 2002 by Werner A. Leeb, located at: http://www.ottoscharmer.com/sites/default/files/2002_ScharmerInterview_us.pdf)

**Theory U (Scharmer)**

“At its core, Theory U makes a distinction between the different ways that action and attention come into the world. *I pay attention this way, therefore it emerges that way*. Or, as the late CEO of Hanover Insurance, Bill O’Brien, put it: ‘The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener.’ Theory U draws our attention to the *blind spot* in leadership today: the ‘interior conditions,’ the sources from which we operate both individually and collectively. Since I grew up on a farm, I like to compare our interior condition to a field. Each field has two dimensions: one that is visible, what’s growing above the surface; and one that is invisible, what’s beneath the surface – that is, the quality of the soil. The same distinction applies to social fields… Theory U draws our attention…to the invisible source dimension of the social field, to the quality of relationships that we have to each other, to the system, and to ourselves…. The essence of leadership is to become aware of our blind spot (these interior conditions or sources) and then to shift the inner place from which we operate as required by the situations we face. This means that our job as leaders and change makers is
to cultivate the soil of the social field...the relationships among individuals, groups, and systems that give rise to patterns of thinking, conversing, and organizing, which in turn produce practical results.” (Scharmer, 2018, pp. xi-xii).

The U: One Process, Five Movements – “When leaders develop the capacity to come near to that source, they experience the future as if it were ‘wanting to be born’ – an experience called ‘presencing.’ That experience often carries with it ideas for meeting challenges and for bringing into being an otherwise impossible future. Theory U shows how that capacity for presencing can be developed. Presencing is a journey with five movements: As the diagram illustrates, we move down one side of the U (connecting us to the world that is outside of our institutional bubble) to the bottom of the U (connecting us to the world that emerges from within) and up the other side of the U (bringing forth the new into the world). On that journey, at the bottom of the U, lies an inner gate that requires us to drop everything that isn't essential. This process of letting-go (of our old ego and self) and letting-come (our highest future possibility: our Self) establishes a subtle connection to a deeper source of knowing. The essence of presencing is that these two selves - our current self and our best future Self - meet at the bottom of the U and begin to listen and resonate with each other. Once a group crosses this threshold, nothing remains the same. Individual members and the group as a whole begin to operate with a heightened level of energy and sense of future possibility. Often they then begin to function as an intentional vehicle for an emerging future.”

(From: http://www.ottoscharmer.com/publications/executive-summaries)

Seven Theory U Leadership Capacities – “1. Holding the space of listening: The foundational capacity of the U is listening. Listening to others. Listening to oneself. And listening to what emerges from the collective. Effective listening requires the creation of open space in which others can contribute to the whole. 2. Observing: The capacity to suspend the ‘voice of judgment’ is key to moving from projection to true observation. 3. Sensing: The preparation for the experience at the bottom of the U - presencing - requires the tuning of three instruments: the open mind, the open heart, and the open will. This opening process is not passive but an active sensing" together as a group. While an open heart allows us to see a situation from the whole, the open will enables us to begin to act from the emerging whole. 4. Presencing: The capacity to connect to the deepest source of self and will allows the future to emerge from the whole rather than from a smaller part or special interest group. 5. Crystalizing: When a small group of key persons commits itself to the purpose and outcomes of a project, the power of their intention creates an energy field that attracts people, opportunities, and resources that make things happen. This core group functions as a vehicle for the whole to manifest. 6. Prototyping: Moving down the left side of the U requires the group to open up and deal with the resistance of thought, emotion, and will; moving up the right side requires the integration of thinking, feeling, and will in the context of practical applications and learning by doing. 7. Performing: A prominent violinist once said that he couldn't simply play his violin in Chartres cathedral; he had to play" the entire space, what he called the ‘macro violin,’ in order to do justice to both the space and the music. Likewise, organizations need to perform at this macro level: they need to convene the right sets of players (frontline people who are connected
through the same value chain) and to engage a social technology that allows a multi-
stakeholder gathering to shift from debating to co-creating the new.”
(From: http://www.ottoscharmer.com/publications/executive-summaries)

RETURN TO AN EARLIER QUESTION: IS ACTION RESEARCH STILL RELEVANT?

Despite the many shifts in the ODC profession over the last 70 years or so of its
existence, a core process/model can still be utilized by members of the profession who are
trained as scholar-practitioners. Participatory action research (PAR) was mentioned above, but
a particular variant of action research has also become part of the so-called “positive OD”
movement associated with author-practitioners working in the four emerging “trend” areas
identified in the section on Positive ODC Practices for Transforming Times. This variant is
Appreciative Inquiry (AI), as initially developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987). These
authors criticized traditional action research for being too focused on problems and problem
solving, as well as too action-oriented and not concerned enough with generating theory. In
their terms, traditional action research does not take enough time to marvel. For them research
should involve appreciation, be applicable, be provocative, and be collaborative.

“The generative incapacity of contemporary action-research derives from the discipline’s
unquestioned commitment to a...problem-oriented view of the world and thus to the
subsequent loss of our capacity as researchers and participants to marvel, and in marveling to
embrace the miracle and mystery of social organization.... The knowledge-interest of
appreciative inquiry lies not so much in problem solving as in social innovation. Appreciative
inquiry refers to a research perspective that is uniquely intended for discovering,
understanding, and fostering innovations in social-organizational arrangements and processes.
Its purpose is to contribute to the generative-theoretical aims of social science and to use such
knowledge to promote egalitarian dialogue leading to social-system effectiveness and
integrity.... Thus, appreciative inquiry refers to both a search for knowledge and a theory of
intentional collective action which are designed to help evolve the normative vision and will of
a group, organization, or society as a whole.” (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).
References and Resources

The following print and Web resources were used in developing this “takeaway” and the presentation slides.


Resources on the Web

https://www.solonline.org
The Society for Organizational Learning (SoL) transitioned (July 1, 2018) to the Systems Leadership Institute

https://www.presencing.org/#/
The Presencing Institute
(has grown out of Otto Scharmer’s “Theory U”)

Gervase Bushe, Dialogic Organization Development and Transformational Change

http://www.dialogicod.net
Dialogic Organization Development – Emergence, Generativity, Narrative

http://www.artofhosting.org/home/
The Art of Hosting: Harvesting Conversations That Matter
http://www.theworldcafe.com/#
The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter

https://reospartners.com/tools/transformative-scenarios/
Transformative Scenarios

https://reospartners.com/tools/dialogue-interviews/
Dialogue Interviews

https://reospartners.com/tools/social-labs/
Social Labs

https://www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/more-on-ai/the-generic-processes-of-appreciative-inquiry/
Center for Appreciative Inquiry

OD Trends for 2018

https://www.odnetwork.org
OD Network – note the 2018 conference is “OD Emergence: Create the Possibility...”

https://www.odnetwork.org/page/odcompetencies
Global OD Practice Framework

https://www.wickedproblems.com/1_wicked_problems.php
Wicked Problems – Problems Worth Solving