



The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 19
Issue 2 June

Article 3

May 1992

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Darlyne Bailey
Case Western Reserve University

Pranab Chatterjee
Case Western Reserve University

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Recommended Citation

Bailey, Darlyne and Chatterjee, Pranab (1992) "Organization Development and Community Development: True Soulmates or Uneasy Bedfellows?," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 19 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol19/iss2/3>

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Organization Development and Community Development: True Soulmates or Uneasy Bedfellows?

A Rejoinder to Thomas Packard's
"Organization Development Technologies in Community
Development: A Case Study"

DARLYNE BAILEY & PRANAB CHATTERJEE

Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences
Case Western Reserve University
Cleveland, Ohio 44106-7164

Our paper is written to express both strong dissent from and partial support of Dr. Packard's article "Organization Development Technologies in Community Development: A Case Study." Beginning with a summation of the article, this paper introduces the main area of contention, provides a vignette to illustrate key points and concludes with affirmation of the need for reconciling the differences between organizational development (OD) and community development (CD) as two systems of planned change.

The Packard article proposes that OD, an effective consultation technology for improving life in organizational settings, be more widely used in communities. Moreover, the author uses the historical origins and current practices of OD to purport that the fundamental values and processes of OD are similar to and compatible with those of CD. Through the use of a case study the article provides a description of how OD has been used to effect change in one community. The article ends with a series of recommendations for social workers attempting to employ OD strategies to effect community change.

In the final section of the article the author alludes to what we see as one of the fundamental differences between OD and CD, an area of departure between these two systems that, unless understood and reconciled, disallows any union of practice. This area is the perception and behavioral stance taken by the change agent towards the power structure. In OD, the power structure

are those at the top of the organization—the leaders who are simultaneously the practitioner's employers and primary clients. This need to constantly attend to the power structure serves to essentially shape the practitioner's role and the strategies employed. This practitioner, therefore, must work mainly from the *upper level of the system*. In CD, whether the practitioner is employing a locality development, social planning, or social action orientation (Rothman with Tropman, 1987) one's stance towards the power structure can be significantly different. As noted by Rothman and Tropman, in locality development and social action strategies the CD practitioner views the community's leadership as collaborators and oppressors, respectively. The clients of the social activist are actually *all the other* community members while those of the locality development practitioner are *all* the citizens in the community. Therefore, while all three CD approaches would agree with OD that leadership support of a process is preferable, in all but one of the generally accepted CD approaches the practitioner does not see the power structure as a primary employer and thus may work from *all levels* or even *of the bottom* of the system.

The implications of this fundamental difference in perception of and stance toward the power structure may not be readily apparent. The following vignette is presented to more clearly highlight this difference.

During the early 1970's, the (Indira) Gandhi leadership in India wanted to develop local support in village India for the country's family planning program. Family planning was a phrase for population control and population control was one of the nation's priorities in an over-populated country.

One of Gandhi's sons was later accused of executing these family planning programs with groups of illiterate Moslem villagers against their informed consent and with the use of OD techniques. Participation in small group sessions was used to teach and eventually use family planning techniques. Such participation led to vasectomies, and the relatively uneducated and illiterate Moslem villagers did not understand what vasectomy meant. Later they were told that they had agreed (they had given uninformed consent) to undergo a vasectomy in small group settings and that they had agreed to do so in the national interest.

Gandhi's son was thus supported by the top (national government), in a CD setting, through OD techniques. He was the government's agent, and not the advocate of the illiterate and uninformed minority group of Moslem villagers.

While this illustration may seem extreme to some change agents, those who have worked outside of the continental U.S.A. will recognize this situation as all too familiar. In the language of French and Raven (1959), the OD practitioner's source of legitimate power comes from the publicly announced, unwavering support of top management. Without this support, others lower in the organization will quickly become aware of the situation and the project soon falls in on itself (Bechhard, 1969; Martin & Martin, 1989). As aptly described by one practitioner, an OD project without top management support is like an airplane without fuel (Weisbord, 1973). This relationship with the power structure suggests several ramifications for the OD change effort that serve as additional areas of differences between OD and CD.

First, the OD value of collaboration undergirds this practitioner-management union such that there is an implicit (and sometimes explicit) contract that all OD activities must be agreed upon by the organization's leadership. This position may have a direct impact on the amount and type of information the practitioner collects as well as the numbers and roles of the people that management sees as important participants in the process from beginning to end. The entire OD effort may be seen as a self-serving move on the part of management to further its vested interests (Chatterjee, 1975). In CD, the information that is collected must be representative of the entire community in order to effect community-wide change.

Second, this publicized union between practitioner and management may limit the staff's degrees of trust and candor in the OD process. Such constraints may, in turn, bias the collected information. In CD, the change agent works for the community and may in fact actually be hired by any of the citizens. Working with all the residents increases willingness to "tell it like it is" thus providing the CD practitioner with a full understanding of the issues.

Third, the personal relationship between change agent and management has led some OD practitioners to view the responsibility for change as residing within individuals rather than within systems, finding the former level as both conceptually and behaviorally more manageable (Sikes, 1989). This perception has serious implications for OD interventions and is in direct opposition to the fundamental goals of both OD and CD.

These areas of difference between the two change processes are not meant to be exhaustive or, more importantly, a condemnation of OD. In fact, some OD practitioners have directly confronted the topic of change agent-management alliance in a way that for them it becomes a non-issue (cf. Golembiewski, 1989). Highlighting these areas underscores the message that the perception and behavioral stance taken by the OD practitioners towards the power structure must be fully appreciated before such strategies can be used to successfully effect change in our communities.

There is a small but growing body of literature that describes necessary shifts in both the OD and CD paradigms to enable a merger of these technologies (Bailey, in press; Brown & Covey, 1987; Jones & Griffin, 1989). Interestingly, but not surprisingly, these and other authors are also contributing to the number of studies where OD is practiced in private and public agencies in the nonprofit sector; areas that Packard noted as being nonexistent (or at least unreported) in the past. These case studies and proposed practice models support Packard's concluding statement that potential for using OD strategies in CD arenas is promising.

More work is needed to continue to craft thoughtful refinements in both change practices. It would be easy yet fatal for those trained in CD to import wholesale the OD methodologies. Social work practitioners and academicians alike must appreciate the commonalities between OD and CD yet acknowledge that for most schooled in CD more formal training in OD is critical; training that enables practitioners to accurately assess under what conditions what combination of technologies is needed. The issues facing our communities are guaranteed to become greater in number and complexity. With such a challenge facing

us, there must be corresponding growth in the skills of social work practitioners.

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