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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses differences among schools in their readiness for organizational development interventions. The author begins by outlining criteria for organizational success. He then discusses two variables that have been found important in assessing readiness to profit from organizational development; i.e., readiness for collaboration and ready access to novel ideas or the "variety pool." The author suggests that schools must adapt any organizational development strategy to meet local problems. Consequently, "failure" to adopt prepackaged innovation is often a successful use of resources in meeting a local problem. Systematic effort by a client does not always require "success," but only that the school feel it has learned something and is likely to spend less effort than before on working toward desirable outcomes. The author concludes by suggesting that the most "innovative" schools are not necessarily the most effective. (Author/DN)

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOLS

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I want to talk to you today about differences among schools in their readiness for OD interventions. I chose this topic because I think it is the key to advances in the effectiveness of OD during the next few years. I see some OD consultants willing to smooth over any small problem conceived by a client, and I see others applying a standard technique such as drawing out more open communication to any organization without an hour's worth of diagnosis. There is much waste in such indiscriminate therapy. I want to offer today some thoughts about suiting treatments to states of readiness.

The title of this paper, "Conditions for Success and Failure of Organizational Development in schools," obviously begs a question. When we want to help a school develop into something different from its present state, the end desired in one school is not necessarily the same as that in another. The OD consultant does not try to mold every school to the same image. But I cannot very well talk about success and failure unless I talk about success and failure to achieve some particular thing. I must first, therefore, tell you what "thing" it is that Dick Schmuck and I and others at CASEA -- which is a part of the Center for Educational Policy and Management at the University of Oregon -- believe can be a success for organizational development.

Criteria for Success

Taking our cues from general systems theory, we have set out for ourselves four outcome criteria that we believe to be the necessary and sufficient marks of what John Gardner called the self-renewing organization and what Walter Buckley has called the morphogenetic organization. In our phrasing (see Chapter 1 of the Handbook), a self-renewing or morphogentic organization shows the following four abilities:

1. It institutes systematic problem solving to alter its manner of striving for goals.
2. It maintains access to creativity, novelty, and imagination in its membership. Buckley calls this the variaty pool.
3. Proceeding from the planning phase of problem solving, it puts proposed steps into action. It "gets off the dime."
4. It checks periodically to see whether its planned movement toward a goal is taking place. If this is not happening, it recycles.

You will note that these criteria do not specify any particular organizational structure, any particular distribution of power, any particular mode of decision making, or any particular anything except the "meta-goal" of being able to change in a coherent manner to meet changing conceptions of the needed relationship of the school to its environment. In my view, the local school or district must find its own suitable solution to a problem. Our goals as consultants are (1) to help the school find its own solution, and (2) to leave behind a capacity on its part to continue to do this by itself.

To obtain indicators of the four criteria, we have counted instances of the establishment of new structures or organizational practices, and have compared them with the base rates in comparable schools. We have also used questionnaires and interviews to ask people to tell us about instances they have themselves seen. New substructures have included teaching teams, multiunit structure, reorganizing the schedule of the first two weeks of the first grade to cope with differences in readiness among the children, and a new sub-structure within a PTA to speed communication between teachers and parents, to give a few examples. We have also looked for temporary task forces, as in the case of a school in which 12 teachers had resigned, a problem-solving OD team was invited to collect and feed back data, and 10 of the teachers then decided to stay with the school after all. Or the case of a district that used OD teams to facilitate confrontations during a frightening financial crisis.

We also look for intermediate outcomes that we believe are necessary qualities of a school that is going to achieve the morphogenetic criteria. We have looked for ability to summon reserve energy, such as maintaining regular group meetings at 6:30 in the morning. And for evidences of expending energy in a useful direction, as by asking staff members what others they depend on to do their jobs well, and also asking them with whom they talk seriously about important matters at least once a week, and then counting the overlapping names. And for increased effectiveness in meetings: drawing out contributions of members, summarizing progress, not leaving decisions vague, and debriefing. For increases of student-initiated talk in classrooms. For increased influence of staff or students on the curriculum. And for wanting to be in the same building three years from now.

What I mean by success or failure, then, is the appearance of evidences of the sort I have just listed, or the lack of them. Success for us as OD consultants is enabling the school to increase its examples of one or more of the four criteria, and failure is causing the school to decrease one of them. Note that success is not always pleasant, nor failure always unpleasant. In at least two schools, we taught the staff to make consensual and firm decisions -- whereupon they came to the firm consensus that they didn't need us any more. It has also happened that a great and warm affection has grown up between us and a school staff, but without any significant increase in their ability to perform according to our four criteria. Testing effects in terms of the four criteria takes objective assessment, not expressions of gratitude.

Maybe there is someone among you who is asking whether schools don't do those things ordinarily -- whether they don't solve problems, use imagination, take actions, and check on progress. Well, of course, some do, at least sometimes on some tasks. But most, in my experience, do these things too poorly to cope with really serious problems. I am supposing that most of the people in this room agree with me on this.

So, I have told you that I think it makes sense to talk about a school or an OD consultant being successful or not in terms of the criteria for self-renewal or morphogenesis. And I have implied that I do not think self-renewal can be brought about by the purchase of any standard package -- not team teaching, nor MBO, nor accountability, nor PPBS, nor micro-teaching, nor multiunit structure, nor even putting the principal through an NTL Human Relations Lab. And I have said I was going to talk about the readiness of schools for responding to training that seeks self-renewal as its eventual outcome. So it is

about time I got to the point.

I want to spend most of the remaining time on two variables we have found important in assessing readiness to profit from OD: namely, (1) readiness for collaboration, and (2) ready access to novel ideas or the "variety pool." Let us begin with collaboration.

Collaboration

Schools differ a great deal in their readiness to attempt altered patterns of interdependence -- that is, altered role-reciprocations. The interactions among role-reciprocators carry messages, not usually explicit, telling organizational members whether they are meeting expectations. It is upon such a communication network that one's professional ego feeds. To contemplate possible change in these supports, even when the supports are not very supportive, can be a fearful thing.

Take as an example the collaboration required for team teaching. We began asking questions about innovations of various sorts among the schools of Kent, Washington, in 1968. By 1969, the press for innovations of the team teaching sort had become very strong. In that year, every one of the 12 elementary schools in the district had important percentages of staff reporting that team teaching or something similar was a new and useful thing that had begun during the past year or two. By 1970, however, the percentages of staff reporting team teaching had dropped considerably, and by 1972, no elementary school in Kent had more than 35 percent of its staff saying that team teaching was new and in two schools, absolutely no one reported it.

Our analysis of the data indicates that some of the schools were able to marshal their resources quickly to deal with the environmental press. In some schools, close to 100 percent of staff in 1969 and

about 50 percent in 1970 were thinking of team teaching as new and useful. Among these schools, most dropped to percentages close to zero in 1972.

Other schools showed a different pattern. In this other group, the percentages aware of something like team teaching going on in their schools in 1969 ranged only from about 30 to about 70, and in 1970 between about 20 and 45. And -- this is important -- these percentages remained substantially in the range from 20 to 35 in 1972. In other words, in the group of schools where a lesser percentage seemed to know what was going on during the peak year, a greater percentage also seemed three years later to think something was still going on when it wasn't! We know team teaching was no longer amounting to much in those schools in 1972, because one of our staff went to each school for which the claim was made and checked.

I interpret these data to mean that in some schools, almost everyone knew about the effort to undertake team teaching, because almost everyone was engaged in it. In these schools, team teaching had either been made to work or had been consensually rejected by 1972, and therefore almost no one reported team teaching as "new" in those schools in that year. In the other group of schools, however, only some of the staff were actively engaged in the team teaching effort in 1969, and others in the school remained confused about what efforts were being made in that direction, with the result that about a quarter to a third of the staff in those schools went on thinking, between 1970 and 1972, that efforts were being made. In brief, some schools were able to marshal concerted effort either to rule against team teaching or to adopt it in good order, while other schools did not manage clearly to do one or the other. I take this as evidence of a difference in

readiness for collaborative work.

Here is the same story with a few more figures in it. The year 1968-69 was a big year for innovations of the team-teaching sort in Kent. In no elementary school in the spring of 1969 did less than 30 percent of the staff report that something like team teaching was new and useful during the last year or two. In three of the 12 elementary schools existing in Kent that year, close to 100 percent of the staff reported team teaching. Two of those three had undergone OD training in the fall of 1968.

By the spring of 1970, no Kent elementary school had more than 56 percent of staff still reporting team teaching as new and useful in their school. There were 13 elementary schools by then, and four of them had received some OD training. All four of these trained schools were above the median in the percentage of staff reporting team teaching as new and useful.

And by the spring of 1972, no school had more than 35 percent of staff reporting team teaching as a new thing. Among these elementary schools, six had shown precipitous drops (from 50 to 15, for example) in percentages of staff reporting team teaching between 1970 and 1972. Of these six schools, four had received OD training, and two had not. But seven schools had a quarter to a third of staff continuing to report team teaching from 1970 to 1972. Of these seven, only one had received OD training, and that only recently. Of the three schools among these 13 that turned out to be actually practicing team teaching in a school-wide way, all three had received OD training.

In connection with OD, the importance of this kind of readiness seems to me very clear. If a school is insufficiently ready for collaborative commitment, then demanding immediate collaboration (as in

team teaching) will result in a new organizational chart and little else. On the other hand, if teachers are ready for collaboration, then giving them training for group-building and heightened trust will be seen by them, correctly, as wasting time and the consultant will be seen, again correctly, as incompetent.

Variety pool

A ready access to novel ideas is also an important indicator of readiness to profit from OD training. If a staff is unable to think of any other way of doing things than the customary way, no amount of training in communication or problem solving or anything else is going to change anything. If a staff finds collaboration very easy, but the variety pool remains impoverished, teams of staff may become very friendly and chummy, but they will not reach out to use one another's skills to do anything different. In fact, scoring high on "variety" turns out to be a good predictor of a school's readiness to undertake OD.

A couple of years ago, Steven Saturen (1972) studied 30 elementary schools in three cities. Of these, six underwent training. Saturen chose an indicator of access to the variety pool consisting only of four questionnaire items,* as follows (weights used in scoring are given here in parentheses after each answer-choice):

1. Suppose Teacher X strongly disagrees with something B says at a staff meeting. In Teacher X's place, would most of the teachers you know in your school...

   ...seek out B to discuss the disagreement?

   ( ) Yes, I think most would do this. (2)
   ( ) Maybe about half would do this. (1)
   ( ) No; most would not. (-2)
   ( ) I don't know. (-1)

*The content of these items originated with John Wallen, then of NWREL.

2. ...keep it to themselves and say nothing about it?

   (same choices as above but with reversed signs on weights)

3. Suppose you are in a committee meeting with Teacher X and the other members begin to describe their personal feelings about what goes on in the school. Teacher X quickly suggests that the committee get back to the topic and keep the discussion objective and impersonal. How would you feel toward X?

   ( ) I would approve strongly. (-2)
   ( ) I would approve mildly or some. (-1)
   ( ) I wouldn't care one way or the other. (0)
   ( ) I would disapprove mildly or some. (1)
   ( ) I would disapprove strongly. (2)

4. Suppose you are in a committee meeting with Teacher X and the other members begin to describe their personal feelings about what goes on in the school. Teacher X listens to them and tells his own feelings. How would you feel toward X?

   (same choices as above but with reversed signs on weights)

It turned out that all of the schools that somehow became those to undergo OD training -- all six of them -- scored above the median on this 4-item indicator of ready access to the variety pool!

Saturen also applied to his 30 schools an indicator of readiness for collaboration. This indicator, too, used four questionnaire items:**

1. Suppose Teacher X wants to improve his classroom effectiveness. In Teacher X's place, would most of the teachers you know in your building...

   ...ask another teacher to observe his teaching and then have a conference afterward?

   ( ) Yes, I think most would do this. (2)
   ( ) Maybe about half would do this. (1)
   ( ) No; most would <u>not</u>. (-2)
   ( ) I don't know. (-1)

2. ...ask other teachers to let him (Teacher X) observe how the other teachers teach, to get ideas how to improve their own.

   (same choices as above)

** The first three items are due to Wallen, and the last to Eidell, Abbott, and Pellegrin of CEPM-CASEA.

3. Suppose Teacher X develops a particularly useful and effective method for teaching something. In Teacher X's place, would most of the teachers you know in your school...

   ...describe it briefly at a faculty meeting and offer to meet with others who wanted to hear more about it?

   (same choices as above)

4. Regardless of policy or who new does it, whom would you prefer to plan and develop the school curriculum? Please mark one or more choices below (the "adaptive" choice is "a group of teachers").

   ____I don't care much who does it
   ____Citizens' or parents' committee
   ____Board of Education
   ____Superintendent
   ____Instructional supervisor
   ____Principal
   ____Department head or grade chairman
   ____A group of teachers
   ____The individual teacher
   ____Counselor(s) or guidance director
   ____School psychologist
   ____A student committee
   ____Other; specify_____

On this indicator of readiness for collaboration, it turned out that of the six schools that later underwent OD training, four scored above the median and two below. Three of these four also scored above the median on the more discriminating of Saturen's dependent variables; namely: reporting at least two innovations during the last two years, actual collaboration in developing the school curriculum or in choosing teaching methods, perceiving influence by teachers on how the school is run or on the principal's decisions, and involving students in developing rules for student conduct. The two schools that scored below the median on readiness for collaboration usually scored below the median on these dependent variables.

There is an important lesson in Saturen's findings. His four

schools that were above the median both on variety and on collaboration almost always outshone schools that were untrained in OD and also schools that were above the median on either variety or collaboration alone. BUT, the schools that were high on variety and low on collaboration were often at the bottom of the heap in respect to the dependent variables. In other words, it can be dangerous to have a ready access to novel and sometimes uncomfortable ideas if readiness for collaboration is low. Pressing such a school into an innovation that requires strong collaboration can stir up anxiety and even strong fear that the staff cannot handle, and the result can be a strong combative demand to jettison the innovation, along with feelings of having been callously forced into violations of professional norms and even of common decency.

The Innovative Whirl

One implication of the story I have been telling is that a school that seems on the surface to be very innovative is not always a very effective one. Sometimes we hear people saying about a school, "Oh, yes, that's a very innovative place. They're always doing the newest thing there." However, like most of the elementary schools in Kent between 1968 and 1972, the school may be giving each "innovation" only an inspection, so to speak, or only a fickle whirl. After a while, if a school continues to spend energy trying out new ways of doing things that fail to produce useful and permanent outcomes, the drain of energy must produce discouragement, pessimism, and a decreased likelihood that any innovation can take hold and be productive in that school.

Beware, therefore, when someone tells you that making a new thing work in such-and-such a school or district will be easy, because

it is such an innovative place, anyway. If a school or district has had a long history of innovation, the chances are that it has had long experience with new ways to drain off energy into no profit, and the people there will expect your proposal to lead to no profit, also. That is a harder place to carry on OD, not an easier one.

Summary

I have said a good deal about two particular variables important to readiness -- variety and collaboration -- because we have found them crucial in our work and because they are not mentioned often in the literature as variables of readiness. But these are not the only variables we have found to be important in conducting OD successfully. In this summary, I shall list for you the variables we think at this stage in our research to be the crucial ones to readiness for OD. Talking as a consultant rather than as a social scientist, however, I shall list conditions -- that is, the favorable ends of the variables. If a single one of the following conditions does not hold, the chances of success for a complex social innovation are greatly reduced. (1) The central office must support the school in pursuing its own leads, or at least be permissive toward it. (2) The decision to move into the innovation must be almost consensual and the decision must be recycled continually. (3) The desire for collaborative work must be widespread in the staff. (4) The anticipation of some pain, with the concomitant expectation that the pain will "purchase" something that is worth it, must be widespread. (5) The staff must exhibit a willingness to entertain unusual and even anxiety-producing ideas from its members. (6) The key leaders must intend to stay with the school for at least two years after the innovation starts.

As an added bonus, here are the conditions we believe must come about after entry and during the process of establishing a new way of doing things. If the new way is to resist future threats to its continuation, these conditions must be maintained. (1) New norms for communication must be practiced that demand much more immediate, face-to-face information than is customary and allow much less postponement of information or suppression of it than is customary. (2) Systematic problem-solving processes that marshal the abilities and commitment of the working group must be adopted. (3) A norm of taking action (not just talking) in response to interior and exterior challenges must come about. (4) Norms and roles must be understood much more clearly and widely than is ordinarily now the case; in particular, the principal's consistency and clarity from the outset about his readiness to risk new norms is vital. (5) Procedures for quick feedback about progress toward goals must become a part of every major decision and every plan for action. (6) Ways must be found to maintain a lively effervescence of fresh ideas, even when they annoy.

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