# Evolution of Organizational Development and Implications for Management of Ghanaian Organizations

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**Abstract**
The paper traces the history of Organization development (OD) over the past decades by highlighting major events that led to the formation of T-groups and thus organizational development.  Five main stems (National training laboratory, Action research, Normative Approach, Quality work life and strategic change) of organization development are explained. The paper also outlines the contributions of some prominent people like Bradford and Kurt Lewin whose works have resulted in the evolution of OD. Based on past events examined, current trends emerging in OD were outlined together with implications for Ghanaian organizations.
**Keywords:** Evolution, organizational development, management, Ghana.

## 1.1 Introduction

Organisational development is a discipline which is well noted for blending theory with practice.  However, it's conceptual antecedents can be traced to the post world war ll era. According to French (1969) "organization development refers to a long-range effort to improve an organisation's problem-solving capabilities and its ability to cope with changes in its external environment with the help of external or internal behavioural-scientist consultants, or change agents, as they are sometimes called" (French, 1969, cited in Cummings &Worley, 2005: 2). The paper examines Organizational development from 1948  and offers an insight into events that led to the development of the discipline and its theoretical underpinnings. Also, current trends of OD are discussed and implications for planned change in Ghanaian organizations stated.

## 1.2 History of Organizational development

 The past history of organizational development can be traced to the post-world war ll. The shortages in critical manpower and resource shortages faced by all organizations, public and private after World War II stimulated the search by social scientists and managers, separately and in cooperation with one another to maximize the utilization of existing individual and organizational resources (McGill, 1974; Grieves, 2000). The approach used by social scientist and managers together with the backing of governmental programs and policies led to the development of two methods for stretching scarce personnel and the production  of resources (McGill,1974; Grieves,2000). These methods were personnel training at all levels and long-range organizational planning.

Following those events, the development of individuals in organizations and the development of organizations itself became key in maximizing individual and organizational effectiveness (McGill, 1974). In 1945, Bradford who had been responsible for in-service training in human behavior in the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service was assigned to establish training programs for the many agencies. This created the opportunity for Bradford to introduce a new concept of training which focused on training as an integrated program of individual and organizational growth. Bradford's perspective, unique in its time, constituted the initial movement toward conceptualizing what is now recognized as OD (McGill, 1974; Grieves, 2000).

Bradford's contribution to the development to adequate training programs resulted in the emergence of other training methods uch as the T-Groups. The T-Groups also known as "Laboratory Training" also contributed to the evolution of organizational development (McGill,1974 ; McKendall,1993; Gallos, 2006).  In 1946 Kurt Lewin and his staff at the Research Center for Group Dynamics of MIT were tasked to offer  training assistance in training community leaders in Connecticut. After the

session was over some of the participants were allowed to attend the feedback meetings where reports of the outcome of the research were being discussed. It was observed that some of the participants reacted to data which described their own behavior. The participation of  subjects in the feedback meetings led to the drawing of two conclusions stated below.

- First of all feedback of data about interaction in the group could provide rich learning experiences, presenting the T-Group as a new and valuable tool in training and education.
- Secondly, the process of "group building" and the skills learned thereby had high potential for transfer

to a variety of back home organizational and community situations( McGill, 1974; Grieves, 2000; Gallos, 2006)

Following the turn out of the training program in Connecticut, Bradford and other prominent people like Benne and Lippit formed the National Training Laboratory in Group Development popularly known as NTL. The main concern of NTL during its formative years was continued experimentation as a training tool and learning experience in a laboratory setting (McGill,1974; Gallos, 2006) Later it was observed that the laboratory method of learning had a great impact on changing traditional training methods. Events surrounding the formation of the T-groups and NTL led to other stems of the history of organization development such as action research, normative background, quality of work life and strategic change (McGill,1974; McKendall, 1993; Cummings & Worley,2005). Amongst these three stems, action research was spearheaded by Lewin in the mid1940s to counter the challenges that people faced during the conduction of researches in the social environment. Consequently, there was the need for social scientist to engage research participants in the research process, provide feedback to them which also contributed to the development of the discipline (Gallos, 2006).

Also much attention was drawn to the normative background which emphasized the fact that, human relations was the best approach in managing organizations. This idea was closely linked with Likert's Participation Management program which capitalizes on four main types of management systems namely; exploitive authoritative systems, benevolent authoritative system, consultative systems and participatory systems (Cummings & Worley, 2005; Gallos, 2006). Following a survey-feedback process adopted by Likert in the conduction of researches in some organization, it was realized that much emphasis was placed on enhancing managerial and organizational effectives. Hence, there was the need to improve on the quality of work life of employees by integrating technology and people in working environments (Cummings & Worley, 2005; McGill, 1974).

In addition to the historical events preceeding the emergence of organization development, changes in the political, social and technological environments of an organization also necessitated the use of strategic perspectives to meet the intricacies of organizational processes (McKendall, 1993; Cummings & Worley, 2005). Therefore, tracing the history of organizational development some of the main ideas that influenced the development of the discipline were;

- Training people to enhance their skills
- Teamwork
- Participation of research subjects in feedback meetings and the conduction of research to examine social problems that inhibit organizational effectiveness.

## 1.3 Theoretical Roots

The historical roots of organizational development are meaningless without outlining the theoretical roots of the discipline. Several theories have been identified to explain the basis on which the discipline was developed (Gallos, 2006). These theories have been presented in three major categories: the individual approach, T-group approach and the total system approach. Theories which were classified under the individual approach to change were Maslow and Herzberg expectancy theories whilst theories grouped under T-group were propounded by Lewin, Argyris, and Bion (Grieves,2000; Cummings & Worley,2005; Gallos, 2006). The total system approach theories were also propounded by Likert, Lawrence and Lorsch and Levinson. These theories explain the foundations that underpin the development of the discipline to its current position (McKendall, 1993). Thus practice of organizational development has been extended to different types of organizations all over the world which has created a basis for continuous improvement, as well as, ensuring that the core objectives of the organizations and employees are achieved.

## 1.4 Current trends in Organizational Development

Organization development is widely practiced in a number of countries and this has necessitated the inventions of a new set of interventions to meet demands being posed by of the globalization and information technology. For instance the organization development network has expanded from 200 to 4118 members within four decades (Cummings & Worley, 2005). Several theorists such as Chris Agyris, Warren Bennis and Edgar Schein have contributed to the profession by formulating concepts to explain the processes of planned change in organizations. In addition to this, prominent people like Warner Burke, Peter Vaill, Thomas Cummings and Max Eden also contributed to the discipline by developing areas such as community and societal change, socio technical systems, industrial democracy amongst others (Cummings & Worley, 2005; Mirvis,1980 cited in Gallos, 2006,p.39).

## 1.5 Implications and recommendations for Ghanaian Organizations

The major events which led to the development of OD brings to the fore some key ideas which will enhance the practice of the discipline in 21s century Ghanaian organizations. There is the need to change managerial strategies in order to enhance both individual and organizational effectiveness. Following the methods of learning proposed by Bradford and Lewin, it implies that Ghanaiana organizations should adopt different strategies to make

organizational climate more consistent with both individual needs of the environment. Consequently, should place great emphasis on training and skill developments of staff. Also, Ghanaian organizations should try and improve intergroup collaboration and create an open up communications system to enhance the relationship of management and employees. Lewin 's ideas about group dynamics also creates the opportunity for management of organizations to plan better, change structure and roles in order to enable organizations adapt in any environment they find themselves operating. Lastly it is implied that there should be constant collaboration of management and OD practionners in organization in the conduction of research and the implementation of interventions.

## 1.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, organizational development is aimed at enhancing organizational effectiveness through a joint effort of consultants and employees. The historical roots of the discipline can be traced to the formation of T-groups, the adoption of experiential learning in laboratory settings (NTL), action research, normative research, quality of work life and strategic change. Similarly the development of OD were also supported with theories such as Marslow's hierarchy of motives, Expectancy theory by Vroom and Job Satisfaction theories by Hackman and Oldham These theories explained the foundation on which the discipline was developed. Furthermore key ideas like training and development, teamwork and research participants' involvement in feedback meetings underpinned the development of the discipline. Currently recent developments suggests that the network of Organizational development has expanded from 200 to more than 4000 within 40 years this shows how widely it's been practiced worldwide including Ghana.

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