Rethinking 'Organizational Effectiveness' as a Core Premise of Organization Development: Beyond Narrow Organizational Interests and Towards Wider Soulful Interventions

The origins of Organization Development (OD) can be traced back more than seven decades to the pioneering work of Kurt Lewin (see Lewin, 1946, 1947) and, as a perspective on organizational change, it continues to have considerable purchase in the world of work and within the academic community (see for example: Brown, 2010; Bushe and Marshak, 2015; Cheung-Judge, and Holbeche, 2011; Jackson, 2006). The seminal and most widely used definition of OD has been provided by Dick Beckhard. He has defined OD as "….an effort: (1) planned, (2) organization-wide, (3) managed from the top, to (4) increase organizational effectiveness and health, through (5) planned interventions in the organization's processes, using behavioural science knowledge" (Beckhard, 1969:9). Beckhard's articulation of the core characteristics of OD has been challenged on several fronts. For instance, the 'managed from the top' emphasis has been questioned by Oswick (2013) who presents an alternative 'bottom-up' perspective where "OD is less about the downward processes of instigating and implementing planned change and more to do with facilitating and accommodating upward processes of change" (p. 373). Equally, the 'planned' and 'scientific' credentials of OD have been questioned by Bushe and Marshak (2009) who have argued that OD is more typically an 'emergent process' rather than a planned one and they have also asserted that 'diagnostic approaches' (which are problem-centred, based on the scientific and retrospective gathering of data) are increasingly giving way to solution-driven 'dialogic approaches' (i.e. where the emphasis is on the real-time, projective co-construction of future outcomes).

In this contribution we want to challenge a different, taken-for-granted assumption in Beckhard's oft-cited definition – namely, the focus in OD on "increasing organizational effectiveness and health". In keeping with the remit for 'opinion pieces' for *JCM*, we wish to express concerns about the development and direction of OD which are "personal, controversial and provocative" (By, 2019). In a nutshell, we want to argue that the dominant focus within the OD discourse is on organizations and their success (i.e. a preoccupation with 'organizational effectiveness') at the expense of wider responsibilities and obligations, and that the framing of 'organizational health' is overly narrow and partial (i.e. what is healthy for the organization rather than what is 'healthy' at an individual or societal level).

There are three main parts to this paper. First, we offer some support for our assertion that OD initiatives focus too much on organizational effectiveness and organizational health. Second, we discuss the scope for embracing a wider set of change imperatives under the auspices of OD (i.e. increasing sustainability, enhancing social responsibility, addressing community needs, and so on). Finally, we conclude by briefly sketching out how this could take shape in terms of a more inclusive and socially-informed repertoire of OD activities (i.e. via what we have chosen to call 'soulful interventions').

Organizations Only Focus on Developing Themselves

According to Brown (2010), the major goals of OD are to: "(a) increase productivity; (b) increase responsiveness to clients; (c) improve competitive positioning; (d) increase employee involvement and participation; (e) increase employee morale; and, (f) develop new managerial skills and strategies" (p. 7). One could be forgiven for thinking that having OD goals which include a concern with increasing 'employee involvement/employee morale' and developing 'managerial skills/strategies' might suggest that 'organizational productivity/effectiveness' is not the dominant imperative in OD interventions. However, a deeper dive into the OD literature reveals that initiatives around improving the working lives

of employees and the enhancement of skills are undertaken in the service of improved productivity.

So, for example, OD interventions aimed at re-designing work to increase worker autonomy undoubtedly can improve workers' lives and enhancing their well-being. However, the benefits for workers can be seen as a mere 'by-product' of a desire to increase organizational efficiency and effectiveness. This is based on the premise that satisfied and engaged workers are likely to be more productive than their alienated and disengaged counterparts. Put simply, the humanistic orientation of OD - which undergirds initiatives such as QWL (quality of worklife) programmes (French, Bell and Vohra, 2005) – is really just a convenient 'means' to efficiency-based 'ends'. This resonates with Michael Rose's description of the shift in prominence from the scientific management movement of the 1920's (where employees were treated as extensions of the machinery they operated) to the Human Relations School of the 1940's (where employees started to be treated as being human) as a relatively modest, and largely rhetorical, change of emphasis where personnel practitioners simply became the maintenance crew for the human machinery (Rose, 1975).

We would assert that it was a 'subliminal capitalistic logic' (i.e. valorization, efficiency and profit maximization) which informed the Human Relations School and continues to inform the field of OD. If we take a step back and consider other OD foci, it is possible to argue that it is not all about the bottom line. For example, an emphasis on 'improving organizational health' (Brown, 2010) and 'building change capacity' (Hayes, 2010) are not efficiency-oriented. That said, they are still explicitly inwardly-focused on organizational improvement rather being more outwardly focused on contributing to society. This focus is represented in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1 – About Here

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Organizational Changes Beyond OD

It is possible to think of organizationally-instigated changes which are not primarily aimed at improving the organization and contributing to the bottom line. This alternative cluster of initiatives originate within organizations, but have a 'beyond-organization' focus. Forms of change activity which fall into this category include corporate philanthropy, volunteering schemes, and CSR programmes. These activities are very different in emphasis from OD activities insofar as they are not simply concerned with what is best for the organization – but, instead ask: what can the organization do in terms of change to address wider social issues and societal challenges (e.g. poverty, health, education, sustainability and food security)? Figure 2 juxtaposes these different categories of activity.

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Insert Figure 2 – About Here

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It is somewhat surprisingly that there appears to very little correspondence, or overlap, between CSR-related activity and OD interventions. This is apparent if one looks at core OD textbooks. They do not mention CSR or sustainability (e.g. Brown, 2010; French et al, 2005; Hayes; 2010; Senior, 1997). Equally, CSR textbooks do not engage at all with OD or organizational change (e.g. Kotler and Lee, 2005; Banerjee, 2007; Blowfield and Murray, 2011; Crane, Matten and Spence, 2013).

Although CSR and OD have not been explored as mutually-implicated fields of inquiry, there are a very limited number of contributions which have made tentative connections. For instance, Amir, Javaid, Mahmood and Zafar (2013) assert that: "Change management would be effective in those companies which have effective CSR policies because CSR improves employees' perceptions of the company and they will be motivated to adopt those policies" (p. 55). In effect, this contribution argues for complementarity rather than connection insofar as it claims that good CSR arrangements enhance how employees view the company and this increases their receptiveness to organizational change initiatives. This is very different from our core assertion that a CSR focus should be an integral part of OD activity. Indeed, it inverts the logic of our argument by suggesting that a concern with wider social issues (via CSR) can be used to sharpen the organisations focus on productivity and efficiency (i.e. via OD). Similarly, Kemp, Keenand and Gronow's (2010) study of the process by which a global mining company was able "to articulate a change agenda for gender and community relations within a CSR framework" (P.578) illustrates how CSR can assist OD initiatives (i.e. complementary rather than overlapping).

Rather than simply positioning CSR as a means of enhancing OD activity, Carollo and Gueri (2017) take a very different tack. They suggest that, at least conceptually, CSR managers could be thought of "as prime examples of change agents" (2017:632). However, their study of a network of Italian CSR practitioners found that: "CSR managers are more likely to foster continuity instead of change in current business practices" (p. 632). This contribution simultaneously highlights the scope for integrating CSR and OD activities (e.g. CSR managers as change agents) and the ongoing reality that these domains remain relatively disconnected (e.g. CSR managers are inclined to embrace continuity over change).

Rethinking organizational change, we would posit that one of the primary reasons why CSR/philanthropic initiatives and OD/change interventions are seen as separate and distant

forms of organizational activity is because they are informed by different 'institutional logics' (Alford and Friedland, 1985) or worldviews. OD is informed by an inward-focus on productivity and efficiency, which is underpinned by a desire to create competitive advantage (i.e. competitive self-interest) while CSR and philanthropic activities are informed by an outward-focus which is relatively altruistic (i.e. benevolent selflessness). These contrasting organizational orientations are presented in Figure 3.

Insert Figure 3 – About Here

In addition to having competitive and benevolent orientations, it is possible to think of a position of low commitment to both organizational gain and societal gain. We have referred to this as an 'indifferent' orientation (see Figure 3), which is characterised by disinterest, disengagement and ambivalence (i.e. soul-less inactivity). In sharp contrast to soul-less inactivity, it is possible to think about an orientation which simultaneously places a huge premium on organizational gain and societal gain. This abundance orientation (see Figure 3) creates space for organizations to engage in what might be thought of as 'soulful activity'.

Towards Generative Mindsets and Soulful Change Interventions

A world view based upon 'indifference' leads to an 'absorptive mindset' that privileges passivity and inertia, maintains the status quo, and avoids risk. Beyond this, the dichotomization of OD/change activity and CSR/philanthropic activity arises out of a 'distributive mindset' (see Figure 4). When considered from this perspective, there is an implicit trade-off between the competitive worldview (i.e. a 'grab mentality') and the benevolent worldview (i.e. a 'give mentality'). In this regard, the inward-facing organizational-focused behaviour (i.e. OD initiatives aimed at profit maximization and

increased efficiency and greater productivity) is balanced against selfless outward-facing societally focused behaviour (i.e. CSR/philanthropic activity aimed at benefitting society). The zero-sum framing which underpins the distributive mindset treats resources as if they are finite and presents 'selfish-grabbing' and 'selfless-giving' organizational activities as being mutually exclusive.

Insert Figure 4 – About Here

We would contend that the distributive view dominates in organizations and it also explains why, as identified earlier, there is an enduring delineation of OD/change programmes and CSR/philanthropic activities both within organizations and within academe.

Rather than relying upon a distributive mindset (i.e. a fixed pie to be divided), we could embrace a 'generative mindset' which privileges abundance and the notion of mutual gain (i.e. bigger pies and/or more pies). When viewed in this way, the imperative for OD interventions is no longer simply about organizations interests and instead stretches to concurrently adding societal value and organizational value (see Figure 5).

Insert Figure 5 – About Here

To a certain extent 'strategic CSR' (Chandler, 2015) and the concept of 'creating share value' (Porter and Kramer, 2011) have tentatively started to balance organizational and societal interests. However, they come at it from the CSR/philanthropic perspective and lean into the area of organizational interests without meaningfully incorporating insights from the field of

OD/change (i.e. focusing on societal initiatives which add some organizational value). Put differently, initiatives such as CSV concentrate on external community-oriented activities and consider the scope for also leveraging them for profit (i.e. as 'win-win' opportunities). For example, where a corporation builds a road to help to connect rural communities in Africa and, in doing so, also improves its own transportation infrastructure in the region. If taken from the other direction (i.e. organizational initiatives that add value to society), there is considerable scope for developing OD interventions that move beyond an exclusive focus on organizational interests. The benefits of broadening the focus of OD activities to incorporate a concern for society (i.e. soulful interventions) is that it enables stakeholders to draw upon an extensive and invaluable body of OD knowledge about how to engage in processes of change and apply these insights to wider social issues and social challenges. Moreover, the rich repertoire of OD techniques developed over several decades – such as action research (Lewin, 1946), survey feedback methods (Likert and Likert, 1976), laboratory training (Bradford, Gibb and Benne, 1964), appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987), world café (Brown and Issacs, 1995), future search (Weisbord,1987; Weisbord & Janoff, 1995), open space technology (Owen, 1992) – can be put to work as soulful interventions which add benefit to organizations while simultaneously improving communities and enhancing society as a whole.

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Figure 1 – The Dominant Emphasis in Organization Development

Concern for the Organization
High
Low

Organization Development

Low
High
Concern for Society
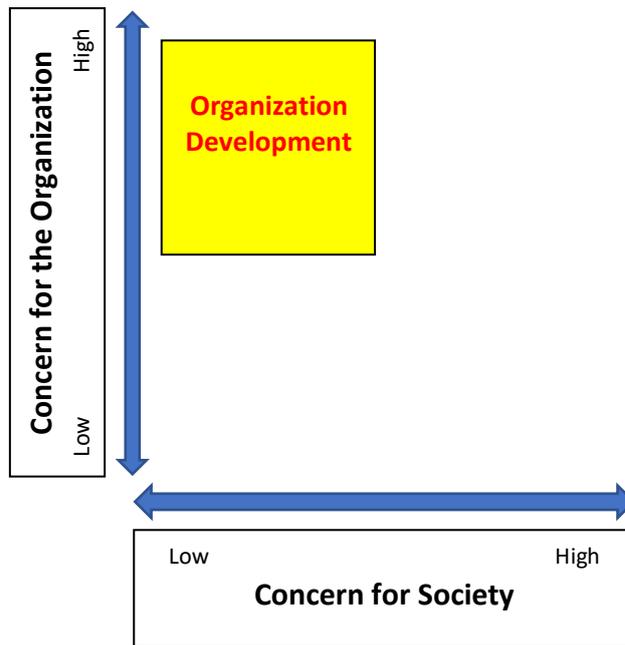
Figure 2 – The Dominant Emphasis in CSR/Philanthropy
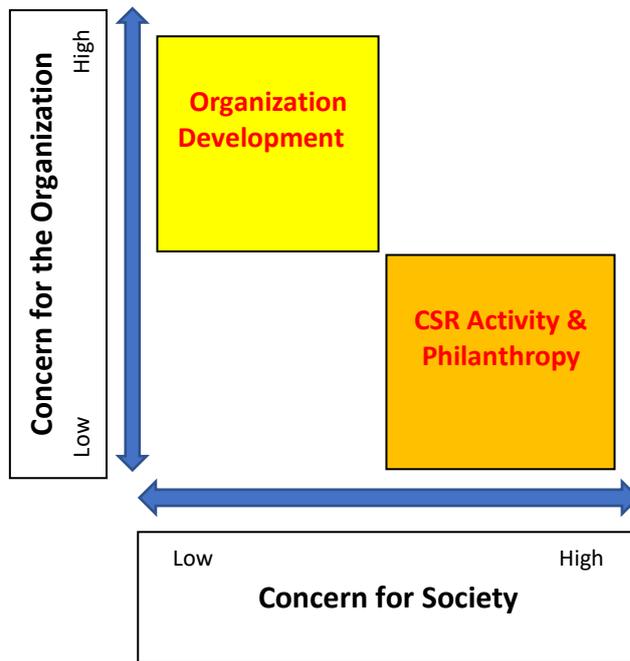
Figure 3 – Different Types of Organizational Orientation

Competition (self-ish activity)	**Abundance** (soul-full activity)
Indifference (soul-less inactivity)	**Benevolence** (self-less activity)

Internal organisation gain

External society gain
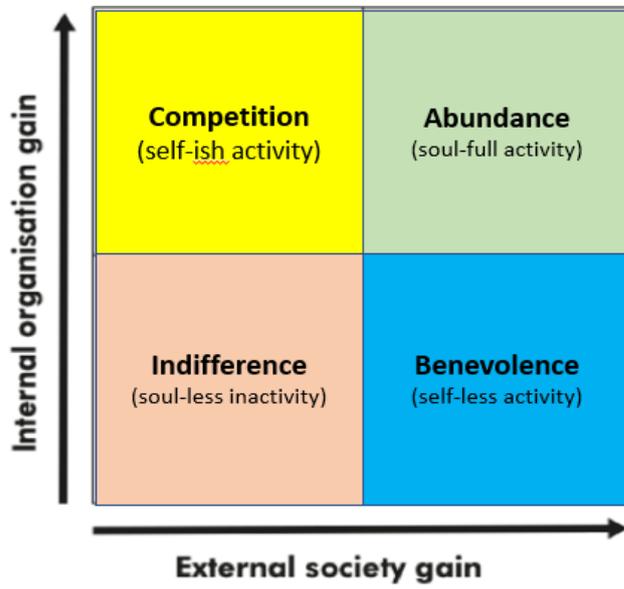
Figure 4 – Prevalent Repertoire of Organizational Mindsets
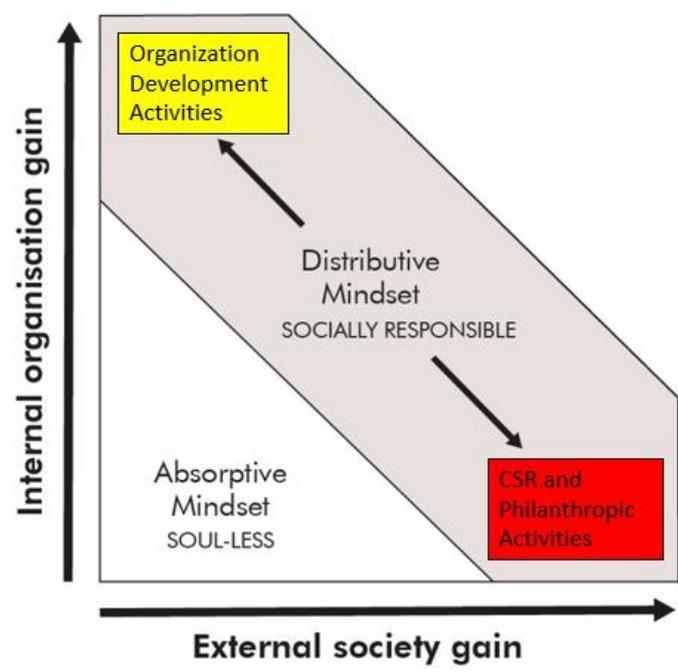
Figure 5 – Expanded Repertoire of Organizational Mindsets