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Questions of Identity

Who and What Are We?

What Is Our Purpose?

Whom Do We Serve?

• FREEZE FRAME

Before and after each chapter in this book, we will include questions for your personal consideration or group discussion. Some of these questions arose from the initial conversation between Bob Tannenbaum and Meg Wheatley, while others have been suggested by the online conversation among more than one hundred practitioners. The questions will help you to connect this material to your own beliefs, experience, and practice and to integrate new ideas.

In this chapter we consider the questions of identity: our purpose and whom we serve. Take a few minutes to consider your thoughts on the questions below before beginning this chapter.

1. For me, what are the boundaries of the field of OD? What fields is OD related to, and how? Is it important that those boundaries be clear? Why or why not?
2. What was the purpose, if any, that brought me into the field of OD? How does that purpose relate to the work I take on?

3. As I consider my purpose and work in the field, whom do I serve? Do I consider the focus of my service to be a single client, the organization, the employees, a higher power, myself, society as a whole, or something else?



Identity

We begin, as we do in each of the sections of this conversation, with the discussion between Meg Wheatley and Bob Tannenbaum.

Meg Wheatley

What I'm interested in, Bob, is the continuity that you've seen in all these years. As you look out now and into the future, what do you see that feels like it's continuous, and what do you see that might signify a radical break? That's what intrigues me.

Bob Tannenbaum

I don't think that in a major way we're facing a paradigm shift. Consider systems theory. People in our field, and related fields, began talking in systems terms going back before the 1920s. Eric Trist and Fred Emery at the Tavistock Institute were using systems approaches for a long time. I have a quote from Trist that actually uses the phrase self-organizing.

Then I think of sensitivity training, which started at Bethel in 1947. As a trainer, you walk into the group with no agenda, no traditional leadership, and things are wide open. More recently, one of the trends of the field has been to move toward large group interventions, where one of the phrases used is "getting everyone into the room." But what happens again, what takes place, is what happens in a T-group. In a sense, some of the best things we've done in the past fifty years have been *systems oriented*, a tremendous awareness of relationships, interconnections, of minimizing to the extent possible the expression of control and authority. There are so many examples of that both in writings and in action from the field.

For me, through the years, the field of OD has been primarily defined by, and gained its identity through, several basic qualities:

- It has increasingly focused on human systems at all levels, from the individual to the inter-organizational;

- Its basic concern has been with systems change; and
- Its practitioners have been guided by humanistic values.

Organization development practitioners have primarily been specialists in facilitating change processes—helping client systems to move in directions desired by that system—rather than activists using the client system as a vehicle for the attainment of their own goals.

Nevertheless, increasingly these qualities do not demark the field. There are many others who are concerned with systems, change, values, and processes—other consultants, diplomats, arbitrators, conciliators, counselors and therapists, managers, teachers, parents. All of these specialists, and more, share overlapping theories, concepts, and methods (although they may be designated by differing language).

I have predicted, and continue to predict, that a new field is emerging that will break down present boundaries and will coalesce at least many of these present specialties under one change-developing body of theories, concepts, and methods. Groups might be differentiated by the focuses of the entities, such as business organizations, international political relations, classroom, home, and so on. My preference for a designation of this emerging umbrella field is Human Systems Development.

Meg Wheatley

It's true. We see that the issue of identity of the field is so important; it guides who joins the field and what they believe about their own purpose. It is the source of organization and, as such, a source of energy. So it matters very much. Identity applies to everything, whether it's at the individual level or the nation state—a relationship, a team, or a field of work. We need to be together asking: What are we trying to be? What's possible now? How can the world be different because of us?

So as we consider our identity and purpose, we must consider the world. We must ask ourselves: What will the world need from us and our field in the future, and how can that help us define ourselves? I believe the world is in a dire situation now. This is not the time to tinker with our field. It is time to ask ourselves, "What is going on—the big picture?" The skills and processes of OD are needed during this time, needed as they have never been needed. Who do we need to be, with what we know, during this time of planetary crisis? What is our purpose? What do we want to give voice to?

Bob Marshak

I believe we as a profession are losing our roots and purpose and, therefore, our identity. We don't have an agenda anymore, nor do we have practitioners who can think psychologically. Many new practitioners are hanging on to something they don't understand. Here is some of what I believe OD is and is not:

OD is value-based. Our roots come from human psychology: Maslow, McGregor, Argyris, and the notion of psychology of potential, growth, and development. We were values-based early on. The OD value is not about change but about change that makes people better—humanistic values.

For example, we might ask workers to have input into a solution because we had the notion that they would be more committed to plan. However, the "value" reason would be "more input gives better results." If we involve workers in order to have them become committed to our plan, we are manipulating. We would be seeking input only for the sake of buy-in, an invitation to participate without the belief of the competency or ability of others. Another principle is a belief that all input is valid, that it provides a diversity of viewpoints, and therefore the results will be better because of the input process.

Today, we have practitioners using interventions without understanding the values they are based on. We do not have practitioners who are looking for new theory. We have moved from a field that was at the margin to one that is in the mainstream. Our interventions are different from the early ones. They are market-place-driven. We have co-opted our ability to confront the organization so that we can remain marketable.

OD is about people. If people are the variable, then the practitioner is doing OD. If the variable is about a process, a strategy, or an intervention, then the practitioner is not doing OD. This is not to say it is not honorable or without contribution. But OD is values-based.

Some people think of OD as facilitation of a meeting or a big event. No. The OD practitioner has to know a lot at many levels, which includes how the business operates as well as how individuals operate. The primary tool for our work is the use of self, which includes use of character and personage, a developed mind, strong theory foundation, and the ability to stretch into different bodies of knowledge.

In the past we believed that if the people side were right, the business side would go right. Now, practitioners often don't understand the people side, and the shift is to try to understand the business side. Sadly enough, there is not much theory for integrating the two. In one sense, OD was about liberating tight constraints.

Now organizations are not bureaucratic, but the struggle is among different elements, such as financial and economic drivers, bottom line, ROI, and shareholder equity, which are a new form of tight constraints.

I believe we are afraid to own the values of OD because we fear we will not get work. We are disingenuous and colluding when we enter into a situation out of alignment with our values.

OD respects its founders. The early founders were people who believed in self-actualization, humanistic and social psychology, social justice, democratic process, equity, and empowerment values of OD. They were the early connectors in beliefs, theory, and practice. They were the ones who embodied the values that are so core to OD. The founders of OD had Ph.D.s in social psychology. They had to know group dynamics very, very well in order to be a T-group facilitator or a group facilitator. Now, it seems that interventions are just orchestrated programs. The skill level of working with group dynamics is missing. The founders can help us with the language of why we do what we do. So, let's study our roots.

Chris Worley

I happen to believe that OD is alive and well. But if you listen to those who believe that OD is dead or dependent on the reputations of well-known practitioners, you can see how it got into this situation. The field's definitions are fuzzy, its most successful interventions have become institutionalized, and it's too easy to call yourself an OD practitioner.

The problem begins with the definitions and boundaries of organization development. Although there are more than a dozen definitions of OD, most suggest that it concerns system-wide planned change, uses behavioral science interventions, targets human and social processes of organizations (specifically the belief systems of individuals, work groups, or culture), and intends to build the capacity to adapt and renew organizations. Moreover, there is considerable overlap in the activities and interventions listed within most OD textbooks.

Almost every OD intervention is claimed by at least one other discipline. Reward system and performance management interventions are considered part of human resource management; leadership and strategic change methodologies are shared with the strategy and business policy discipline; and reengineering is practiced by industrial engineers and information technologists.

Where do these other fields end and OD begin, or vice versa? Where do emerging issues, such as environmental or sustainability auditing, creating an internal

information system knowledge base, or managing cross-cultural organizations belong? These fuzzy boundaries make it difficult to determine what OD is and what it is not.

Another reason for OD's weak reputation is that it may be a victim of its own success. Many of the techniques and interventions invented and practiced by OD professionals have become "mainstream." Team building is as prevalent in organizations as budget planning. Organization surveys, feedback, and problem-solving meetings are considered a normal part of organization life. The issues and interventions that were once closely identified with organization development are now part of traditional business practice.

Finally, OD has shot itself in the foot by coddling a variety of untrained and inexperienced people. In its attempt to be inclusive, people who do not have the background, education, or experience to support an organization through complex change can call themselves OD practitioners. The most misunderstood qualification of being an OD practitioner is the most fundamental: the role of personal growth and self-development.

Too many people enter the field of OD because its roots are in the counterdependent tradition of overthrowing oppression. Some people who call themselves practitioners are doing the work to overthrow a generalized belief that all management regimes are authoritarian . . . and they are unaware of that motivation. When people become "OD practitioners" because they think organizations "should" be changed, because they were treated unfairly in an earlier context, or because all managers are bad, and there is no awareness of these motivations, OD becomes a "cause."

Personal growth work is central to the practice of OD because it helps to answer the question, "Whose needs are you working?" Unfortunately, too many practitioners are working their own needs, are unaware of those needs, and are unconsciously intervening in organizations to alter power and authority distributions when that may or may not be appropriate. These self-proclaimed OD practitioners unconsciously promote their view of "right" without concern for the organization's current state, strategy, or values, and that hurts the field's reputation.

Building on Bob Marshak's earlier comments, I think an important first step is to better define OD. To my mind, for an activity to be labeled OD it must:

- Involve change in some system;
- Intend to improve the effectiveness of that system; and
- Build capacity in the system to manage itself in the future.

If an effort labeled OD does not involve change, then I think there's too much overlap between OD and other disciplines like human resource management or organization behavior. If it is not intended to improve the effectiveness of the system, then I think accusations of irrelevance may be justified. And perhaps most importantly, I think that learning must be involved. Unless the effort builds capacity in the client system, then there's little chance of distinguishing OD from change management.

A second important step in creating an identity for OD is getting clearer about the qualifications. While I'm against certification, I do think the market needs to be educated about its consumption of consultants. To be an OD practitioner, people need to have demonstrated self-knowledge, a broad understanding of theory and practice, and supervised experience.

Finally, I believe the field needs a more coordinated effort to articulate the "values" it thinks are so important. There are at least three different efforts underway by the OD Network, the OD Institute, and the Ethics Clearinghouse. If each one competes with the other to come up with the "right" or "best" list, the field will become increasingly fragmented.

Organization development is a powerful technology that can help organizations manage change, achieve objectives, and implement strategies. While many have pronounced OD dead or dying, these prognostications have been occurring for twenty years. OD, like other behavioral science disciplines, is going through its growing pains, and there is every reason to believe that it will thrive and survive into the future.

Glenda Eoyang

I agree with Dr. Tannenbaum when he says that a new field is emerging. He says this field "will coalesce at least many of these present specialties under one change-developing body of theories, concepts, and models."

As I see it, if we don't find a way to coalesce, the energy and focus of the field will continue to dissipate. Practitioners will find it even more difficult to describe our work to their clients. Scholars will focus on more and more subtle differences within the field while they miss the major transformations beyond it. Researchers will continue to wrestle with methods and findings that are either overly simplistic or not generalizable. Standards of practice will continue to weaken as more and more people do the work with less and less understanding.

We can avoid this slide into entropy and disorder, but we need a new way to conceptualize our work so that we can incorporate the rich learnings of the past and build a framework to carry our discoveries and applications into the future.

William Gellermann

I too would like to emphasize the point made by Bob Tannenbaum when he said, "My preference for a designation of this emerging umbrella field is Human Systems Development." Human Systems Development (HSD) is the field with which I identify. If we collectively were to identify with that field, many of us could still focus on businesses and corporations, while others focus on the whole range of other systems (for example, individuals, team building, communities, nations, or transnational networks) and some of us focus on the global governance system.

D. Kirk Hamilton

As Chris Worley and others have noted, the field of OD overlaps with the edges of a good many other fields. But from some of those fields there are important principles that we in OD should consider. Take physical space. As an architect entering the OD field, I'm surprised by the lack of material on the physical environment. Architects frequently are involved in the planned change of organizations at the request of their clients. They rarely have a foundation of organization theory to assist or guide them. Architects live on the technical side of the socio-technical model.

But OD practitioners seem not to consider the physical environment. Most definitions of the environment in OD books talk only of the larger external cultural or regulatory environment, or the environment as something with which the organization transacts inputs or outputs. In 1973, Fred Steele wrote a small book in the Addison-Wesley series, *Physical Settings and Organization Development*. He is one of the few to relate the immediate physical environment or setting of the individual, group, or task to OD.

Why is there so little attention to the profound effect of the physical environment on the organization? Is the physical design of architecture or interior design a legitimate OD intervention? If so, OD practitioners should be prepared to consider the efficacy of a physical intervention and the advantage of collaborating with a design professional.

Purpose

Meg Wheatley

I believe we need to look now at the answers to some important questions. We must ask ourselves who we need to be in this profession, at this time, in this world. We must consider our purpose in our work with increased consciousness—or we con-

tinue to contribute to what I see as a huge problem. We have decided we can make up our own rules for being on this planet. We don't have to follow life's rules. We're playing God and ignoring the generic rules of the game. We thought we could grow forever. We've decided that we don't have to go through the cycles of life. We have created the mess we're in. But there's an ecology principle that we've forgotten: Nature always has the last word.

Bob Tannenbaum

There is a statement in your writings, Meg, that I very much agree with—the necessity to go through the dark side in major change. Therapists have held that central to how they work all the time. The holding on/letting go/moving on lab that Bob Hanna and I did at Bethel had the same orientation.

There are some really new things—particularly in chaos theory—that strike me. But as I look at it, and I'm open to being convinced otherwise, I see a bigger challenge in the number of people who are reached with an awareness of what's already there in value terms. We have a lot of accumulated wisdom already about these kinds of things.

Meg Wheatley

I agree, Bob. You're right that some things are constant, such as values. We still need to go through the dark side to accomplish major change. As they did in the earliest T-group, facilitators need to be ready for whatever happens in a group.

But some things are so very different. The increasing interconnectedness of everything and everyone means that our actions can have an impact on others unknown. One person can have a strong impact through either fear or love. You mention chaos, Bob. We are surprised with unimaginable events. There is the power of one—the terrorist who changes millions of lives. Most people do not know or want to know the extent to which they are interconnected.

I've been watching failure of the old paradigm. Corporations, major consulting firms, schools, governments, and churches cannot look past the immediate project. Is the system developing greater capacity or unraveling? It is hard to provide a solution to what we helped create. We don't have the means or resources to solve these problems and we don't understand the consequences. We solve one problem and create twenty more.

I believe that, in the war of values, there has been a victory. Market values have won: individualism, competition, speed, and greed. How can we compete through

materialism if we don't subscribe to these market values? We believe we wouldn't be seen as progressive or modern.

But there is no future in a system based on individualism, profit at all cost, or growth at all cost. OD has always been a profession of idealists, people for whom service meant more than money, and for whom purpose was more at the heart level. We have to find a way into the middle of the mess. The eyes of the truly hungry people are on us. What are they hungry for? What is not happening that people are longing for?

Turning to one another is an essential gesture. Are we engaged in a profession helping to move toward a web, or are we doing what we are asked to do? We are in a good place to help, to honor values of being truly human. That is our identity and purpose.

Kathleen Dannemiller

The driving force of my personal work in organization development has been to help every voice be heard. How we do that is always different, but for me the method has been to work with microcosms of the organization, get them listening to each other in a way that brings out each person's truth and accepts it as truth, then combine yearnings of everyone into a compelling vision of where we need to be going together, and then to come up with our own answers as to what will get us there. Probably the most important truths for me are encapsulated in that statement: Let every voice be heard and each person's truth be true.

Steve Cady (of Bowling Green University) and I have been doing some research into the commonalities among people who have started whole system technologies (the one I started so many years ago is called Whole-Scale Change, but there are a good number of others). We've learned that there are five "truths" these people agree on. Each of us, and all of us, see the following:

- *Systems.* We simply see, believe, and breathe system.
- *Purpose.* There are no throwaway lines in our lives. In any part of the system we enter, we are always "on purpose."
- *Change Journey.* We all recognize change as a journey, not just a "one-time" fix-it happening.
- *Theory Base.* All of our work is rooted in robust theory.
- *Values.* Everything we do, in every part of our life journey, is based consistently on values.

Jeff McCollum

The purpose that drives my work is helping organizations serve their key stakeholders (customers, employees, and investors) with distinction. The “development” part of OD is what inspires me—developing people and organizations of distinction.

When we are far enough out into the future to see the 20th Century in full perspective, I think we will see the industrial organization as an aberration in human development that valued financial assets over human ones, polluted the planet, and created jobs that were spiritual prisons for people in them. I think OD emerged as an antidote to the ills of the industrial model that has subsequently become the model for most organizations (see Mintzberg’s “Machine Bureaucracy”).

The exciting thing about being in this field now is that we are collectively engaged in helping organizations produce idiosyncratic models/forms in response to the changes in the environment.

And I worry a bit. Years ago I saw a training movie, the name of which I can’t remember, but the thesis has stayed with me since. The thesis is that organizations/agencies arise to deal with a societal problem and wind up with a vested interest in the problem. Police have a vested interest in crime. Ministers have a vested interest in sin. Do we have a vested interest in the perpetuation of organizational dysfunction?

Chuck Phillips

Like others in this conversation, I am working to balance the really good work of my organization and its products with the best interests of its people, including myself. I see as part of my purpose to be challenging the organization and its leadership to always be planning, making decisions, strategizing, and so forth, in the context of their responsibility to the multitude of legitimate stakeholders.

Judith H. Katz

I deeply connect to the purpose that people have expressed here: to make the world a better place. I was fortunate to be a child of the 1960s. For me, OD is deeply rooted in a set of values and principles of change, social justice, equality, and participation. OD has always meant knowing myself and using myself as an instrument for change. One of the lessons I learned early on was to trust my experience and emotions as real data, to know what my limits are as well as how my identities (as a

white, Jewish, heterosexual woman) and experiences impact my practice. I was drawn to OD because it requires all of me to be fully engaged and to recognize that the change is not only out there but also in me.

After more than twenty-five years as an OD practitioner, I am still optimistic that change is possible—that we can make the world and the organizations in which we work better places, creating workplaces that work for us all. OD is at the forefront of this change. This is the new frontier—the human frontier—to stretch beyond what has been. Being a part of such change fuels my passion, purpose, and being.

Bev Scott

When I started practicing OD in 1973, it seemed to me that OD's purpose was centered on helping to change organizations to be better places for human beings to work, especially the disenfranchised, those at the bottom, and those who were different. This humanistic, value-based approach matched my own values and I was excited to find this field for my career. Such a purpose required providing opportunities for members of organizations to give voice, participate, and become involved in the decision process. It was also clear that in order to really be effective in supporting change in both individuals and in organizations, we as practitioners had to be self-aware and know our own issues and hang-ups first.

Over time as an external and internal OD consultant, I observed and participated in the shift that focused on influencing managers and leaders to be more effective (which would ultimately impact employees) and to meet their organizational goals.

The increased focus on shareholder value in the mid-1980s pushed managers to take the actions, such as downsizing, business process re-engineering, mergers, and acquisitions, that have resulted in increasingly oppressive and disruptive work environments. We saw business consultants use techniques and methodologies from OD and call it change management. We, as a field, became timid and uncertain. Had we lost our values? Was OD out-of-date? Could we help leaders become more effective in accomplishing goals we no longer believed in? Could we influence leaders from our original purpose and value base?

I think that our values base is what distinguishes our field from others that use similar technology. Today, values such as having choice, giving voice, valuing a balanced life, and sustainability are critical to the future of not only our field but also for organizations. These values are the foundation of our purpose and identity.

Steve Cady

Like many others in this field, my purpose is related to values. I value bringing people together from all walks of life—multiple perspectives, conditions, values, beliefs, and attitudes. It is my goal to create communities of diverse people supporting each other in living their dreams and doing the necessary personal work to support their dreams being realized.

When I started working in OD, my goal was to make a lot of money first, and then I would pursue my purpose more fully. A mentor of mine gave me some advice you've probably heard before: "Do what you love, and the money will follow." So I flipped things around and focused on my purpose first. It was at that very moment the wonder of my life journey opened up. I often think of the question, "Did I do that on purpose?" I am reminded of the power of purpose. By staying on purpose, I have found OD and the many opportunities it affords me to richly live—a passionate life—a life of my dreams.

Glenn Allen-Meyer

I entered the field in the mid-1980s. I was tremendously energized by the ways in which people at work seemed to open themselves up during sessions (training programs, T-groups, and so on) and during their participation in change. This, to me, was like a grand flowering of what I thought human potential could be. I was instantly taken by the field and knew I would become part of it in some way. My challenge and purpose was simple: I wanted to be part of helping people find and use their voice and their talent at work.

By the early 1990s, something had changed. "How could it be," I wondered to myself, "that people who seemed so interested in change now seem so cynical?" I started hearing terms like "flavor of the month" being used to describe processes that had filled me and others with such excitement just a few years earlier.

My purpose then split into two streams that guide my work today. The first stream is about identifying the individual, group, organizational, and societal biases that limit people's ability to bring their voices to work—to be fully themselves in a way that adds undreamed of value to their places of work—and have a positive impact on those situations.

The second stream involves studying the basic assumptions of organization development, which, over the years, have become co-opted by organizational change infrastructures that tend to "market" change to people at work in order to gain economies of scale during the change process. People at work today—used

to SPAM, telemarketers, and targeted marketing campaigns—recognize hype when they experience it and respond with compliance, at best, and, at worst, with resistance that leads to lateness, turnover, accidents, and other forms of dysfunction.

My light remains strong, however. The feelings I felt when I first started—the sense that I had become part of something tremendously right for people—continues. Inside the cynical response to marketed and hyped change, I still find many, many reasons to work to uncover opportunities for my own voice and for hearing the voices of others.

John Agno

At certain times in life, most people take stock of where they are and where they want to go. Deciding what is important to us during our life's journey, including where we may be stuck, is a good way to begin this mid-course correction. The gift of knowing who we are and what we are meant to do helps us set a forward life direction—both personally and professionally.

Unfortunately, most people begin this life purpose investigation situationally—from where they are in their work (like their OD career), in their relationship with spouse and family, and in consideration of all those competing commitments that drain one's available energy—rather than looking inwardly to unlock their dreams. Working on the intangible, inward, ideal-self stuff (assumptions/beliefs, values, vision, and guiding principles) is what it takes to become aware of one's real identity.

Once you know who you really are, you can begin to articulate what you were meant to do—your “purpose.” Then, and only then, is one able to cross the purpose bridge from the intangible to a tangible action plan that can take one to where he or she wants to be. Using this inward to outward process helps bring clarity by:

- Becoming self-aware of the “should roles” we have been playing based on our inherited or traditional purpose—which has resulted in our unconscious default behavior. Just being aware of our traditional roles and purpose allows us to begin to choose the behavior that is representative of who we really are and wish to be.
- Articulating who we really are (rather than who we are expected to be), writing it down, and testing our assumptions brings a tremendous energy focus that can push us along in attunement with our discovered purpose. Without this internal work, we have no “go to” purpose statement that keeps us in alignment.

Those competing commitments of the present continue to diffuse our available energy and pull us in many different directions, making it difficult to move forward.

Robert McCarthy

I came to OD work in the hope of finding a more effective way to facilitate change after a difficult early experience as a troubleshooter for a CEO. I found the problems, but making the needed changes was painful and slow. I thought there just had to be a better way to improve performance.

I notice that what remains of the work is the growth of the individual. Everything else is subject to entropy and dissolution through mergers, new leadership, and so forth. What lasts and what continues to inspire me are innovative projects that become models for others and the growth of leaders at every level.

These individuals are doing the work we used to do. They have acquired the skills and the knowledge of OD methods to lead their organization improvement work without consultants. My conclusion is that OD is a field of work. The profession is "third party," and the job is transferring the knowledge of the tools to the organization.

Paula Griffin

Robert, I like your comment that what remains in our work, after the organizational changes and tides of organizational centralization and decentralization, is the growth of the individual. As a veteran of more than one downsizing, merger, or centralization shift, I've seen months' (or years) worth of work disappear in a whirl of memos neatly filed by project, or client, or year. It can be discouraging if your purpose was to complete the project that was cancelled or improve the organization that disappeared in the merger. When our goal or purpose is to improve the human condition or to help individuals to improve themselves, there is always something to look back on and something to look forward to.

John Adams

Paula's comment makes me think of sustainability, which has been a theme for me. I have long believed we must become more involved in broader perspectives, longer time frames, and more systemic and socially responsible ways of considering our work. It's beginning to happen. In a 1992 survey of what it is important for OD to consider, only 7 percent of the responses expressed any sense of the future

being different from the present. In an early 2002 Delphi process on the future competencies that OD people will need (conducted by Saul Eisen), there was a very central presence of the need to pay attention to issues of sustainability and social responsibility in the future.

So as I move into the sage stage of my life (sixty this year—yikes!), I am finding that my purpose is very focused on bringing awareness to individual and collective thought patterns in order to enable healthy choices in the context of larger system awareness.

Whom Do We Serve?

Meg Wheatley

One thing that interests me is something you've mentioned, Bob. Whom do we serve, as OD practitioners? For myself, I have always been interested in what was going on with people inside of the system. But I am personally committed to encouraging people to notice this question of "Whom do you serve?" Is it our careers, our status, our paychecks, or people (the humanistic values)? Is it these deeper values? Is it some deeper recognition that a human being, whoever he or she is, is worth being active for?

We must realize what's happening inside organizations. We're no longer able to align humanistic values with economic values. That's what I mean when I say we lost. So for me the task now is for a lot of personal introspection about what it is that will really give me a valuable life. Am I only going to serve the economy and bring down the planet, or make a stand and figure out how I can serve the human spirit?

Bob Tannenbaum

This is important. It was very typical in those early years when most of us were university-based and had a guaranteed income that people entered the field to change the world. I'd ask interns what attracted them to the field, and the almost universal answer was, "I want to make this a better world. I want to have a role in improving the kind of world we're in." I think that has changed, at least for some.

Meg Wheatley

I believe that, starting in the 1930s, we made that disastrous split to create personnel functions so that line managers didn't have to worry about people. From that time onward, I have seen in the field of OD that we have been trying to recreate or reconect this very dangerous split—between thinking that management is one set

of skills and managing the organization is another set of skills, and that you don't have to do them both simultaneously.

It's disconcerting to feel that we may have, as a profession, created this imprisonment, these chains of ownership. We may feel that because we are working for the big consulting firms we aren't empowered to speak the truth as we see it. That becomes easier as we get older for sure. I have a great need for people who come into this field to ask themselves why they are really in it. Because if you're just in it for the money, there are easier ways to earn a living, right?

I was thinking that many in the field now have a different master than they had intended. They are restricted because of economic means or the desire to have a good life, a material advantage. And that's actually the same problem that's affecting the whole world right now. We are living in a time when the systems that started out as fairly benign (or at least more reasonable) have changed. Now everything is a slave to the economy. Everything is justified now by whether it helps the economy or it doesn't help the economy. The decision question is, "Is this going to give me the income I want?"

Bob Tannenbaum

Besides income, I think power and its attainment motivates an awful lot. Really, most of the politicians keep making decisions in terms of what it takes to be reelected. So apart from money, this need to hold on to power is pretty important.

A footnote to what you've been saying: I've been increasingly aware that what we now say is relevant not only to OD practitioners, but to all of the people who are facilitators—counselors, teachers, parents, and other consultants focused on process. If we're thinking about having an influence in society, there are many other practitioners who can also be relevant. The way of being effective with others is quite similar in these diverse roles.

John Adams

When we are talking about whom we serve, or what, my service is to the highest level my spiritual practices can take me. At the present, this means focusing on the greatest good, even in the darkest corners.

Kristine Quade

I determine whom I serve from the vantage point of agreements. First, I have agreements with myself about the kind of person I am (values and beliefs). Second, I have agreements about the kind of work that I will do (principles or guidelines).

With the first two agreements, I must be as clear as possible in order to enter a conscious agreement with the client. This goes to what others have said about knowing thyself, the self is the instrument, and knowing the reason I do my work. When I am unclear about my foundation, then I will fail to optimize the service I am to provide.

Julie DiBenedetto

I believe we as OD/HSD professionals are serving the individual, community, and organizational stakeholders that comprise the human systems from which they (and we) are a part. By “serving,” I mean to help stakeholders to help themselves. Human Systems includes the word human, which implies everything associated with being human—mind, body, and spirit.

Carole Lyles Shaw

Fundamentally, I know that I serve my own values and interests. That’s why clarity and self-awareness are such critical competencies for people in the helping fields. Secondly, I serve the people who create the economic value—that is, the folks who actually do the day-to-day work in my client systems.

To that end, I serve managers—the front-line supervisor, the team leader, the executive. I truly believe that skilled and caring managers create livable work environments, and it is my life work to help each manager do that job better and, as a consequence, experience more fulfillment in his or her own life as a result. I also believe that this pathway leads to viable organizations (for-profit, non-profit, government, and others). I do not believe that every organization should last forever—they never have in human history. So my work is *not* predicated on the assumption that the leader’s work is to ensure that the organization survives.

Patty Sadallah

The “whom do we serve” question has always been two-pronged for me. There is the “client” and his or her best interests as a direct “who,” but there is also an indirect beneficiary, a broader “whom.” I choose the first very carefully and make sure that what they are about is consistent with what I am all about.

When I worked with my first non-profit client, I was totally hooked! I prefer working with client systems that really care about the mission and outcomes for their client communities. It is rewarding to work in the community development area and be able to sit back and see stronger neighborhoods and know that, in a small way, I helped.

Andrea Sigetich

I attempt to always serve the individual who has appeared in front of me. I believe that serving—I mean really serving—the individual will serve the community and, ultimately, the world.

Richard Axelrod

I believe the answer to the question about service is that we serve everyone. We serve those who are in front of us in the moment when we attend to them, and we serve those who are not there when we ask ourselves how this will impact those who are not present. We serve those whose voices are in the room when we listen attentively and those whose voices are not in the room when we bring their concerns into the conversation. We serve our self-interest when we place our values or our economic needs first and the self-interest of others as we facilitate their agendas.

We serve those in power as we help make their dreams come true and those not in power when we help make their dreams come true. We serve the whole when we take the systems view, and we serve the part when we make sure they are included in the conversation. We serve those who have come before us and those who will come after us. In the words of Martin Buber, “We serve both I and thou.”

Who we serve is a vast tapestry of clients and interests and who we serve in the moment is much like a Gestalt. And what we decide in the moment is who or what is foreground and what is background. Is our own or the client’s self-interest foreground or background? Is the whole or the part foreground or background? Are our values or the client’s values foreground or background? And it is how we answer those questions in the moment that seals our collective fate and determines who we serve and whether or not that service makes a difference.

• FREEZE FRAME

Now that you have read Chapter 1—addressing questions of identity, purpose, and service—consider your answers to the following questions before you move on to the next section.

1. Having considered the purposes that other OD professionals have talked about, how have your own thoughts about purpose evolved? Write a two-sentence description of your purpose in this field as you now see it.

2. Based on what you read about the field's identity, boundaries, overlaps, and conflicts, what would you like to learn about related fields, if anything? What do you believe professionals in this field should do to clarify the field's identity?
3. As you consider your original thoughts on whom you serve and the discussion here, how might you phrase a statement regarding whom you serve if a client asked it?
4. As you move to the next chapter—Principles in Action—consider the relationship of your purpose to your operating principles or values.

OUR STORIES

Throughout the book, we will offer brief stories of how some of the OD practitioners who participated in these conversations came to the field. This group entered the field because the values they perceived as core to this field fit with strongly held values of their own about the importance of social justice.

Bev Scott

My roots are similar to others of my generation. I came to OD from social action and social justice after working in the War on Poverty in the 1960s and being actively involved in anti-racism education in Detroit in the early 1970s. I found kindred spirits in this field who held the values of equity, participation, humane organizations, growth, and development. I also found I could apply my academic training in sociology and psychology, and I discovered the value of personal growth. The opportunity to learn about myself, to grow, and to develop insight and understanding was a special reward that I had not originally identified when I decided I wanted to “do OD.”

William Gellermann

Ever since I can remember, my purpose (although I didn't know to call it that) was to make the world a better place. OD brought me to a clearer sense of how I might do that—by facilitating the development of organizations so they might better serve their purposes. But now I have found that most publicly chartered corporations are required by their charters to serve their stockholders, and that the courts have interpreted that to

mean maximizing stockholder value in the short run. So now I'd like to join with others who are seeking to change corporate charters so they can serve all of their stakeholders, and my purpose has expanded to serving the global community. My particular focus is working with the United Nations and its network/community of human systems.

Mimi Weber

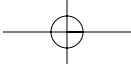
I began my career as an RN, although I had always thought about a career in education or counseling. In retrospect, the field of OD has given me the opportunity to do all the things that I love: bring healing to a situation that has created personal or organizational pain, facilitate learning and problem solving to promote personal and organizational growth, and continue on my own path of growth and development. I have always been passionate about helping others and making a difference, always wanted to work with compassion, empathy, creativity, and personal integrity. As an internal consultant, OD gives me the chance to do that on a daily basis.

Thomas C. Matera

When I first discovered OD as a coherent field that one could practice as a profession, I was searching for a way to help people improve their lives in the organizations they seemed so bound to. Today, my purpose remains the same, although I now call it seeking personal and social justice (and I don't think people are quite so "bound" to the organization as they were in 1982). There is no way to peace; peace is the way: in ourselves, in our organizations, in our culture, and in our world. I know no other profession whose incumbents so completely aspire to these achievements. That's why I got in; that's why I'm still here.

Matt Minahan

As a child of the 1960s, I was brought up to believe that I had only one job: to make the world better. I am daily aware that of the world's six billion people, 1.2 billion live on less than \$1 a day, and that less than 1 percent of our federal budget goes to aid those countries affected by drought and flood and famine and sickness. I believe we are responsible to use our health and wealth and education to help these people. We have such uncountable blessings that I believe I have no choice but to give back to those who have less. That's what drew me to the field and keeps me in it today.

**Julie A. DiBenedetto**

I chose the field of OD as a profession because I knew the world could be a better place and I was (and still am) willing to do my part to help. I believe one person does make a difference in the development of the whole! There were those who thought I was foolish to leave my “well-paying” position with “upward mobility” for the opportunity to dedicate my career to facilitating the development of human systems. Yet, I knew (and still know) this path is my life purpose as well as career purpose.

