

Chapter 7

Evidence-Based Organizational Change and Development: Role of Professional Partnership and Replication Research

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is targeted mainly toward HRD practitioners and line managers who are actively involved in bringing about effective and beneficial organizational change and development (OCD) within their own respective organizations and/or within host organizations. Its purpose is to help them to appreciate more fully the complexities of the process issues of managing change, and the value of using theory and results of rigorous internal research in a very conscious and focused way to inform, shape, and evaluate their own change agency practice. After discussing why so many OCD programs fail, the author argues that ‘evidence-based management’ and ‘evidence-based HRD’, coupled with HRD’s understanding of and alignment with the strategic thrust of the business, will likely lead to more effective OCD initiatives and programs. Several case examples of evidence-based OCD from the United Kingdom are presented, and the merits of ‘design science’, ‘professional partnership research’ and ‘replication research’ are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years or more organizations both large and small have been subjected to enormous environmental pressures, the main drivers of which have been: *Technology*, particularly IT; *Governments*, which on a worldwide basis have initiated deregulation, privatization and increasing free trade; and *Globalization*, where private sector

companies have had to compete more aggressively and public sector organizations have had to deliver more value for money services (or products) (see Barkema, Baum & Mannix, 2002; Champy & Nohria, 1996; Dess & Picken, 2000; Yukl, 2006). These pressures have resulted in mergers, acquisitions, amalgamations, decentralization, flatter structures, downsizing, multidimensional restructuring, increased flexible work practices,

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drives on quality and value, greater emphasis on customer orientation and care, and increasing stress levels at work (see, for example, Hamlin, 2001a; Gunnigle, Lavelle & Monaghan, 2013; Shook & Roth, 2011). In light of these trends of change most executives in the 21st century recognize that their respective organizations need to adapt continuously to constantly changing environments. But they tend to struggle with the transformational changes required to ensure the survival of their respective organizations, or to raise their game to substantially higher levels of performance (Rogers, Shannon & Gent, 2003). Furthermore, when they initiate required programs of organizational change and development (OCD) and look to navigating them, they rely on lower level managers to facilitate and implement the change processes. Thus, in a very real sense, most managers in most organizations are agents of change (Axley, 2000).

Stewart (2015) argues that HRD professionals are also agents of change, who operate either within their own or other organizations to help and partner with managers in the facilitation of OCD programs. Stewart claims that HRD is of itself a strategic function that has a significant impact on the long term survival and business success of organizations (see Stewart & McGoldrick, 1996; Fredericks & Stewart, 1996). Gold, Holden, Iles, Stewart and Beardwell (2009) have argued, HRD in theory and practice has a major influence on the interplay of culture, leadership, and the commitment of employees through: (i) shaping organizational culture; (ii) developing current and future leaders; (iii) building commitment among organization members; and (iv) anticipating and managing responses to changed conditions. This view is consistent with McKenzie, Garavan and Carbery's (2012) observation that "the shift from operational and tactical HRD to *strategic* HRD has witnessed a metamorphosis for HRD practitioners increasingly becoming partners in the business tasked with aligning people, strategy

and performance rather than simply promoting learning and development" (p. 354). It also chimes with Kohut and Roth's (2015) view that "HRD practitioners and scholars need to enter the fray of the discussion on change management" (p. 231).

The need to initiate and facilitate OCD programs continues to increase in frequency, pace, complexity and turbulence, and there appears to be no sign of abatement. Hence, one of the major challenges facing contemporary managers and HRD professionals is how best to help people through the transitions of change, and to survive or thrive in working environments that are in a constant state of flux. As will be discussed later in this chapter, all too often OCD programs fail because management and HRD/HRM/HR professionals fail to rise to the challenge that change brings. However, for those organizations that do manage change effectively, OCD initiatives become welcomed as opportunities for increasing efficiency and for building new organizational success. Thus, this chapter is concerned primarily with the challenges that confront managers, HRD practitioners, and other HR professionals in bringing about effective and beneficial OCD; it is also with the practical contribution that management and HRD research can make to the efficacy of their respective change agency endeavors.

The specific purpose and objectives of the chapter can be summarized as follows:

- I. To outline the extent to which OCD programs fail and why they fail.
- II. To argue the case that managers and HRD practitioners operating specifically as change agents should adopt an evidence-based approach.
- III. To outline certain relevant obstacles to 'evidence-based OCD', and illustrate how these might be overcome through pragmatic HRD 'professional partnership research' and 'replication (empirical generalization) research' respectively.

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