Chapter 2
Evidence-Based Organizational Change and Development:
Organizational Understanding, Analysis, and Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

The chapter first provides an overview of "best practice" and conventional "received wisdom" relating to OCD and emphasizes the importance of adopting more evidence-based approaches to develop in-depth understanding of the organization prior to planning and instigating an OCD initiative. The authors then discuss a range of historical and contemporary theoretical perspectives for analyzing and making sense of the interacting relationships between an organization's structure, function, and culture, and of the complexities, contradictions, and paradoxes of organizational life. Additionally, they identify various approaches, tools, techniques, and desirable attributes, competencies, and political skills for developing and evaluating the effectiveness of EBOCD strategies and change agency practice.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides in the first instance an overview of 'best practice' and 'received wisdom' relating to organizational change and development (OCD) as reported in the management literature over the past three decades or so. It then draws attention to various insights concerning how best to bring about change successfully based on examples of more recent theory and practice. And finally it discusses some of the realities of modern day organizational life that challenge the role of the evidence-based organizational change and development (EBOCD) practitioner (change agent).

The change agent's role is complicated because of the complexities, contradictions and paradoxes of organizational life (Hamlin, 2001; Hatton, 2001) and the 'complexity and creativity in organizations' (Stacey, 1996a; 2011). This role includes the need: (i) to understand the organization and make sense of the organizational dynamics taking place; (ii) to develop appropriate OCD strategies; (iii) to implement them effectively; and (iv) to assess how effective the strategies have been in execution. Additionally, change agents need to spend time critically evaluating the effectiveness of their own change agency so as to draw lessons for the future (Cummings & Worley, 2014; Hamlin, Keep & Ash, 2001; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009). As argued by Hamlin and Davies (2001), "organizations and people employed in them are more complex than is often implied by much of the management literature, and that 'solutions' to organizational change 'problems' are also more difficult to grasp than many 'experts' imply" (p.39). Besides selecting carefully the theoretical/philosphical approaches to be used in formulating their OCD initiatives and programs, change agents need to build in sufficient time for evaluation and critical reflection. It is through such evaluation and reflection that (i) new insights can be gained to explain why certain aspects of the formulation and implementation of OCD strategies either succeed or fail; and (ii) new ways of approaching change agency problems may emerge through new approaches and models of change being developed as a result of the lessons learned. As argued in Chapter 1, engaging in 'critically reflective' as well as 'evidence-based' practice should become an essential feature of managing/facilitating change programs.

Over 30 years ago Morgan (1988), reflecting on the *emerging waves* and *challenges of change* that confront organizations and the need for new competencies and mind sets, suggested that one of the challenges for managers is to *create semi-permanent order* out of the environmental turbulence impacting on organizations. Handy (2002) also drew attention to the major problems that organizations would need to deal with as a result of what he called the increasing discontinuities in organizational environments. What these futurists foresaw has indeed become a present day reality for many if not most organizations. As Buchanan and Badham (2008) assert, organizational change, innovation, revolution, and discontinuity are the norm in the 21st century.

THE CHALLENGE FOR EBOCD PRACTITIONERS

As already implied, this chapter aims to emphasize for line managers, and for those various stakeholders such as colleague HRD professional practitioners, external OD professionals, management consultants, and/or executive coaches who support them in their role as change leader or change agent, that the quality of their decisions concerning the effective management of change will increasingly be of crucial importance within the context of rapidly changing organizational environments. We suggest that a fuller understanding of their role as change agents requires them to adopt a stance, if they have not already done so, which can be best understood as that of the 'critically reflective, research-informed/evidence-based practitioner' (see Hamlin, 2002: 2007). This means becoming familiar with or extending their knowledge of current theory and research concerning strategic thinking, organizational change, organization development and the role of the evidence-based change agent, and then using their understanding to inform and subsequently critically reflect upon and evaluate their change agency practice (Hamlin, 2016; Hamlin & Davies, 2001).

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