In support of research-based organisation change and development through professional partnerships

by Bob Hamlin, Fiona Campbell, Margaret Reidy & Jim Stewart

Occasional Paper Series 1999

Bob Hamlin
Principal Lecturer
University of Wolverhampton, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 1902 323695
Fax: +44 (0) 1902 323755
Email: R.G.Hamlin@wlv.ac.uk

Fiona Campbell
Research Assistant
University of Wolverhampton, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 1902 321651
Fax: +44 (0) 1902 321777
Email: ex1371@wlv.ac.uk

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Management Research Centre
Wolverhampton Business School
Telford, Shropshire TF2 9NT
☎01902 321772 Fax 01902 321777

The Occasional Paper Series is edited by Kate Gilbert

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Abstract

This paper provides a review and synthesis of current practice in the field of Organisation Change and Development (OCD). Five key 'failings' of managers contributing to the low success rate of OCD programmes are identified. To overcome these 'failings' a case is made for more evidence and research - based OCD practice, particularly OD initiatives informed and shaped by organisationally based research facilitated through 'university-organisation' professional partnerships of the kind advocated by Jacobs (1997). A framework conceptualising OCD Professional Partnerships is presented. This suggests an integrative and cyclical process connecting OCD research and consultancy which follow a similar sequence of stages with outcomes that are mutually beneficial and reinforcing. A UK example of an OCD Professional Partnership set within one part of the British Civil Service is presented which demonstrates how OCD practice can be profoundly influenced and enhanced by academically rigorous internal research. This is compared against a USA example set within a municipal government department. A number of common lessons are drawn of relevance to OCD practitioners and organisational leaders concerned with strategic change issues.

The authors

Bob Hamlin

Bob Hamlin is a Principal Lecturer in Human Resource Development and Divisional Manager of the People, Organisation and Management Division within Wolverhampton Business School. His major research interest is management effectiveness.

Fiona Campbell

Fiona Campbell is currently working as a researcher in the Management Research Centre of Wolverhampton Business School. This paper is based on the findings of her PhD. Current projects involve investigations into managerial effectiveness and behavioural competency models and their application in the public sector and measurement of employee attitudes in organisations experiencing change. However, her main research interest remains within the effects of downsizing and redundancy, and the management of change in UK organisations.

Margaret Reidy

Margaret Reidy is Research Officer, HMCE, Nottingham Trent University. Her current major research interest is cultural change within the British Civil Service.

Jim Stewart

Jim Stewart is Reader in Human Resource Development at Nottingham Trent University and Books Reviews Editor for the Journal of Applied Management Studies. His main research interests are in management effectiveness, the application and use of National Vocational Qualifications and the meaning and practice of HRD.

In support of research-based organisation change and development through professional partnerships

Introduction

This paper strongly supports the case for more research informed practice within the field of Organisation Change and Development (OCD). It is our contention that generally Organisation Development (OD) , which we identify as a major specialism within the field of Human Resource Development (HRD) as defined by, for example McLagan (1989) and Swanson (1995) in the USA and the University Forum for HRD in the UK (See Hamlin et al, 1998), lacks a sound and sufficient empirical base, and that a gap exists between research and practice. This 'lack' or 'gap' has constrained if not prevented OD practitioners from maximising their impact and contribution to organisational effectiveness and the gap needs to be bridged. To this end we argue the case for more collaborative effort between OD academics and OD practitioners whether managers, trainers, developers or outside OD consultants. In particular we contend that 'professional partnerships' of the kind advocated by Jacobs (1997) and supported by Hamlin et al (1998), can be particularly effective in generating relevant, robust and rigorous research which leads to enhanced 'expert' OD practice that is more likely to bring about beneficial as opposed to detrimental organisational change. We offer a 'framework' to illustrate the concept of 'professional partnerships' and discuss the benefits of such 'partnerships' based on practical examples drawn from our own experience.

The need for research-based OCD practice

It is undoubtedly true that a majority of OCD programmes fail, as has been reported in both the British and American literatures. Evidence suggests the majority of 'downsizing' and 'delayering' exercises are unsuccessful with few ever achieving the aimed for goals of increased competitiveness and profitability (see Howard, 1996; Wyatt, 1994; de Meuse et al, 1994 and Hussey, 1997). Furthermore the majority of TQM and BPR programmes, both in America and Western Europe appear also to be unsuccessful with 50% to 70% failing to yield the required improvements or benefits claimed (see Schaffer & Thomson, 1992; Hammer & Champney,1993, Kearney, 1994; Hamel & Prahalad, 1994; Wilkinson et al, 1993; Coulson Thomas, 1996 and Nelson & Coxhead, 1997). Regarding culture change the situation is even more bleak with the failure rate running at over 80% in the UK (IRS,1997). Additionally research suggests that many organisation change initiatives fail badly, resulting in unintended consequences that seriously damage organisations and the people within them. For example, Marks (1994), commenting from a USA perspective, argues that the prevailing rapid pace and massive scope of organisational change, whether caused by mergers, acquisitions, corporate rationalisations, delayering, TQM, BPR, or downsizing, has increasingly taken its psychological toll, not least on those employees who emerge as 'survivors' of the turmoil. In particular he refers to the 'wrenching experiences' that are often badly handled by top management who tend not to get involved, but instead invariably leave it to ill equipped middle managers and supervisors. Also to the 'psychological reactions to the transitions' which lead to the survivors feeling guilty, fearful, suspicious, cynical and demoralised; to the various adverse 'behavioural reactions' that lead to employee alienation and psychological withdrawal; and to the 'business consequences' of unintended increases in retraining costs and use of temporary workers, of the loss of the wrong people and of the enforced contracting out of key functions.

From their research findings in the UK, Worrall and Cooper (1997 & 1998) have revealed strong evidence that the objectives which drive many organisational change programmes are not achieved, that in many cases the change process has strongly negative effects on employee loyalty, motivation, morale, and sense of job security, plus many other unintended human consequences similar to those reported by Marks which damage the quality of working life. As a recent report from the Roffey Park Management Institute claims:

> *The danger of badly handled mergers is that people employers want to keep, become
> disaffected and leave. Also failure to manage the people dimension risks disruption, mistrust,
> political infighting, a legacy of bad feeling, the loss of key employees and a negative impact on
> business performance.*
>
> <div align="right">(Devine & Hirsh, 1998)</div>

From the weight of this evidence we conclude that the process issues associated with organisational
change are far more complex and difficult to manage successfully than is often supposed, and that
generally managers are insufficiently skilled in the area of change management.

Why organisational change & development programmes fail

That such a high proportion of OCD programmes fail is somewhat surprising bearing in mind the
plethora of 'best practice' advice and guidance in the management literature on 'how to' manage
change effectively.

Evidence suggests that in organisations where change initiatives fail these follow a predictable pattern
(Bulletpoint for the Theory Manager, 1998). This typically starts with top management announcing a
new corporate change initiative, quickly followed by a series of short, company wide
communication/training events to bring every body 'up to speed', the setting up of cross functional
committees to discuss 'the way forward', and then the subsequent re-allocation and re-arrangement of
resources. However, through this process the organisation and its management lose focus which leads
to loss of momentum and resources. The change then fails. Causes of failure can be many and varied
but the vast majority appear to come from within the organisation itself.

Most appear to stem from a general lack of change agency expertise not only on the part of managers,
but also of trainers, developers and OD practitioners. In particular, it appears managers tend not to
take heed of the 'received wisdom', or follow ' best practice' approaches to the effective management
of change. Although most if not all managing change models promoted in the management literature
are basically sound and have high face validity, in many cases the simplified diagrammatic/summary
formats of the models can appear overly simplistic and just plain common sense. Herein lies what we
consider to be a potential weakness of change management 'models' and 'prescriptions'; namely that
they are subject to over simplification. This can lead to the 'skipping of important steps' and a lack of
rigour in the application of change management models. It is suggested these weaknesses or
omissions most likely come about as a result of a lack of change agency expertise of various kinds,
particularly on the part of line managers. We suggest these weaknesses are exacerbated by one or
more of the following five 'failings' in facilitating and managing organisational change

Failing 1: Managers Not Knowing the Fundamental Principles of Change Management

Complacency and ignorance appear to be two of the most significant factors that contribute to the
failure of organisational change programmes (see for example, Hammer & Stanton, (1995)
commenting upon the situation in the USA and the Royal Society of Arts (1995) report on 'The Role
of Business in a Changing World' relating to the UK context).

Failing 2: Managers Succumbing to the Temptations of the 'Quick-Fix' and 'Simple Solutions'

The management literature contains much anecdotal and research-based evidence of this 'failing'.
Attention is drawn particularly to the writings of Kilman(1989); Hussey (1996); Kotter (1996) and
Gamblin (1997).

Failing 3: Managers Not Fully Appreciating the Significance of the Leadership and Cultural Aspects of Change

Beckhard and Pritchard (1992) discuss in some detail the interdependence of what many expert commentators regard as being the three most important factors in a fully functioning organisation, namely, 'leadership', 'culture', and 'the management of change'. Other writers, including Hammer & Stanton (1995), Warrick (1995) and Kotter (1996) commenting from an American perspective, have demonstrated that failing to give sufficient attention to the 'leadership' and 'cultural' factors lead to failure. UK and European based examples of major transformational change programme failures due to a lack of attention to the cultural issues have been well documented by, for example Brooks & Bate(1994), Boonstra & Vink (1996) and the Industrial Relations Service (1997).

Failing 4: Managers Not Appreciating Sufficiently the Significance of the People Issues

This can be inferred from the range of undesired, unintended and damaging consequences resulting from badly implemented OCD programmes as revealed by the work of Marks (1994) and Worrall & Cooper (1997 & 1998). Other evidence of this failing is provided by, for example, Hammer & Stanton (1995), Alexander (1991) and Hussey (1996), and by Devine & Hirsh (1998).

Failing 5: Managers Not Knowing the Critical Contribution that the Human Resource Development (HRD) Function Can Make to the Successful Management of Change

Of the five managerial 'omissions' or 'failings' on the part of managers the one of greatest concern in our view is their failure to use HRD to best effect as a tool for managing change. Unfortunately many managers appear to see HRD only in terms of high cost training courses or long term qualification programmes. An associated view is that HRD is an unnecessary expenditure that can only be afforded when profits or funding are plentiful, rather than as an essential investment that organisations can ill afford not to make even in the toughest of times, especially during periods of organisational change. As we have demonstrated, change can lead to either beneficial or detrimental outcomes. We would argue that the scale and nature of the HRD effort incorporated into programmes of OCD will significantly affect the outcomes achieved. This argument is illustrated in Figure 1.
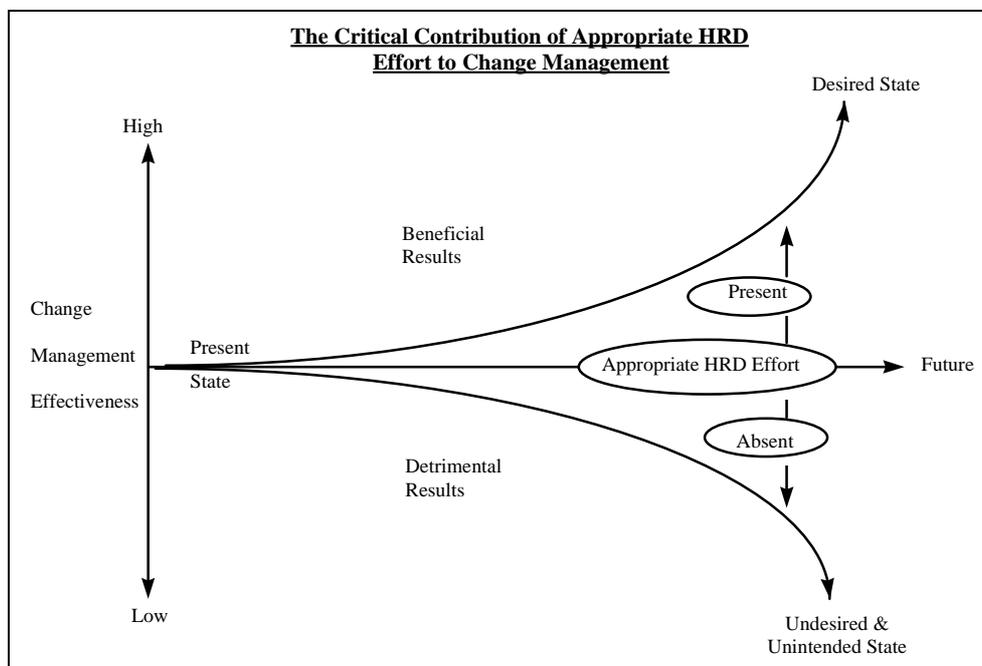

Figure 1. The critical contribution of appropriate HRD effort to change management

Unfortunately, the failure to incorporate appropriate HRD effort into many change management programmes comes about because of how trainers and developers are perceived by line managers, and how they perceive themselves. Historically most have operated in roles and positions widely considered of 'lower status' than those of other functional specialists in, for example, Finance or Marketing. Generally they have lacked 'credibility' in the eyes of line managers which has not been helped by being part of Personnel Departments that have also lacked credibility due to the dominant focus of HRM professionals on administration (Hussey, 1997; Herriot, 1998; and West & Patterson, 1998). Furthermore, as Ulrich(1997) points out, for too long the HR function "has been plagued by old myths that have kept it from being a 'profession'. This has resulted in "line managers placing uniformly low expectations upon the function" and hence on HRM and HRD practitioners. Consequently comparatively few in-company trainers have gained access to top management, or been in positions of significant strategic influence. However, in many cases the constraints or barriers experienced have been self induced due to their own narrow understanding of HRD. Many trainers see the function as being concerned primarily with the provision of training and development, and themselves mainly as direct trainers, instructors, providers and administrators. Not as strategic organisational facilitators, change agents and internal OD consultants. For over a decade calls have been made in the UK for trainers to become more managerial and consultant like in orientation and practice, and to develop themselves for roles with strategic influence (Coopers & Lybrand, 1985; Barnham, Fraser & Heath, 1988; Phillips & Shaw, 1989; and Stewart & Hamlin,1990). But it has only been in most recent times that the Institute of Personnel and Development (IPD) has given full recognition and support to this need (See Harrison, 1997). Similarly HRD practice in the USA has only recently entered a state of transition, moving from learning to a performance paradigm (Bassi et al 1996). As Holton et al (1998) observe, "if HRD is to be respected it needs to position itself as a strategic partner with line managers and achieve the same level of importance as traditional core organisational processes such as finance, production and marketing. They argue a 'performance improvement approach' will enable HRD to become a strategic partner, and that this is best accomplished through consulting partnerships with line managers of the kind advocated by Robinson and Robinson (1995).

Additionally Ulrich (1997) argues that in light of the new competitive realities, HR professionals in general 'must focus more on the deliverables of their work than on doing it better if they are to face up effectively to the next agenda for competitiveness'. To this end they need 'to become a strategic partner with line managers, an administrative expert, an employee champion and a change agent'.

However, in our view, the majority of trainers, developers and other HR professionals will continue to find themselves operating at the margins of organisational life unless, that is, they improve their 'credibility' in the eyes of line managers, and unless the five OCD 'omissions' and 'failings' of managers indicated above can also be overcome.

Unfortunately, traditional approaches to manager and management training and development do not adequately address these 'failings'. We have demonstrated elsewhere that much management development that organisations invest in, both off the job and on the job, is not successful (See Hamlin and Stewart, 1998). We have shown that this is due in part to a general lack of empirical research into the every day 'practical realities of managerial life' and the 'particularities' of effective and ineffective management applying within British organisations, not least in the area of bringing about beneficial organisational change. We suspect much management training and development in the USA also lacks a sound and sufficient empirical base, and relies too heavily on the views of classical theorists and modern day management 'gurus'.

We suggest the management climate in many organisations is not conducive for trainers and developers to operate strategically as internal change agents, OD consultants or research-based HRD practitioners. Hence this precludes the development of appropriate management development initiatives that could, perhaps, help managers to overcome their 'failings'. There appears to us to be a 'vicious circle' in play where the five OCD 'failings' of managers contribute to the 'credibility'

problems of HRD and OD practitioners, which in turn lead to a lack of 'appropriate' HRD or OD effort incorporated into OCD programmes, which then fail to question the 'appropriateness' of management development programmes offered to managers. These programmes then fail to address and overcome the five particular OCD 'failings' of managers and so the 'vicious circle' goes on as illustrated in Figure 2. At the heart of this is a perceived lack of sufficient evidence and research-based professional practice on the part both of line managers, trainers, developers, and other HR professionals.
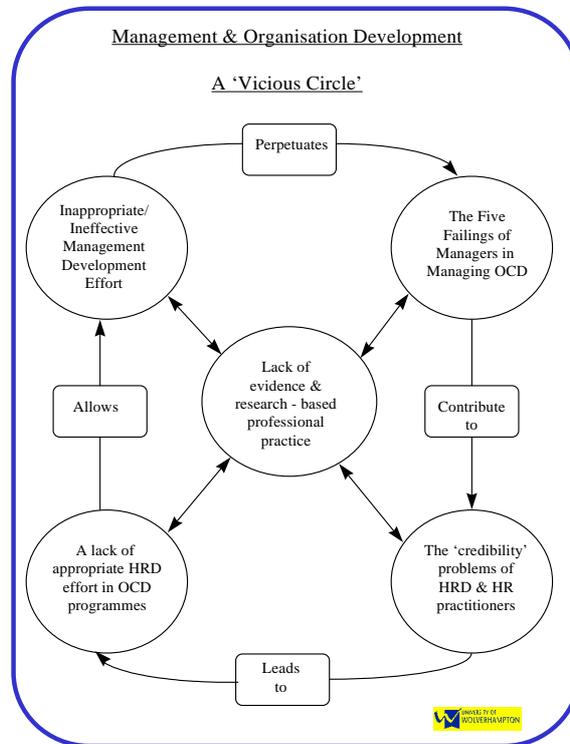

Management & Organisation Development

A 'Vicious Circle'

Perpetuates

Inappropriate/ Ineffective Management Development Effort

The Five Failings of Managers in Managing OCD

Lack of evidence & research - based professional practice

Allows

Contribute to

A lack of appropriate HRD effort in OCD programmes

The 'credibility' problems of HRD & HR practitioners

Leads to

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Figure 2. Management & organisation development a 'vicious circle'

Yet OD and HRD practitioners can make pivotal contributions in helping line managers bring about beneficial organisational change when allowed to do so (Warrick, 1995). But trainers and developers need to 'sell' their services to managers and it behoves managers to update their understanding of modern day OD/HRD theory and practice. They need to be prepared to include OD/HRD practitioners as members of the 'coalition' of change agents responsible for leading and managing organisational change programmes. Both need to strive harder to work together in collaborative partnership to ensure maximum success. This means they need personally to become more skilled in handling the process issues of change; more expert as change agents; and also more cognisant of the critical and interdependent contributions each should or could make towards the successful and beneficial management of change.

However, in our view, the task of the change agent is far more complicated than is often anticipated. This is due to the fact that modern day organisations and the people within them are far more complex than what is frequently inferred from much of the management literature, and that 'solutions' to organisational change 'problems' are also more difficult to grasp than many 'experts' imply. Hence change agents need to be very selective in the 'theoretical approaches they use to inform and shape their practice, but they need also to build into their organisational change and development programmes sufficient time for review and reflection. From such reflection new theoretical insights can be gained as to why particular aspects of change programmes either succeed or fail. Also, new ways of approaching the problems of change will emerge through the development of new 'theories' informed by the change agents own professional practice.

It is our view that to assure maximum success, evidence and research-based practice needs to become an essential feature of the process of managing organisational change and development. The practical importance of internal/in-company research cannot be over estimated. Conducting internal research is a process which can help make change occur. It can, when conducted with appropriate academic rigour, lead to deep seated fundamental issues concerning the effective functioning of the organisation being brought to the surface and being confronted. For example those aspects of managerial behaviour or management   culture which impede or block organisational change and innovation. In company research which is acknowledged as being rigorous, relevant, robust and ethical, and which 'strikes a chord' inside the organisation, enables people to admit, in public, ineffective as well as effective features of organisational life, including their own performance or behavioural deficiencies or inadequacies (see Hamlin, Reidy and Stewart, 1997). They will also more likely advance personal 'theories' reactions and opinions which otherwise would not be revealed. Being able to think and act like an academic researcher gives the practitioner, whether manager or developer, the additional skills and disciplines required to be a true expert in their own field of change agency practice. This implies having the capability to obtain consistently the results required by the organisation rather than getting lost in the processes of organisational change and development.

We advocate strongly that managers, trainers and developers should use sound research to inform and shape their practice as change agents, and to measure their own effectiveness in this role. As Quirke (1995) observes, "*the use of internal research as an instrument on the corporate dashboard*" provides "*continual feedback that allows greater responsiveness*" and helps "*to speed up the changing behaviour within organisations*". Furthermore, as Heracleous & DeVoge (1998) claim, research informed OD can help to 'provide crucial clarity to management on the strategic objectives (of organisational change)' and on the critical success factors (CSF) linked with each objective. Also on the actions required to achieve each CSF, which thereby eliminate unrelated and wasteful change initiatives, and lead to more effective and efficient change management.

However, the question needs to be asked, how might this become a commonplace feature of OCD practice particularly in the area of strategic organisational change? This brings us to our proposition that OCD collaborations and partnerships between OCD academics and practitioners will lead to the production of robust and rigorous internal research, capable of providing the empirical base necessary to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the OCD effort.

Based on our experience, we believe active engagement with internal research by OCD practitioners, preferably in collaboration with OCD academics to reinforce the academic rigour, is a vital requirement in the field of OCD practice. The key point of our proposition is that OCD collaborative partnerships, involving support from top management, can lead to a strong empirical base of evidence that will enhance significantly the relevance and effectiveness of OCD practice.

In the USA Swanson(1997) has advocated recently that HRD professionals should "*advance their professional practice by becoming truly expert practitioners*" through what he calls "*backyard research*" because, as he claims, "*HRD void of operating principles, theories and good research to guide the HRD effort leads to poor professional practice and undermines the whole credibility of HRD"*. Jacobs (1997) has argued that "*the HRD field depends on research being considered an essential counterpart to practice, not an optional activity when convenient nor an extravagance when financially possible*", and strongly advocates HRD collaborations between organisations and universities. However, these should be 'professional partnerships' in which the 'partners' recognise that HRD scholars and HRD practitioners enter such partnerships with their own respective goals, that although these may differ they will complement each other, and that maintaining the integrity of the goals for the common good is important. Thus, in 'HRD professional partnerships' , there is a dual goal to advance the HRD field and improve the organisation through the findings and application of rigorous internal research. From our experience HRD and OCD professional partnerships can provide

the means for closing or bridging the research-practice gap which, by so doing, increases the chances of improving the 'success rate' of strategic change initiatives.

Building upon the ideas of Jacobs, and also a number of tentative ideas generated by a group of OD/HRD academics and practitioners attending the UK based University Forum for HRD 1997 Annual Conference, one of us has devised a 'conceptual framework' to illustrate the connection between 'OCD professional partnerships' and the 'OCD research-practice gap', as shown in Figure. 3
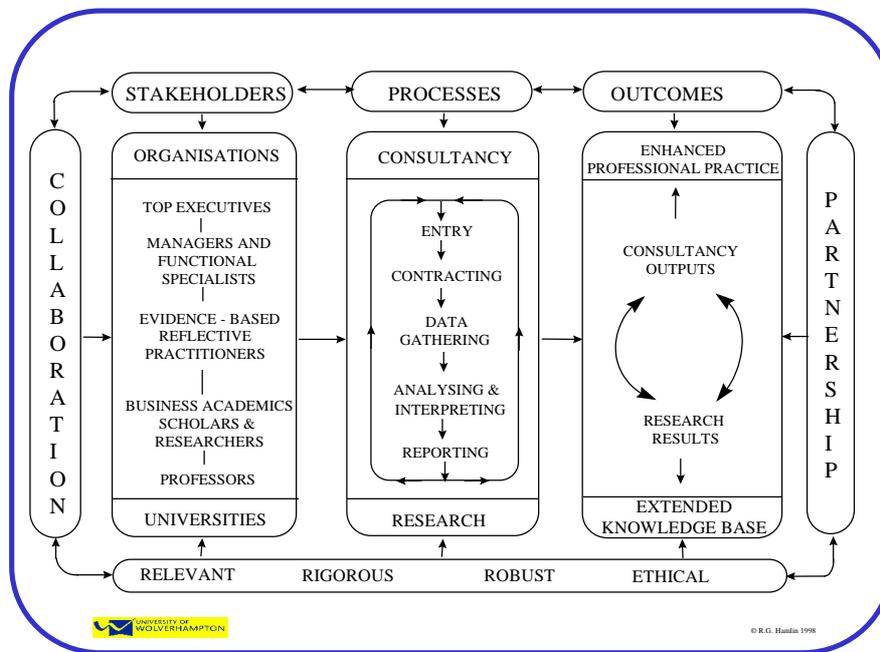
Figure 3. Closing or bridging the OCD research-practice gap through OCD professional partnerships

Attention is drawn to what we identify as the cyclical nature of the processes for conducting internal OCD research and OCD consultancy. These are similar, follow a 'common' sequence of stages, and produce outcomes that are mutually reinforcing. Hence internal research generated through OCD professional partnerships is used to inform, shape and enhance professional practice, whilst at the same time certain outputs from the OCD consultancy can be fed into research and also contribute to the advancement of the OCD field. But only if both the research and the consultancy practice are sufficiently relevant, robust, rigorous and ethical.

To illustrate the benefits of applying this 'conceptual framework' in practice we provide below a case study example of an OCD professional partnership with which three of us have been associated in HM Customs & Excise which is a Department of the British Civil Service.

Case study example: HM Customs & Excise (Anglia Region)

This OCD professional partnership was set within the Anglia Region of HM Customs & Excise (HMCE), one of fourteen Executive Units comprising HMCE within the UK. The partners in this instance included Dick Shepherd, the Regional Head of 'Anglia', Margaret Reidy his internal Research Officer/ OD consultant, and Bob Hamlin and Jim Stewart who are OCD academics/practitioners at the University of Wolverhampton and the Nottingham Trent University respectively.

The aim of the 'partnership' was to help bring about radical change in the management culture of the organisation through OD/HRD initiatives based on the findings of rigorous internal academic research. The research programme included, amongst others, an extensive 'ethnographic' longitudinal

case study on the changing culture of the organisation with its inherent attitudes and behaviours. It also comprised a complementary 'empirical' research study into the criteria of managerial   and leadership effectiveness using critical incident technique and statistical analytic methods for processing the data, namely factor analysis.

The 'partnership' comprised two strands, the one concerned with the 'ethnographic' research,   the other with the 'empirical'.   The 'ethnographic' research became coincidentally the focus of an Ph.D/M.Phil study programme undertaken by Margaret Reidy who had the full support of her manager, Dick Shepherd , with Jim Stewart as her Director of Studies. However, besides acting as a 'research supervisor' to Margaret Reidy, Jim Stewart also operated in an 'advisory' and 'sounding board' capacity to Dick Shepherd, particularly regarding the application of the research findings. Hence this strand of the 'partnership' was partly contractual for the doctoral studies component, and non-contractual for all of the other aspects.   In essence the 'student/supervisor' and 'consultancy' relationships, in combination, bore the characteristics of the OCD professional partnership as articulated by Jacobs. The 'empirical' strand to the 'partnership' differed from the 'ethnographic' strand in that it was wholly voluntary and non-contractual on the part of the OCD academic, Bob Hamlin, with each partner entering the 'partnership' with quite different yet complementary goals. It should be mentioned that in the ' Anglia partnership' the internal OD practitioner, Margaret Reidy, carried out most of the field research.

At the time of his appointment as Regional Head of 'Anglia' in 1991, Dick Shepherd found himself in a region which, whilst productive, was working with a predominant 'command and control' style of management.   However, to reflect the changing organisational environment where year on year demands to deliver more for less were being made by the Department, the management style needed to be changed. Furthermore, to cope effectively with the various change programmes he anticipated would be imposed 'top down' from above, and those he intended initiating himself, he concluded a new cultural infrastructure was required. One comprising cultural characteristics such as 'flexibility', 'risk-taking', 'enterprise' and 'innovation', as opposed to the prevailing traditional culture of the British Civil Service. Having set out his expectations clearly to the organisation, and having encouraged his managers to adopt a more open style of management, he found that change was slow to happen due to the effects of 'cultural lag', a term first coined by Bate (1996). He realised he needed to understand better the resilient but no longer relevant culture of his organisation so as to know how best to change it. Hence he commissioned an ethnographic longitudinal research study from Margaret Reidy on culture and cultural change which was designed to help inform, shape and measure the changes he had set his mind to bring about. In the main his early change initiatives were a success in terms of changing the organisational structure. These included a major 'de-layering' exercise, plus changes in systems and procedures to improve, for example, the effectiveness of the organisations' communications.   However, the desired changes in the management culture were only partially achieved, as revealed by the ethnographic study.   A large proportion of managers persisted in managing in the traditional ways of the Civil Service.

Hence at the beginning of 1995, Dick Shepherd decided he needed to address further the issue of changing the management culture. But he felt he needed to understand better, and be convinced about, those particular managerial behaviours that were proving to be particularly effective for managing successfully within the changing organisation, and therefore were in need of encouragement and promotion. Conversely, also those behaviours that were least effective and needed to be discouraged or eliminated. Furthermore, he and Margaret Reidy were curious to know whether a different research methodology would substantiate the longitudinal 'ethnographic' research findings. Hence a second strand of the OCD professional partnership was formed with Bob Hamlin, focusing on a complementary 'empirical' research programme into managerial and leadership effectiveness within 'Anglia' using the critical incident technique and statistical analytic methods for processing the data, namely factor analysis. This latter research, and its application to inform and shape the range of OD/HRD interventions used to bring about significant change in the management culture of 'Anglia', has been published in some detail elsewhere (Hamlin & Reidy,1997 , Hamlin,

Reidy & Stewart, 1997 and 1998). In summary, the initial 'management effectiveness' research revealed six 'positive' criteria relating to managerial effectiveness, and twelve 'negative' criteria relating to managerial ineffectiveness as applying within 'Anglia'. These are shown in Figure 4.

✔ **'Positive' Criteria**

Effective Management

- Empowering/communicating widely
- Proactive team leadership
- Proactive management

- Supportive/participative leadership
- Active development of others
- Managing change

✘ **'Negative' Criteria**

Ineffective Management

- Exhibiting 'gradist' behaviour
- Narrow/parochial behaviour
- Lack of emotional control
- Entrenched management thinking
- Being deliberately obstructive
- Lack of concern/consideration for individuals and the organisation

- Autocratic/dictatorial leadership
- Manipulative behaviour
- Irrational management
- Depriving individuals of support
- Passing the buck to others
- Ignoring/overriding the needs of others

Figure 4. Criteria of managerial effectiveness within 'Anglia'

The above criteria are rich and robust in that they are underpinned by behavioural statements which are relevant in terms of the inherent language and culture of 'Anglia', and have been piloted and tested through a number of diverse tools.

A further research study was carried out focusing specifically on team leaders with the purpose of identifying criteria of leadership effectiveness. It was based on twenty of the 'positive' leadership-specific behavioural statements obtained from the management effectiveness research, and used the same data processing methods. The identified leadership effectiveness criteria were as follows:- 'empowering people'; 'providing help'; 'creating a supportive climate'; 'providing expert advice and professional support to people'; 'developing self and others'; 'enabling involvement and participation in decision making' 'encouraging self reliance in problem solving'; 'promoting open and honest communications'; 'adopting and promoting a corporate approach', and 'building and developing effective teams and teamwork'. (See Hamlin, Reidy and Stewart, 1998).

The preliminary findings from the critical incident stage of the initial management effectiveness research were first presented by Dick Shepherd to his managers at his 1995 Annual Management Conference. The results were well received with people admitting that the identified behaviours did exist. These were then discussed in syndicate workshops with some of the revealed behavioural problems being addressed. Various managers and team leaders carried the results back to their offices, and ran similar workshops with their own people in order to address those problem issues affecting them. Subsequent monitoring of the culture changes that had taken place as a result of the research-based OD interventions revealed marked increases in the incidence of 'positive' managerial behaviours, and reductions in the 'negative'. However, many problems remained with certain managers still exhibiting attitudes and behaviours associated with ineffective management as defined by the 'negative' criteria. Hence it was concluded additional effort was required to effect further change in the management culture. The reasons why the initial findings had not had a bigger impact was that some people did not relate the 'negative' behaviours to themselves, although they accepted

that in general such behaviours were a major problem for the organisation. The strict codes of confidentiality and anonymity as applied when conducting the research meant none of the observed critical incidents and behaviours reported in the findings were attributed to any persons in particular. Hence it was too easy for people to believe that other managers elsewhere in the organisation were the ones exhibiting the negative behaviours. Some managers were obviously reluctant to analyse their own behaviours in relation to the research findings. This created a barrier to further cultural change. Therefore a different approach was needed that would encourage and enable managers and team leaders in the organisation to relate the 'positive' and 'negative' criteria to their own behaviours. The approach used was based on the concepts of 'self analysis', '360 degree feedback' and 'action learning', using a range of 'framework tools' focusing on different 'criteria' and 'problem issues' identified by the management and leadership effectiveness research. Team-effectiveness workshops were set up for particular team leaders (managers) and their respective teams, and these were facilitated initially with the help of Margaret Reidy. Through the process of action learning, participants at the workshops were helped to translate and transfer to themselves not only the positive findings of the research, but also the negative findings that required personal remedial action as revealed by the 360 degree feedback process. The 'negative' criteria tended to have a wide ranging and lasting impact and became an invaluable learning tool. This 'team effectiveness/action learning' workshop approach enabled people to obtain feedback from colleagues without risk of compromising their positions or relationships within the organisation. It allowed them to work through problems in a supportive climate and learn from them, and led to meaningful change on a individual, team and organisational level. Subsequent workshops have since become self generating and self facilitating.

The research-based OCD practice outlined above has been highly successful in engaging the active interest and commitment of 'Anglia' people to the process of strategic change. Managers have gone much further in their thinking than has been the case with previous organisational change programmes. Whereas in the past 'Anglia' people had not always responded well to certain organisational change initiatives, particularly those involving consultants using external research or adapted 'off the shelf' OD instruments that failed to 'ring true', in this case they were willing to move forward with cultural change brought about through the strategically led research-based OD/HRD interventions initiated by Dick Shepherd. This was because the internal research findings presented an accurate picture of the actual realities of managerial life as it existed, and also 'struck a chord' with people. But we believe the perceived value of this research-based OCD practice stems particularly from the attributes of the research resulting from the 'Anglia' OCD professional partnership, namely its 'academic rigour and credentials', the 'strict codes of anonymity and confidentiality' that were applied, its 'relevancy' and the 'sense of ownership' it engendered. In the case of the 'Anglia' cultural change programme the contribution of the internal research was pivotal and of crucial importance. As Dick Shepherd says, "it was of enormous value in bringing about the culture change, and gave me the confidence and courage to proceed with the change programme".

The current case study holds several similarities to the work conducted by Holton, Redman, Edwards and Fairchild (1998) in the USA. Holton et al. (1998) describes an Enterprise Project created through an effective partnership between a government civil services division and Louisiana State University (LSU). The aim of the project was to develop a strategic plan to implement new practices in city HRD programmes. As with the current case study, the Enterprise Project formed a win-win partnership between LSU and the department Baton Rouge Quality and Employment Development (QED). The partnership provided an important source of expertise for the HRD practitioners and also offered a 'real-world laboratory' in which the LSU could test emerging models and theory. A secondary benefit recognised by QED was that 'outsiders' would challenge their thinking and push them to make fundamental changes if necessary.

Holton et al's (1998) study utilised an action research approach whereby the process was focused on a particular organisational problem. Using an emergent process of orientation, agenda setting, benchmarking, theoretical grounding, planning and evaluation the combined team of practitioners and academics moved QED to advanced HRD practice. Although, the methodologies used by Holton et al

(1998) were significantly different to the current case study, the parity is clear. The collaborative elements of experience in the field and theoretical knowledge allowed both organisations (Anglia and QED) to move forward through significant organisational change processes, thus enabling them to overcome previously culturally bound problems and restrictions. Both partnerships have also led to increased understanding of particular models and theory, and enabled broader and more long term relationships to be established between research and practice.

Conclusions

We believe several lessons of particular relevance to OCD practitioners and academics can be drawn from the experience outlined above. In our view, strategically led research-based HRD needs to be a central plank of any strategy for bringing about beneficial strategic change' However, this is unlikely to become commonplace if most OD/HRD practitioners remain operatively constrained at the margins of the organisation, rather than at its centre. The question is, how might OD/HRD people become centre piece players on the organisational stage? Certainly this will not happen unless and until managers overcome the five OCD 'failings' discussed earlier, and unless and until OD/HRD people increase significantly their competence and credibility. Herein lies a major challenge for OCD professors and academics who could and should be making key contributions towards such developments by, for example:

1. Ensuring managers who study for MBAs offered by their business schools fully understand the significance of investing in appropriate OD/HRD effort when managing change. This might mean changing the way OD/HRD is taught in business schools. We suspect insufficient attention is given to the 'soft' issues of organisational change on many MBA programmes, and that many academics from other disciplines undervalue the critical contribution of HRD and HRM. Perhaps greater emphasis should be placed on helping managers recognise the importance of becoming evidence-based reflective practitioners and skilled change agents, and also the value to themselves of engaging in OCD professional partnerships

2. Ensuring OD/HRD practitioners, through their studies, develop the skills required to operate effectively at strategic levels within organisations with competence, confidence and credibility. This includes helping them develop expertise as internal consultants, change agents, strategic organisational facilitators and also as evidence-based reflective practitioners.

3. Considering doing more applied research focused on enhancing professional OCD practice as well as advancing the OCD field of knowledge.

4. Recognising the potential of OCD professional partnerships for generating academically rigorous OCD research that can be more relevant and of greater interest to OCD practitioners than some of the research currently published in the OCD literature.

Finally, we strongly urge OCD practitioners to engage with the idea of forming OCD professional partnerships with OCD academics as a means of enhancing their OCD effort through strategically led, research-based practice.

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