

"Innovative and effective OD professionals are in a unique position to help build leaders who exchange outmoded practices for forward-looking leadership today—and model this themselves."

Consulting in the Fast-Forward Lane: Helping Leaders Discard 7 Outmoded Practices

By Mitchell Kusy and Louellen Essex

THE FUTURE TENSE CONNECTION

OD practitioners play a pivotal role in guiding individual and organizational change. As leadership coaches, they must assess a leader's approach then help the client make needed behavioral changes. When facilitating the organization change process, the OD practitioner helps the client understand the current state of affairs, create a vision for the future, and chart a course for implementing specific action steps. Doing this well is a function of the OD practitioner operating with state-of-the-art models regarding effective leadership and organization behavior. Staying up to date is critical for both leaders and OD practitioners.

This article provides an approach to help you determine if your OD framework is congruent with the most current thinking about innovative leadership practices. Use it to assess the

advice you give as a coach or facilitator. Discard old ways of thinking that will not effectively serve your clients in the 21st century.

BUT FIRST, A MESSAGE FROM OUR SPONSORS

Our initial literature review revealed several studies that form a foundation for our work. John Kotter's research (1995) at Harvard University indicated that leaders actually communicate 10 times less than they should when leading key organizational changes. OD professionals need to prepare leaders for this increase in communication by helping them understand the leadership practices that must change and how they could go about changing these. Effective communication is at the heart of successful leadership (and OD). As Lindstrom (1998) notes,

OD practitioners must engage in high impact communication—and entice leaders to do this as well. This requires a shift of communication style from “tell” to “sell.”
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communication will become an art form.

We have corroborated studies from others on variables contributing to organizational success in the 21st century. For example, we have captured the influence that work-life effectiveness has on organizational performance. In a study conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (formerly Coopers & Lybrand, 1997)—the top priority of twelve hundred students in thirty leading universities in ten countries is achieving a balanced lifestyle. OD practitioners must help leaders understand this fact. Leaders need to be aware that this is the most important factor to these young entrants into the workforce and will have a heavy influence in determining their first place of employment.

Another creative practice in 21st century leadership is the quickly declining use of core (permanent) staff in organizations. Relying solely on this group prevents an organization from being nimble. In order to effectively utilize non-core (temporary or contract) staff, leaders must treat non-core with the same respect as core. According to Feldman, Doerpinhaus, and Turn-

ley (1994), the key concern of temporary staff relates to the dehumanizing and impersonal ways they are treated. OD practitioners must be aware of this concern and help leaders integrate non-core staff into their organizational change efforts.

A leadership practice which moves front and center in the 21st century is the ability to recruit, retain, and develop high-powered talent. Sabbaticals introduce a critical way of doing this. These present opportunities to recharge one’s career batteries while providing valuable learning experiences for the organization. According to Tom Peters (1996, p. 1), “Sabbaticals present a great growth opportunity for progressive organizations. Sabbaticals can provide a real boost to business innovation.” This concept is reinforced in Fortune’s list of the “100 Best Companies to Work For.” Topping this list at number one is Container Store, which offers sabbaticals after 10 years of employment (Levering & Moskowitz, 2000).

Technology is driving leadership and organizational success in the 21st century. In one study contrasting the number of solutions to a problem generated by two established teams, the one using an electronic brainstorming strategy was found to generate twice as many ideas in one hour (Farnady, 1998). Technology is a vehicle that will help leaders manage change in the virtual workspace; OD practitioners must become adept at integrating this into the phases of needs assessment and action planning.

OD practitioners must also examine how to build more successful teams in the 21st century—not *more* teams. According to Senge (1990), most teams do not generate new ideas. Rather, participants enter the team playing field with predetermined views and battle for those ideas to prevail. Decisions then appear to be made by deferring to the team member who fights the hardest or argues the best. In another study, Warren Bennis (as noted in Hesselbein and Cohen, 1999) found that great groups are made up of an innovative blend of assertive, eccentric individuals with a shared vision so powerful that they let go of their egos to settle the conflict. Old models of team building will no longer work because everyone should not be in teams. OD practitioners should not become team-building pumping machines, but help leaders understand the best ways to build teams, and when and how to disband them.

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OUR RESEARCH: 7 STOPS AND STARTS

Through our research, we have found seven outmoded practices every leader must absolutely stop to succeed in the 21st century. In their place, we have identified seven innovative practices which we uncovered through the three phases of our research:

1. We first reviewed present and anticipated leadership practices and trends, based on a literature search from 1990–1999; through this review we discerned common themes among the critical factors contributing to leadership success now and in the future.
2. We then conducted structured interviews in innovative organizations with leaders worldwide who have been cited as successful in leadership journals or by colleagues. These organizations included mega-corporations such as 3M, ABB, American Express, Accenture, AT&T, BMW, Dayton's Commercial Interiors, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, Medtronic, Motorola, Oracle, St. Jude Medical, and Target Stores. We also included non-profit firms such as Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and Northwest Area Foundation. In addition, leaders in small- to medium-sized organizations were interviewed in such companies as Forum Corporation, Ridgeview Medical Center, Lawson Software, Life USA Holding, Inc., and Texas Refinery Corp.
3. Following the interviews, we analyzed the data, using a content analysis methodology to derive common themes.

7 STOPS AND STARTS

Our research on the most successful, innovative leadership practices pointed the way to seven outmoded practices every leader must stop and exchange for seven fast-forward practices they must start. In this article, we adapt these seven “exchanges” (Essex & Kusy, 1999)—delineated below—to the needs of the OD practitioner.

1. Exchange “Telling” Communication Modes for “Selling”

OD practitioners must engage in high impact communication—and entice leaders to do this as well. This requires a shift of communication style from “tell” to “sell.” With the onslaught of virtual technologies like e-mail, voice-mail messaging, personal digital assistants, as well as the advent of desktop video conferencing, a leader’s message must stand out in the crowd. Communication must be done with persuasion and precision.

Specifically, our content analysis indicated that leaders who communicate successfully behave like good salespeople—they analyze their audience, outline their message, and choose the most appropriate communication channel. Within this framework, they often develop an “elevator” speech in which the most important leadership messages (e.g. the mission and vision) are repeated every day in every way to reinforce their

significance. We have also discovered that successful leaders use virtual technologies (e-mail, video and audio-conferencing) to communicate. While these leaders have not eliminated face-to-face communications, they have become much more judicious in selecting the appropriate communication channel based on the situation.

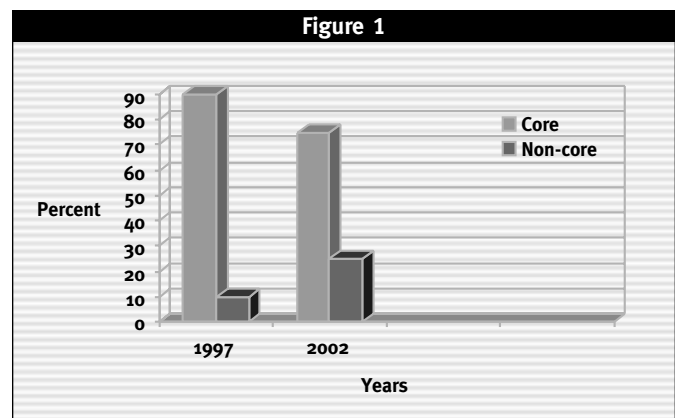
As an OD practitioner, this exchange has many implications for you. Assess your client’s communication approach to determine if their style entails an adequate amount of persuasion, not only information dissemination. Make sure your client is skillfully using an array of technologies to communicate. Finally, check to be certain you are doing the same.

2. Exchange Core Staff “Doing It All” for Non-Core Integration

Successful leaders let go of the notion of talent permanency in exchange for building a “non-core” talent pool. Leaders who think of their staff as primarily core and permanent will be boxed in because they will not be flexible enough to meet the demands of 21st century work. Leaders need to use as small a core workforce as possible to stay nimble and be competitive. *Figure 1* depicts our interviewees’ predictions that the work done by the non-core (temporary and contract) workforce will grow from 10% to 25% between 1997 and 2002, respectively (Essex & Kusy, 1999).

To become more expeditious, successful leaders avoid treating non-core as peripheral or “appendages” to their organizations. These non-core staff are critical in helping meet the work and time demands in this economy. Core staff are not the only ones capable of doing important, high-visibility tasks. The specific talents of non-core and their ability to be flexible with time make them ideal for enhancing an organization’s need for flexibility.

As an OD practitioner, make sure you incorporate non-core staff in organization interventions you facilitate. Don’t leave them on the sidelines. Coach leaders to assess the way they manage non-core staff and to find even more creative ways to utilize them and fully integrate them into the work team.



Average workforce percentages from interviewed leaders when asked the percentage of work done by core and non-core in 1997 and their prediction for 2002.

3. Exchange Motivating Others Via a Single-Generation Focus for a Multi-Generational View

We have found that successful leaders attract and retain the best of every generation. While one's generation doesn't explain everything about a person, it is one of the variables influencing reward effectiveness. Successful leaders we interviewed set aside their own motivational agenda and establish a smorgasbord of performance-reward approaches, based in part, on generational differences.

Time savings accrue when one knows how to motivate the youngest generation who have been in the workforce for at least five years—Generation X (born 1964 through 1975). The first real generation of latchkey kids, this group can be fiercely independent; they may have a harder time with group process events such as meetings than do other generations. While those in all generations seem to dislike meetings, it is for GenXers that meetings appear most abrasive. In addition, their primary calling cards include being quite technologically astute since they grew up with computers. More than any other generation, they seek work-life effectiveness (i.e. work-life balance) as a common standard.

To lead this group, we discovered that successful leaders *and* change agents relate work to the “big picture” and provide communication in short “bites.” Leaders of this generation need to understand how this group responds more positively than their older counterparts to lateral opportunities, when reinforced by two means—enriched learning and enhanced pay. When engaging these individuals as part of the client system, it is critical that OD practitioners tailor-make some of their strategies to appeal to this group.

For baby boomers, born from 1946 through 1963, many are at the stage of mid-career burnout. One of the best vehicles we have found for addressing this is something academics have engaged in for years—sabbaticals. These stimulate organizational creativity and save organizational time by not having people stagnate and be unproductive in stale careers. They benefit the person *and* the organization when an individual's project matches organizational needs. Sabbaticals have the added benefit of cutting an organization's costs of turnover because it helps rejuvenate careers. While OD professionals must understand that sabbaticals can certainly work for all generations, it is the baby boomer who may resonate to these the most.

And finally, for the oldest and probably most-neglected generation in the workforce today—traditionalists (born from 1925 through 1945), retirement is often considered their next “career.” While some may want to retire, it is an erroneous assumption that they don't want to work any longer. We have found that some traditionalists simply don't want to work *full*-time. The strategy of many successful leaders is to provide a variety of contexts for part-time work for this generation. In addition, some of these part-time arrangements could include using them as organizational “sages” through an array of internal consulting assignments.

As an OD practitioner, consult with leaders to help them understand the impact generational differences may have on the way they work with their staff. Assess their recruiting, selection, and development approaches to see if they are working with a “one size fits all” model. Coach them to adjust their approaches to accommodate the needs of GenXers, boomers, and traditionalists.

4. Exchange Stagnating Teams for Migrating Ones with a Project Focus

One common problem leaders associate with traditional team building approaches is that teams still fall short in producing optimal levels of flexibility in today's high-speed organizations. We have discovered that innovative and successful leaders have stopped automatically growing teams within organizational silos—where the views of multiple stakeholders are not considered and where creativity due to “like” thinking may decline. These leaders have also stopped thinking of team membership as permanent. Instead, they develop migrating project teams, assembled from selected staff throughout the organization, then disbanded when no longer needed.

Our research documents the power of virtual teams in disparate locations connected via technology. Many vehicles are available, including collaborative software systems such as groupware that allows team members to jointly author documents and presentations. Another is group decision support systems designed to create an on-line environment for group problem-solving, brainstorming, categorization of ideas, and polling of team members to prioritize alternatives. The key is that *leaders* must become much more adept in creating both fluid project teams and virtual teams.

OD practitioners, as they review team structure and process, should look carefully to make sure their client is utiliz-

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ing an approach that maximizes the available talent within the organization, including those who are not in one location. Then, check to be sure technologies are in place that allow teams to work collaboratively on-line, any time, any place. Assess leaders' abilities to orchestrate virtual team work through conducting virtual team meetings, building virtual relationships, and communicating effectively on-line.

5. Exchange Excessive Team Building for Maverick Creativity

Leaders we interviewed pointed out the significance of organizational "mavericks"—those individuals who are bright, imaginative, free-spirited, unconventional, intolerant, and visionary. They often don't seem to "fit in" to conventional ways, yet

- common work area) that are reconfigured as needs arise;
- Team suites with private individual space and meeting areas with electronic whiteboards; and
- Huddle rooms for brainstorming and creative enterprises.

A second context for the workplace of the future is a greater focus on telecommuting. Leaders should choose telecommuters whose work and personal style are best suited for at-home or off-site work. The "out of site, out of mind" syndrome which has plagued unsuccessful telecommuting attempts, should be avoided. Leaders should stay in close touch, via technology with their virtual staff members.

It is critical that OD practitioners help leaders assess their workplace configuration to make sure it complements the type

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their creativity and unique thinking style is critical to innovation. It is important for leaders to nurture mavericks and avoid excess conformity in order to capture their talent. One strategy is to create specific, but limited, team roles that allow mavericks to play to their strengths (e.g. consultative roles on teams). This may require them to be "on-call" as needed. Another strategy is to rotate their assignments among different product or service categories. And finally, leaders should be willing to run interference for them when needed. This will help them survive organizational rules and politics.

OD practitioners can coach leaders to adopt a "policy" of saying "maybe" before saying "no" with organizational mavericks. Assist the leaders you're working with to make limited and well-staged team assignments for their mavericks; help leaders understand the importance of running organization interference for mavericks, keeping them out of trouble and focused on their creative efforts.

6. Exchange Buildings for Virtual Spaces

Mobile and virtual space yields not only more exciting work environments, but, in many cases, better bottom-line results. Most office space is not maximally conducive to group work and team communication. Instead, we have found that successful leaders promote physical spaces that encourage knowledge sharing including:

- Centers for accessing information;
- Caves and commons (personal work spaces surrounding a

of work staff are being asked to perform. OD practitioners can help their clients delineate performance contracts for telecommuters including what is to be accomplished, performance standards, and even expectations for when they should come in to the physical workplace for face-to-face interaction. Make sure you include telecommuters in the OD interventions you facilitate and guide your clients to explore creative ways to communicate with them. Coach your clients to become more astute in creating workspaces that enhance, rather than inhibit, work modes of the 21st century.

7. Exchange Continual Reorganizations for Partnered Structures

We sometimes wish we had a nickel every time we have been asked by a client to help them restructure their organization. This often entails growing new units to manage new product developments, support services, or special functions.

By finding suitable, external partners—who may even be competitors—leaders can expand organizational capability without the need for internal organizational growth. Because of the high cost of talent, the intense focus on running lean, and the lack of available workers, internal growth is much less attractive than it once was. Leaders must find the best external partners—those based on common goals, but uncommon capabilities. In our interviews with leaders, we discovered that internally generated growth, once promoted as a ticket to productivity, is no longer the preferred route to organizational expansion. What is

In this era of just-in-time work, leaders need to have the requisite skills to lead immediately and successfully. OD practitioners need models to quickly and accurately assess leadership fit within an organization's existing or desired culture. Old perspectives such as leading in one space, requiring face-to-face contacts, and having direct reporting relationships exclusively are all anachronisms that no longer embrace the sine qua non to organizational success.

critical for leaders to understand is how to search for suitable organization partners, how to build an understanding of best ways to work together, how to engage in conflict resolution processes, and how to end the partnership should the relationship falter.

OD practitioners can serve a facilitative role in partnership building by helping clients 1) identify characteristics of a suitable business partner, 2) develop working guidelines and expectations and 3) mediate differences between partners. Because partnerships require a great deal of communication to succeed, the OD practitioner can set the stage for success by helping parties learn how to effectively work together.

PLEASE, ADJUST YOUR SETS!

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Where do *you* fit in for building these organizational enhancements on the part of your client leaders? We see two ways:

1. Coaching leaders to understand why these seven practices are needed for the greatest probability of successful change efforts;
2. Walking the talk by modeling these seven new behaviors and discarding the old. ■

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