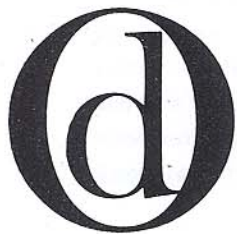


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# ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS

*Witch Doctors, Messianics,  
Sorcerers, and OD  
Consultants: Parallels  
and Paradigms*

Warner Woodworth  
Reed Nelson







John Huehnergarth

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*Changes designed to improve a social system are not exclusive to modern or sophisticated cultures—indeed, the interventions of primitive peoples have often been effective. Witch doctors, sorcerers, and messianics, in fact, have much to teach OD consultants, to whom they are akin.*

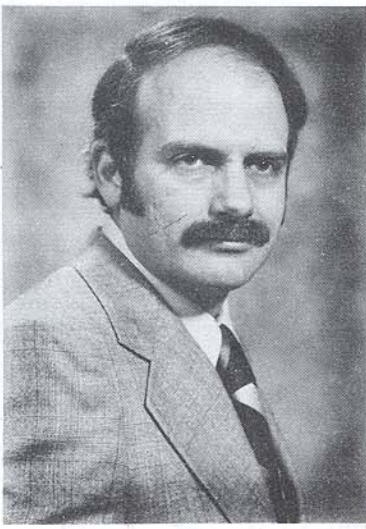
# *Witch Doctors, Messianics, Sorcerers, and OD Consultants: Parallels and Paradigms*

Warner Woodworth  
Reed Nelson

*A* great obsession of Western industrialized civilization has been its preoccupation with newness. Driven by the furies of a fickle technology, our consuming society flits from one new gadget to another—experiencing along the way the transition, uncertainty, and complexity of future shock. The ambiguity-borne stress that occurred only occasionally in the physical or cultural environment of earlier societies when they suffered some kind of cataclysm has become a constant stress in the contemporary world.

One way of dealing with the tricks of a changing environment and their effects on social institutions is organization development (OD). According to Wendell L. French and Cecil H. Bell, Jr., OD proposes to “improve an organization’s problem-solving and renewal processes . . . with the assistance of a change agent, or catalyst, and the use of the theory and technology of applied behavioral science.”

We would like to suggest that, despite OD’s relatively new nomenclature and ideo-



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logical trappings, its interventions serve much the same function many curing or healing rituals do in "primitive" societies—and that, in fact, primitive practitioners often have a better notion of what is occurring in their social system and how to remedy it than "modern" change agents have. By comparing these parallel roles in different cultural contexts, we aim to widen perspectives on the role of the change agent in today's organization, critique specific dimensions of the field, and suggest new directions for research in developing more effective interventions.

In order to establish some points of reference, we have set up a generic framework that enables us to examine and com-

pare various change strategies across cultures. This framework consists of four principal dimensions. We will treat interventions with reference to *causes* of the problem being addressed; *needs* that must be satisfied to treat the causes of the problem; *procedures* employed in the intervention; and, finally, the *outcomes* of the intervention within the system. This framework allows us not only to focus on the underlying themes of an intervention without becoming confused by the unfamiliar (or overly familiar) cultural trappings that surround it, but should also provide an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of a given intervention in treating the issue it addresses.

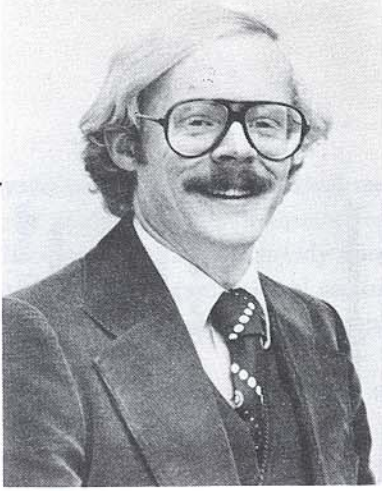
#### THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF AMERICAN OD

A factoring of organizational development into the four elements above presents an interesting profile of the field as currently practiced.

1. *Causes*. As Warren Bennis has pointed out, OD grew out of the technological and ideological cataclysms of the postindustrial revolution. Demystification of national myths—and of the traditionally accepted power structures legitimized by those myths—called into question authority relationships and organizational norms formerly accepted as given. Ever since, increasing education and professionalization of the workforce has lowered their tolerance for routinized activity and raised the expectations and demands of people in general. Higher living standards and increasing government intervention to secure individual and collective welfare have defused old motivations for production and shifted the emphasis from basic survival and security issues to self-actualization.

2. *Needs*. This growing disparity between the legitimizing mythology of past power structures and a new, emerging ideol-





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ogy has exposed the exploitative bases of traditional Western economic and production organizations. It has led to demands for fulfilling human needs that current organizational modes have been incapable of fulfilling, or designed not to, except for a narrow elite perched atop the corporate pyramid. The clamor for this fulfillment from formerly submissive sectors of the organization and society have created an ideological impasse for American managers committed to equality while involved in authoritarian operating procedures and discriminatory power structures.

3. *Procedures*. Myriad therapeutic measures, outlined by Edgar F. Huse, have arisen within OD to face this conflict. These generally include or emphasize such interpersonal and group dynamics techniques as team building, process consultation, intergroup conflict resolution, sensitivity training, and individual counseling—all in conjunc-

tion with various attitudinal measurement instruments. Although sociotechnical interventions may arise from these efforts, such interventions are often not considered within the skills realm of most change agents. In short, there appears to be a focus primarily on the human relations aspects of organizations—a focus that seemingly ignores the more political dimensions of power, distribution of rewards, conflict, and so forth. This focus is made explicit, for example, by Robert Tannenbaum and Shel Davis, who say that there is “a bias regarding organizational development efforts. Believing that people have vast amounts of untapped potential . . . we feel that the most effective change interventions are therapeutic in nature.”

4. *Outcomes*. A close examination of OD techniques reveals that, too often, they obscure the causes of a problem rather than face the perhaps unresolvable issue that organizations, like other social arrangements, tend to limit individual behavior. That is, for an organization to multiply individual effort, its members must undergo a process of differentiation and socialization that channels them into specific roles—and, of course, this process of necessity narrowly limits human behavior.

For a brief summary of OD in terms of the four elements described above, see Figure 1.

In his study of primitive work organization, Stanley H. Udy finds the modern pluralistic organization merely shifting irreconcilable problems from one stress point to another in the organization in the vain hope that there is a solution. In examining this interface of problems between sectors of the organization, OD often transfers into the personal and interpersonal arena problems that are system-born. The managers involved are led to think that these problems may be solved through the application of such sacred languages as TA (Transactional

Figure 1

## ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Causes of Dysfunction	Underlying Needs	Procedures	Outcomes
<p><i>Institutional</i></p> <p>Society in transition. Technological changes result in more complex administrative and organizational forms.</p> <p>Inequities in division of labor and distribution of rewards.</p> <p>Imbalance in social system caused by environmental change.</p>	<p>Need for legitimized social systems.</p> <p>Need for perceived equity in institutions.</p> <p>Need for system equilibrium, reduction of turbulence.</p>	<p>OD as generally practiced does not address these issues. Instead, it focuses efforts on interpersonal and personal problems caused by environmental pressures that impair organizational functions. In the end, OD tends to reorder organizational ideology and legitimization without affecting institutional power structures.</p>	
<p><i>Interpersonal</i></p> <p>Conflict caused by breakdown of traditional authority structures. Deterioration of role models caused by modernization.</p>	<p>Need for mutually accepted role models and hierarchies.</p>	<p>Team building, T-groups, and other interpersonal activities address the interpersonal and group level.</p>	<p>Lets off steam, grants minor power concessions; provides a feeling of participation and freedom to discuss otherwise prohibited subjects.</p>
<p><i>Personal</i></p> <p>Incongruities in world view stemming from value contradictions.</p> <p>Shift from concern with physical survival to rising expectations.</p>	<p>Need for congruent world view.</p> <p>Need for congruent self-concept in the face of organizational roles.</p> <p>Emerging need for autonomy and self-actualization.</p>	<p>Gestalt learning, value clarification, and so forth redefine personal identity issues.</p> <p>Participative management schemes.</p>	<p>Promotes redefinition of self-concept within organizational parameters; reaffirms workability of existing system.</p> <p>Provides participation and autonomy within organizational power structure.</p>



Analysis) or through the mystical measurement of attitudes and subsequent feedback and discussion. Ironically, as Udy notes, ambiguity between organizational sectors may be the only thing holding the organization together.

Basically, Udy posits that the nature of social systems versus that of the physical environment is inherently incompatible, that "there is an intrinsic hiatus between social and physical constraints in any work system." In examining work organization in traditional and modern societies, he concludes that when work organization is carried out according to prevailing social patterns, efficiency falls. Conversely, when work systems are production oriented (that is, based on the physical constraints of the environment as expressed in production technology), the surrounding social system begins to disintegrate.

In modern pluralistic organizations endowed with discrete departments, each entrusted with a specific function, the social and physical environments are artificially separated one from another in an attempt to avoid conflict between the two. But conflict is of course unavoidable, according to Udy's analysis, and strains develop at the points of contact between physical and social systems. Accordingly, the modern management consultant must constantly arrive at "new, improved programs" that once and for all resolve the difficulties between labor and management, personnel and production, line and staff, or whatever critical interface currently manifests the tension inherent in the system. In Udy's scheme, then, the management consultant serves as a perpetrator of collective myths that must change every so often as endemic tensions arise out of conflicts built into the system. These myths symbolically set the system aright and correct its imbalances. Although the native shaman in his or her more static native environment tends to change myths less often than

do modern counterparts, the function is essentially the same: that of reintegrating persons or groups into a system which, by its very nature, tends toward disintegration.

Considered in this light, the venerated elder of American Indian nations, who relates legends of the tribe's great origin and destiny and sets forth models for ideal role behavior, is not at all unlike contemporary consultants making presentations at management retreats. In such settings, middle managers huddle around the corporate campfire to hear the counsel of the great chiefs and their chosen consultant medicine men, who present the new plan by which the firm will eventually rule the market through the powerful magic of the OD brotherhood.

In short, we see most OD interventions as activities whose principal function consists of minor adjustments in the organization's culture—adjustments aimed at ensuring the goal continuity and power structure of the system. Through the harmless venting of frustrations and token participation schemes, the organization is made to appear more congruent with liberal societal values. This helps maintain sufficient consensus for the system to function optimally (as such consensus and such functioning are defined by the party that hired the consultant). As often as not, intervention by a change agent is called for by someone in the firm's upper echelon who is trying to create a power base larger than those of his rivals in the firm. Thus for all the consultant does, he seldom steps out of the bounds established by the politics of the system. Often he will justify this behavior by saying that an organization cannot make a quantum leap from System 1 to System 4, or that OD efforts must be carried out from the top down.

Illustrating the phenomena of harmless venting of feelings and control of change by managerial elites is a 1971-72 effort to apply OD in a community setting. A team of consultants was invited by business



leaders of a midwestern city to help reduce community fragmentation, alleviate racial unrest, and establish a systemwide approach to solving local problems by employing applied behavioral science techniques. With funding by a major foundation in the community, the change agents embarked on an extensive program of data collection, issues analysis, and the creation of a citizens' forum consisting of 60 influential representatives of business, labor, government, and other community groups.

Everything went well for the first year, during which these diverse interest groups met, diagnosed issues, and began to develop new levels of trust and cooperation. However, when the group decided to act on major community problems (housing, poverty, healthcare, racism, and so forth), the white, business power structure suddenly withdrew its participation and financial support. They felt that polite discourse and "safe" release of pent-up frustrations were acceptable, even desirable. But when blacks and organized labor, in particular, began to coalesce and move from debate to action, the anchors of legitimacy and financial support were suddenly pulled up. After recovering from the initial shock, the community returned to its near-original state of endemic tension and fragmentation.

#### "PRIMITIVE" CONSULTANTS

Having noted the role of management consultants in American, if not indeed Western society, let us examine some of the attributes and activities of change agents in other cultures and see what they have in common with their western counterparts. Stresses and strains arise between elements of almost any social system, and Western industrial society is, perhaps contrary to its culture-bound assumptions, not the first to develop detailed technologies and specialized personnel to

help ameliorate the problems that result.

The role of the witch doctor in many African societies, for example, as S. F. Nadel has described it, closely parallels activities of consultants in Western society. The witch doctor is usually a person who, through some accident of fate such as widowhood, sterility, or insanity, is not in a position to function in the social system in a normal, competitive manner. Often the society delegates to this position persons for whom the social system has no adequate social definition or role. It is not uncommon for such a person to purchase extensive training at the hands of an experienced practitioner who understands the mysterious gadgetry of witchcraft. After a long apprenticeship, the would-be shaman begins his or her career through an attempted cure or other supernatural intervention in the community. If the novice's attempts are successful, legitimacy is established and he or she begins to gain a clientele on the basis of the successful wonders performed.

It has been noted that the most important diagnostic tool of the witch doctor in society is a thorough knowledge of the state of the village network of social relations at any given time. Through shrewd interpretation of the client's ills coupled with close observation of village life, the shaman senses areas of conflict between groups or individuals in the system and brings these conflicts into the open by making accusations of sorcery to the offending party. In the case where accusation has already been made, the shaman operates by mediating the conflict and working out a settlement between the parties with the aid of his supernatural technology. It should be brought out here that this process is not necessarily rejected by the accused outright because, in many societies, sorcery may be practiced without the conscious knowledge of the sorcerer.

The diagnostic model of native shamans and their somewhat neutral training



and technological position within the system are common to the operating methods of shamans in many, if not most, cultures. Furthermore, as Jane N. Murphy points out, the need for a repertoire of supernatural tricks to legitimize the subsequent techniques and the important role of expectancy and reputation in the whole process seem to be almost universal for change agents.

Perceptive management consultants in Western society today will recognize much in the foregoing description. They too have undergone long, costly training, often including the hazing ritual of a graduate degree, magic jargon, grids, and graphs. Such techniques, mysterious except to the initiated, are used to raise the expectancies of potential clients. The mediation of power struggles and accusations of subconscious crimes are all squarely within the realm of this experience. Above all, a shrewd understanding of the organization's social system, consciousness of the consultant's own image, and its potential for creating the expectancy so necessary for "success" are undeniable realities for the Western consultant as well as the native.

#### AFRICAN THERAPEUTIC TECHNIQUES

So much for parallels between native consultant and management consultant in terms of preparation and image. Now let's look at specific intervention techniques for native societies, which should be even more enlightening for the open-minded OD practitioner. So-called primitive societies use numerous techniques for reestablishing lost balance in social systems. When schematically compared with the functions of most OD efforts, they are quite competitive. One good example is the Zar ceremony, reported by John G. Kennedy. This ceremony is an all-female African ritual aimed at coping with some of the social side effects of indus-

trialization and urbanization in Africa (see Figure 2).

As industry has come to Africa, men have taken to commuting to urban centers to engage in factory labor, returning to their wives and families in outlying areas only at the end of the workweek. The absence of the men during the week and the polygamous relationships they tend to arrange between city and country greatly decrease physical and emotional support for already low-status women. The resulting increase in stress threatens the social order and creates emotional and psychosomatic problems for many of the women.

The all-female ritual that developed in response to this pressure is reserved for extreme cases of such problems. In this ceremony, a large number of tribal women collaborate to exorcise the spirit that has taken possession of one of them. Women who previously have had to deal with such a problem play an active role in diagnosis by serving as mediums to the spirits involved, finally exorcising them through appeasement. Activities not normally tolerated by the society—such as getting answers to forbidden questions about men's extramarital relations through divination—are temporarily acceptable. The net result of the ceremony is to release tension, symbolically improve female status, and provide therapeutic solidarity for the tribal women.

This temporary escape from a system's inequities and pressures, achieved by allowing lower status members to express grievances in a sympathetic atmosphere, is often replicated in U.S. laboratory training programs. The classically popular three-day management seminar of many corporations closely approximates the festive air of the Zar and many similar native rituals the world over, as described by J. Robin Fox.

The pattern of ritual exorcism present in this ceremony and most healing ceremonies is similar to that of many encounter

Figure 2  
ZAR CEREMONY

Causes of Dysfunction	Underlying Needs	Procedures	Outcomes
<p><i>Institutional</i></p> <p>Endemic stress in system caused by low status of women. This exacerbated by (1) decreased male support because of male migration to cities (where, women suspect, life is more exciting) and (2) ease with which men can get divorced from their wives or have polygamous marriages.</p>	<p>Need for release of tension caused by system inequities and behavioral restrictions.</p> <p>Need for variety and excitement in life.</p>	<p>Ceremony is all-female activity — including special clothing, magical techniques, dancing, incense, and special foods. Prohibited information is obtained.</p> <p>Festive atmosphere.</p>	<p>Increased female status through special ceremonial role; disownment of personal behavior; harmless release of tension. These successes increase confidence in technique.</p> <p>Breaks routine.</p>
<p><i>Interpersonal</i></p> <p>Suspicion of spouse infidelity.</p> <p>Perceived lack of support from spouse.</p>	<p>Need for reduction of ambiguity between husband and wife about interpersonal affairs.</p> <p>Need for supportive relationships.</p>	<p>Fortune-telling about spouses.</p> <p>Community activity.</p>	<p>Reduces ambiguity.</p> <p>Promotes supportive relationships.</p>
<p><i>Personal</i></p> <p>Subordinate position promotes low self-concept.</p>	<p>Need for improvement in self-concept.</p>	<p>Patient is dressed in high-status clothes and given special attention.</p>	<p>Increases status.</p>



groups. In such groups a high level of anxiety stems from the ambiguity of the social situation. In the presence of this anxiety, social inhibitions and barriers fall or are forcibly destroyed with the hope of effecting some cathartic experience that will give group members a return on their emotional investment. Such an experience is usually forthcoming, although all may not participate equally in its benefits. Similarly, most native exorcism rituals, already blessed by high levels of expectation, induce a very high degree of anxiety in participants through the activities of the medium and other members of the party. Social inhibitions drop, and when the exorcism has successfully taken place, the climate of the ritual becomes relaxed and supportive.

#### NATIVE AMERICAN INTERVENTIONS

Navajo curing rituals described by Gladys Reichard come even closer in similarities to OD myths and rituals. As in Western organizations, the strains inherent within the Navajo social system, caused by conflicting system goals and an imbalance between inducements and contributions, occasionally result in intense personal pathologies. In Western society, these pathologies are treated by individual curing agents (psychiatrists or ulcer specialists) who often interpret the problem as being personal rather than system induced. Only when the Western organization perceives a threat to its well-being arising from collective reactions to system strains will it call in OD shamans to fix the system.

In the Navajo case, however, individual breakdowns are usually identified as signs of an imbalance in the entire system. As John L. Landgraf has noted, "Satisfactory life in the universe was conceived as a whole harmonious equilibrium; the diseases and ills of all kinds were disturbances which partly

embrace rites and ceremonies could make an attempt at restoring."

Fittingly, Navajo attempts at setting these imbalances right feature reciprocal ceremonial obligations that entire tribal clans are required to support. The whole social system is required to take part in the curing process in a manner that expresses group solidarity and interdependence. Because the illness is not identified as being the fault of any particular person, but rather an imbalance in the cosmic order that requires the best efforts of all to overcome, resistance to the process is minimal.

The resulting ritual follows the dynamics of other curing practices in industrial and non-industrial societies (see Figure 3). The neutral change agent is called in and uses special, secret technology (in the Navajo case, hand trembling or some other clairvoyant tactic) to arrive at a diagnosis. The entire related clan or clans are assembled for a workshop of one to several days. Expectancy and anxiety levels are raised astronomically by elaborate performances with special technology. Finally a cathartic peak is reached by the exorcism of whatever is upsetting the system. Should the technique prove ineffective, it is reasoned that the correct combination of procedures was not used. A more systems-oriented intervention could hardly be found in the entire canon of OD testimonials.

#### MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS

Note that the techniques cited up to this point, both native and modern, have been essentially neutral or "balance" interventions—that is, they are aimed at facilitating the operation of an ongoing system. The basic assumption underlying these interventions is that the system will continue intact, essentially with "business as usual." This leads us to the obvious question: "Don't change

Figure 3

## NAVAJO INTERVENTIONS

<i>Causes of Dysfunction</i>	<i>Underlying Needs</i>	<i>Procedures</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
CHANTS AND SINGS			
Apache hunting vs Pueblo community tradition causes tension (domination vs. social control and harmony).	Need to set right what has been disordered; treat illness and alleviate social discord.	Entry: Professional contracted by client group.	Effectiveness comes through two main purposes: (1) suggestion—that is, special technology and vocabulary used to create confidence and expectation—and (2) reaffirmation of group solidarity through involvement of total community in the ceremony.
Tension in the system can be seen at personal, interpersonal, and system levels.	Need to maintain or restore system equilibrium. Need for coexistence of contradictory tendencies in the system.	Diagnosis: Special techniques applied—hand trembling, wind listening, or star-gazing. (May call for “ready-made” instrumented package or directive therapy.) Implementation: Intricate chant or singing involving the whole community.	
HUNTING RITUAL			
Distribution of game is constantly changing. Too much hunting in one area could deplete game stocks.	Need to decide where to hunt and how much to kill. Need for disownment of responsibility for success in the hunt.	Future-seeing and prediction by means of fire-watching and bone-ash reading.	Technique avoids personal responsibility for outcome of the hunt. Game is preserved.
The hunting tradition must be suppressed throughout the community but encouraged in the field.	Need for distinction between village conduct and field conduct.	Special hunt training session permits expression of issues usually taboo in the community (blood, death, and so on).	Proper role behavior is symbolically identified.



agents ever effect power, or 'advocate', interventions aimed at actually modifying the structural bases of a system?" The standard OD response here would be that the change agent does not actually administer changes. Rather, he or she tries to improve the organization's decision-making or "self-renewal" capacities so that organization members themselves can understand and cope with their own problems. To put it in simpler terms, they are change agents who do not really change anything.

Of course, some interventions are continually being made in an effort to change the power distribution of organizations, but these activities tend to come from power holders rather than neutral consultants who sell their special expertise to interested parties. Indeed, any social system at a given moment is in a state of flux, with one leader or faction trying to gain ascendancy over another; change agents, as noted earlier, are often called in to mediate minor skirmishes in these struggles. However, conflict mediators in native systems sometimes become power holders and thereupon attempt major structural changes in the system. A quick look at their accomplishments may provide a lesson for consultants interested in advocacy interventions.

Such native interventions arise where social relations are marked by distrust, violence, and exploitation or where social structure is otherwise rapidly upset or altered by conquest, colonization, or other cataclysmic events. Faced with these extreme conditions, the traditional spiritual advisors of the community—shamans, faith healers, prophets, pilgrims, witch doctors, and the like—may escalate their activities from simply treating temporary imbalances in the system to proposing and sometimes even organizing an alternative social structure. A loyal following will rally around a charismatic leader who will eventually organize his or her disciples into a new social order.

The subsequent ideology of such groups usually represents an ingenious synthesis of traditional social values with ideas from the new dominant order. The leader will predict the beginning of a golden age free from want and sorrow—contingent, of course, upon the efforts of the followers in heeding certain divine injunctions, which usually turn out to be rules necessary to establish a harmonious social system.

The accomplishments of these groups are impressive. Their creative energy and solidarity has created classless, crimeless societies; built major cities in trackless swamps; created far-flung mutual aid societies; and defied whole armies. Their most important contribution, however, seems to be the integration of large groups of people into a new social system. The syncretic ideology of messianic movements forms a bridge between native and modern society if the movement survives long enough. In essence, messianic movements are the native response to a turbulent environment. In OD terms, natives faced with a disintegrating social environment do not join a T-group; instead, they initiate a whole new system.

The great vitality of messianic movements and the integrative function they appear to fulfill in a turbulent environment imply that management consultants may too often use balance interventions better suited to a static social environment when a structural approach would be more effective. They should in fact use advocate interventions if they claim to address the problems of a social environment with rapidly changing values. Of course, if the environment in question is not really so turbulent that it needs structural interventions, OD practitioners should not stress such needs as strongly as they currently do. This is one of the criticisms that Charles Perrow advances in critiquing OD. In either case, the fact that most native reactions to a rapidly changing social environment tend to be structural

Figure 4  
MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS\*

Causes of Dysfunction	Underlying Needs	Procedures	Outcomes
<i>Institutional</i>			
Demystification of societal legitimizers. Inequities in division of rewards. Imbalance in the social system caused by environmental changes.	Need for legitimized social systems. Need for perceived equity in social systems. Need for restored equilibrium.	Establishment of separate social order and ideology congruent with environmental changes.	Addresses causes.
<i>Interpersonal</i>			
Conflicts caused by breakdown of traditional legitimizers of the stratification system. Deterioration of traditional role models stemming from modernization and from secularization.	Need for rewarding social relationships. Need for stable norms governing social interaction.	Festive atmosphere and communal activity provide social integration and control. New egalitarian norms developed, congruent with new ideology.	Addresses causes. Addresses causes and reestablishes equilibrium.
<i>Personal</i>			
Frustration born of position in the stratification system. Incongruities in world view caused by demystification. Decrease in mystic experience stemming from breakdown of religious world view.	Need for sense of self-worth. Need for congruent world view. Need for mystic experience.	Movement identifies adherents as leaders of new cosmic order. Mythology provides congruent world view. New world view permits mystic experience.	Addresses causes. Reestablishes equilibrium. Addresses new parameter for system.

Examples: Cargo Cults, Ghost Dance, African nativistic movements, Padre Cicero in Juazeiro, Medieval European Messianic movements.



should alert those in the field to critically re-examine current directions. Figure 4 uses the same scheme for outlining the functions of messianic movements as that used for summarizing OD—thus permitting a vivid comparison between the two approaches to planned change. Particularly revealing is a comparison of the outcomes generated by the two methods of intervention (see Figures 1 and 4).

The preceding might tempt some to initiate a “Repent, for the End Is Near” activity at future OD workshops, but the history of messianic movements suggests extreme caution for would-be consultants-turned-reformers. As with other advocate schemes, the big problem with most messianic movements is that the people involved feel threatened by the prospect of an alternative system. Often such movements and their leaders have brought great benefits to their followers, only to have their efforts swept away by swift political action. This will sound familiar to OD practitioners who have found themselves on the street after delivering some “honest feedback” to company executives. Unfortunately, space does not permit us to trace the dramatic history of advocate interventions and develop the parallels that exist between native and Western movements and their leaders, but one intriguing case merits attention.

### *Padre Cicero*

The Brazilian Northeast has been the scene of many messianic movements, most of them terminating in violent military repression. One notable exception has broken this pattern. In the late 1800s, a newly consecrated Catholic priest arrived in the village of Juazeiro in Ceara, a northeastern state of Brazil. As in most villages of the area, crime, oppression, and abject poverty reigned supreme, supported by Brazil’s feudal land-holding

patterns and its violent frontier tradition.

Unlike most Catholic priests of the region, however, Padre Cicero did not accept the situation as hopeless—so he didn’t restrict his activity to performing the sacraments and conducting other necessary church business. Instead, he adopted a very active schedule of visiting town members—in the process imparting blessings and prophetic counsel to all. He adopted a style of hair and dress like those of the local faith-healers and followed a lifestyle definitely marginal to that of the official church. Soon his reputation as a holy man began to grow, and miracles occurred in the local population wherever he ministered. Before many years passed, Padre Cicero’s reputation as a great curer and prophet spread throughout the northeast. People traveled hundreds of miles just to receive his blessing or consult with him about important decisions. Many began to move to Juazeiro just to live under his spiritual protection. The city became known as the New Jerusalem and prophecies about the appearance of Christ in Juazeiro and the approaching end of the earth were promulgated by the Father and spread far and wide.

After taking advantage of this movement and his reputation to free the town of thieves and other undesirable influences, Cicero began settling newcomers in fertile lands surrounding the area. This, of course, was a dangerous affront to local power holders since it provided a model of independence for tenant farmers. In time the Church, acting under pressure from the elite, prohibited the Padre from practicing the sacraments and ordered him to leave Juazeiro. Cicero agreed to desist from his official priestly duties—but refused to desert his flock in Juazeiro. By this time, there was nothing the local elite could do about the situation because the Father had bargained his influence with the people for political ties

with state and federal governments; he commanded great power in state and even national politics.

Eventually, Padre Cicero himself became vice-governor and, later, a federal deputy. Under his tutelage, Juazeiro became the most prosperous manufacturing and agricultural center in the state, with the lowest crime rate and perhaps the most uniform distribution of wealth in the country. Even since his death in 1939, Juazeiro has continued as the religious center and a major city of the state of Ceara.

What made the Father so successful when other such "New Jerusalems" in the same area had been totally annihilated by federal forces a few years earlier? To understand this, it's necessary first to realize that the balance or neutral change agent is protected from the system by his marginal position in the society or organization. Thus local faith healers in Cicero's area were not priests, but austere religious pilgrims who could mediate between elitist orthodox Catholicism and the lower classes because of their concomitant participation in spiritual pursuits and closeness to peasant ideology. This is true of almost all shamans; they never represent the dominant religious order, although their spiritual activities associate them with religion. In Brazil, therefore, when these traditionally balance interventionists tried to make structural changes by setting up alternative societies, they lost their equidistant position and were removed by the dominant order.

Cicero was different. Being a priest automatically aligned him with the elite—a position that allowed him to secure the support, or at least the acquiescence, of local power holders until his power matched or superseded theirs. But it was also an equivocal position, since for a long time he was a member of one social system while leaning toward another. This resulted in considerable strain—strain manifest in his seminary's

refusal to ordain him because of his unusual views (he had to seek ordination under a different ecclesiastical body) and in the constant invective he inspired from other priests in the region. Finally he stepped so far out of bounds that he was stripped of his priestly duties. By this time, however, lack of official credentials did not make a difference.

Everywhere in the Father's actions, one finds the contradictory elements of two antagonistic paradigms at work. On the one hand he pledged everlasting loyalty to the Church, while on the other he refused to heed its order for him to leave his New Jerusalem. He wore the beard and tattered robes of local faith healers while fulfilling all the official duties of an ordained priest. He proudly proclaimed himself judge, chief of police, and mayor of the town as he continued to make personal visits to every household in a growing population center. In other words, Cicero succeeded in ameliorating problems of the social order by personally bearing the contradictions of the system on a long-term basis rather than, in the fashion of other faith healers, merely providing occasional release from the inherent tensions of the system through effervescent group activity. Invoking Udy's jargon again, Cicero bridged the "intrinsic hiatus" between two incompatible systems with his own person. It is perhaps for this reason that the structural interventions of native movements tend to be messianic. They seem to recognize the need for some cosmic figure to atone for the weaknesses of the system and thus reconcile the real with the ideal. This may seem overly abstract and difficult to grasp for the Western management consultant, but the peasants of northeastern Brazil understand it with little difficulty. The chorus of a popular folk ballad about Padre Cicero's persecutions expresses well the suffering of the change agent (advocate interventionist) who has to function within one system while advocating an alternative structure:



The Father Cicero Romao  
Had to be bound and buffeted  
So he could free us  
From our Great Sin

## IMPLICATIONS FOR OD

Despite our criticisms of OD, the prime objective of this article is not to attack but rather to enlarge the scope of organizational change methods. A principal text by Wendell L. French and Cecil H. Bell asserts that "OD is not a mysterious and magical spell cast upon an organization by the incantations of a behavioral scientist 'change agent.'" In contrast with this somewhat condescending stance, we do not see OD as a uniquely scientific and sophisticated tool of modern man. The elitism of a superiority perspective cuts us off from the potentially valuable resources of so-called primitive practices.

In comparing approaches to social change across cultures, we see a number of similarities. OD has a sacred jargon all its own (the Managerial Grid®, TA, MBO, and so on). Practitioners use a set of magical methods that are incomprehensible to the uninitiated (survey feedback, process consultation, behavior mod, and so on). Trainees insist on having flip-chart pads upon which they can make organizational drawings to hang on the wall—drawings that seem somehow reminiscent of Navajo sand paintings, which also symbolize a message. Finally, we sense possible personality similarities between the charismatic consultant who, through the use of story telling and sharing sagas of the past, builds a credibility among clients not unlike the tribal faith of those who come under the spell and healing powers of the native shaman.

In sum, our purpose is to cast the consultant role in a wider context—thereby providing, we hope, greater insights into both cultural and procedural aspects of in-

terventions into social systems. As part of this effort, we would like to emphasize several aspects of native interventions that we feel merit the attention and consideration of applied behavioral scientists.

First, the equidistant position assumed by native consultants (unless they are engaged in activities within a rapidly decaying social system) suggests that the very nature of the intervention precludes an advocate stance. If hired by a client to reestablish system equilibrium, the change agent must strike a balance between conflicting forces in the system. That, clearly, is the contracted function, and if the change agent for ethical or other reasons should seek an advocate stance, he or she would have to arrange for an advocate-client relationship. It was obvious in our case study of messianic movements that advocate interventions involve a much longer time frame, greater stress, and greater commitment to achieving substantive change than do efforts aimed merely at a temporary restoration of system equilibrium.

A prominent aspect of many native curing ceremonies, except for witchcraft and sorcery accusations, is nonassignment of guilt. In other words, socially unacceptable activities are attributed to a spirit, cosmic imbalance, or some other nonpersonal entity, and group collaboration is focused upon exorcising the unwanted influence. An oft-encountered difficulty with OD schemes is the implication, implicit or explicit, that someone is to blame for current dysfunctions of the system. This indeed may be the case, but assignment of guilt rarely contributes to the solution of the problem. With all the creative energy of modern behavioral scientists at hand, it must certainly be possible to create some statistically significant scapegoat that can be driven out of the organization, leaving it pure and undefiled.

One difficulty that organizations experience in adapting to changing environments is the tendency for social structure to

stifle creativity. As precedent begins to take root in an organization and as interpersonal and interdepartmental relationships become routinized, they form restrictive decision-making parameters that limit creative, adaptive responses to organizational problems. It is extremely important, especially at higher levels, to take a novel view of the organization, its environment, and its problems. The Committee on Psychiatry and Religion noted in 1976 that mystic experience, which is both a prerequisite for and the hallmark of native consultants, produces a novel view. That is, everyday objects and events assume a different significance in the mystic's view, and transcendental experience tends to bring unlikely elements together into new systems of thought. A study of the organizing tech-

niques of mystics and visionaries or the structure of native curing rituals might yield some interesting clues on how to produce creative behavior in executives. This does not mean that we are advocating corporate seances—but we are not excluding them, either.

Above all, we hope that as consulting becomes increasingly international, and as American management philosophy continues to wreak havoc with the cultures of many nations, this article may stimulate some novel thought processes and disrupt some assumptions about where to look first for the solution to organizational problems. It may be that the best consultants are to be found lurking in the jungles, not in the ivy-covered halls of behavioral science.



#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Two books that suggest certain social and economic conditions that have facilitated the rise of OD as a contemporary behavioral science technology for addressing societal needs are Warren Bennis's early introduction to the field, *Organizational Development: Its Nature, Origin and Prospects* (Addison-Wesley, 1969), and a major text of more recent vintage, *Organizational Development and Change* by Edgar F. Huse (West Publishing Co., 1975).

A typical illustration of our criticism that much of OD overemphasizes human relations and changes of a psychological or interpersonal nature while excluding macrorealities or organizational politics, power, and economic issues is Robert Tannenbaum and Shel Davis's chapter, "Values, Man, and Organizations" in Newton Margulies and Anthony Raia's *Organizational Development: Values, Process, and Technology* (McGraw-Hill, 1972). An even wider critique of commonly held approaches to organizational theory is Charles Perrow's *Complex Organizations: A*

*Critical Essay* (Scott, Foresman, Inc., 1972).

For an interesting exercise, the reader might want to juxtapose two different books that perhaps most clearly point to parallels between the magic of OD and shamanism. We suggest that Wendell L. French and Cecil H. Bell, Jr.'s *Organization Development: Behavioral Science Interventions for Organization Improvement* (Prentice-Hall, 1973) be read hand in hand with the strange and provocative study of Carlos Castaneda, *Journey to Ixtlan: The Lessons of Don Juan* (Simon & Schuster, 1972). Of particular interest are the similarities concerning the general process of apprenticeship by which one becomes a consultant or sorcerer—in either case, "a man of knowledge, a man of power," with dazzling trials, legends, and mystic lessons.

With respect to the role of work and the structure of labor in various cultures, Stanley H. Udy's classic *Work in Traditional and Modern Society* (Prentice-Hall, 1970) is imperative reading. A review of several sources provided a useful perspective on the role of witch doctors in other societies: S. F. Nadel's "Witchcraft in Four African Soci-



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The specific native cases describing strategies for coping with and generating change in other cultures are analyzed in more detail by John L. Landgraf in *Land Use in the Ramah Navajo Area, New Mexico* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1959); by Gladys Amanda Reichard in *Navaho Religion: A Study of Symbolism* (Panthe-

on, 1950); and by John G. Kennedy in "Nubian Zar Ceremonies as Psychotherapy" (*Human Organization*, Winter, 1967). One source for the discussion of messianic movements is Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz's excellent treatise, *Messianismo no Brasil e no Mundo*, which unfortunately has not yet been translated from the Portuguese.

Finally, a very useful study of the relationship between mysticism and creativity and the transcendent world view of the shaman is the work of the Committee on Psychiatry and Religion: *Mysticism: Spiritual Quest or Psychic Disorder?* (Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry; Publication No. 97, 1976).