SURVEY-GUIDED DEVELOPMENT[*]

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OPSOMMING

Daar is reeds heelwat sukses behaal met die organisasie-ontwikkelingsbenadering bekend as Opname Gebaseerde Terugvoer (OGT). In hierdie artikel word onder meer die volgende kenmerke van OGT bespreek: die mate waartoe die benadering voldoen aan gestelde vereistes vir suksesvolle organisasieontwikkeling, hoe OGT verskil van die ander belangrikste organisasieontwikkelingsbenadering naamlik laboratorium- of sensitiwiteitsopleiding, die belangrikste stappe van 'n OGT-program, die voordele en waarde van die benadering en aanduidings van moontlike verdere navorsing wat daartoe kan bydra om die doeltreffendheid van Opname Gebaseerde Terugvoer te verhoog.

It is a well-known fact that large amounts of money and thousands of man hours are annually spent on organisation development programmes (OD-programmes). A recent survey (Coetsee, Coster & Van Niekerk, 1978), found that 73 of the largest South African organisations invested an average of R24 000 per annum in organisation development programmes. Research indicates (Porras, 1979; Porras & Berg, 1978; Beer, 1976; Bowers, 1976; Kahn, 1974; Tichy, 1974; Levinson, 1972), that although organisational development techniques have been applied for more than three decades, very few scientific indications exist that they have improved organisational effectiveness.

In this paper various features of an organisational development approach, survey-guided feedback, with which a considerable measure of success has been achieved is described. These features include: the extent to which survey-guided development meets the requirements of organisation development approaches, how it differs from the other main organisation development approach - laboratory training, the critical steps of a survey-guided development programme, the advantages and value of this approach and possible future

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research which could contribute to improve the effectiveness of the survey-guided development approach.

REQUIREMENTS OF ORGANISATION DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

Although there are many descriptions of organisational development (OD), it is possible to outline the basic characteristics and requirements of organisation development.

The literature on this topic suggests for example that:

− Successful OD involves all sub-systems, that is the aggregate or *total organisational system*. This systems orientation, distinguishes OD from other developmental approaches, such as management development or assessment centres, which are aimed at changing and improving specific organisational sub-systems.

− OD must be based on *organisational needs*. American research, for example that undertaken by Bowers (1976), as well as a local survey, Coetsee et al. (1978), indicate that OD-techniques are often applied in organisations without first defining organisational problems and/or specific needs.

− A major requirement for the application of an OD-programme is a thorough *identification (diagnosis) of problems and developmental needs* and of processes, such as decision-making, leadership styles and communication, in the various subsystems of the organisation.

− OD should also be a *planned, systematic process*. The identification of training needs and problems should form the basis for the planning and execution of the OD-programme as well as for the specific OD-interventions to be applied. Apart from this it should also include the following steps: the application of the programme, intermediate monitoring of progress and the evaluation of the entire programme.

− OD should be a *process of long-term change*. The evaluation of the entire programme referred to above implies a re-determination of training needs. This is the starting point of a new cycle of interventions consisting of the steps already outlined. One of the reasons why organisation development is undertaken is to ensure that the organisation will continue to adapt to change arising from technological developments and new economic and management requirements. Thus organisational development cannot be a one-time occurrence but should be an on-going process.

−   OD should be *based on scientific principles.* Authors such as Bowers (1976),
Friedlander and Brown (1975), Kahn (1974) and Levinson (1972), all agree that one of
the main shortcomings of many OD techniques is that they are not based on empirically
derived principles. Contemporary organisational theory has contributed little to the field
of organisation development. Various researchers are at present engaged in active
research in this field and indications are that a scientific theoretical basis is developing.

OD should be directed at both the *improvement of organisational effectiveness* and *the
effectiveness and satisfaction* of the individuals in the organisation. Although this is the main
purpose of organisational development efforts, preliminary research indicates that the
application of OD-programmes does not often achieve this result. Bowers (1973, pp. 21-24),
in a study of the effectiveness of OD-techniques, found that the application of only a few
techniques - interpersonal process consultation with reasonable success and survey feedback
techniques to a large extent - improved organisational effectiveness. The lack of data on the
effectiveness of OD-techniques is probably the result of OD-practitioners' resistance to having
their work evaluated or their lack of effort to determine and report results.

THE TWO MAIN OD-APPROACHES

Systematic OD as it is known today has evolved from two related but separate stems.
The first is laboratory training, also known as sensitivity training, T-groups, L-groups or small
group training. The second stem is survey research and feedback or survey-guided
development.

Laboratory training

The T group approach has been used widely in South Africa and is well known. This
approach has been applied in a number of different ways involving various approaches and
using divergent training and leadership styles, but the following aspects are always
emphasized to a lesser or greater extent: participant involvement, expression of feelings and
emotions, awareness of own behaviour and observation of the behaviour of others, the use of
feedback and interpretation to sensitize the participant to personal and inter-personal
processes, making the participant aware of his influence and impact on others, analysing

characteristics of personal style, improving knowledge of group functioning and highlighting the complexities of the communication process.

The rationale of laboratory training as used in organisational settings, is that its application fosters the sensitivity of people (managers and employees) in interpersonal relationships and group situations. It therefore contributes to their becoming more effective employees, which in turn results in a more effective organisation.

Whether the application of laboratory techniques really obtains these results, is doubtful. Laboratory training is a form of individual development and often results in changes in the attitudes of the individual, improved inter-personal skills, greater openness in communication and increased flexibility in role behaviour (Campbell & Dunnette, 1968; House, 1967). Serious doubt, however, exists whether this is transferred to behaviour in organisational settings (Franklin, 1979). Bowers (1973), in the most comprehensive evaluation of the effects of various OD approaches up to now, found that laboratory inter-ventions led to declines in effectivity measurements. Gibb (in Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 673), in a rather sympathetic review, concludes that there is a "growing impression that this simple ap-proach is minimally effective". According to Katz and Kahn (1978, p. 673) "many plausible reasons for this conclusion can be proposed individual differences in the people trained, in the trainers and the purposes stressed in the training, differences in the receptivity of the back-home situation".

The most serious criticism against the laboratory approach is that it meets very few of the basic requirements and characteristics of OD-programmes outlined above.

Survey-guided development
Information has an important influence on both individual and organisational functioning. Individuals act and organisations function on the basis of the information they receive, process and transmit. In order to make decisions, to decide on action steps, to test attitudes and opinions and to change behaviour, people are constantly searching for information. Organisations are also information processing systems. They search for and gather information from their external environment as well as data about internal functioning.

Organisational structures provide the communication networks to transmit information from one person to another and from one work group to another in an organisation. The gathering of information about all relevant aspects in organisations is essential for the understanding of behaviour in, and the characteristics of such organisations. Nadler (1977)

expands on this theme as follows: "Given this relationship between information and organizational behavior, it is only natural to think of information's potential value as a tool for the improvement of organizations and for planned organizational change" (p.5).

A kind of information that is particularly potent for influencing behaviour and attitudes in organisations is feedback. Research on feedback, according to Nadler, Mirvis and Gammann (1976) indicates that it can have a positive effect on individual, group and organisational performance. Feedback serves as an error-correction device, is useful in identifying and solving problems and serves to clarify goals, and, by so doing increases the motivation to perform well.

Staff members of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan recognised the potential value of information gathering and feedback for organisational development. They have, over the past three decades, developed a survey methodology consisting of the use of a carefully constructed questionnaire, the use of rigorous probability samples and carefully controlled coding procedures. Another development was the construction of a detailed feedback methodology.

Bowers and Franklin (1976) point out that the data-based approaches to organisational development and specifically the survey feedback technique, originated not from the search by practitioners for more effective aids, but from the concern of organisational management researchers for better ways of transmitting new scientific findings from the producers (researchers) to the consumer (organisational managers).

It is often believed that survey feedback consists of a rather superficial handing back of tabulated numbers and percentages, with little else. However, when employed with skill and experience it becomes a sophisticated and powerful tool for the improvement of organisational functioning.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SURVEY-GUIDED FEEDBACK TECHNIQUE

What it is

Survey-guided feedback consists of gathering data about an organisation, analysing this information to determine specific strengths and weaknesses, and feeding the results back to the appropriate group to decide on and implement steps to improve effectiveness. The purpose of survey-guided feedback is to assist an organisation to diagnose its problems scientifically and to develop and implement action plans for problem solving.

According to Bowers and Franklin (1972, p. 48) four elements are involved:

– a model

– a goal

– an activity, and

– feedback.

The *model* is a mental picture of the surrounding world - the organisation, and the factors which cause organisational behaviour. Survey-guided feedback is based on a model that views people as rational, cognitive, information-processing individuals. From the model, desired future states are identified of which some are selected as *goals*. *Activities* are initiated to attain the goals and *feedback* is used to compare, adjust and correct behaviour.

Critical steps of a survey-guided feedback programme

Obtaining the commitment of top management

The commitment of top management must be obtained to all aspects of the programme including the conceptual model, the data gathering methods and feedback sessions. If top management does not accept the theoretical model underlying the approach, the programme will most likely fail, no matter how effective the ensuing steps. Top management must also be committed to share the data with lower levels and to work with them in solving problems that may emerge.

Gathering of data

As already indicated, a thorough identification (diagnosis) of problems and developmental needs is a major requirement for the successful application of an OD-programme. This data gathering phase is characterized by an in depth and comprehensive measurement of the way in which the organisation is presently functioning. The measurement is based on the diagnostic model and provides descriptive data of a high validity about how the system operates; including what seems to be going well (strong points), what seems to be the major problems and the causes thereof and what the perceptions and feelings of the employees are.

These measurements include the use of usually two or more techniques such as a standardized questionnaire, interviews, process observation and unobtrusive measures. The

diagnosis in turn forms the basis for the design of the change programme and for deciding what kinds of interventions will be appropriate.

There are a number of questionnaire format diagnostic instruments available, for example the Bass-Valenzi Management Styles Profile, the Organizational Assessment Package and possibly the best-known and most widely used, Survey of Organizations. The latter was developed by Mann and his associates at the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan. This questionnaire consists of 124 questions of which 5 tap biographical information and 119 are directed at measuring 30 factors related to organisation climate, task characteristics, work group functioning, leadership and employee satisfaction with various aspects. A similar questionnaire, Organizational Diagnostic Questionnaire (ODQ), has been developed for use in South African organisations.

Analysis of data

The data are usually analysed by computer and prepared in a format to show scores for each unit or work group, also referred to as family groups, within the organisation, and for departments, branches, divisions and for the company as a whole. When a standardized questionnaire is used norms are usually provided. The data for each work group are presented in table format and in the form of graphical displays or data profiles.

Training of key personnel

As survey-guided feedback is an ongoing process, it requires the training of suitable internal personnel as change agents, also known as resource persons. They are trained to interpret the data, to act as resource persons at work group feedback meetings, and to assist work groups in problem-solving activities.

Apart from internal resource persons, managerial, supervisory and other key personnel are trained in data feedback procedures to enable them to conduct effective feedback meetings with their work group.

Feedback of group data in work group meetings

The resource persons in charge of the programme, either an internal or external consultant, assist top management in understanding the diagnostic data. Data are thus fed back to the top executive team first and then down through the hierarchy to family work groups.

This is known as an interlocking chain of conferences (Mann, 1961) or the waterfall pattern (Bowers, 1976).

The feedback material for each feedback meeting is of special relevance for the particular work group. For example, the section head, meeting with his or her department heads, will be given companywide diagnostic information, and, in addition, the section's data will be broken down for the departments represented at the meeting. Thus the participants can determine how their section compares with the organisation as a whole and what the strong and weak points are of all the departments within the section. In turn, when the department head meets with supervisors reporting to him, they will have data showing how their department compares with the section of which it is part and how the units within the department compare with one another. In general each family work group is given detailed feedback about its own strengths and problems and comparative information about the company as a whole or the larger part of the company to which it belongs.

A work group feedback meeting has three general purposes (Hausser, Pecorella & Wissler, 1977, p. 66):

−   " to share survey data with work group members,

−   to identify specific problems the data suggest, and

−   to take action to solve those problems".

Experience with data-based change as well as research points to the importance of the feedback meeting (Klein, Kraut & Wolfson, 1971; Nadler, 1976). The change process is largely initiated when members of work-groups sit down together to work with the data. The effectiveness of feedback meetings thus determines whether feedback will produce change.

Although numerous more complex survey-feedback designs have been used, the steps outlined above are the basis of most of the approaches.

Feedback techniques, employing group involvement in problem identification, discussion and solution, have the great advantage of working within the existing organisational structure. Katz and Kahn (1978) point out that each work group " ... can act directly on those issues within its realm of authority, and can send its supervisor as emissary to the next level of management with requests beyond its own power" (p. 677).

In most cases work groups have a series of feedback meetings, which often become a permanent feature of their activities.

Monitoring progress

A short form of the survey questionnaire and/or interviews is used to gather data from small samples, at frequent intervals during the programme. The purpose is to determine how the programme is perceived, what effects are occurring in terms of attitudes and performance, what kinds of problems are being experienced and whether adjustments or corrections in the change programe are necessary.

Assessing the effects

To assess the benefits of the programme and evaluate the success of the change effort the whole data gathering phase, as explained previously, is repeated. The evaluation also includes investigation of changes in criteria such as labour turnover, absenteeism, waste and return on investment. The evaluation phase provides a re-diagnosis and, therefore, is the starting point of a new intervention programme which would include all the steps outlined above. Used in this way, survey-guided feedback meets all the requirements of an OD-programme explained earlier.

EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTIONS AND CHANGES PRODUCED BY A SURVEY-GUIDED DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

One of the features of survey-guided development is the great variety of needs on individual, group or total organisation level that can be met. This is suggested by the variety of changes introduced by family work groups during the problem solving and solution implementation phase of a survey-guided development programme. The following examples illustrate this. A survey-guided development programme was executed during 1979 in a large South African organisation and some of the changes introduced were:

− Restructuring several departments and work groups

− Improving functioning of work groups. Measures introduced include the participation of subordinate in decisions which affect them, letting each other know when personal behaviour is counter-productive or offensive, total work groups to attend team building exercises provided by specialists, introduction of off-work social sessions.

− Improving communication within work groups: heads higher up in the hierarchy were invited to group meetings, tea-sessions were introduced to discuss work related matters,

opportunities were created for individual group members to submit discussion points for inclusion in group meeting agenda, individuals given feedback on presentations during group meetings, training courses were introduced to improve the effectiveness of meetings, to improve personal communication skills. An attitude emerged of "fining a guy a beer for not passing on information".

– Making communication between divisions, between departments and between work groups more effective: other departments were notified in writing of changes that might affect them, regular meetings between department heads were introduced, notice boards were erected and a divisional news letter was initiated.

– To improving task performance and individual work satisfaction, measures introduced include: job rotation, job enrichment, restructuring of tasks, redesigning tasks, introducing flexi-time, improved automation of work, supervisor to explain why certain jobs have to be done, development and introduction of new job training programmes.

– In order to make the work-environment more suitable changes included brightening the office environment by providing plants and wall paper, changing to an open office system.

– With regard to supervision, steps included: introduction of new management systems such as management by objectives, greater delegation of work, giving subordinates more say, sending supervisors to management courses to improve supervisory skills, and feedback by subordinates to supervisors on their supervisory behaviour and performance.

WHAT ACCUMULATED RESEARCH EVIDENCE SUGGESTS ABOUT SURVEY-GUIDED DEVELOPMENT

Many organisation development projects employing the survey-guided development approach have been undertaken, yet little has been reported in scientific journals. The available research results do, however, indicate that collecting and feeding back data in the manner explained in this paper can improve organisational effectiveness and the effectiveness and satisfaction of individual organisation members. In the most comprehensive study to date on the relative impact of different kinds of OD interventions, Bowers (1973) obtained information from 23 organisations. Six types of interventions were involved: Survey-guided

feedback, interpersonal process consultation, task process consultation, laboratory training, data hand-back and no treatment as a control. Survey-guided feedback was the only intervention associated with large, organisation-wide positive changes. Alpin and Thompson (1974) in a report on a successful survey-guided development effort at Parker Pen, attribute its success to the same factors to which Bowers attributes the effectiveness of this approach. This includes the extensive coverage of data collection and feedback activities, the amount of unfreezing this technique stimulates and organisation members' tendency to accept and perceive the generated data and problem solutions as relevant.

Survey-guided development has been demonstrated to lead to:

− Increased employee involvement in the organisation (Brown in Pasmore, 1976)

− Improved employee attitudes (Baumgartel, Kimberley & Nielsen in Pasmore, 1976; Nadler & Pecorella, 1975)

− Positive changes in the psychological meaning of jobs (Hautaluoma & Gavin in Pasmore, 1976)

− Improved quality of interaction among group members and improved satisfaction with decisions (Miles et al. in Pasmore, 1976)

− Decreases in absenteeism and labour turnover (Hautaluoma & Gavin in Pasmore, 1976)

− More effective action in the area of employee relations, improvement of upward and downward communication in the organisation and improvement in employee morale (Soat, 1979)

− More equalization of power between supervisors and employees (Chase, 1968)

− Improved product quality (Kimberley & Nielsen in Pasmore, 1976)

− Productivity improvement brought about by a combined survey feedback and socio-technical intervention (Pasmore, 1976).

Apart from the above there are indications that the following benefits may result form a survey-guided development effort:

− The effective development of interpersonal skills. Franklin (1979) describes this benefit as follows: "In fact, the survey-guided development approach was designed, in part, to minimize the problems associated with many human-resource-development training

efforts while emphasizing elements associated with effective interpersonal skill training and organisation development" (p. 284).

–   Scientifically sound diagnosis of an organisations' strengths and weaknesses as well as indications of which development activities will be most effective under the particular circumstances (Franklin, 1979)

–   Greater comprehensiveness in relation to other OD-programmes (Bowers, 1976; Alpin & Thompson, 1974)

–   Reduced resistance to change through employee involvement, an acceptable change-agent-organisation relationship and the tendency of employees to perceive the data as relevant and valid (Alpin & Thompson, 1974)

–   French and Bell (1978, p. 156) states that "... survey feedback is a cost effective means of implementing a highly desirable change technique".

Research thus indicates that survey-guided feedback interventions can lead to important positive changes in organisations. It is important to note, however, that the positive effects are according to Nadler (1977, p. 170) "uneven and inconsistent". This approach is, therefore, not by any means without its limitations. The most important points of critique (Nadler, 1976) are survey-guided development's almost complete reliance on self report data from organisation members, and the limited use which is made of other available organisational data. There is also still a scarcity of theory and models for the process of collecting and feeding data back, and relatively little research has been done on the effects of survey-guided feedback.

The mere use of survey-guided development does not guarantee success. There are indications that the behaviour of the feedback consultant and the way in which feedback data is presented and dealt with (Chesler & Flanders, 1967; Klein, Kraut & Wolfson, 1971) moderate its impact.

The manner in which the entire programme is conducted and especially how the data is collected, and the feedback-process is of major importance. Where there has been an effective and active process of collecting data, using data during frequent meetings, intensive training of key-personnel - then positive changes tend to occur. The more involved members of the organisation are in the entire data collection and feedback process - the greater the amount of positive changes.

FUTURE RESEARCH NEEDS

The little research that has been done to date has given some indications of the value of survey-guided development interventions. The knowledge that this is a potentially powerful tool to improve organisational functioning, the effectiveness and quality of work life of organisational members is appealing. An examination of the work to date gives indications of directions which could be followed up in the future to overcome present limitations and to improve the survey-guided development approach. This includes:

−   The development of various models and theories including models and theories of organisational functioning and behaviour indicating activities that result in improved organisational functioning; more detailed models for data collection, diagnosis and feedback processes are also necessary.

−   The improvement of diagnostic procedures to increase comprehensiveness and the quality of diagnosis. More attempts should be made to employ other organisational data in addition to employee questionnaires.

−   The improvement of the training of consultants in relevant skills and in the ability to select and apply treatments in accordance with organisational needs.

−   The examination of ongoing rather than one-shot feedback interventions.

−   Investigations as to how survey-guided development interventions combine and interact with other organisational development efforts.

−   The improvement of measures and methods to monitor progress and to evaluate the effects of survey-guided development on organisational functioning.

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wat daartoe kan bydra om die doeltreffendheid van Opname Gebaseerde Terugvoer te verhoog.

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