What is organisational development?

Organisational development is the practice of adapting, improving and evolving an organisation so that it can grow or advance. We develop it so that it can improve its performance and achieve its goals. The CIPD's definition of is 'a planned and systematic approach to enabling sustained organisational performance through the involvement of its people'.

Development can take many forms, but OD focuses on maximising the value gained from the organisation's resources. As universities' competitive advantage is delivered through their people OD will involve applying behavioural science knowledge and practice, such as leadership, group dynamics and work design.

OD is related to change management in the sense that many developments will be implemented using change management practices, but also, because it is being done continuously; OD is a planned, ongoing, systematic change that aims to institutionalise continual improvement within organisations.

OD is where interventions are developed with a 'systematic mindset'. They create alignment with the organisation's goals in a planned and intentional way, with a view to bringing about a particular result that will improve the overall performance of the organisation.

Who does organisational development?

Organisation development may sit within a project management office, a quality enhancement function, or within the HR department. And when it does sit within HR, OD doesn't replace HR, but it does heavily draw upon and develop many of the processes of HR to bring about the required change.

There are many ways of delivering organisation development. As it's a people and problem-centred activity and usually spans different parts of an organisation, successful OD practitioners need to be very effective at working with colleagues across departments or organisational disciplines in a multi-disciplinary approach.

OD activities are usually overseen at board level to ensure they reach all areas of the institution and take the organisation forward in a systematic way. Because of this, to be successful, practitioners also need to have a strong grasp of strategic planning and a good estimation of the potential of the organisation's human and social capital.

When and why to undertake organisational development

Universities operate in a constantly changing environment. Because of this, they often find that the practices they have used historically, no longer work as well as they did.

It is critical that OD is an ongoing activity rather than an annual or ad-hoc initiative. One way to approach OD is to use organisational metrics and people analytics to identify the 'fit' between the organisation's goals and needs, and the practices that are attempting to fulfil them. For example, using information from an annual staff survey to review and redesign practices.

Universities have historically been able to rely on a linear approach to setting their strategy and goals. However, with the current pace of change, institutions have to review their strategy, often altering their course in response to external forces. In these circumstances, embracing OD to make sure that their practices are in line with the new focus.

From the CIPD https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/organisational-development/factsheet

What is the Edward de Bono Six Thinking Hats technique?

In the Six Hats methodology, de Bono identifies six different ways of thinking, each represented by six coloured "thinking hats." As you wear each hat, you learn how to think in different ways to brainstorm and approach problems from various angles.

The de Bono's thinking hats are defined in the following ways.

White thinking hat

Start gathering facts and data based on these problem-solving questions:

- What do we know about this issue?
- What don't we know about this issue?
- What can we learn from this situation?
- What information do we need to solve this problem?
- Are there potential existing solutions that we can use to solve this problem?

Black thinking hat

Questions to help you think from the black hat perspective can include:

- How will this idea likely fail?
- What is this idea's fatal flaw?
- What are the potential risks and consequences?
- Do we have the resources, skills, and ability to make this work?

Green thinking hat

The green hat may ask questions such as:

- Do alternative possibilities exist?
- Can we do this another way?
- How can we look at this problem from other perspectives?
- How do we think outside the box?

Yellow thinking hat

Yellow hat questions could include:

- What is the best way to approach the problem?
- What can we do to make this work?
- What are the long-term benefits of this action?

Red thinking hat

A red hat thinker's objectives include:

- Make intuitive insights known.
- Seek out your team's hunches and feelings.
- Reveal an idea's hidden strengths.
- Use instinct to identify potential weaknesses.
- Find internal conflicts.

Blue thinking hat

Questions that will help you in the blue hat role may include:

- What is the problem?
- How do we define the problem?
- What is our goal and desired outcome?
- What will we achieve by solving the problem?
- What is the best method for going forward?