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[Review of the book *Organization development: Principles, processes, performance*, G.N. McLean, 2005]

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Published in:
International Public Management Journal

Publication date:
2010

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Kenis, P. N. (2010). [Review of the book *Organization development: Principles, processes, performance*, G.N. McLean, 2005]. *International Public Management Journal*, 13(2), 206-209.

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Publisher Routledge

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International Public Management Journal

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t737963440>

A Review of: “*Organization Development: Principles, Processes, Performance*” by Gary N. McLean”

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Online publication date: 20 May 2010

To cite this Article Kenis, Patrick(2010) 'A Review of: “*Organization Development: Principles, Processes, Performance*” by Gary N. McLean”', *International Public Management Journal*, 13: 2, 206 — 209

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/10967491003756831

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10967491003756831>

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BOOK REVIEW

***ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT: PRINCIPLES,
PROCESSES, PERFORMANCE* BY GARY N. McLEAN**

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Organization Development: Principles, Processes, Performance. Gary N. McLean. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers. 2006. 465 pages. ISBN: 978-1576753132

Organizational development (OD) is about planning, improving, and reinforcing strategies, structures, and processes that lead to organizational effectiveness (no matter how the desired effectiveness is defined) based on behavioral science knowledge. Public management is about the management of problem solving and decision making in the public sector. Since public problem solving and decision making always involves corporate actors or organizations, one would assume that the knowledge generated in the field of organizational development is relevant for students of public management. Reviewing Gary N. McLean's newest book, *Organization Development: Principles, Processes, Performance* provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on this assumption.

There is a myriad of definitions for organizational development but the key is that OD is a planned and long-range strategy for managing change in order to improve organizational effectiveness while following OD processes, principles, and values. It is thus different from organizations changing quickly to changing circumstances through unplanned changes and not following OD principles. It is also different from empirical research that posits things change by simply looking at them. In OD, the results from planned action must be continuously examined and change strategies revised as interventions unfold. Consequently, what makes OD so distinctive is that it stands for a planned and systemic change, and that its practice is grounded in a distinctive set of core values and principles that guide practitioner behavior and action (called *interventions*). OD processes are based on key values such as respect and inclusion, collaboration, authenticity, empowerment, self-awareness, democracy, and social justice. OD is value-based but it is also at the same time supported by theory, action research, and is informed by data.

In this excellent introductory textbook, McLean offers readers a clear and comprehensive overview of this field to acquaint them with the vocabulary of organization development. It is mainly written for those who actually plan to get involved in an organizational development trajectory. It provides insight into the basic processes and a helpful overall “process model” to support those rolling out an organizational development program. Such programs might, for example, produce organizational renewal, enhance cultural change, enhance profitability and competitiveness, ensure health and well-being of organizations and their employees, institute total quality management in order to reduce roadside accidents, create a common culture after a merger or acquisition, help or manage conflicts, and so on.

The chapters are organized along a clearly developed process model that includes the following: entry in the organizational development process (marketing and contracting); start-up; organizational assessment and feedback; action planning and interventions; implementation at the individual level, the team and interteam level, the process level, the global level, the organizational level, the community level, and the national level; evaluation of processes and results; adoption of changes and follow-ups; and, last but not least, separation from the organization (i.e., ending the relationships between the client and the OD professional).

Organizational development as presented in this book has an inherently positive touch about itself. Implementing an organizational development process promises a bright future, and the book lays out how to get there. At the same time, McLean also reflects critically about the basic premises, about overlap with other fields, and about future challenges for the field of OD. In particular, the chapter “Issues Facing OD and Its Future” is very instructive. The chapter is so outspoken and sharp in its critical observations that sometimes one starts to wonder to what extent the tools and processes presented in the previous chapters still hold. On the one hand, the chapter concludes that OD, when correctly done by competent professionals, can benefit organizations in many different ways. On the other hand, McLean presents ideas of where he thinks the OD field will go that will move it forward in dramatic ways and considers whether the field is ready to take these steps. What he considers necessary for the future of the OD field is that it opens up and gets “mainstreamed” in professional organizations of students of organization instead of being isolated in separate OD networks. Furthermore, OD scholars and practitioners need to be open to studying larger more and complex systems and to take into account societal developments rather than being limited by the boundaries of an individual organization. To me it seems that the identity of OD is very much linked to the OD professional, with his/her specific skills focusing on a specific organization as client. An interesting question is, of course, whether or not the mainstreaming and enlargement of the field (beyond the study of isolated organizations) will undermine some of the basic OD principles.

Is the field of organizational development, as presented in this book by McLean, relevant for students of public management? This seems a pertinent question, since on the first sight there is, as stated above, clearly a potential connection, but on the other hand there is very little literature that combines organizational development

and public management. This is somewhat surprising, since as early as 1969 Robert Golembiewski published an article in the *Public Administration Review* entitled “Organization Development in Public Agencies,” and in 1977 he edited (together with William Eddy) two volumes entitled *Organization Development in Public Administration*. Both publications, which I consider to have been visionary at the time they were written, seem not to have had a great impact in the field of public administration/management. A search in *Web of Science* reveals that these publications are hardly cited. In the same database the keywords “organization(al) development” and “public administration” or “organization” or “management” hardly produce any results. It thus becomes clear that both fields are little connected. In what follows I would like to reflect on why there is a missing link. The book by McLean turns out to be also a good source for speculating about this issue.

One of the reasons might be that it is only because the concept “organization development” is not commonly used in the public management literature but that instead other concepts are used for pointing to a similar phenomenon. The recent article on “Managing Successful Organizational Change” by Fernandez and Rainey (2006) might be indicative of such an explanation. According to McLean, organizational development and change management are, however, different things. Within the field of organizational development, only changes that are planned, and that can rely on the use of organization development processes and principles, are relevant. Thus the literature addressing organizational change in the article by Fernandez and Rainey is different from what is meant by organizational development.

Another reason might be that the public sector has a variety of distinctive features that provide special challenges to organizational development objectives. This is an issue Golembiewski already addressed in his 1969 seminal piece. Public business is often looked at from a variety of perspectives (from the perspective of the executive, the legislature, special interests, and the media). This implies that in a public sector environment the design and implementation of organizational development programs can be frustrated in multiple ways. Moreover, the number of interests at stake at the same time is presumably higher in a public sector setting compared to business organizations. McLean presents in his book a list of 10 clusters of possible desired outcomes of organizational development processes (e.g., advance organizational renewal, enhance profitability and competitiveness, facilitate learning and development, improve problem solving, strengthen system and process improvement). Whereas in a private sector organization it is more likely that an organization will decide to roll out an organization development process in order to achieve one of these specific desired outcomes at a specific time, it can be expected that in a more politicized public setting several desired outcomes have to be achieved at the same time. This is obviously often not feasible given the contradictory demands and forces related to such different outcomes.

The question thus remains: where is the link? I believe the link lies in the near future—a future in which public administration scholars and organizational development scholars need to join forces in order for both to keep up with the developments in organizational practices. In the field of public-management change, research streams which focus on performance, developing competences leading to

successful complex interventions, dealing with global, trans-domain and larger work systems, etc., will have to become the center of attention. In the field of organizational development, issues such as non-planned change, dynamic changes, the increased focus on innovation and learning, etc., will have to become more apparent. These issues are also clearly identified by McLean and positioned as affecting the future of the OD field.

What is impressive about McLean is that his agenda is not to defend or merely suggest that OD adapt to the changing circumstances. He actually suggests changing the focus of OD for the future. He suggests that OD professionals will need to make a movement from working with individuals and teams toward larger and more complex systems that require a high level of expertise. McLean equally indicates that the field will also need to figure out how to become actively involved in megasystems, such as communities, national, regional, and worldwide organizations. Moreover, it is stated that even while OD professionals continue to work in organizations, the ambiguity of the OD field calls on them to work for the good of the broader society, which may, in many cases, be in direct conflict with the vision, mission, and goals of the organizations in which OD professionals are working.

I believe that this necessary change in the focus of OD moves OD much closer to the field and reality of public administration, and that developments in the field of public administration move it more and closer to the field of organizational development. It is for those working in these fields to pick up these signals and to link up. Doing this provides a great opportunity for rejuvenating the respective fields and to getting us closer to our world of tomorrow. McLean's book is in any case a good anchor point in this respect. On the one hand, the book is extremely informative about what the OD field is all about and, on the other hand, the book is well aware of the broader developments challenging the field as it has developed up to now.

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