Exploring Organizational Development initiatives in Saudi organizations

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Abstract – Organizational Development is a group of planned change methods that aims to enhance the organizational effectiveness and the general employee quality of work life. One of the major interventions of OD is structural intervention. It consists of a revision or modification in the organizational structure to achieve the transformation related goals. There are some methods that encompass changes in the task structure whereas others focus on goal – setting and the detailed plans to accomplish them.

OD in Saudi Arabia is still in the formative stages and practiced by some large corporations mainly. This research has tried to present some efforts in ushering in the change programs through two select organizations, both are medium-sized. Results demonstrate lack of employee involvement and trust issues. Future research implications are discussed.

Keywords- contract; consultant; organizational development; Saudi Arabia; structural

INTRODUCTION

Organizational development (OD) is a set of planned-change techniques or interventions designed to improve organizational effectiveness and employee well-being [1].

Organizational development (OD) can also be defined as a process or effort to enhance effectiveness of an organization and the wellbeing of its members through planned interventions driven by applications of social and behavioral science, based on a synthesis of definitions from [2]. Alternatively, it is also described as a system wide application and transfer of behavioral science knowledge to planned development, and reinforcement of the strategies, structures and process that lead to organization effectiveness [3]. There have been other apt definitions given whereby OD has been explained as an effort planned organization wide, managed from the top, to increase organization’s effectiveness and health, through planned interventions in the organization’s processes using behavioral science knowledge [4]. [5] has described OD as a powerful set of concepts and methods for enhancing organizational Development and individual well- being. [6] has rightly pointed out that the activities of OD has the primary objectives of disturbing the status quo and elevating the organization to a better condition.

According to [7], there are four types of OD interventions, namely, human process intervention, Techno-structural intervention, Human Resource Management intervention and strategic intervention. The paper examines the structural intervention in case of company B through structural implementation (job descriptions). In case of company A, the initial processes of Organization Development till the negotiation has been examined.

Structural change techniques involve an adjustment in the organization’s structure to accomplish change goals. Structural adjustment may be the change goal or simply may lead to it. Some techniques focus on changes in the task, whereas others focus on the means of setting goals, as well as strategic plans for attaining those goals. Here we discuss the more commonly used structural approaches to change: goal setting, job redesign, quality circles, and strategic planning [8]. The term ODI can also be define as range of planned activities that organisation and the OD practitioners design and execute together in the course of organisation development programme for the purpose of improvement [9].

OD interventions are the plans involving particular activities that have been designed to bring in change in an organization. Over the years there have been several programs to foster change in the organization through improved productivity, performance and satisfaction. In general, organizations that wish to achieve a high degree of organizational change will employ a full range of interventions, including those designed to transform individual and group behavior and attitudes.

The research studied the organizational development initiatives in two different companies based in Saudi Arabia. A detailed exploration of some organizations revealed the reluctance in sharing details and resources related to the OD interventions undertaken.
or about to be undertaken in them. In the first organization, the discussion was from the problem identification to the scanning of proposals of prospective external consultant. The second company had introduced structural OD intervention (job descriptions). Information was collected through a brief interview with the internal OD consultant/manager.

The research was conducted in two Saudi organizations who discussed through extensive interviews the OD initiatives undertaken under the condition of anonymity. A proper consent was taken from both the companies and the study was eventually started. However, as both the organizations requested anonymity hence in the course of the research paper the identity of the companies will not be disclosed, they will be referred to as company A and company B. In company A, the process of problem identification, tracing of the external OD consultant the negotiation process with proposal alternatives.

COMPANY A

Background

This company had started as a sole trading company and have transformed into a limited liability company and aims to become public in the near future. The company has grown to become one of the leading importing, distribution and meat manufacturing companies, marketing its own brands plus a select portfolio of international brands.

Process

The CEO and his top management of the company sought to substantially grow the business activities and scale of operations. The leadership had identified that certain previous growth initiatives had failed to achieve projected new growth trajectories. The following were the areas of concern: lost new business opportunities, weaknesses and bottlenecks in internal operations, losing brands’ market value, failures in successive product development projects over the past decade.

Following this, the internal OD specialist undertook the steps to undertake the causes. The salient aim would be to drive future business growth in the respective dimensions: to develop an effective company vision and mission, to draft a clearly articulated seven years’ plan and finally a strategy implementation management process underpinned by the balanced scorecard methodology.

The emergence of the External OD consultant

There were a number of extensive meetings between the CEO and the internal OD consultant to present a clear draft of the change framework. The internal consultant had introduced several strategy implementation ideas and processes, namely, Blue Ocean and Balanced Scorecard. This was followed by the CEO’s participation in a workshop held at Turkey focusing on these areas. He had then decided to hire an external OD consultant. The main purpose was to facilitate and lead the company’s top management team in its strategy development workshop. The consultant would also add value with his experience in using the proper techniques and methods.

The consultant proposal was prepared following discussions among the CEO, the internal OD Manager and the workshop instructor. Post-discussions the consultant proposal was prepared. The company top management was required to elaborate on its requirements and perspective in the form of a well-structured business case. The business case encompassed the key strategic issues, namely, the current situation and aspects, the risk factors and their impact, the recommended options and the success criteria. Once the business case was prepared, the internal OD manager was given the responsibility to develop the project scope and charter. The internal OD manager then focused on the negotiation platform and invited proposals from other short-listed external consultants and establish a series of evaluation criteria for each proposal. The meticulously defined criteria were based on the project time frame, consultant’s flexibility, the consultant’s profile and related experiences, background check and feedback evaluation, a thorough evaluation of project plan and deliverables and finally the total proposed cost of carrying out the project. There were two suitable profile proposals from the different external sources of OD consultant’s profile shortlisted. Though the company refused to reveal the identity and particulars of the consultant, however they had provided the parameters of comparison (given below):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>Profile Proposal 1</th>
<th>Profile Proposal 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scope Clarity</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliverables</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeframe</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total months</td>
<td>3-4 Months</td>
<td>4 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From/To</td>
<td>Aug-Oct</td>
<td>Aug-Jan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The company did a comparison between the profile and the background of the two shortlisted proposals of the OD external consultants. After deep deliberation they had finally chosen profile proposal 1 due to certain strategic advantages over the other like risk area, deliverables and scope clarity.

Company B

Background

This organization is a multinational security services company and has a joint venture with a Saudi company. There are various regional offices across Saudi Arabia and its core competency lies in providing integrated security systems.

Process

Data was collected through detailed interviews with the concerned internal OD consultant supported by the respective samples of job description forms. The interview was made at the head office of the company in Saudi Arabia. The interview was taken with the Saudi head of the organizational development team. Job descriptions after the intervention in the form of samples and forms were collected after the structural intervention. There were no proper job descriptions prior to the interventions conducted. The following below is the snapshot of the interview process:

Qs.1 What were the problems observed?
The problems were mainly related to lack of proper job descriptions, weak authority-responsibility relationships.

Qs. 2 Can you explain the planning process for developing the job descriptions?
The process of the program included:

a. Communication with the heads and senior management of the company about the overview of the project and its overall implementation.

b. To work as a consultant to the different departments of the company and identify the feasible and non-feasible dimensions.

c. Finalizing all the structural framework with function descriptions

d. Analyzing the responsibilities and tasks in it.

e. Creation of the positions for the responsibility.

Qs.3 What are the key issues did you face?
The department heads initially did not cooperate, maybe due to the fear of downsizing.

There were two key issues, firstly how the job would contribute to the goals of the organization and secondly, how efficient can the grouping of certain tasks be made. Considerable time was spent on the above areas.

Qs. 4 How was the external consultant contacted? Describe how was the relationship developed?
The external consultant was contacted through emails and face-face meetings. It was a single-handed decision made by the top management. Another significant aspect of this project demonstrated its confidential nature, the employees were not involved in any manner but was communicated with final structures and results.

Qs. 5. Could you tell whether you collected data prior to the program from the employees?

There was no previous data or survey done. The program started from the scratch.

Qs. 6 Did you perform a job analysis during the intervention? If yes, which areas did the job analysis cover?

We began by understanding the duties and requirements of the job being filled. To determine these attributes, we did a thorough job analysis covering the following areas:

- the mental/physical tasks and duties
- the methods and equipment
- the significance of the job.

The interview reflected that job descriptions were considered vital by the company in spite of some prevalent differences in their contents and usage variations.

A sample of Job description after the intervention:

Department: HR

Job Description for: HR Officer (Employee Care)
Reporting to: Manager HR
Primary Duties

- Assists in day-to-day operations of HR
- Carries out responsibilities in following functional areas
  - HRIS, Employee Relation, Training & Development, Compensation
  - Organization Development, Executive Administration, Employment
- Provides support to company staff on all personnel matters
- Assists with payroll processing

Duties & Responsibilities

- Provides payroll information by collecting time and attendance records.
- Maintains employee confidence and protests operations by keeping human resource information confidential.
- Maintains employee information by entering and updating employment related information.
- Submits employee data reports by assembling, preparing and analyzing data on weekly basis.

The job description above is precise and has clarified well the primary duties and responsibilities

DISCUSSION

Organizational Development (OD) initiatives in Saudi Arabia is in its nascent stage in most of the organizations. In the first company, the complete OD process and framework was virtually done by the chief executive without the involvement of the employees, neither their feedback was taken regarding their perception of the weaknesses. The internal OD consultant had provided his insights on the strategy implementation aspects. The proposal identification process was detailed and extensive as discussed above.

For the second company, there was again the decision taken by the top management and senior management. Additionally, the job description did not indicate the competencies and skills required to do the job. Neither are the necessary skills, training and educational level mentioned. At this stage it cannot be used as a tool for recruitment and training purposes. The company should carry out such interventions every two to three years. Other performance dimensions to be added to the forms include performance measurements aspects, qualification requirements, language skills and personal abilities.

Another salient issue which I would like to highlight in this context is that there was a complete lack of data collection done prior to the OD intervention to facilitate the diagnostic process. Effective interventions are dependent on valid information on how the organization functions; the employees are given the opportunities to make open and conscious choices with external pressure. In doing so they indirectly gain employee trust, involvement and support. On the other hand valid information consists of the accurate knowledge of the organization’s way of functioning. There has to be an internal commitment, otherwise employees choose not to participate or involve themselves in any manner. The formulation and planning exercise did not include the employees in the above two companies which is a vital consideration for the programs to succeed. Moreover a solid strategic plan to implement the program has been found in both the programs clearly. In the second company a passive resistance from the supervisors were felt but there was no positive effort to minimize the areas of dissatisfaction and insecurities. A proper workshop handling the related OD queries, doubts and misconceptions should have been conducted to dispel the preconceived notions and doubts.

There were a number of limitations of this research: the senior managers as well as the internal OD consultant refused to disclose detailed information and preferred confidentiality; since the employees are best representatives of the organizations, a survey was requested to evaluate their perception of the OD program’s effectiveness which has been declined to safeguard confidential information of the companies. Lastly, though the interview method is not sufficient or suitable to explore the OD interventions and could have been more productive if it was supported with questionnaire administration.

SUGGESTIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

From the organizational perspective, there are some recommendations for effective OD programs in future. Firstly, the different initial stages of OD had not been done following the supportive and participative thrust that defines OD. [10] had compared OD with other management consulting methods and came to the conclusion that the former possesses humanistic concerns. OD thus focuses on respect for individual potential and growth, an emphasis on decentralizing and democratizing organization [11]. Ironically, the human concerns were found to be sadly missing in the strategic planning and the related primary phases of the OD process in the organizations. I would like to present the following suggestions, firstly, there should be a more team –oriented OD interventions with the maximum possible participation of the employees at all level. Secondly, there should be proper data collection methods to be done to facilitate proper diagnosis and further interventions. Thirdly, there is a paucity of research in the Saudi organizations and more broadly in the gulf context, maybe because of the stigma that OD encompasses change which in turn involves examining the inherent weaknesses of the organization and individual and group dynamics. There was a natural propensity of the OD/HR specialists to conceal information during the interviews. To minimize...
this, there could be more research partnerships between academics-OD consultants to elicit effective information and work on change projects with better focus. Future research should concentrate on more organizations and administer multiple research instruments to obtain fruitful data.

References


