**The Dark Art Of OD**

Organisation Development (OD) has many metaphors, the one that resonates most for me is that it’s a *‘dark art’*, often misunderstood, with vastly different applications, meanings and uses. It is nearly always a casualty caught in the crossfire between HR and Transformation as the fight between ‘systems’ versus ‘people’ rages on within our organisations.

Transformation and change within the public sector is a new ‘norm’ for us all. The low-hanging fruit of savings and efficiencies are long gone, organisations are incredibly lean and in the territory of needing to achieve *’marginal gains’*. OD offers an important opportunity; not for theories but to drive evidence-based insights to both make and keep those gains as insights grow and deepen.

OD isn’t a quick fix or short term intervention, but an integral part of the HR leaders’ role. It isn’t just about people or systems, it’s the environment within which people and systems work in synergy. It is about making every part of the organisation as effective as it can be.

People behave and act in reaction to how they think and feel about the system they work in. Systems are broad and complex and so are people.

To support our HR leaders in becoming more confident within the OD space, WME, CIPD and LGA are launching *‘Inspire OD’* aimed at building awareness and understanding and offering tools and techniques to apply within the workplace.

For a flavour of just how broad the OD spectrum can be, here are four trends we could seek to harness:-

**Leaders as disrupters** – Leaders at all levels need to start questioning and challenging the status quo. We are entering an age where we must challenge long-held orthodoxies about how services are delivered, who by and in turn, what constitutes our workforce. By getting OD interventions right, we have an opportunity for a common language and way to understand leaders’ needs and how best to help them work across boundaries and systems.

**Inclusion and Diversity** – There is a social movement that is redefining the corporate and social responsibilities of organisations; it is becoming less acceptable for organisations to be unrepresentative of their customers or citizens. Few of our senior leaders are female and even fewer are from BAME communities. For a Region as diverse as the West Midlands, where over 30% of our community is BAME, we’re not representative in our workforce. There is untapped potential in Local Government and the wider public sector to support inclusive and diverse teams to perform better. We are slow to build the business case within the sector and this is one area OD can offer interventions to support talent.

**Understanding our people** – We have yet to harness all the discretionary effort with our workforce. There is an opportunity to use new technology and wearable-tech to really understand productivity, motivation and what makes our people happy. We all ‘like’ posts on twitter or facebook, view online news and online shopping regularly and many of our browsing preferences or adverts are based on what we like and how we feel. To have this level of ‘insight’ about our workforce would be incredibly powerful. The heart of OD is how people think and feel; this influences their behaviour and these interventions could drive significant insight.

**Big Data** – If you can’t see it, analyse it and look at trends, you can’t change it. Individually organisations monitor a wealth of data about people, by using ‘Big Data’ together can we now drive changes and insights. In the West Midlands if we could harness and analyse data and trends about our local government workforce, we could test out a range of hypothesis. What if we knew the impact sickness had on teams, if data showed us how age, length of service and team absence levels impacted on absence - we could drive preventative interventions.

Rebecca Davis, CEO West Midlands Employers r.davis@wmemployers.org.uk

*Inspire OD programme, aims to develop OD capacity and understanding within the HR community and launches 26/27June in Birmingham, before being offered more widely via a subsidy from LGA. More:* [*http://aspirehrbp.org.uk*](http://aspirehrbp.org.uk)