Organization Development and Change in 21st Century
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Lecture - 14
Discussion on Various Large Group Interventions

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Third type of organizational level intervention is where the whole system is involved. So, the focus is on issues affecting the whole organization or a large segment of it, such as developing new products or services, responding to the environmental challenges or environmental changes or introducing new technology. There are various types of change programs where large group is involved where whole organization all the groups and departments are involved simultaneously as a part of the intervention process.

We are going to look at primarily two interventions in this category, first is the future search conference and then we will discuss open-space meetings.

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Comprehensive OD interventions involve getting the whole system in the room, what does that mean? It means it is getting all the key actors of a complex organization or system together in a team building, future planning kind of a session.

So, people from different departments or different functions come together in large numbers and they contribute towards team building and future planning for their organization.

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Our first example of the large group intervention is future search conference. This was developed and popularized by Weisbord. Phase one of this process is environmental appreciation. A large number of people are invited for these meetings, they are generally clubbed into smaller groups according to the hierarchy, function and their expertize.

In the first stage, people look at environmental appreciation meaning what are the changes in the world around us that are taking place and in light of those changes what is the desirable and probable future. These two things are being articulated by various groups, and these groups after working together on these two questions assemble again in the large organization and large group and report that to the large group.

Phase two is system analysis: history, present and desirable future. That means, they look at what is the history of my system means how we are functioning, they look at how we have evolved as a department or group in the last few years.

And as a result of that how we are currently functioning. They also look at what is the desirable future means in future how differently we should be behaving, what are the different measurements we need to follow, what are the different processes and systems we need to implement to create the desired future or to survive in the future which demands and is posing challenges currently.

Third stage is integration of system and environment, which involves dealing with constraints, strategies, and action plan. Groups may identify the desirable future, but that desirable future can be created only by designing systems and processes.

We can design the systems and processes, but there will always be some constraints in getting those systems and processes implemented and working. In that context, these groups are encouraged to foresee what are the probable challenges, what are the constraints and then make an action plan and form the strategy.

If you remember, in the diagnostic stage we talked about force field model. Force field analysis can be used in this stage as well while identifying what are these new systems and processes, how they should follow, they should implement or follow to embrace the desirable future, to awaken in the desirable future, to function in the desirable future, they also need to identify what are the supporting factors and what are the opposing factors of

that. And then in the meeting itself they need to identify how to address the opposing factors and the supporting factors for these plans.

So, this was the very first type of organization wide intervention which was popular and being adapted in different formats by large number of organizations. The benefit of this intervention is that you get the perspective from a very large number of people and you get diverse perspectives.

It makes people feel empowered, it makes people feel involved and one of the basic tenets of the chain management process is that people support what they create. In this process people have the feeling, the organizational members have the feeling that they are the ones who are taking charge of what they are doing, in-charge of their organization and they have the power to change the course of action of the organization.

So, it has a psychological impact, it infuses energy, it enthuses people and it helps bring out a large number of ideas from the different quarters of the organization.

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Comprehensive OD Interventions: Strategic Planning Technique

- Group reflection on What business we are in? (gives/examines mission statement)
- Identify and analyze the various domains that make demands on the organization
- Identification of domains or environmental segments
- To identify the current demands of the domains
- To identify the current responses of the organization to those demands
- To predict future domain demands and future organizational responses
- To identify ideal or desired domain demands and ideal response
- Action planning
- Implementation

In this strategic planning technique, which is similar to the future search conference, they adapt the following steps. First, there is a group reflection on what business we are in by examining the mission statement. So, a fundamental thinking is encouraged in this intervention, where they look at what business we are in, what is my identity, what is the reason for our existence as organization.

Then groups identify and analyze the various domains that may demand on the organization. If I am an oil company, should I identify just as an oil company or I can look at the energy company. These are the questions being addressed and in the context of these existential questions and questions relating to the purpose and mission of the organization, they identify and analyze the various domains that make demands on the organization.

What are the changes going on, which involves identification of the domain, identification of the current demand of the domain and to identify the current response to the organization to those domains. We discussed in the very first session that there are a large number of technical changes taking place: machine learning, block chain technology, artificial intelligence, robotics, big data, a large number of technologies are defining and redefining the different business models.

In the context of these challenges, organizations need to relook not only how to serve their existing customers, they need to relook how their business can be redefined.

And in the session on transient advantage we looked at how some companies have been able to redefine their business over the periods and that is how you see retailer like Walmart is getting into healthcare, telecommunication companies getting into activities which were the domains of the banking, banking organizations are getting into the domain of the insurance selling. Those changes are happening because of their appreciation and understanding of the changing nature of the environment and demands and of course, the opportunities coming along with that.

But how a company and organization can decide where to venture into, what to look at? Strategic planning technique at the organizational level is a forum where the collective wisdom is harnessed and ideas are invited to look at what are the possibilities for this organization to venture into, in order to respond to the changing demands of the environment and environment which constitutes the technical environment, political environment, global economic and social environment.

Prediction of the future domain demands and future organizational response is also done in this intervention to identify ideal or desired domain demand and ideal response. So, if you look, the first step is about existential question, it is about questioning why this organization exist and redefining the purpose.

Second step is looking at and appreciating the environmental demands more closely and identifying the most appropriate response. Once the response is identified it is supported by action planning and after action planning comes the most important part of the intervention, that is implementation.

Implementation requires resources, follow up and most importantly the commitment of the people who are involved in the process. We have already looked at the implementation process of the change, we have looked at the Kotter's model more closely which describes the 8 steps of change.

But what change this organization should undertake, in which direction organization should undertake any change, what should be taken up as the change project, these questions are answered in these kinds of interventions. Gone are the days when a few people had the prerogative and considered to be competent to think about their strategic direction of the organization and innovation.

Nowadays it is recognized that strategy and innovation are everyone's job. And more so it is the job of people who are at the interfaces, people who are at the interface of the organization and the customer, people who are the at the interface of other departments, people who are interacting with a larger number of stakeholders.

So, to get the insights about what market is demanding and what should be our action plan, these conferences are helpful. Once the right things are identified we can follow the Kotter's model or other model or the Kurt Lewin's model to implement the change process.

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A large group meeting is based on certain assumptions: number 1, organization members perception plays a major role in environmental relations. Number 2, organization members must share a common view of the environment to permit coordinated action towards it. Number 3, organization member's perceptions must accurately reflect the condition of the environment if organizational response is to be effective.

An organization cannot only adapt to the environment, but also proactively create it. These large group interventions that we have just discussed are based on the assumption that people have the ideas and the competencies.

Their ideas can come when they are made aware of the environmental challenges. Their competencies can result into synergies and the coordinated action when they work collaboratively and when they operate from the perspective of the common understanding about the challenges, opportunities and ways of responding to that.

Last but not the least, it is not that organizations can only respond to the challenges, the most successful organizations proactively challenge the environment, they proactively change the taste of the customer, they proactively come up with the services which create a new market. Whether it is Ola, Uber, whether it is Swiggy, whether it is iPhone, in all these cases we see it was not the demand of the environment a direct demand of the environment, it is these it is these companies proactive thinking which has created the market or which has activated the market, which has converted the hidden need of the

customers, hidden need of the society into a tangible market. This kind of thinking can be promoted in large group interventions.

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Large group interventions require a very sound preparation. All the instructions must be clear, agenda must be clear and communication also must be clear. So, preparation for the large group meeting involves identifying the compelling meeting theme, if theme is not compelling people will not be motivated to participate.

Selection of the appropriate stakeholders to participate, if meeting is under represented in terms of some stakeholders, i.e. some critical stakeholders are missing, these large group interventions will not be successful.

Development of the relevant tasks to addressing themes. A very important thing is that the ideas which are identified are converted into action planning that is where the managerial skill comes. We may have great ideas, but we may not be able to convert those great ideas into managerial action planning and the general action planning. So, these three things are essential for any large group intervention to be successful.

We are going to look at two methods in the large group intervention further: open system method and open-space method. Before describing these, we must remind ourselves that following up on the meeting outcome is essential for the success of these interventions.

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Now, we are going to look at a very interesting intervention called open space method. John Harris is the person who popularized it and the birth of this intervention is also interesting. His team, John Harris's team organized an International Conference and like any other International Conference they had to prepare for one whole year or 2 years to identify the speakers, to make the schedule and to take care of all the logistics.

Conference was done well, it was very well organized, people were happy attending that, participants found it useful, interesting, intriguing. In the feedback, it came out that the most productive time slots were during the lunch and tea breaks where people got engaged into open discussion. So, participants identified the most productive time slots were the tea breaks and lunch breaks because there they were getting opportunity to interact with others in a free-flowing manner.

Then the propounder of this method thought that if the free time happens to be the most productive time of the conference, why cannot we have the conference which has free time and based on this insight this open-space method was proposed. Open-space method starts with setting a condition for the self-organizing. It means, first they have to announce the theme of the session.

So, when it is conducted in a business organization theme of the session is announced. It might be quality control, it might be innovation, it might be strategic response, it might be developing new process, developing new services and products etcetera. So,

announcement of the theme of the session is the first thing that directs the energy of the people towards one domain.

Second is establishing the norms for the meeting. There are two types of norms, the first is "Law of Two Feet" that simply means those who come for the meeting have to take the responsibility of holding the conversation, stand by the conversation and commitment for the implementation which comes out of these conversations. If you cannot take the responsibility of what you say and what you are supposed to do to implement the ideas emerging from that meeting one should not come for the meeting. So, that is the law of two feet.

There are "Four principles". The first principle is "whoever comes is the right people", this principle makes people open minded to interact with as many people as possible, without being judgmental about who is more valuable and who is more relevant to talk to and who is less relevant to talk to.

Second principle is "whatever happens is the only thing that could have", this principle makes people ready to embrace the surprises, this principle makes people sensitive that living system has the quality of emergence. That means, outcome may not be exactly the way you think about. So, we should be welcoming and open to accept that outcome.

Third principle is "whenever it starts is the right time", that makes participants ready to be active instead of waiting for more people or specific conditions, this principle makes participants to be action-oriented and proactive in their role. And last is "when it is over, it is over", this principle helps the participant to move on if they have completed the discussion on one theme, they need not to strictly carry on the discussion just to spend time. They can move on to the next theme or related themes.

So, once these norms are established participants create the agenda and coordinate the activity through information posting. How participants create agenda? Under the identified themes after setting up these norms, participants are invited to suggest the sub themes or the specific projects they would like to participate in to fulfil the agenda of the open-space method.

So, suppose there are 100 people, they are invited to present what they are passionate about, what project they would like to initiate, what activities they would like to initiate or carry out in order to fulfil the agenda of the theme.

So, a few people take the initiative, they become responsible for those particular initiatives and others those who have not taken the leadership in terms of proposing group projects or coming up with the different activities or processes, this agenda being created by the different group members is being opened and people sign up for the different projects being floated in the process.

So, suppose there are 500 people, if 25 people initiate and take the initiative of taking a project those 25 sub themes are communicated to all 500 people and other 475 participants can sign up for some or other of these 25 sub themes. With the signing up they get to know the time and place where groups who have signed up for these sub themes or the projects are going to meet.

So, they go back to their respective groups, identify the problems, challenges, opportunities or the project plan and what should be done under that theme and then they come back and report that to the large group.
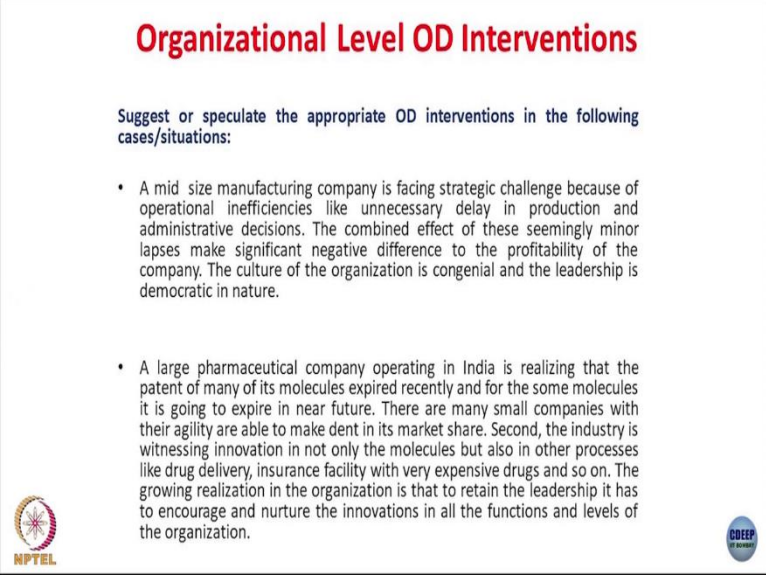
In this stage coordination activity through information posting is very important. If there are 25 groups working on 25 different projects or processes what is being transpired, what is the outcome of their discussion has to be quickly recorded and circulated to the large group.

And if someone in the large group is interested to go to that group and give their additional input, they are encouraged to do that. And, in that process the whole group is benefited by the participation. In these subgroups the person who proposes that project or the idea has to remain with that idea and other group members can move from one group to the next group and can keep giving their perspective and ideas.

The person or who are the coordinators of the each group have the responsibility to compile what is being discussed in terms of the insights, what the insights they have got, what are the ideas that emerged, what are the project ideas or the process ideas that emerged, all that is being documented and reported to the large group. People become aware of it and then the second phase of discussion starts.

There are a large number of organizations which have implemented the open-space method. This method is particularly relevant for promoting the innovation across the organization or identifying some smaller innovation, but high impact initiatives across the departments and functions in knowledge.

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So, what should be the intervention in this situation? The second situation we looked at was of the large pharmaceutical company operating in India it is realizing that patent of many of its molecules are expired recently or for some it is going to expire in the near future. There are many small companies with their agility are able to make dent in its market share.

Second, the industry is witnessing innovation in not only the molecules, but in other processes like drug delivery, insurance facility with very expensive drugs and so on. The growing realization in domination is that to retain the leadership position they have to be innovative organization and innovation need to happen in all the processes and systems not only in terms of developing new molecules.

So, what might be the most appropriate intervention here? Open space method. So, the open space method was used in this situation because organization wide innovative projects were needed. Small groups were constituted within all the divisions and functions and they all were encouraged to identify innovative projects and for that open-space was found to be the most appropriate.

Another situation we discussed was of the head of the quality and production department of the capsule cover manufacturing plant who are almost always at the logger heads. The acrimony between them have been percolated down among the employees of their departments. None of these two department actually leave any chance of putting down another one in joint meeting of the plant and one to one review meetings with the plant heads. What might be the most appropriate intervention here?

Intergroup conflict resolution method. And our last example was a welding electrode manufacturing plant. The production demand increased drastically and though they were able to respond to that demand. In the last few months there were customer complaints about the quality of the product and simultaneously the conflict among the shift in-charges, finance and operations at different departments had also increased.

Culture of this organization has been positive before, but the smaller conflicts arising among the different departments due to changing work demands are making the management and employee concerned about the future of organization. Based on this discussion what recommendation you can make about the appropriate intervention in this situation? Microcosm group intervention was conducted to address this issue.

So, I hope that after this session you are not only being exposed to the variety of the organization wide intervention, but you also become sensitive to what might be the most

appropriate intervention in a specific situation and that understanding comes with the right diagnosis.

A right diagnosis leads to understanding of the right intervention. To identify the appropriate intervention, we need to have both levels of knowledge, knowledge of diagnosis, how to diagnose, diagnosis data collection must be robust and at the same time we must have exposure to the plethora of OD interventions so that we can pick up the most appropriate intervention suitable for that condition.