

DEVELOPING AND VALIDATING 'SYSTEM READY' OD PRACTITIONERS ACROSS THE NHS

Sharing learning for developing OD capability across systems

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ORIGINS

The changing nature of the delivery of health and social care in England with a focus on population health requires leaders to lead and operate without authority beyond their organisational boundaries and across sectors. In turn this requires Organisational Development (OD) practitioners who would traditionally operate within an organisation to have the capability to operate at system level with the same system mindset, supporting leaders to develop system thinking and move to new ways of working.

NHS 5th largest employer in the world
Employs 1.04 million staff
Provides healthcare to 54 million people
Net expenditure of £126.269 bn for 2018/19
1 million patients seen every 36 hours.

Designing the intervention

Key questions:

- How does the NHS identify its OD talent?
- How do you assure system leaders, with any degree of certainty, of the capability of an OD practitioner at any given point?
- How do you assure the OD talent pipeline to ensure the availability of OD practitioners who are capable of supporting this most complex organisation and system level change and improvement work?

EXPLORATION

The project was initiated in the NHS North West Leadership Academy in 2016. There seemed to be an assumption being made that those practitioners operating within organisations could step up and start to operate at system level across organisational and sector boundaries and our sense was that this was not necessarily the case. We started to explore how we might address this and understand what the capability actually was. We disregarded assessment centres as we felt this resulted in practitioners either passing or failing with a potentially damaging impact through the process. We wanted to ensure that we took a developmental approach to this aligned with the values underpinning OD practice:

- Respect for human difference
- Commitment to social justice
- A belief in life-long learning
- A belief in self-renewal at both the individual and organisational level
- Built upon research methodology
- Building client capability and capacity
- Working for independence rather than creating dependency

We wanted to apply behavioural science into health and care systems, organisations and the places where our citizens work and live.

PILOT

The project was piloted and tested with OD practitioners in the North West of England. This is now a project spanning the 10 Local Leadership Academies across England. A series of action research cycles focused upon how we supported OD practitioners to robustly evidence their capability to undertake system level OD support.

The approach supports the talent pipeline for OD at a system level and system transformation.



APPROACH

The aim was to put each practitioner at the centre of their evidence and support their development using a **six step approach**:

- 1 • Personal career and OD competency reflection
- 2 • A one day workshop to explore the concept further
- 3 • Reflection and a decision to submit a claim of practice
- 4 • Support to develop the claim over six months
- 5 • Submission of claim using the competency framework with review of evidence by a panel of peers and experts
- 6 • Validation developmental interview with the panel members to confirm the claim and evidence - issuing with a validation certificate

Framework

In order for the approach to have longevity and relevance the process itself allows for the competency framework to be interchangeable allowing for updates in practice. The first cohort of practitioners used a combination of the **NHS North West Leadership Academy OD Competency Framework** and **CIPD OD Competencies**. Practitioners provided their evidence against each of the elements of the combined framework. Further cohorts have utilised the **Global Practice Framework**.

RESULTS

1st North West cohort

4 practitioners put forward a claim, 2 were validated to lead system level OD work influencing senior system leaders (system OD leader).

2 were validated to operate and deliver interventions at system level working with system leaders (system OD practitioner)

2nd North West cohort

2 practitioners put forward a claim, 1 was validated to lead system level OD work influencing senior system leaders (system OD leader).

1 was validated to operate and deliver interventions at system level working with system leaders (system OD practitioner).

National roll out

78 expressions of interest. 68 participants in the workshop.

27% ready to make a claim. 33% ready in 12-18 months. 40% considering further development.

KEY LEARNING

Key learning about practitioners and the talent pipeline:

- Most OD Practitioners** • Work deep within their organisations working with various internal clients at different levels of the organisation
- Many OD Practitioners** • Don't get experience or gain competency of working alongside the CEO and Executive Board
- System OD Practitioners** • Often part of system or locality groups working to support system interventions that are already scoped or designed, not directly influencing.
- System OD Leaders** • Experienced leader working alongside and influencing system leaders, accountable for mobilising support to system transformation.

Feedback from participants

“Be in it to shape it” “Insightful”
“Made valuable connections”
“Process had integrity and was robust” “Opened doors”
“Developed in confidence”
“Provided assurance” “Supported thinking”

EMERGING STRATEGIC ISSUES

- How do we support our practitioners to gain the competency of working above the level of a single organisation?
- How do we support our organisations to enable their practitioners to gain experience of working with their own executives?
- How do we enlist our organisations and systems into the effort to develop system capable OD practitioners?

SHARING INTERNATIONALLY

The team have shared learning in conferences for the ODN in Europe and the United States of America. The OD Network is the leading global association of organisational development practitioners and scholars, and a go-to resource for cutting edge trends and practices on creating healthy and effective organisations. Pictured left to right, Deborah Davis, Karen Dumain and Maxine Craig.

