

Public administration and development



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Section A)

Introduction:

In this review I will discuss the article “ Experimenting with Organizational Development in Bhuta: A Tool for Reforms and The Achievement of Multilevel Goals” by O’Flynn and Blackman (1999), published in 2009 issue of the Journal of Public Administration and Development. O’Flynn and Blackman (1999) discussed Organization Development (OD) as a tool for achieving multi-level socioeconomic goals and reform across multiple organisations to enhance the capacity of building and good governance by the Royal Government of Bhutan, by linking it with Bhutanese Philosophy of development, Gross National Happiness (GNH). Whilst highlighting issues and challenges, the author pointed out that there exist a strong connection between Bhutanese philosophy of development and OD. O’Flynn and Blackman (1999) argued that using OD as a tool to achieve multilevel reform is a unique attempt and that there is an enormous possibility of using OD in this context for other developing countries especially in Bhutan.

Summary:

O’Flynn and Blackman (1999) discussed Bhutan’s approach of adopting the Western OD consulting practice via a unique way of GNH or middle path of development and pointed out that transparency, accountability, efficiency and professionalism are the pillars of Bhutanese development philosophy. To determine whether OD can be used to achieve multilevel goals and understand the concept of GNH, they divided the article into three sections. In the first section, O’Flynn and Blackman (1999) described the history of Bhutan, including its reforms and the ideology of GNH, which were

introduced by the third king in 1960. In addition, how the Bhutanese reject the concept of globally accepted Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in favour of GNH as a measure of a development tool. Civil services reforms were discussed and how they aimed to improve services by achieving goals of good governance and GNH.

In the second section, O'Flynn and Blackman (1999) explored the assumption of OD as a tool for achieving multilevel goals by drawing attention to OD literature and its application in non-western countries with different cultures. Later in the section, O'Flynn and Blackman (1999) discussed the possible role of NGOs and aiding agencies in promoting OD as a capacity-building tool in developing countries.

In the final section of their article, O'Flynn and Blackman (1999) examined the potential of OD in a Bhutanese setting and its associated emerging problems by refereeing from official documents and newspapers, and pointed out, though OD was implemented as a reform agenda to achieve multiple socioeconomic goals, it was actually used for political gaining, accountability and transparency.

Finally, O'Flynn and Blackman (1999) concluded that though use of OD to achieve multilevel goals was a complex process and it encountered many problems, it still appeared that OD has tremendous prospective in the case of Bhutan and it is now seen as an inspirational tool across the border.

After the brief introductory section, the next section examines the main theme, strength and weakness of the article by focusing on the different literature related to OD theory, issues, and dimensions.

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Critical Evaluation:

The field of OD has sought to improve the effectiveness of human and organizational systems using change and development methodologies based on applied behavioural science knowledge (Cummings & Worley, 2001, pp 1-2). O’Flynn and Blackman (1999) made a point that typical use of OD is a planned change approach used at work group or organizational level, is in line with OD literatures where function of OD is discussed as planned change in an organization or its sub section (French , Bell and Vohra , 2006). On the other hand , recent studies in East Africa indicate that OD has a role in assisting Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to model in their own organizational practices the transformed society that they imagine (McApine , 2007) this supports the idea of using OD as tool for social development in Bhutan. While discussing the development of Bhutan, O’Flynn and Blackman (1999) relate this to clear direction, coordination among different agencies, and commitment, however, they argued that Bhutanese commitment towards their culture and environment prevent them from rapid development. This argument is supported by Alghatam (2005) view who writes, “ Culture has a hard-hitting wide-ranging effect and influence on national development”.

Subsequently, O’Flynn and Blackman (1999) significantly described the philosophy of Bhutanese development, which was focused on maximum happiness of the individual rather than economic growth by rejecting the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that is globally accepted for measurement of development in favour of new GNH, However, O’Flynn and Blackman (1999) fails to mention measuring indicators of GNH. To date various methods have

been developed and introduced to measure GNH indicators e. g GNH indicators include components like subjective happiness, mental health, spirituality and social support etc (Ura, n. d), these indicators are being done in the following fields: living standards, education community vitality etc (European Parliament, 2007). One question that arises however is whether it is possible for the Royal Government of Bhutan to support development policies without establishing any kind of relationship with developed countries of the west and if it can modify the structural context in which it operates. (Basu, 1996)

Furthermore, while discussing OD as a tool for achieving multilevel goals, O'Flynn and Blackman (1999) highlight the reforms in Bhutanese bureaucracies and civil services to identify the interconnected goals and argue that these reforms can play a vital role in achieving multiple goals. A considerable amount of literature has been published on this issue e. g The World Bank (2008) defines the civil service reform as civil services and administration (CSA) reform “ involves all aspects of the management and organization of personnel. It includes programs to downsize the civil service and reforms to the personal information system, including civil service censuses, careers path and other aspects of incentive system and the organization of ministries”. Furthermore, a key feature of OD intervention is the transformation of skills and technology for the betterment of individuals and capacity building of the organization (Cummings and Worley, 2001). Moreover, different studies have shown that OD focuses on changing the entire system rather than focusing on only one or a few components. It emphasizes on helping people and organizations learn how to diagnose and

solve their own problems in contrast to relying on others for solutions (Coffey, Cook and Hunsaker, 1994-552). In all situations, OD uses behaviour science knowledge and techniques to influence people's attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviours on the job, with the ultimate goal of facilitating organizational effectiveness (Krenitner and Kinicki, 1992). Additionally, O'Flynn and Blackman (1999) make a point that implementation of OD application in Civil Service Reforms (CRS) leads to reducing the size of the civil service and is being used to implement specific predefined strategy. Minogue et al (1999) supports this as CRS was driven by ideology in response to citizens and taxpayer's demands for improved public service while, at the beginning it focused on reducing the size and cost of the state.

While pointing change process, the author identified Lewins (1951) approach of 'planned change' allowing people active involvement in organization and society, in order to solve the social problems. This is quite in line with OD literature, as there are a number of major theorists and practitioners who have contributed their own models and techniques to its advancement (e. g Argyris, 1962; Beckhard 1969; French and Bell, 1973). However, all these models are considered to be based on Lewins (1951) model of change process that consists of three phases of unfreezing, moving and refreezing (Burnes, 2004). In their view, OD in practice is about facilitating planned change and OD interventions are classified as target level of change and nature of change, to them OD address to 'individuality'. A serious weakness with this argument is that modern days OD scope is not narrow, dealing single entity, its focus system as a whole, covering all aspects (Beer 1986).

The theme of O'Flynn and Blackmans (1999) article was the implementation of OD in non-western and in aid driven societies. The article raised question regarding OD fitness in multicultural environment, possible unseen problems associated with it and presented views from OD literature in support and against that OD can be implemented cross culturally by tailoring techniques accordingly (Senior & Fleming, 2006). Obviously, this is the strong point of the argument, OD has its considerably long history in western economies (French & Bell, 1999) but now, it has emerged across the world economies (Cummings & Worley 2005). Research shows that ' Culture' is not simply a factor to be put in but must be considered as the context within which all transactions take place because it changes the entire landscape that pervades all relationship and behaviours and, importantly, " meaning". (Trompenaars & Woolliams, n. d). The field of OD can afford to be no less vigilant than other disciplines in the pursuit of knowledge concerning the implications of multi-cultural similarities and difference for success, international professional practice. Particularly critical is the need to test the assumption that ethical standards for professional conduct are transportable to other countries (White and Rhodeback, 1992). Golembiewski (1993) argues that one of the constraints faced by OD practitioners in non-traditional countries (developing countries) is the value-laden nature of OD. He argues, " OD could adopt its tools and western based behavioural science assumptions, to adopt amore differentiated perspective suited to inter alia developing countries". In addition, a study by Sun (2000) and Ngo (2001) found that OD can be successfully applied when western and eastern perspectives are suitably adapted to environmental conditions and situation and organizational reform. In its broad sense it is an ongoing and much

needed phenomena in china, and provides challenges and unique opportunities to apply OD cross culturally and related change methodologies (Lau and Ngo 2001). Although each of these dimensions differentiates between the values held by culture, the framework does not suggest methods for bridging the national culture gap. (Nyberg & Smith, 2009)

According to O’Flynn and Blackman (1999), “ Non-government organizations (NGOs)/CSO have been especially attracted to the participatory philosophy... capacity building tool”. They made a strong point that NGOs/CSO can play an important role in promoting western oriented OD concepts in developing countries, as Ruggie (2004) describes that public domain is being reconstituted at both national and international level as a result of the new role of NGOs and adoption of CSR policies by enterprises. Therefore, one should expect that the CSO and NGOs into the provision of many of the characteristic public service of the welfare state would tend to display of relational contracting to a varying degree (Mendoza and Vernis, 2008). In addition O’Flynn and Blackman (1999) were very right in erasing point of influence of aid agencies in policy making of developing countries and their dictating role, as these agencies tend to impose OD intervention on policies of developing countries as a contribution of ‘ technical capacity building’ . The risk is that no one benefits because the intervention provided to an organization may not need it (McAlpine, 2007), however, there is an inconsistency with their argument while describing the role of non-governmental organizations.

Conclusion:

This article has given an account of and the reason for the widespread implementation of OD. The purpose of the study was to determine whether western driven OD approach could be applicable in the context of Bhutan. The article has made a significant contribution in the field of OD by analyzing OD to pursue multiple goals, highlights the issues, problems and potential associated with it. However, the scope of the study and the evidence of the analysis indicate that OD is not present as completely in Bhutan and is only being used as a tool for audit. In their article, O’Flynn and Blackman (1999) covered several points i. e OD for achieving multiple goals, Bhutanese GNH philosophy and OD implementation in developing countries. I have argued that, while O’Flynn and Blackman (1999) were right that OD can be used as a tool for achieving multiple goals in cross cultural environments, as it has emerged itself across the world economies (Cummings & Worley 2005). Furthermore, it can be successfully applied when western and eastern perspectives are suitably adapted to environmental conditions and situation (Sun 2000, Ngo 2001). The weak point of the article is that although it has discussed in depth all issues related to OD implementation in Bhutan, it fails to point out the weakness of policies towards implementation and factors associated with it, also the article fails to provide the method of calculation of Bhutanese concept of GNH.

In summary, this research has thrown up many questions in need of further investigation and invited other researchers and OD practitioners to work on how western-based OD can be implemented in non-western culture more

practically. Despite this rather bleak picture of OD in Bhutan, the country has tremendous potential for OD implementation.

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