

Warren Bennis: A main, neglected value of “self as instrument” in OD?

“The last item to consider in assessing the cultural readiness of the client system [in undertaking a major change effort] is the most difficult to render in objective terms, and yet it is possibly the most important factor in estimating the probability of success. *It has to do with the change agent’s relationship with the client system, in particular, the quality and potentiality of the relationship.*

If the change agent believes that it is possible to establish a relationship with the client system based on a healthy, realistic understanding of his role and with realistic expectations regarding the change, then a change program may be indicated. But if the relationship is based on fantasy, on unrealistic hopes, on fear or worship or intimidation, then the change agent and/or the client system must seriously re-examine the basis for their joint work.

Let us be clear about this. We mean that if the change agent can foresee a healthy relationship in the future, he might well consider the organization development program. We do not think it is possible for the relationship to be totally trusting and realistic during the beginning phases of work. In any case, *the main point we want to stress is the diagnostic validity of the relationship; the problems that inhere in that relationship are probably symptomatic of the problems to be encountered.*

We are suggesting that *one of the best ways of diagnosing cultural readiness has to do with the way the client system reacts to and establishes a relationship with the change agent. The quality and vicissitudes of the encounter—insofar as it is a miniature replica of the intended change program—provide an important clue regarding the fate of the organization development program.*”

-- Warren Bennis, *Organization Development: Its Nature, Origins, and Prospects*, 1969