

*"When asked what professional trends the OD Network should address in the next 3-5 years, the most frequently cited trend was the impact of technology. IT was identified by more people than those who addressed the next two issues combined"*

# What OD Practitioners Want and Need for Success

*By Matt Minahan, Carrie Hutton, and Marti Kaplan*

**A**S PART OF the learning and orientation to her new position as Executive Director of the OD Network last year, Amy Herman asked a group of us a question that none of us could answer: What do OD practitioners really believe about themselves, their jobs, and our field?

As behavioral scientists, we knew better than to project our own answers onto the entire field, so we did what good OD consultants do, we collected some data. Specifically, we conducted a survey of OD Network members and a slightly different survey among practitioners who were not OD Network members, during the spring of 2001. The data were highlighted at the OD Network's Annual Meeting during the conference this past fall in Vancouver, but this article goes into a greater level of detail about the respondents and the responses, both among members of the OD Network and nonmembers.

## HIGHLIGHTS

The respondents to the electronic surveys were mostly white (89%), female (56%), between the ages of 40 and 59 (67%), living in the US (87%), mostly external (40%) or internal (22%) consultants, likely to be working in the private sector (73%), have been working in the OD field 3–10 years (32%), and were joiners, in that a majority of the respondents are members of other professional organizations (75%). External consultants tended to be older with more experience and higher levels of education than internal consultants. It is interesting to note that these percentages are almost identical to analysis of the OD Network's member database, which appears elsewhere in this issue.

PRIMARY JOB		
	#	%
External independent OD consultant	240	32%
Internal OD consultant	169	22%
Other (please specify)	75	10%
Internal OD manager	74	10%
External OD consultant employed by a consulting firm	59	8%
HR generalist/manager	43	6%
Internal trainer	25	3%
Professor (full-time)	23	3%
Work not directly related to OD or HR	20	3%
Full-time student (not employed)	15	2%
(skipped this question)	14	2%
External trainer	11	1%
Total Respondents	754	100%

**THE FINDINGS:**

At first blush, it looks like externals outnumber other colleagues. But when internals are combined with internal OD managers and HR generalist/managers and internal trainers, they equal 41% of respondents, which is exactly the same percentage of external independents, externals employed by consulting firms, and external trainers. It is interesting to note that only 3% of respondents are academics, and only 2% are full time students.

LEARN YOUR OD SKILLS	
	%
self-taught/life experience	66%
formal degree program	59%
workshops or seminars	59%
certificate	19%
other	18%

In a question that invited multiple answers, we asked how the 646 respondents learned their OD skills. The “other” answers included on-the-job training, mentoring, learning by doing, internships, practice, networking, training programs at NTL and Gestalt Institute, the OD Network Annual Conference, and participating in conversation on the odnet email discussion lists.

ORGANIZATIONS	
	#
Am. Society for Training and Development	51
Soc. For Human Resource Management	18
International Coaching Federation	13
Int’l Soc. for Performance Improvement	7
American Psychological Association	5
Association for Quality and Participation	5
Association for Psychological Type	3
International Association of Facilitators	3
Project Management Institute	3
Soc. for Prof. Dispute Resolution	2
American Management Association	2
OD Institute	2

Three quarters of respondents (75%) belong to other professional organizations or societies. Of those who listed their professional affiliations, approximately half were members of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD). Many were also members of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the International Coaching Federation. Many respondents listed multiple memberships in a wide variety of national and regional organizations.

We asked the 563 people who responded to the OD Network Member Survey why they joined, and their answers were to gain knowledge, because of the shared values, and to network with others.

<b>CHALLENGES</b>	
	<b>Imp or very imp</b>
Learning new techniques	90%
Maintaining high ethical standards	81%
Maintaining work/life balance	80%
Networking with other practitioners	76%

We asked about the important and very important challenges facing OD practitioners, with 734 people responding, 90% of whom identified learning new techniques. Liability and finances (collecting bills and cash flow) were not important to most respondents.

<b>REASONS FOR MEMBERSHIP</b>				
<b>Rate the following reasons you are a member of the OD Network.</b>	<b>not important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>important</b>	<b>very important</b>
Professional recognition among OD peers colleagues	30%	33%	28%	9%
Professional recognition within my work organization	50%	26%	19%	5%
Because I share the same values as OD Network members	9%	28%	46%	17%
To network with other members	3%	20%	42%	34%
To gain knowledge outside my own school of thought	2%	6%	33%	59%
To gain knowledge so I can better help my clients	1%	6%	23%	69%
To access the "Members Only features" of the OD Network web site (Roster Job Exchange OD Resources)	17%	27%	31%	25%
To receive the <i>OD Practitioner</i> (quarterly journal)	11%	27%	39%	23%
For the OD Network member discount at the annual conference	46%	38%	14%	3%
For other membership benefits such as discounts and insurance	61%	26%	9%	3%

We asked members and non-members alike which OD Network member services are of most value to practitioners. Among the 713 respondents, the three most valuable were:

<b>MOST VALUABLE SERVICES</b>	
<b>OD Network services of most value to practitioners</b>	<b>Imp or very imp</b>
OD Resource Directory	79%
Selected <i>OD Practitioner</i> Articles on the Web	78%
<i>OD Practitioner</i> (quarterly journal)	77%

LEAST VALUABLE SERVICES	
OD Network services of least value to practitioners	Not imp or somewhat imp
Long distance calling service	85%
Group liability insurance	80%
Education directory	80%
Group life insurance	76%
Membership directory (paper)	72%
Group disability insurance	70%
Group dental insurance	69%
Group medical insurance	68%

The services that are of LEAST value to the 713 survey respondents represent somewhat of a surprise. However, when the “employed” people are filtered out, among respondents who are self-employed (independent externals and external trainers), the group insurances become much more important.

WEB SITE	
Visits to ODNetwork.org	%
More than once a week	9%
At least once a week	14%
At least once a month	35%
At least once every 6 months	35%
Only for the Annual Conference	3%
Never	8%

Of the 653 people who responded regarding the OD Network homepage, it is clear that it has a small core group of regular visitors, and a larger group of occasional users. People are most likely to view the home page (68%), the annual conference information (62%), the events catalog (57%), and the *OD Practitioner* (52%). Many would also be interested in seeing new web-based services including an on-line magazine (69%), on-line dialog (64%), e-mail magazine (62%) and distance learning (62%).

ANNUAL CONFERENCE	
Attend the Annual Conference	%
Never	60%
Once	15%
2-4 times	17%
5-6 times	4%
7 or more times	3%

There is a large corps of practitioners (60%) who don’t attend the OD Network’s Annual Conference. More than 30% of the 674 respondents have attended the OD Network Annual Conference 1-4 times, and 7% have attended 5 or more times.

FACTORS IN ATTENDANCE	
Influence decision to attend	Imp or very imp
Conference sessions	90%
Major figures in the field	78%
Cost	78%
Opportunities to network	75%
Location	66%
Topics for plenary sessions	63%

When asked what factors influence their decision to attend, respondents made it clear that there are several factors, and that many of them are important.

## TRENDS FOR THE FUTURE

When asked what professional trends the OD Network should address in the next 3-5 years, the most frequently cited trend was the impact of technology. IT was identified by more people than those who addressed the next two issues combined (maintaining professional standards and globalization).

Regarding technology, people commented on the increasing use of technology in organizations (and how it impacts OD), how the Internet and e-commerce is affecting their clients, and thus their practice, and the increasing use of technology in the practice of OD, with virtual teams and e-conferencing mentioned frequently.

Regarding standards, there was a wide perspective, with some wanting the field to look more professional, others wanting standards to measure themselves by, and others wanting a credential to demonstrate competence.

Comments on globalization centered around the increasingly global and technical environment that consultants and their clients work within, an increase in working with different ethnicities, cultures and races, and an increasing awareness of OD as it is applied in other countries.

TRENDS		
Issues named by more than 5	#	Comments
Technology	88	
Credentialing/Standards	39	
Globalization	36	
New economy issues	31	
OD/HR/Training dilution/confusion	23	
Ethical issues/Values	21	
ROI/The business case for OD	21	More strongly and clearly identified by internal OD consultants and managers
Social responsibility	15	
The metrics of OD	14	
Bringing new people in	14	Externals talk about bringing new people into the field; internals talk about adapting to new generations
Shifting demographics	11	Aging population
Mergers and acquisitions	10	
A call for tools for quick implementation while building sustainability	7	Mostly from internals
Wholeness/Spirituality in the workplace	7	
Continuous practitioner/self-development	6	Mostly from externals

## AUTHORS

**MATT MINAHAN, Ed.D.** has been a member of the OD Network for 20 years, coordinates the ODNet email discussion lists, and is working as a volunteer on several OD Network projects. He is president of MM & Associates, a small consulting firm specializing in strategic planning and organization design. He can be reached at [matt@minahangroup.com](mailto:matt@minahangroup.com).

**MARTI KAPLAN** works as an independent OD consultant, primarily with small businesses. She has volunteered actively in OD Networks over the past two decades.

**CARRIE HUTTON** is a full-time student pursuing a M.S. in Human Resources and Organization Development from Johns Hopkins University. She recently left her position as human resources manager for the Cassidy Companies, Inc. to complete her graduate degree and to develop a consulting practice in the areas of human resource management and organization development.

### MALES VS. FEMALES

- There were more female respondents (56%) than males (44%). Men were older with a majority (34%) in the 50–59 age range. In contrast, most women (37%) fell in the 40–49 age range. Although the majority of respondents of both genders held masters degrees (65% of men and 69% of women), more men than women held doctorate degrees (22% of men versus 15% of women).
- Although both men and women found learning new techniques to be an important challenge, women were more concerned, with 54% rating this as “very important” in contrast to 41% of men.
- Women also found work life balance to be a greater challenge than men with 51% rating it as “very important” as compared to 35% of men.
- Women were also more interested in sessions with major figures in the OD field and cost when making their decision to attend the annual conference.

### A WORD ON METHODOLOGY

We collected the data for this research on behalf of the OD Network in Spring, 2001, using a web-based survey system called Survey Monkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>). We initially conducted one survey that was designed for, and sent the link via email message only to members of the OD Network. We subsequently realized that most of the same data would be of interest from non-members as well, so we deleted a few questions and reworded a few, and then sent the link via email messages to our odnet email discussion lists, inviting non-members only to reply. Because we guaranteed anonymity to all respondents, we had no way to verify either that only members completed the member survey, or that only non-members completed the non-member survey. Much of the data aggregation and analysis was conducted using the online tools available at Survey Monkey. However, because the tool was unable to aggregate results across the two surveys, we downloaded several data files and combined them in Excel spreadsheets to arrive at the combined results that are reported here. ■

### EXTERNAL VS. INTERNAL CONSULTANTS

- When compared to internal consultants, external consultants are older with a higher percentage of respondents in the age categories from 40 years of age on up.
- 24% of external consultants have earned doctorate degrees as compared to 9% of internal consultants.
- Although the largest number of internal consultants have from 3 to 10 years of experience (45%), most external consultants have 15 to 25 years of experience (33%). External consultants also ranked higher in the 10 to 15 and the 25+ years of experience categories.
- External consultants find marketing their services to be a greater challenge than internal consultants with 58% rating that item as “very important” versus only 23% of internals.
- The largest number of external consultants (30%) rated the OD Job Exchange as “not important” while the majority of internal consultants (32%) rated this service as “important”.
- Although between 70 and 81% of internal consultants rated group liability, medical, dental, disability, and life insurances as “not important”, by contrast between 30 and 44% of external consultants rated group insurances as “not important”, and most of the “important” and “very important” responses came from externals.
- The consultant directory was a future service of much greater interest to external consultants, with 64% rating it from “important” to “very important” versus only 47% of internal consultants.
- In deciding whether to attend the OD Network Annual Conference, external consultants were more interested in sessions with major figures in the OD field than were internal consultants. 76% of externals rated this item as “important” to “very important” in contrast to only 50% of internals.
- Although opportunities to network at the annual conference were a deciding factor for both internal and external consultants, externals weighted it more heavily with 48% rating this factor as “very important” versus 33% of internals.