Developing the OD Workforce: Career Pathways in OD

Premiered at the OD in The NHS II Conference, 7 July 2014
I just fell into OD...

I joined the NHS a few years back as a temporary administrative assistant, and progressed to the role of Business Manager involving a variety of work including diary management, IT, estates, and induction of new staff – I didn’t realise it at the time but OD was actually a component of this role.

With reorganisation of the NHS, I was then ‘lifted and shifted’ to one of the Commissioning Support Units (CSUs), with no definite role to transfer into. I was asked to step into a role focusing on service redesign and internal OD, which were big issues impacting on the new organisation. I currently works as the Internal OD Lead and have been in this role for 9 months working alongside a team of four individuals – Head of OD, OD Lead, HR Graduate, and Admin Assistant – and work closely with the internal Communications team.

The OD Lead I work alongside with is Myers Briggs accredited and I am currently pursuing an Insights Discovery qualification, that aims to help individuals and teams understand their preferences and behaviours and learn to adapt and connect with others to create strong and effective relationships.

I feel that I fell into OD more by chance than as the result of a planned career path but I enjoy the role and believe career pathways in OD are becoming more structured.
OD often gets lumped with HR...

I began my career working in local government where I undertook various administrative and business management related roles. Within local government, I progressed into the L&D role where I became interested in the infrastructure that supported the delivery.

I have been working in current role of OD Practitioner at a Foundation Trust for the past two years. I feel that there are many people doing OD within my organisation that don’t recognise their input in this area. I also get frustrated that OD often gets lumped with, and indeed can sometimes be subsumed by, HR in the NHS.

In reality, I often feel my role is more closely linked with the service improvement team than with HR, and my day to day work often falls under the remit of the Associate Director of Wellbeing and Engagement rather than the HRD.

I hold qualifications in coaching and L&D, which I feels are directly applicable to his role. In addition, I am also PRINCE2 accredited and hold management qualifications that I obtained during my time spent in local government.
OD is a step behind in the public sector...

I didn’t purposely set out to pursue a career in OD, but began my career as a graduate trainee in the financial sector and in the 90s worked for an organisation that encouraged business schools and universities to develop psychometric testing and other OD tools. I gradually moved away from the line management of operational staff to the management of those in an L&D function.

In mid 2000’s, I stepped into my first dedicated OD role where I remained for two years, working for a multinational corporation which placed a strong emphasis on OD. Based on experience gained at here, I applied for her current post of Assistant Director of Learning and Organisational Development at an NHS Trust.

In comparing the NHS to the private sector, I feel that whilst there is a strong common purpose and set of shared values, OD is a step behind the private sector in other regards. I feel that within the NHS it is often a struggle to inform OD practice as we don’t have the necessary data available and robust systems are not in place for basic measures.

Colleagues within my current team have a broad range of experiences but most have a non-NHS background, which I believe is symptomatic of the lack of structured OD career pathways in the NHS and signals an issue with the ability to ‘grow our own’ OD talent pipeline. I believe that a gap in development opportunities for the OD workforce across the NHS exists and as such am very supportive of the Do OD ‘Developing the OD Workforce’ project that aims to address this issue.
Qualifications alone won’t make you a great practitioner...

I believe that the NHS OD workforce is an eclectic mix of those that have arrived in their current roles by chance and those that have arrived there as a result of a planned career pathway. I feel that a lot of work undertaken in delivering development across the NHS falls under the remit of OD but it is not until relatively recently that it has been given this title.

I am MBTI accredited and also hold a coaching qualification, and whilst these qualifications have been invaluable, I feel that this underpinning knowledge alone won’t make you a great OD practitioner.

Instead, I feel that it is important to get a balance between formal qualifications, exposure to many different situations, and continuous learning on the job and from peers that is key to success within an OD role.
You need to take a consultant approach...

I first began working in the field of OD whilst working as a HR Generalist in the hotel business. This was a hugely varied role but had a strong focus on learning and development and made extensive use of the Investors in People framework. I spent the next six years working for a management consultancy which focused on internal OD and undertook some OD consultancy work. I then spent a short period in an L&D role within an acute trust, before moving into her current role as Head of OD for a Foundation Trust. I feel as though OD has taken on a much more prominent role within the NHS since the publication of the first Francis report.

I hold an MSc in HR Development, a qualification which placed a big emphasis on culture change and a strategic approach to people management and OD – this is something I feel has been very useful in my OD career. I also hold a coaching qualification and am MBTI accredited. Many of my contemporaries are CIPD qualified but she believes that there is perhaps not enough support in place to help people learn how to use their experiences in a way relevant to OD. I feel strongly that some development on how to take a consultant approach is particularly useful to those pursuing a career in OD across the NHS.
OD is a central part of the solution to challenges...

I spent a year working in a car manufacturer’s press office as part of a sandwich course in my Business studies degree course in university. After graduating, I initially started working in PR for a small firm, and then moved from this role into a Communications Officer post in the NHS and spent just over two years in this post, developing skills in facilitation and building networks. It was then I was seconded into a post within the area of service improvement and built upon my skill set before moving into current role as Head of Organisational Effectiveness. The remit of current post is very broad, encompassing matters ranging from Health and Wellbeing to Workforce Integration; as well as working very closely with colleagues in Communications team.

I believe the profile of OD within the NHS is growing, and that OD is a central part of the solution to many of the key challenges being faced by the NHS. However, I also believe that no structured route for career progression in OD currently exists within the NHS and that OD is all too often lumped together with HR.

I don’t currently hold a Masters qualification, although the idea of pursuing a Business Psychology Masters is something I am considering as I believe that this would support my own learning and development. I am also keen to explore and learn from OD best practice in other industries and find this particularly valuable; last year I visited both eBay and John Lewis.