

ORIGINATION OF THE AFML/RX ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
Jim Mattice, 1968 Chief, Technical Operations Office, AFML
(With inputs from others)

AFML (RX) was the first organization within the Air Force (and likely the DOD) to openly pursue Organizational Development (OD) with dedicated staff, outside facilitators and funding to achieve long-term permanent change in behavior and outcomes as a result of leadership action. OD, and later iterations (TQM, T-Groups, MBO, IPTs, etc.) became active to some extent in US industry, some universities and the National Training Laboratories beginning in the 1950s, but practice in the DOD did not occur until the mid-late 1960s.

In 1967, then AFML Director, Dr Alan Lovelace, initiated a formal program and assigned Richard Vossler, a retired AF Lt Col and Physics Division Branch Chief, to receive formal OD training and operate a Lab level program out of the Plans Office, led by Bernard Chasman, but reporting directly to the Director. Initial efforts, including structured employee interviews, in-house and off-site meetings with Division and staff office chiefs were met with passive support and/or outright resistance to needed change (“this too shall pass”).

Then, at a 1968 two-day off-site at Hueston Woods State Park, Dr Lovelace broke dramatically from the mid-afternoon planned agenda to individually and up-close-and-personal confront each participant (including me, the only living attendee) with his blunt assessment of their leadership contribution to the Lab and needed organizational change. After a somber dinner which Lovelace did not attend and a period of directed self-reflection, the group reconvened for a near all-night (to 2 AM) debate which literally broke the back of the resistance to change. Lovelace demanded participation while he mainly listened and indicated his willingness to resign if the group so wished. The result was an individual and personal commitment to “get with the program” or move on. This led to a series of actions involving retaining the recognized national leader of the OD movement, Dr. Herbert A Shepherd, MIT, to devise a tailored program and agenda to be implemented through the Plans Office Staff, now augmented by Jerome Krochmal, a former researcher in touch with grass roots employees.

As a result, the entire Lab annual agenda, program planning and budgeting processes were all infiltrated with OD concepts, experiences, and training. This, set the stage for what was to follow...significant cross-division and Lab/center personnel mobility as a desired experience (after some rough starts) for career development, expansion of the collocated engineer program, the evolution of the A- and T-Area Focal Point System, detailed Roadmaps of all current and planned programs showing other Lab and Services/Agencies related efforts, and critical transitions to advanced development, ManTech and SPO implementation opportunities.

Most importantly, the Executive Group (senior leaders of the Directors Staff and Division Chiefs), became the main owners and implementers of the new OD culture. By the early 1970s the results were both dramatic and enduring, placing AFML (RX) in a clear leadership role to adapt to related efforts now emerging within the Air Force and industry in MBO, TQM and IPTs.