

THE ORGPAX EDUCATIONAL APPROACH - WHITE PAPER[®]

Introduction

This white paper outlines some of key features of the Orgpax approach to training and learning as it relates to the challenges of group organization. It explores briefly...

- ❁ the historical context of adult learning in this area
- ❁ the Orgpax learning model
- ❁ the didactic content of Orgpax tool-kits and services
- ❁ some comparisons to other adult-learning delivery mechanisms

The objective is to indicate not only the unique features of the Orgpax model, but also to situate the key characteristics of the approach in an educational context.

The historical context

Before the industrial revolution in northern Europe and North America there were few “human resource” or “organizational” specialists in organizations, or available to them, to consult on how to solve certain recurrent organizational challenges. In general, the people “doing the doing” made their own decisions based on their own experience or intuition: counsel, when available, was generally life-experience based. Only the very few large organizations, such as the military, the church or the British East India Company, had structures that supported staff-specialists, and even these did not include “human-resource” or “organizational” specialists as we know them today.

Perhaps the first to write about how to pursue a successful career was Eustache de Refuge (Traicté de la cour ou instruction des courtisans, Paris, 1618: see www.treastiseonthecourt.com). This was clearly self-help advice for those at court, not only the place where the prince lived and had sumptuous balls and feasts, but also the seat of government. As De Refuge observed...

“...it’s important not to neglect the most basic and universal rules of behaviour, even though these may not always produce the results you had hoped for. Many good pilots have been lost at sea despite their knowledge and experience of navigation, whereas others less knowledgeable, with neither astrolabe nor compass, have successfully completed many a long and perilous voyage. But none of us conclude from this that we should simply throw ourselves to the mercy of the winds without skill, science or compass.”

The work ethic even towards the end of the industrial revolution was still strongly biased in favor of what we would call today “competence learning through experimentation” (“Teaching, Training and Learning: a Practical Guide”, Ian Reece and Stephen Walker, Business Education Publishers, Sunderland, 1977), in short, self-help. Very widely published at the end of the last century, Samuel Smiles (“Self-help: with Illustrations of Conduct and Perseverance”, Samuel Smiles, London, 1874) observed...



“Heaven helps those who help themselves” is a well-trying maxim, embodying in a small compass the results of vast human experience. The spirit of self-help is the root of all genuine growth in the individual; and, exhibited in the lives of many, it constitutes the true source of national vigour and strength. Help from without is often enfeebling in its effects, but help from within invariably invigorates. Whatever is done for men or classes, to a certain extent takes away the stimulus and necessity of doing from themselves; and where men are subjected to over-guidance and over-government, the inevitable tendency is to render them comparatively helpless.

Even the best institutions can give a man no active help. Perhaps the most they can do is, to leave him free to develop himself and improve his individual condition. But in all times men have been prone to believe that their happiness and well-being were to be secured by means of institutions rather than by their own conduct. Hence the value of legislation as an agent in human advancement has usually been much over-estimated... Laws, wisely administered, will secure men in the enjoyment of the fruits of their labour, whether of mind or body, at a comparatively small personal sacrifice; but no laws, however stringent, can make the idle industrious, the thriftless provident, or the drunken sober. Such reforms can only be effected by means of individual action, economy, and self-denial; by better habits, rather than by greater rights.

Similarly, the “how to” business publications of the day also emphasised the same self-help ethic...

Take for your star, self-reliance. Don't take too much advice – keep at your helm and steer your own ship, and remember that the great art of commanding is to take a fair share of the work. Think well of yourself. Strike out. Assume your own position. Put potatoes in a cart over a rough road, and the small ones go to the bottom. Rise above the envious and jealous. Fire above the mark you intend to hit. Energy, invincible determination, with a right motive, are the levers that move the world. Be in earnest. Be self-reliant. (“The Business Guide: or, Safe Methods of Business”, J.L. Nichols, A.M., Naperville (Illinois), 1892)

Subsequently organizations have seen the rise of management science, and with it a host of specializations in topics such as organization development (OD), technical training, management training, recruitment, compensation and benefits, industrial relations, employee relations, communications, equal opportunity, business process engineering, total quality management, performance appraisal, human resource planning, employee coaching and counselling, career planning, employee assistance and many others. During the post-war period in the heyday of the big military-model organization it was not unusual to find internal specialists in most of these disciplines available to managers to help them fix their problems or, as often as not, to fix them for them. Many line-managers came to believe themselves insufficiently educated or equipped to deal with certain organizational challenges that earlier generations had been prepared to tackle without question.

In this millennium, things have changed, and the values of effective organizations now include a renewed emphasis on self-help in a context where...



- ❁ command and control structures are becoming increasingly rare
- ❁ relatively informal, flat, team-based structures are increasingly common
- ❁ the layers of management in the typical organization are half or fewer than those of the typical organization just 20 years ago
- ❁ the span of control of managers has substantially increased in the past 20 years
- ❁ the amount of management time available to coach and guide subordinates has substantially decreased in the same period
- ❁ the number of management specialists (e.g. human resource, internal consulting, internal project managers, etc.) has considerably decreased in past years, and many organizations require such staff groups to charge (internally) for their services
- ❁ organizations are increasingly using web-sites and intra-nets to provide self-help information for employees to mine.

These and other changes have contributed to an organizational context in which new approaches are needed to enable team-leaders and team-members to better deal with the organizational challenges that have always faced people in groups.

Some new approach to information-transfer and organizational-learning is needed. Orgpax provides it.

The Orgpax learning model

The Orgpax approach to learning delivery is an andragogical (andragogy: "... an organized and sustained effort to assist adults to learn in a way which enhances their capability to function as self-directed learners...": "A Critical Theory of Adult Learning", Mezirow, J., 1981) student-centered approach: the didactic content of the Orgpax approach, its approach to teaching, reflects this emphasis on adult self-help.

The Orgpax learning model and approach...

- ❁ makes no assumptions about student entry behavior other than the broadest of familiarity with working in a group
- ❁ is humanist, in that it is based on the self-esteem, dignity and the motivation of the student to develop new skills
- ❁ is cognitive in that it involves mental processes, particularly of data collection, synthesis and evaluation: tool-kits provide models, information and checklists to support these: students learn how to think
- ❁ recognizes the need of a student to add reflection to his/her experience, before moving to the learning and doing phase of problem-solving: questionnaires/exercises are provided to this end.
- ❁ acknowledges the affective domain of learning through the provision of values-focused exercises, team processes, and vehicles for group discussion for the student to respond to
- ❁ delivers teaching primarily through comprehensive self-help tool-kits, but supports these with access to tutorials with process experts or authors: all tool-kits make liberal use of illustrations to demonstrate "how to": indeed each tool-kit is in the nature of a teaching project in which the task is described and the tools provided by the teacher, but the



student decides on the application and on what approach to follow to achieve his/her objectives

- ❁ has a problem-solving focus, providing organised opportunities for insight to occur through active discovery: it enables the student to manage the process to reach the product objective of solving his/her organizational problem
- ❁ effectively also equips the student to teach

Didactic content

Orgpax tool-kits represent an unusual combination of several didactic dimensions. These include...

- ❁ the management science dimension
- ❁ the organization development dimension
- ❁ the “experiential” dimension
- ❁ the historical dimension

All these are present in each full tool-kit, integrated into a coherent whole. Additionally, tool-kits are supported by a help-line, consultation from a distance, and orientation seminars.

Some characteristics of each of these learning dimensions are as follows...

The management science dimension

Each tool-kit addresses the substance and steps of the process to be engineered, and lays out key content issues: examples include the list of dimensions typically requiring clarifying about the role of a position or committee, legal considerations to take into account when recruiting, etc. Tool-kits look at what considerations are important, what data to collect, how to analyze that data, and likely or desired model outcomes. These guidelines are supported by illustrations, a process checklist and questionnaire/analysis tools, available in adaptable soft (electronic) format. This dimension addresses principally the cognitive domain of learning.

The organization development dimension

Each tool-kit also includes a suggested process for getting the job done successfully. This always includes suggestions for the team facilitator or leader, as well as process guidelines such as the likely timing of different part of the process, caveats on approaches to avoid, recommended approaches to getting the work done, etc. These suggestions are accompanied by suggested group exercises (for example, broad reflection exercises), material to encourage team-work, a special “team members” version of each team leaders tool-kit to enable the facilitator to better guide the process, questionnaire/analysis tools in adaptable soft (electronic) format, a brief slide presentation to enable the facilitator to introduce the process to the team, etc. Care is taken to always discuss “next steps” at the end of any particular process. This dimension addresses the cognitive domain, but pays particular attention to the essential value of the affective domain to successful organizational change management.



The “experiential” dimension

Orgpax tool-kits include not only advice, but also the tools to do the job, delivered in a “Tools for your own process” soft (manipulatable) file. These tools include adaptable questionnaires, analysis formats, exercises, etc. to support either the management science or the organizational development dimension. These tools are integrated into a cohesive whole, and delivered in a manner designed to enable the reader to lead a complete process from beginning to end, as well as to judge whether or not (or to what extent) to employ a third-party facilitator for all or part of the process. The tool-kits also suggest who the process leader should involve in the process, the kind of staff support that may be needed and for what reason, how long the process is likely to take, process evaluation criteria, etc. In short, everything likely to be needed to manage a process successfully in normal circumstances is included in one seamless road map.

Both the cognitive and effective domains are addressed.

The historical dimension

In support of the Orgpax philosophy (see above) that the last century saw an unwarranted emphasis on the need for specialization and specialists to address organizational issues, most Orgpax tool-kits include quotations from works at least 50 years old that address the topic of the tool-kit. Thus the recruiting tool-kit includes a quotation from Vegetius (400 AD) on selection criteria for Roman army recruits, the tool-kit addressing mission statements includes the mission of Clare College, Cambridge, England, written by the Lady Clare in 1351. These “Plus ça change” quotations embolden the student to press ahead, secure in the knowledge that most people solved their own problems (without leaning on a management “specialist”) before the industrial revolution. A strong reinforcer in the affective domain of learning.

Other dimensions

The provision of various distant or in-person support services or tutorials complements the stand-alone learning package that is the tool-kit. In this way the student has an opportunity to question the author or others on the meaning and application of any particular tool-kit, or to enable his/her team to do so.

Additionally, Orgpax generally arranges to support a client through the referral of a qualified consultant, coach or facilitator, should the student feel the need. In this way the student can opt to control the process, while engaging professional support at various times to fulfill various roles within it.

Orgpax also offers a customization service, further enabling a team-leader to have any tool-kit adapted for the specific use of his/her organization, thus making the learning-material organization-specific in every domain.

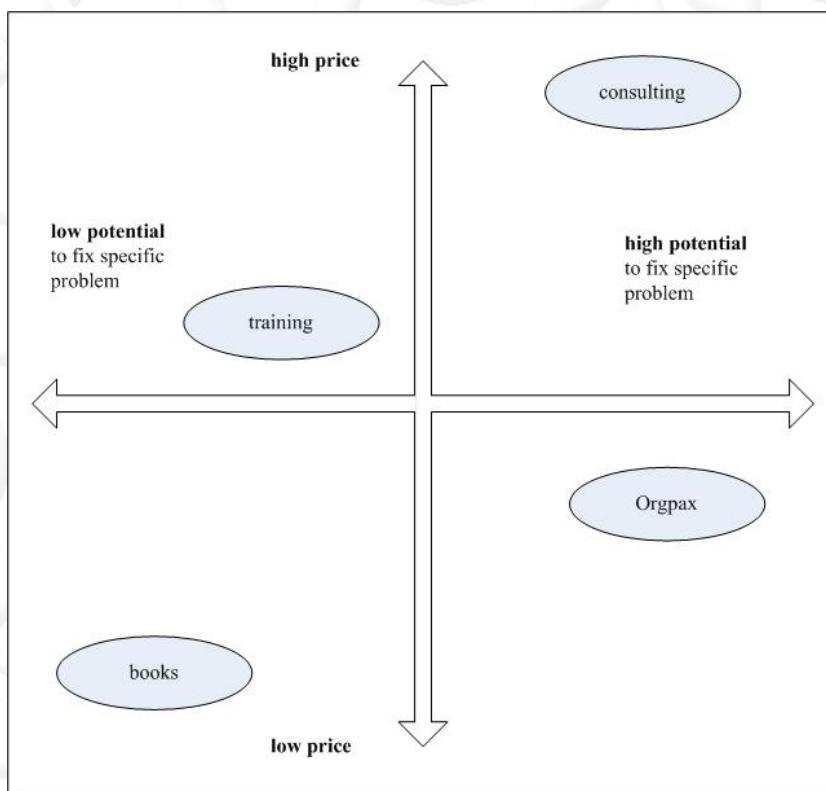
Comparative characteristics

Orgpax tool-kits are experiential and applied in nature. The processes that they suggest have been tested and validated over time, and represent simple but sound approaches for most organizational circumstances most of the time. They do not pretend to be experimental, particularly innovative in their content, nor to represent leading-edge management research.



They are intended rather to equip a typical individual to deal with a typical situation in a typical organizational context.

The tool-kits, being designed as stand alone self-help packages for virtually anybody's use, have few current parallels in the educational world. They are more than the typical management book, since these are typically limited to the provision of general advice with no hands-on tools. They are not training courses (for either classroom or distant learning) since they are designed not to require a teacher for their delivery. They are not like most self-learning (autodidactic) training courses, since these tend to focus on the passage of information rather than "how to" leadership advice in the affective domain. They are not management consulting or process-facilitation, where the technology (the management science and organizational development dimensions) resides with the consultant. They in fact combine parts of the didactic approach of each of these learning media and impact the knowledge, skills, attitudes and personal development of the student.



Their unique learning characteristics enable their content to be delivered to the student at a price which, while generally more expensive than that of the typical management book, is far less expensive than the cost of delivering training or management consulting. Furthermore, the learning delivered is specifically focussed on a particular organizational challenge, and provides the experimentation tools for the student to solve his or her specific problem.

The effectiveness of the Orgpax educational approach in this regard, as compared to other typical problem-solving aids, is illustrated in the positioning analysis. This analysis discounts the further consideration that, in the case of both the typical management book and typical consulting intervention, the learning value (competence development) is considerably less than either the typical training, or the Orgpax, approach.



Conclusion

The Orgpax educational approach is rooted in the history of adult learning, particularly insofar as the solution of organizational challenges is concerned. In the third millennium it represents a unique combination of characteristics, and is ideally suited to the cost-effective and targeted delivery of organizational solutions.

