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Use of Self: What it Is? Why it Matters? & Why You Need More of It?

Wherever you go, there you are.
Kabot-Zin (1994)

Introduction

An emerging Organization Development practitioner realized through feedback in a week-long developmental program focused on Use of Self that she frequently acquiesced to the group. She assumed the group need superseded her own and rarely, if ever, spoke up. However, she came to understand that by sharing her needs and perspectives, she enriched the group, increased the likelihood of meeting her needs, and became a more engaged and respected group member.

As illustrated in the above example, Use of Self is pervasive, everywhere, all the time. It is not a method or approach, but a constant presence and resource to be developed and tapped. It is the leavening for any of the methods presented in this volume. Methods may be used to develop Use of Self, and it supports other methods. Use of Self is critical to organization development (OD) practitioners and OD-oriented leaders who help organizations ". . . define and clarify values and goals, manage and solve problems, make informed decisions and develop and effectively utilize human resources" (Rainey-Tolbert & Hanafin, 2006, p. 70). In this chapter, we define and clarify Use of Self, its development, and application in the context of OD. We then discuss its importance in a variety of contexts and for the multiple roles readers are likely to occupy. Given the centrality of Use of Self as a concept and practice field, we explore it in the context of levels of system. We then move to options for developing Use of Self and conclude with applications for practitioners.

Definition of Use of Self

A topic as broad and elusive as Use of Self requires some definition of terms and context. Others may know the general concepts we discuss here as personal mastery, emotional intelligence, or self-actualization.

- *Self* is the essence and totality of who we are. Carl Jung (1974) describes the Self as the "centralizing process" that unifies the consciousness and unconsciousness in a person. Self is the accumulation and distillation of all experiences, lessons, talents, preferences, culture, and more. The available portion of the totality can

change as experience and perspective are added, and as the subconscious becomes conscious. The potential is usually sub-optimized. That is, there is more Self available to a person than they are now or know themselves to be. Therefore, Use of Self suggests an ongoing, expanding development process.

- *Use* is what we do with Self: knowing and *deploying* the resources of Self—skills, knowledge, perspective, feelings, etc. Use of Self, therefore, emerges from awareness of Self and by taking action.

Awareness is knowing in-the-moment what is happening. It is also described as being awake, conscious, mindful, present, and attending to what is happening externally and internally, and the relationship between the two. Awareness makes Self a resource for recognizing and interpreting experience. In a sense, the body and mind in-the-moment become are the "radar screen" that registers phenomena worth attending.

Action is what we do—*how* we behave as a result of what we embody. Who we are *being* informs what we act on and how we act. Conscious Use of Self is a necessary competency for practitioners who lead, coach, consult, and empower others to act. We "can too often act automatically from habitual patterns that may not be appropriate for the current situation. Conscious choice is a better choice when our actions will have important impact" (Patwell & Seashore, 2006, p. 30). Therefore, *conscious* Use of Self means we move beyond awareness of Self and take intentional action. Self is always present, regardless of whether we are mindful of it; being intentional about using Self is the key to learning, effectiveness, and development.

Simply stated, *Use of Self* is knowing and deploying all aspects of our personhood (cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual) and applying that knowledge. Expanding Use of Self comes from self-awareness, reflection, continuous learning, and feedback, all of which serve to hone and expand our mastery. Next, we discuss how Use of Self is impacted as the individual shapes change and is shaped by it, in the context of self, group/team, organization, and other social structures.

Importance of Use of Self

Use of Self is a topic that has captivated scholars and practitioners for thousands of years. Philosophers such as Aristotle; ancient yogis in India; and psychologists, beginning with Freud, James, and Jung have explored the topic. We continue that exploration as applied to the multiple roles of OD practitioners who impact Use of Self: consultants, leaders, facilitators, coaches, and other professionals.

Our actions are interpreted according to the role we occupy at the time. Therefore, it is critical to be aware of the expectations others have of us in the context of that role. What is acceptable in a home context is likely less so at work. What is acceptable as a new employee

is different than an experienced one. Likewise, there are different expectations for a manager than a subordinate. Each of us must be mindful of the role we are in and the implications of our actions.

Professional roles also connote the skills and abilities of our craft. Here, the emphasis is on developing mastery of an expanding toolkit, like the methods described in this book. Yet, the skills required in any method are supported by an expanding Self. Our ability to deploy techniques is also reflective of our Self-development, which is distinct from being technically proficient, although related. Rather, Use of Self is about imbuing our proficiency with the fullness of our available being at any given time and making our professional practice uniquely our own.

Wanting to be good at a technique or a method, like those presented in this volume, is common. However, we must avoid the mindset that we are operating a robot from inside ourselves, whose main function is to direct the outer body to accomplish assigned tasks by asking, "How do I get the robot to do a given technique or skill well; how can I *be seen* to be good at something?" To develop conscious Use of Self, we must acknowledge the existence and influence of the robot's user.

An expanded and fluid Self that sees, feels, knows, and can act appropriately in a given situation is what makes us effective. When talking about Self as an instrument, Tannenbaum and Hanna (1985) described Use of Self as social sensitivity and action flexibility. More than a mere technique, Use of Self is an approach to the practice of OD and leadership that emanates from the core of the person. This assertion suggests that the OD professionals and OD-oriented leaders must be grounded in a mature and realistic sense of Self.

Use of Self manifests in several ways, including:
- how we look, talk, and present ourselves;
- the invisible parts of ourselves and our personalities, such as attitudes, values, motivations, biases, fears, assumptions, anxieties, feelings, habits, self-esteem, and hidden selves; the actions we take;
- the decisions we make;
- the choices we pursue; our styles and preferences; and
- the strengths, experiences, intelligences, knowledge, and skills we bring to each situation.

Our Use of Self is further influenced by many factors, including social identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, national culture, gender, age, sexuality, etc.), life and family histories, intentions, personal agency, self-efficacy, and levels of consciousness, self-awareness, and defensiveness (Jamieson, Auron, and Shechtman, 2010). Therefore, "the self is at once our greatest ally and our fiercest enemy, and many of the biggest struggles that people face in life are directly or indirectly the doing of the self" (Leary, 2004, p. 186).

Use of Self for change leaders is essential for deploying the full range of capacities in that role. And, for OD practitioners, Use of Self means being aware of Self, attentive to the needs of others, mindful of context, and in service of mutual good.

Ways of Viewing Use of Self

Rainey and Jones (2014), view Self as comprised of self-awareness, self-concept, self-esteem and social self. Awareness of Self is the level of knowledge an individual has about one's Self and the extent to which that knowledge is consistently applicable in everyday life.

> Self-concept is the broader collection of assumptions and beliefs one holds about oneself and one's self-perception. Self-esteem is one's overall evaluation and judgment of one's worth, usually viewed against one's judgment of others; the value placed on one's self-concept. Social self refers to awareness of and healthy interaction with others; ability to establish and manage functional relationships. (Rainey and Jones, 2014, p. 111)

Another construct is intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal Self. Intrapersonal Use of Self refers to internal knowing, exploration of internal landscape: personal awareness, history, preferences, thoughts, feelings and sensations that comprise our interiority. Interpersonal Use of Self encompasses all the actions and reactions that occur when we are in relationship to others. How we engage in entering a new relationship, meeting and greeting others, establishing credibility and friendliness, asserting authority, raising and resolving conflict, proposing ideas, running meetings, and more are subsumed in interpersonal Use of Self. As human beings, we are cognizant of our thinking, feeling, and behaving. This ability to think about Self is coupled with "the ability to imagine the world from other people's perspectives, including the ability to imagine how one is perceived an evaluated by others" (Leary, 2004, p. 11). Social self (Rainey and Jones, 2014), and social intelligence (Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 2002; Goleman, 2006) reflect our meaning of interpersonal Self. With transpersonal Use of Self, we extend our attention and action beyond the individual to wider levels of systems. Collective, wholeness, oneness, interpenetration, interbeing, and deep presence are some of the terms that attempt to describe awareness and action in which the individual is both an expression of the larger system and a contributor to it.

Each view of Self directs us in ways to develop it as we strive for maximum effectiveness. Next, we explore options for development.

Ways to Develop Self

We may, for example, refer to ourselves as having a creative Self, a compassionate Self, a thinking Self, a feeling Self, and a doing Self. Use of Self is about knowing the facets of who we are and then developing those facets. And then, with feedback and reflection, continuing to develop and apply an integrated Self in familiar and unfamiliar circumstances. With Use

of Self, as with other areas of development, we can move from novice to mastery (Benner, 2004; Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1980; Bennett and Bush, 2014).

How OD practitioners and OD-oriented leaders develop Use of Self offers many opportunities. We develop ourselves as evolving instruments in the process of challenging, supporting, and leading change at the individual, team, organization and social levels. To consider Self as static minimizes and even eliminates the possibility of growth, emergence, and development. A static view of Self says that we have either developed or not; we arrive and then are "finished." But we are not projects to be completed; we are continuously evolving Selves. Use of Self is a developmental journey, guided by intentionality and focus—not a single something to be discovered and deployed.

Kegan (1982) and, later, Berger (2013) provide a stage model of human development using ego as the framework. They describe an evolving Self that can be addressed as an evolutionary and transformational process that does not end, even in the final stage. They remind us that helping others to develop their fullest, most evolved, and complete Self may be limited by our (the helper's) own development (Laske, 2003; Schein, 2009). Thus, our ability to contribute to OD, organizations, and communities, and to support the awareness and development of increasingly larger groups, depends on the degree to which we develop our own Use of Self.

Frankl (1984) challenged our responses to circumstances with his observation that while we may not always have control over our situations, we can always control our responses to those circumstances. Patwell and Seashore (2006) offer a framework for the choices we make, wherein we either attribute our choices to ourselves or to others, and that we are either aware or unaware of those attributions. To make deliberate decisions or to control our natural reactions, we must be able to think consciously about ourselves and the implications of our behavior. In fact, it is possible that the Self's main function is to provide a way for us to override our automatic inclinations (Leary, 2004).

There are many ways to develop Self, and the methods presented in this volume focus on group efforts to support Use of Self. Regardless of the process, several elements are important for effectively developing Use of Self:
- Increasing awareness
- Building acceptance of self
- Engaging with others for challenge, support, and feedback
- Adopting new behaviors and perspectives
- Integrating those behaviors and perspectives into a more conscious and unconscious competence
- Developing mastery is that state of competence at which behaviors are natural, reflection and ongoing learning occurs, innovation occurs, and learning agility is demonstrated. (Bennett & Bush, 2014)

Methods may focus on one, two, or all elements. For example, increasing awareness can be supported by stillness practices such as centering and meditation, or by more active practices such as journal writing, by moving meditations like walking, and by social practices involving feedback. Engaging in dialogue and participating in joint creative activities, like dance or improvisation, develop Use of Self. Challenge, support, and feedback may occur through coaching, communities of practice, learning circles, and support groups. Ongoing practice and reflection, and intentional attempts to increase proficiency, are needed to move from insight to habit, from momentary awareness to deeply ingrained capacity that can be called on at will. Responsible practitioners and leaders can participate in the methods offered in this volume, with or without the intention of leading them, and may pursue Self-development in other ways suggested here.

In group processes designed to support Use of Self, learning occurs at the individual level and beyond. Therefore, facilitators must be prepared to deal with individual, interpersonal and group levels within any given program. As participants come with a wide range of experience and Self -development, it helps to have multiple frameworks at the ready to address the needs of individuals and the group as they arise. Because Self is embedded in, acts upon, and is affected by all levels of system, the facilitator can best support Use of Self by being aware of all levels even if a program may not focus on all of them.
Seashore, et al. (2004) suggest several developmental implications of Use of Self for OD Practitioners and leaders. The conscious and intentional expansion of behavioral range is critical for developing the flexibility needed in varied circumstances. Such expansion necessarily involves bringing what is out of awareness into awareness, which can be surprising, whether joyful or painful. In these situations, systems thinking is essential as it provides a perspective on the unpredictable and perhaps unwanted outcomes that can result from the exploration of the unknown.

There are several options for building these capacities. By partnering with colleagues through co-facilitation or team-based practice and intervention, we benefit from diverse competencies and perspectives. Partnering also supports ongoing Self-development through feedback and helps avoid the pitfalls of our own unconscious, disowned, or underdeveloped aspects. Partnering for long-term development can involve primary relationships such as mentors, coaches, therapists, and work colleagues, or ongoing education and reflection.
Long-term development is greatly bolstered by support systems outside client systems. Since OD practitioners and leader sometimes fall prey to relying on clients for emotional support, they should instead learn to manage conflict, challenge and resistance with the help of a network of trusted outside others. Options include communities of practice, personal accountability boards, as well as professional development groups, and an array of colleagues to call on as needed.

All of the above practices are woven together through reflexive processing—noticing what is happening "outside" as well as the responses "inside" oneself. A practice of developing awareness of the phenomena and the internal relationship to it helps identify the habitual responses projected onto external events and people. And all practices support and require

the appreciation of diversity. That is, the ability to recognize and appreciate the multiplicity of ways there are to perceive and relate to events, as we discuss in the next section.

Applications

According to Seashore, et al, (2004),

> … the Use of Self is a link between our personal potential and the world of change. It starts with our understanding of who we are, our conscious perception of our Self, commonly called the ego, and the unconscious or out of awareness part of our Self that is always along for the ride, and on many occasions is actually the driver. This understanding of Self is then linked with our perceptions of what is needed in the world around us and our choice of a strategy and a role in which to use our energy to create change. (p. 57)

In this context, Use of Self focuses on the potential for changing one's own world—as we perceive it, to act on it, and to leave our mark and legacy for others to appreciate.

As OD practitioners and OD-oriented leaders, we must continue to develop and evolve our current version of Self as we go about our work of supporting individuals, groups, organizations, and larger systems. The more we understand ourselves and our relationship to external forces, the better we can discern what is happening in the organizational world and choose our behavior from a broad palette of options to achieve the desired impact.

As we apply Use of Self, the level of system we target is another option. Just as there are levels of systems in organizations and human systems—individual, group/team, sub-organizations, sectors, communities, and beyond, each level has its own Self, a coherent nature, or way of being, that is discernibly its own. As OD practitioners or OD-oriented leaders, our own development levels affect our ability to be effective at different levels of system. When we further develop our Use of Self, not only are we more effective at the lower levels of system, but we can be even more impactful at the higher system levels, thus creating exponential change.

Regardless of the focus of an intervention, practitioners and leaders have the potential to impact multiple levels of system and, therefore, affect the development of the Self of the system itself at multiple levels. We have observed this in a learning environment as well. When OD students become clear about their intentions and behaviors toward classmates and subgroups, they also begin to focus on developing the effectiveness of the whole class in addition to themselves as individuals—a higher level of their system. As one student said, by practicing new behaviors in the small group, she could bring those same behaviors to the big group for greater impact and change.

According to Nevis (2005), presence is the living out of values, a way of being that communicates values, knowledge, and approaches to learning. Presence includes the ways ideas are expressed verbally and physically, and it is the embodiment of the underlying theory of change. The accumulated development of Self is revealed in our presence, which is the container and deliverer of Use of Self choices at any given time.

To support the development of others, we bring our presence by holding the mirror for them to see themselves, helping them become aware of the importance of developing and using their gifts, talents, competencies in service of shared or common agenda. The mirror also reflects any limitations and deficiencies to be recognized and addressed.

We make our full Selves available to help others identify their own strengths, as well as help them see how their Use of Self both propels and constrains their ability to affect change. We provide feedback and help them gather feedback. We support self-reflection. "One of the foundations of knowing how to help people is to look for the unconscious ways they relate to themselves and to others and to create opportunity for those ways to become conscious" (Bettenhausen, 2017, p. 7). And then, they make choices about what to keep and what to let go of and what to acquire or develop. They integrate those choices into a newly emerged Self that can be applied and refined. As practitioners or leaders, we can pursue this process in multiple contexts and circumstances and thus develop a level of mastery in supporting the development of others. Application of Use of Self in the development of individuals and systems may be undertaken in inter-personal, group, organizational, and social contexts.

We support the development of groups and higher levels of system in much the same way as we do individuals, with additional attention to the dynamic strengths and challenges at the level of system under consideration. That is, we should hold a mirror to the group, allowing the system and the parts to see themselves in relationship to each other, for the individuals to see their Use of Self as a contribution to and expression of the collective Use of Self. Group shadow, covert processes, as well as overt norms and culture become the focus of interventions, while also supporting the individuals who contribute to the group.

Final / Concluding Comments

Developing Use of Self is an essential job for the OD practitioner or leader, and an extensive undertaking, because it involves understanding and effectively using all aspects of ourselves to serve change in others, whether as individuals or larger systems. As practitioners, we are not merely wielding techniques but represent and call on the fullness of our being in support of our work. The more we can see the essence of our Self and understand our own Self, the more we can support others in seeing their Selves. The greater our mastery of Use of Self, the greater the potential impact on the systems we are in. Regardless of how we view Self, there are multiple and overlapping ways to develop it towards mastery, provided we are intentional and diligent. Only then are we able to work with individuals, groups, organizations, and even larger systems, if we choose.

Use of Self is particular and all encompassing. Mastery of it creates a paradox, because it calls for awareness and knowledge of a Self that is infinite in its possibilities, while finite in its realization. To realize individual potential, we must recognize the role the Self plays in fulfilling it. The expanding ability to see Self and to make choices is the unending work of the OD practitioner and leader. ". . . by paying close attention to what is going on inside us and clearly perceiving the limitless world beyond our Self, we can substantially increase our own capacity to contribute to the common good while engaging in the process of individuation and self-differentiation—the unfolding of our unique Selves over the course of our lifetime" (Seashore, et al, 2004, p. 56).

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