

# Organisational Development



## What is Organisational Development?

A common definition often quoted is

*Organization Development is an effort planned, organization-wide, and managed from the top, to increase organization effectiveness and health through planned interventions in the organization's 'processes,' using behavioral-science knowledge.*

(Richard Beckhard, "Organization development: Strategies and Models", 1969).

Put more simply, it is the practice of 'changing people and organisations for positive growth'. (Australian HR Institute)

As stated in our **Mission**, Outdoors Queensland's primary purpose is 'to raise the profile, capacity and opportunity for outdoor recreation in Queensland and encourages all people to recreate outdoors'. To proactively address the responsibility inherent in our Mission, we are committed to providing information, tools and resources to the sector on a variety of topics, such as **Organisational Development**.

We have engaged **Andrew Murray**, from Applied Adventure, to deliver a series of **4 Articles** on the topic of Organisational Development and to facilitate a **Workshop** to explore the issues, the options and the way forward.

# 1: Where do I start?



It is with some trepidation that I commence writing this.

Inevitably there will be people who disagree or who know better than me – either actually or in their own opinion.

I need to acknowledge right at the start that I am not an “expert” - in fact I run screaming if anyone ever tries to describe me as such. Having said this, I have observed, discussed, listened assiduously and read widely on many business-related issues and until recently I was a partner in a well-known business which has enjoyed modest success in the areas of adventure-based training and development, ropes course construction and inspection as well as corporate consultancy and leadership development.

Now I am setting out on a new adventure – I am starting a number of new businesses which will play in the same market but do things in a quite different way. The issue of organisation development is highly relevant to me right now, both professionally and personally as I launch new businesses which will work with businesses on business issues!

Starting out – where do I start?

Probably with the aspiring entrepreneur.

Some questions to ask:

How comfortable am I with risk?

For answers to this question, look at the way you live life – how you recreate, what looks like fun and what does not. Where do you put your savings? How necessary is it to you to have predictability and control of situations, things and people? Risk in business is an interesting thing, there is no such thing as a risk-free business – all businesses are exposed to risk – some more than others and some because of the decisions made by the business owners. Risk appetite is a tricky thing, too much risk appetite and you may “bite off more than you can chew” or make poor decisions that expose the business, too little and you may well be stressed beyond reason in a short while or fail to act decisively when opportunities appear. Be aware of your own position in relation to risk and actively manage yourself to somewhere appropriate. You may even need to seek support and advice from others – maybe professionals like accountants and solicitors and/or engage with mentor/s who can help you with reality checks.

How do I support myself while the business gets going?

When I did some research, it appears that in Australia 60% of small businesses shut down in their first 3 years of operation. The most common reason is shortage of money. Generally speaking, customers are not waiting to fling themselves through your doors! Compelling though your offering may be, it takes time for potential customers to become paying customers – can you meet your financial needs during that time? Certainly, in the adventure field I have seen players come and go – some of them in less than a year and some in a slow and painful spiral of decline that ends in tears.

Is there a market for what I am selling; and who are the currently successful players? How are they doing it?

A mistake that I have made in the past, and that I see many others making, is decrying one’s competition. Hell, they are in the market and playing with some degree of success. Learn as much as you possibly can from your competition: look hard at what they are doing right as well as what they are doing wrong. Capture the rights in your own approach and remedy the wrongs. Keep your eyes open and don’t fall for the reassuring trap of just seeing all their faults and failings. Complacency is risky for any business in any way at any time!

What does “success” look like?

Lots of businesses are out there “just doing it” – getting by day to day, month to month feeding the owners and staying alive; and that’s fine for some. However, having a vision and striving to achieve it really can transform what’s mundane and pedestrian into something exciting and meaningful for all the players: not just the business owners, but for everyone who works in and for the business. Get it right and it may even inspire customers! Regardless of whether you have a vision or not, and we will revisit this later; setting realistic targets and goals can be a great way of staying motivated and of keeping people accountable.

How do we want to operate – how do we make decisions on important matters?

While financial imperatives are important, the outdoors culture appears to be driven by values apart from simple profit. Most of the players in the outdoors with whom I have interacted appear to be driven by more than a simple desire to make money (although to stay in business you have to!). So, in a values driven environment – what’s your organisation telling the world about its values. How do people decide whether they wish to engage with your organisation – as employees, as sub-contractors, as customers even? What do you hold yourselves and your employees to? What is the basis for your strategic and tactical decisions? Again, we will revisit this matter, but organisational values are important. In the words of John Mellencamp: “You gotta stand for something, or you’ll fall for anything.”

On reflection, these are probably good questions for existing businesses to ask and could lead to some exciting and productive change within the business. I have realised over the years that it’s almost impossible to stand still as a business – either we are going forward, or we are going backwards – standing still, comfortable as it may be, is seldom an option.

Enough for now. This is the first of 4 articles. Let’s see where we can go with this!

**Andrew Murray**

## 2: Vision, Mission and Values



Vision and Values – when I first saw these terms pop up, and read what organisations were saying about themselves, I thought that this was corporate claptrap. And these can quickly become just that.

Essentially these should form the “spine” of an organisation, telling the world, and the owners, what the business stands for and forming a sort of compass to assist in navigating the business’ world.

I have found a great book which sets this all-in context: “The Northbound Train” by Karl Albrecht (Amacom Books, NY 1994) – yep printed on real paper and still a cracker.

Big thing for a Vision is for it to have power and purpose. It gives you an aiming point – something to continue towards in the whiteout of craziness that hits us all sooner or later. The Vision should clearly state what your business aspires to be.

He suggests that a Vision should have three components in order to make it useful:

1. A focussed concept: Something bigger and better than fluffy generic platitudes – a value creation premise.

2. A sense of noble purpose: we who work with people in the outdoors generally believe that what we do adds value and helps people be better and more in some way. Our Vision needs to reflect this belief and identify the value and contribution of what we do to a better world.
3. A plausible chance of success – world domination is unlikely for any Australian small business, however it's a good idea to aim just that bit higher than the low hanging fruit! If we set the bar to low, it's hum. Too high and we turn ourselves and others off with the magnitude of the challenge.

It should leave no doubt as to the business you are in and it should inspire you and your employees. It should tell “the world” – your customers and your suppliers; what it is you do and what you stand for.

He gives an example of what he considers to be an excellent Vision Statement:

*“We always strive to be the friendliest place you’ll ever find to bring your family for great tasting, homestyle cooking, served with care and pride in a pleasant country-home setting at reasonable prices.”*

This is “Po Folks” Restaurants – a chain in the U.S. – no doubt at all what they do, what to expect from them as a customer and how to “be” if you work there!

Work back from the what and why of your offering, which must be conceived to meet a real customer need, in order to define your vision! Start with the idea and polish your words to convey the idea. The idea is what's exciting and compelling and we should avoid getting bogged in the wordsmithing until we have decided what the idea/s actually are.

Values: we will never be able to condense our personal values into a concise body of words. Personal values are a vast and complex web of constructs that are the result of “how we are wired”, our upbringing and our interactions with the world. My personal values are mine – a private world which assists me in determining what is good, right, proper, attractive, beautiful, right and naturally all the opposites too.

In contrast, Organisational Values should be concise, public and simple – a clear statement of what our organisation stands for. They are likely to bear the imprint of the Personal Values of the people who build them and should also reflect how we propose to do business.

I'd like to propose that the simpler we can make them the better, but at the same time they must be useful to us as a benchmark for behaviour towards the vision. Probably a maximum of seven values makes sense – after seven no one will keep looking!

Questions to ask in capturing and stating values:

What will it take to achieve our vision?

What behaviours do we believe are right and appropriate for people in our business; and what values sit behind these behaviours?

Can I hold myself and the people who work in the business to these values?

Can I describe the behaviours that these values drive?

Am I prepared to present and defend these values and to be held to them by my customers, my suppliers, by colleagues and by the people who work for me?

There is no one way to present your organisational values.

My son's last school did a pretty good job and their values were presented as "school rules":

- Be there
- Ontime
- Every day
- Ready to work

Unpacking these clearly gives everything you need in order to get the things that the school sets out to do done!

So, what is the Vision of your organisation?

Does it inspire you and your customers, employees and suppliers?

Does it clearly indicate what it is that you do?

And your Values:

Do they provide a benchmark for behaviour?

Are they a real and honest reflection of how you do business?

Are you prepared to hold others to them and to be held to them yourself?

Most of us find some use for a map and compass, particularly when the going gets tough – and it inevitably will!

Vision and values are the equivalent for the world of business.

**Andrew Murray**

### 3: Thinking About Leadership



So far, I have written about setting up/developing an organisation, and I've mainly done so from the perspective of a small business. However – no matter what the organisation, be it a Not for Profit, A Charity, A Club, A Local Government or a business, I think there are some commonalities, and I think that what I have presented applies.

Leadership is an interesting term that gets bandied about, used and abused in the Organisational Development literature. It took me about 25 years in the field to crystallise my thinking about just what leadership is and is not. Maybe having a look at leadership will reveal some of the common themes in the successful operation of organisations, because – when I look at it, effective leadership appears to do the same across all organisations.

I have arrived at the following definition of leadership:

*“Leadership builds and maintains sustainable and productive communities.”*

Notice, I have not said “leaders” – because not all designated leaders actually practise leadership – in fact many don't and not all practitioners of leadership hold positions of power and authority in their organisations. Many brilliant practitioners of leadership hold no positional power at all yet shape and guide the direction and culture of the organisations to which they belong purely by the practise of great leadership!

Let's unpack the definition:

Building community involves establishing and articulating a shared purpose around which people can gather, and then continually reminding and reiterating the “WHY” of that community.

Maintaining community means building positive culture, holding oneself and others to account for upholding and observing the underpinning values and for doing their part pursuing the community’s purpose.

Sustainability means reading the community and its environment and responding to change in creative and resilient ways. Sometimes it means being the initiator of change for the better or the redefining of purpose in order to maintain momentum. It means having a “finger on the pulse” and taking action in response to community needs or to changes in the external world – sometimes before anyone else in the community realises that action needs to be taken.

Productivity – this is key to all successful organisations – they achieve something! Looked at in a narrow, business sense – productivity always relates or equates to financial gain. However, in a broader sense, productivity might be measured in different terms like “trees planted”, “hectares revegetated”, “holiday programs conducted”. Sure enough though – what you measure must relate to your purpose, and how well you work towards your purpose will define your productivity!

And finally, although possibly most critical – the matter of “community”. Researching the term “community” results in a mass of confusing definitions that don’t necessarily help!

How about “A group of people mobilized by a common cause or common causes and characterized by:

- Shared values and beliefs
- Positive relationships
- Reciprocity
- Shared direction
- Identity with their community
- Commitment to their community
- Shared “stories” relating to their community

Now the function of leadership becomes clearer, because leadership contributes to maintaining sight of the common cause and to ensuring that people are inspired and supported in contributing to and belonging within the community. Leadership involves making sure that the community stories are accessible to community members and told and retold so as to keep the community together and focussed on working harmoniously towards those goals which relate to the common cause.

Phew! So how much leadership do you exercise? And who in your organisation exercises positive leadership? In my view – the more the merrier.

**Andrew Murray**

## 4: Leadership and Safety



November last year, I lead some interesting work. This was in my “non-corporate” time.

In my capacity as “Work Safely at Heights Supervisor” I was engaged by the British television company ITV to run the height safety for both their film crews and the celebrities in a “live” episode of the British version of “I’m a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here” at a site with rocky cliffs and deep gorges in SE Qld

I engaged three of my similarly skilled and qualified associates and spent 3 days on this job. Day 1 was a recce day to sort what they wanted to do, Day 2 was a setup day where we got rigs ready or at least decided how to rig what and Day 3 was filming.

On the day we had 5 of 3-man camera/sound crews on rock along with 4 celebrities, their WHS adviser and sundry others. Everyone had to be safe. Oh yeah and their cameras were worth \$170k each so they were pretty keen to look after them too.

Interestingly, the easiest person to keep safe was the cameraman who we hung 10 metres down the 30 m abseil cliff. Once he was harnessed up and provided with a bosun’s chair, we lowered him and his camera into place and tied him off – he was going nowhere and behaved impeccably (he had no choice).

The most difficult was another cameraman who saw us as nuisances and said so. We smiled and spent the day ensuring that anytime he went near an edge, we clipped him into a fall restraint system. To be honest – this was a pain and took up time and effort that the others did not require.

However, no one was hurt, and we received very complimentary feedback from our clients about our speed, skill and obsession with safety.

Oh, and by the way – we had fun! One of our riggers suffers from dry skin and had Nivea in his kit – he was the brunt of much hilarity during the day. I got heaps because I am nearly 50 years older than our youngest rigger.

My point here – staying on the reluctant cameraman's case was a leadership job – we provided for him what he couldn't or wouldn't provide for himself at the time. We recognised that this was short term and did what had to be done to get the necessary outcome – 100% survival.

In the longer term, if he worked for me, we would be having some solid conversations about the necessity to stay safe. First simply because I care and second because it's me who gets hung out to dry if something happens to him.

There is no formula for leadership – you may have some sound principles, but how they hit the ground often depends on what's going on at the time. No one approach works all the time, so you have to think and evaluate how to apply the principles at the time.

How are you going applying the principles outlined in your SOPs?

Are you cheerful and flexible in your approach?

What could you do more of in order to be more effective?

It's worth standing back from the action occasionally and thinking about these things, good leadership takes time, it also gets people on board – and that's when good things really start happening!

**Andrew Murray**

# About the Author



My name is **Andrew Murray**.

I have been active in business in the Outdoor Education, Adventure Based Training and Ropes Course Construction/Inspection/Operation arenas for the past 25 years.

As well, I have been fortunate in that many corporate clients have seen the potential of good facilitation for consultancy/indoor work and offered me opportunities to work in the consulting field.

My experience and activity in working “indoors” and “out” have lead to some phenomenally interesting and rewarding work both in Australia and overseas.

I have worked for some “biggies”, like Boeing Australia; John Deere; Talisman Energy; BHP Billiton; Anglo Coal, Intergen, Coca Cola as well as literally hundreds of small to medium Australian businesses.

In 1988, I did an Associate Diploma in Outdoor Education at BCAE; this was funded by the proceeds of a small business my wife and I owned and operated in NQ for the preceding two years. She too undertook studies that year.

A happy accident that year was an internship with Project Adventure USA in Hamilton Mass. I spent a month and a half at their facility “The Iron Rail” living in a hut in the middle of their ropes course and working with such luminaries as Karl Rohnke and Paul Radcliffe.

I went over mainly to learn how to build climbing walls, but fell into a load of education and learning about both ropes course construction and adventure based counselling.

I came back to Australia and started my own business “Applied Adventure” in around 1991. Shortly afterwards I went into partnership and half owned and operated “Synergy Applied Adventure” until this year, when I decided it was time for a solo run to the finish line. Applied Adventure, Hitch Consulting and Rope Monkeys Australia are the mechanisms for that run.

During my time in business, I have been fortunate to have some phenomenal mentors and colleagues from whom I have learned heaps, among these are Bob Dick – Organisational Psychologist extraordinaire; Karl Rohnke – all round unbelievable outdoor guru and a host of others. I have been fortunate in developing a broad repertoire of skills and knowledge in all things business leadership. While I recognise the critical importance of good management to business success, it is the area of leadership that fascinates me and continues to be the focus of my corporate work. Broadly speaking, I believe that the primary function of leadership is the development of sustainable and productive community and culture.

Currently I am working part time for a local government in the Northern Rivers as a “Corporate Trainer” and spending my other time on startup of the new businesses and having adventures.

My “formal” qualifications include a Diploma of Primary Teaching; Graduate Diploma Education (Outdoor Ed); Wilderness First Responder First Aid; Work Safe at Heights Supervisor; Confined Space Work; Intermediate Chainsaw Operations....

I am currently working towards a Sea Kayaking Instructors qualification.

I am married with a 23 y/o son and live in the Numinbah Valley. My interests include everything outdoors, reading, leatherwork and relearning how to ride a motorbike after 40 years out of the saddle.

I am convinced that in this business relationships are everything. Your network is gold, suppliers and colleagues are as important as clients – and personal connections which are mutually beneficial are what makes work sustainable and satisfying.

My other strong belief is that it’s easy but ultimately unsatisfying to follow the pack. Creating a “value monopoly” is a smart thing to do whereby what you offer is something that distinguishes you from the pack for some clients who come to you for something that they want and simply can’t get anywhere else!

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