

Why This Directory, Now?

When programme choice begins to shape the questions of a profession

A public-facing essay accompanying the Global Organisation Development Programme Choice Directory

This Directory has been created to make that landscape more visible at a timely moment, when search and AI-assisted comparison are changing what participants can examine before enrolment.

A directory can now do more than organise information. It can first offer an overview of a field: which programmes are publicly discoverable, how they describe themselves, and what a prospective learner may compare.

Its further possibility is consequential: by making criteria visible alongside choices, it can help prospective practitioners ask not only where to study, but what kind of formation they are choosing.

These questions matter because they direct attention beyond programme features to the intellectual traditions, practice conditions and forms of judgement through which the field reproduces and develops itself. Taken together across this volume, they make visible both the reach of Organisation Development and the complexity within it: the different understandings of organisation and change, the varied relationships between theory and practice, and the multiple routes through which practitioners are formed.

The question beneath programme choice

A conventional directory helps a prospective learner compare institutions, qualifications, duration, cost and mode of study. Those questions remain useful. But Organisation Development education carries another consequence: choosing a programme can also be a choice about the kind of practitioner one is preparing to become.

That makes a different family of questions relevant.

What view of organisations and change informs the programme? How substantially does behavioural science enter its inquiry? Where are feedback, supervision and consequential practice located? How is Use of Self developed? What forms of third-party agency are contemplated? What assumptions about evidence, participation, authority and change does the learner inherit? And what kind of judgement is the participant expected to acquire?

The Global OD Programme Choice Directory was built for this second order of choice.

The Directory may matter less because it classifies 317 programmes than because it gives prospective practitioners a vocabulary for asking what professional formation should contain.

Its 317 publicly discoverable OD and OD-related programmes are not presented as a league table. They form a field of view in which programme claims, educational architecture and public evidence can be inspected against questions that are usually harder to see than brand, credential or curriculum headings.

When the criteria themselves become available

Until recently, many prospective participants lacked either the information or the vocabulary needed to ask these questions before enrolment. Public information was fragmented, providers described themselves

through different vocabularies, and much of what distinguishes practitioner formation remained tacit. Search widened access to information; AI-assisted comparison now makes it easier to organise, contrast and interrogate that information.

The more interesting change is cognitive rather than technological. *The question can move from "Which programme is best?" to "By what criteria should I judge whether a programme fits the practitioner I seek to become?" The unit of trust begins to shift - from institutional reputation alone toward criteria, evidence, transparency and fit.*

This resembles anticipatory professional socialisation. People begin learning the expectations, distinctions and evaluative habits of a role before fully entering it. **Concepts that an OD practitioner might once have encountered only after years in practice - Use of Self, third-party agency, behavioural-science inquiry, supervision, paradigm assumptions, practitioner formation - can now enter awareness at the point of programme choice. The profession's questions arrive earlier.**

The understated route: learning beside a practitioner

Yet any account of OD formation that concentrates only on formal programmes risks missing one of the field's oldest and richest learning routes: apprenticeship to a seasoned practitioner. There are dimensions of OD that are difficult to acquire through reading, classroom discussion or even well-designed simulation. They are encountered in the close observation of how an experienced practitioner enters a system, contracts with authority, notices what has not been said, holds competing interests, decides when not to intervene, frames feedback, repairs a misstep, and eventually withdraws.

This is long-gestation learning. It may involve shadowing, co-consulting, observation, debrief, supervised responsibility and repeated exposure to the consequences of judgement. *In older craft language, it is learning under a master - not through imitation alone, but through proximity to situated judgement.* The learner sees how theory, values, timing, relationship and consequence are combined when the situation does not arrive already labelled.

The route does not eliminate the need for intellectual preparation. Indeed, apprenticeship without conceptual and methodological discipline can simply reproduce the practitioner's habits, blind spots and preferred explanations. *The apprentice needs theory with which to discriminate, inquiry with which to test interpretations, and enough independence to challenge the very practice being observed.* Conversely, intellectual preparation without sustained proximity to consequential practice can leave the learner fluent in concepts yet unformed in judgement.

The significance for a programme directory is therefore subtle. Formal programmes are not synonymous with the whole ecology of professional formation. Some programmes deliberately incorporate close supervision, field practice and practitioner communities; elsewhere, the richest learning may occur partly outside the programme through mentorship or apprenticeship. Such formation may also be poorly represented in public documentation. What is invisible to a web-based inspection method is not necessarily absent from the learning ecology.

What AI makes cheaper - and what remains scarce

AI sharpens this distinction. Retrieval of theory, comparison of models, first-pass analysis, question generation and polished synthesis are becoming easier to obtain. Capabilities that depend mainly on access to information are increasingly augmentable. That does not make theory less important; it makes possession of theory less distinctive.

What remains scarce is the capacity to exercise judgement under conditions that are social, political, ambiguous and consequential: framing the right inquiry before producing an answer; distinguishing

observation from interpretation; sensing dependency and power; tolerating uncertainty; recognising one's own preferences inside a diagnosis; contracting ethically with competing interests; choosing interventions whose effects cannot be fully known in advance; and remaining answerable for what happens afterwards.

These are precisely the capabilities for which sustained formation - and often supervised proximity to experienced practice - matters. AI may therefore lower the cost of information while raising the relative value of formation. **The educational question changes from solely from "What must an OD practitioner know?" to sit along with "What must a practitioner become capable of holding when knowledge itself is abundant?" Both questions seem potent at the same time!**

From authority dependence to evaluative participation

A directory organised around these questions changes the learner's role. Classification is no longer something that must simply be accepted from an authority. The participant can inspect the reasoning, ask what evidence is missing, question the categories and take unresolved evidence back to the provider as an inquiry.

That movement is important for OD because it mirrors the values the field often claims for client systems: valid information, informed choice, participation, agency and learning from consequences. A programme-choice architecture should not demand from the learner the passive dependence that OD practice itself seeks to reduce.

The same invitation extends to providers. Greater transparency makes it possible for participants to look beyond title and credential toward the processes through which capability is actually formed. Providers can therefore state more clearly what field and traditions they understand themselves to participate in, what is required rather than elective, where practice occurs, how it is supervised, and what the programme does not claim to form.

A global directory also needs a reflexive boundary

There is, however, a caution in turning any framework into professional infrastructure. The Directory uses an explicit operational centre - values-based professional practice, third-party agency, system-wide behavioural-science application, planned and evaluable development, effectiveness and self-renewal - because comparison requires a declared boundary. But a declared boundary should not be mistaken for a claim that these constructs have culturally identical meanings everywhere.

Agency, participation, legitimate authority, inquiry, development and practitioner legitimacy are mediated by local cultures, institutions and traditions of relationship. In some settings, important formation may be carried relationally, through apprenticeship, community recognition or practices that are less extensively codified in public documents. A classification system built from public evidence may therefore encounter not only missing evidence but alternative forms of visibility.

That raises a validity question deeper than consistency alone. A classification can be applied reliably and still fail to represent the construct adequately across contexts. A genuinely global Directory must remain open to whether its categories travel, whether local practitioners recognise themselves in the distinctions being made, and whether future constructs need to emerge inductively from the field as well as descend deductively from OD's established lineages.

This does not make classification impossible. It makes classification accountable. 'Unresolved' should remain an evidence state, not a verdict. The framework should be available for challenge by participants, providers, practitioners and researchers - including those whose intellectual or cultural traditions are inadequately represented in the framework itself.

If the framework succeeds, it may eventually become less visible

The longer-term value of this work may therefore lie beyond any particular edition. At first, a framework such as this can feel unfamiliar or even disruptive. Then it may become debatable. Providers may contest categories; practitioners may propose better distinctions; researchers may test validity; participants may ask sharper questions. That is not failure. It is a sign that the field is beginning to participate in the classification rather than merely receive it.

If the questions become useful enough, the Directory may eventually become less important than the habits it helps establish. Learners may routinely ask about formation, supervised practice, inquiry, worldview, faculty ecology and consequences without needing a directory to prompt them. Providers may anticipate those questions in how they describe programmes. Apprenticeship, mentorship and other situated learning routes may be discussed alongside formal curricula rather than left as invisible background.

At that point the contribution would not be that one publication successfully organised a global programme field. It would be that the field developed a richer cognitive and professional infrastructure for examining how its future practitioners are formed.

That is the purpose for which this Directory is offered: not to decide for the learner, and not to close the meaning of Organisation Development, but to make consequential questions easier to ask - and the answers easier to inspect.

Context note

This essay is a public-facing companion to the September 2026 Global Organisation Development Programme Choice Directory. It develops the Directory's participant-facing rationale, the idea of anticipatory professional socialisation, the distinction between information and formation in an AI-rich environment, and the methodological caution that public-evidence classifications must remain open to construct and intercultural validity.