Organization development can best be viewed as the process of draining the organizational swamp. In a witty, caustic attack, Harvey describes management as it is customarily practiced—and OD as it is seldom seen.

Organizations as Phrog Farms

Jerry B. Harvey

A short time ago I received a telephone call from a friend of mine who was employed as an OD specialist in a large corporation.

"Jerry, I've just been fired," he said.

"Fired? You mean you are out of a job completely?"

"Well, not completely," he replied. "I'm just no longer an OD specialist. In fact, the whole function has been wiped out. They have given me a make-work job in salary administration. It's a nothing job, though. I hate it. I was really interested in doing OD. All I'm doing now is scutt work and drawing a paycheck."

"Why were you fired, Hank?"

"I'm not really sure. I've never heard the reason directly. My boss's boss was the one who really did the firing. He told my boss to do it."

"Why did he tell your boss he wanted you fired?"

"My boss was vague about it. He just said his boss had said I wasn't powerful enough to do the job."

"What did your boss's boss say to you when you asked him about it?"

"I haven't talked with him."

"Why not?"

"That would be violating the chain of command. You don't do that around here."

"Why not?"

"You can get fired for that."

"But Hank," I said, "You have been fired."

"Oh!"

And then, perhaps because I had recently read my children the fable of The...
Princess and the Frog, I said, “Hank, your boss’s boss is correct. You aren’t powerful enough to do the job. In fact, for all intents and purposes, he has turned you into a phrog. I can almost see you in a big phrog pond with your boss’s boss sitting on a willow stump saying to himself, ‘I think I’ll turn ol’ Hank into a phrog.’ “And then he waves a magic wand, mutters some mystical-sounding incantation and concludes with, ‘Hank, you are a phrog,’ and suddenly you have web feet. “Hank, you are now a phrog.”

The silence at the other end of the line was seemingly interminable.

Finally, out came the poignant, one-word reply that echoed down the line, “Ribbit.”

**Organizations as Phrog Farms**

After talking with Hank at some length about his life in the phrog pond, I got to thinking that most formal organizations are, metaphorically speaking, phrog farms. By phrog farms I mean that they turn a lot of good people into phrogs. In addition, if we accept the metaphor of organizations as phrog farms, we might conceptualize organization development as the process of draining the swamp. Therefore, building upon that metaphor, I would like to suggest a number of hypotheses, to make some generalizations, and to conceptualize some issues of organization, management, and organization development within the framework of life in the swamp. These various statements are provided, in no particular order of importance and in no conscious linear sequence, as follows:

1. All organizations have two essential purposes. One is to produce widgets, glops, and fillips. The other is to turn people into phrogs. In many organizations, the latter purpose takes precedence over the former. For example, in many organizations, it is more important to follow the chain of command than to behave sensibly.

2. Phrog is spelled with a ph because phrogs don’t like to be known as frogs, and they try to hide their phroginess from themselves and others by transparent means. In short, once one has been transformed into a phrog, one likes to attempt to hide that fact. For one who has been a person, it’s a great come-down to be a phrog.

3. Phrogs tend to live a solitary life in the swamp, or as one phrog said, “It’s a lonely life on the lily pad.” Phrogs compete with one another for insects, vie for the right to head the flicking order of the swamp, and are ultimately evaluated for what they do in their own mud flats. Furthermore, phrogs don’t really get rewarded for how well they sing in the chorus. Given that, is it any wonder that a common phrog maxim is, “You can’t get involved with other phrogs in the swamp; someday you may have to appropriate their lily pads”?

4. Phrogs speak the Language of Ribbit. The language is simple because it contains only one word, but it doesn’t communicate very well. When all the phrogs in the swamp croak “Ribbit,” the swamp is noisy as hell, but not a lot of real information is ever exchanged. You see, accuracy of information is not very important in the swamp. In fact, any time a person enters the swamp, he or she is generally told why the Language of Ribbit is the only possible language of the swamp, despite the fact that phrogs don’t learn much from one another when they use it. For that reason, people have a difficult time talking with phrogs. In fact, they seldom talk with phrogs at all.

5. Most phrogs spend more time flicking flies in the fog than in draining the
swamp. As best I can tell, their behavior is circular. If they were to spend time draining the swamp, there would be no flies to flick and no phrogs. For that reason, it's very important to phrogs to maintain the swamp as it is rather than to drain it.

6. In phrog farms, bullphrogs generally get to be president. Stated differently, the better a phrog can tolerate the loneliness of his lily pad, the more competent he becomes at speaking the Language of Ribbit, the more facile he becomes in flicking flies, the more skillful he becomes at appropriating others lily pads, and the more adroit he becomes at maintaining the swamp, the more likely he is to become president.

7. Bullphrogs are greatly revered in the swamp. In fact, other phrogs assume bullphrogs have magical powers because of their unusual abilities to turn people into phrogs. In one sense, such reverence may not be misplaced. They are apparently instrumental in the process of phrog production. It is strange to me, though, that we have devoted so little effort to understanding the role that humans play in permitting phrogs to attack them in the swamp.

8. The magic exercised by bullphrogs comes from humans' belief in it. The tyranny of bullphrogs stems not from the reality of the bullphrogs' power, but from the belief of humans in the Myth of Bullphrog Power.

9. Belief in the Myth of Bullphrog Power prevents one from having to take responsibility for the fog and mud and moss that make up the atmosphere of the swamp.

10. Bullphrogs—particularly presidents—frequently feel very trapped in the swamp. Many of them are destroyed by it. They feel trapped because they are trapped.

Mr. Nixon was not an aberration.

11. One of the peculiarities of the swamp is that the masses of swamp phrogs both worship and destroy bullphrogs for the very qualities of phroginess that resulted in their becoming president.

12. Darwinians say only the strongest go to the top of the phylogenetic scale. Phrogologists say only the weakest go to the top of the same scale. Both say only the fittest survive. One is incorrect.

13. Another peculiarity of the swamp is that cowphrogs seldom become president. Cowphrogs apparently don't have the capacity for loneliness, the Language of Ribbit, fly flicking, and swamp maintenance that bullphrogs have. If, by chance, they do develop that revered capacity, they become cowphrogs in bullphrog's clothing, and their croaks deepen.

14. The process of producing phrogs is not sexual—it's magical.

15. OD generally consists of phrog kissing, which is magical, harmless, and platonic.

16. Any activity designed to facilitate phrog kissing is an example of ODD behavior—cosmetic organization development or organization development by deception—or OD as practiced by phrogs. Activities such as phrog chorus-building, interlily-pad conflict resolution, phrog sensing, phrog-style assessment, marsh groups, tadpole development, and phrog coaching in the absence of swamp drainage and area reclama-}

17. Phrog kissing is a seductive activity. Frederick Herzberg claims that being seduced is ultimately less satisfying than being raped, because when we are seduced, we are, in fact, part of our own downfall. Stated differently, and in our context, ODD specialists are frequently seduced into phrog kissing, an activity that seldom leads to love-
Jerry B. Harvey, a professor of management at George Washington University, is a professional associate of the European Institute for Trans-National Studies in group and organization development, a member of the American Psychological Association, a charter member of the International Association of Applied Social Scientists, and a diplomate of the American Board of Professional Psychology. Dr. Harvey received a bachelor's degree in business administration and a Ph.D. in social psychology from the University of Texas, where he served on the faculty of the department of psychology. He has been a consultant to a wide variety of industrial, governmental, service, and religious organizations, and has written a number of articles in the field of management and organizational development.

Making but frequently adds to the warts on the kisser's face.

18. Many organization members belong to Phrognarian Networks, and Swamp Maintenance Associations. The purpose of such networks and associations is to meet and exchange information regarding the nature of the fog in each member's respective swamp. Since the Language of Ribbit is employed, such exchanges seldom allow one to differentiate one swamp from another. Phrogs seem to get reassurance from noting the similarity among their swamps. Or, as one bullphrog put it, "Misery loves company and miserable phrogs love miserable companies."

19. Occasionally, during meetings of Phrognarians, a phrog pharts in the fog. When that happens, that phrog loses some of his or her phroginess and therefore represents a great threat to the balance of the swamp. Phrog pharts are seldom sanctioned by Phrognarians. They are too real. They put holes in the fog and ultimately threaten the atmosphere of magic required to maintain the swamp.

20. There is a myth on the part of phrogs that kissing another phrog turns that phrog into a prince. I think it should be noted that, in general, kissing a phrog only produces skin irritations. For those who decide to kiss anyway, I think they should also realize that, in all that fog, it is very difficult to determine which way a phrog is facing.

21. Phrogs frequently try to set traps for one another. Phrog traps have a peculiar quality because they catch only the phrogs who set them. Stated differently, if you have to set a phrog trap, there is no need to do so. You are already in it.

22. So that the technology of setting phrog traps is not lost to future generations, phrogs of marsh management are hired by Schools of Swamp Maintenance to research and teach. (Phrogs of marsh management are not limited to Swamp Maintenance Schools. In fact, they are on the faculties of all kinds of teaching organizations, defined not by what they teach but by the attitude and approach with which they teach it.) The work of such phrogs is governed by the underlying credo that is frequently displayed on their respective lily pads. It goes something like this: "If the tadpole hasn't learned, the phrogfessor hasn't taught."

The underlying rationale of that credo is rather peculiar if subjected to
close scrutiny. To explain, it clearly implies that the basic responsibility for the tadpole's learning belongs to the phrogfessor. Consequently, if the tadpole does a lousy job, the phrogfessor is at fault. Likewise, following the same logic rigorously, if the tadpole does competent work, the phrogfessor must also get the credit. For all intents and purposes, then, the tadpole doesn't exist, except as some sort of inanimate, passive receptacle for the phrogfessor's competence or incompetence.

23. Given that such a teaching attitude implies that students have no animate existence, is it any wonder that students seem to fit so well into the lonely parallelism of the swamp? Is it also any wonder that when someone accepts responsibility for another's learning, that person ceases to be an educator and becomes a phrogfessor, whose primary job is to prepare tadpoles for life in the swamp?

24. People frequently become phrogs in other kinds of organizations by the same process. After all, a common swamp saying is, "You can delegate authority but you can't delegate responsibility." Translation: "You are responsible for your subordinates' performances. If your subordinates perform competently, it is because of you. If they perform incompetently, it is because of you, too. Like students they don't even exist, except as extension of you. They are objects you must manipulate in the best interests of the swamp."

If phrogs don't feel they are responsible for the performance of their subordinates, then why do so many of them go to training programs designed to help them alter their styles of phrogging. As I see it, they do it because they believe they are responsible for their subordinates' performances and that their style (as opposed to their essence) has something to do with how effectively their subordinates perform.

25. All of us are phrogs at one time or another. All have the potential to develop webbing between their toes. All have experienced the terror of the trap, and accepting responsibility for others actions is the bait with which phrog traps are set.

26. Many bullphrogs can't laugh at the absurdity of their lives in the swamp. Such phrogs tend to become steerphrogs and are very poignant creatures. Bullphrogs frequently die laughing, but I have never seen a steerphrog laugh. They just croak.

27. The seat of our government is

"The job of most swamp managers is to maintain and enhance the swamp, not to drain it.... The purpose of swamp consultants—in the eyes of swamp managers—is to help the swamp operate effectively...."
located in Washington, D.C., in a swampy area of the city known affectionately to some as “Foggy Bottom.” For many, it is also the locus of the “bureaucratic mess.” Perhaps it should be renamed, “Phroggy Bottom.”

28. Making Waves in Foggy Bottom, by Alfred Marrow, is a book about an OD effort to clean up the bureaucratic mess in the U.S. Department of State. In its essence, the book is about the failure of that effort. Should you decide to read it, you might come to realize that making waves—in any organization—is a very different process from draining the swamp.

29. The size of the swamp is growing; the world may ultimately be inhabited by phrogs. Air pollution is not really as great a threat to future generations as phrog pollution.

30. The swamp is ultimately evil. Hannah Arendt described how phrog farms, despite their benign appearance, tend to develop bullphrogs with an enormous capacity for evil. Adolph Eichmann was not an aberration either.

31. The job of most swamp managers is to maintain and enhance the swamp, not to drain it. For example, Winston Phrog hill said, “I was not made marsh minister to preside over the draining of the swamp.”

32. The purpose of swamp consultants—in the eyes of swamp managers—is to help the swamp operate effectively, not to drain it.

33. Most OD literature is designed to facilitate swamp management, not area reclamation. Most managers are phrog farmers. Most OD specialists and phrogfessors of marsh management are phrog farmers’ helpers. The relationship is symbiotic.

34. Most phrog farmers and their helpers are aware of their lots in the swamp. Most have about all the consciousness they can bear. May God have mercy on their souls.

35. God does have mercy on their souls. Otherwise, God would be the greatest phrog farmer of them all.

ALTERNATIVES TO LIFE ON THE PHROG FARM

With all those objects around, it is indeed a lonely life on the lily pad.

“What is the alternative to life in the swamp?” you ask. My pen is poised to frame a reply. After all, isn’t that my job as a responsible phrogfessor, to provide some answers to the problems of the dismal swamp? The temptation is great.

Suddenly, though, I see that sign on my lily pad and realize that another feature of phrogs is that they are frequently afraid to think. It’s not that the thoughts are not there. In fact, in the swamp, there are plenty of thoughts to be thought. But who is to think them? Certainly not phrogs because thinking is as dangerous to the ecology of the swamp as passing gas in the fog.

Not thinking, or getting someone else to be responsible for thinking one’s thoughts, is not without its advantages. As long as a phrog can get someone else to take responsibility for changing the climate of the swamp.

I do know, though, that noncosmetic organization development involves swamp drainage and area reclamation and is done by humans, not phrogs. Ultimately, that process of drainage and reclamation destroys the swamp and includes such modifications in the swamp’s environment as building habitats that allow people to cooperate—rather than compete. Such habitats allow people to:

• Get paid as pairs, teams, and organizations rather than as individuals.

•
individuals get paid for working as a pair, it is amazing how much interest they take in helping one another succeed.

- Work in nonzero-sum climates when it comes to promotion, layoffs, salary, performance appraisal, and grades. For example, during bad times, phrogs lay others off in terms of seniority. People don't lay one another off at all. They all take proportionate pay cuts and therefore learn that they can rely on one another during both good and bad times.

People with zero-sum attitudes believe that the outcome of any interpersonal encounter is zero, that is, "If you get a payoff of plus one, I must get a payoff of minus one, and the outcome is zero." Stated in day-to-day language, people with that attitude say, "If you win, I must lose." People with nonzero-sum attitudes believe that the outcome of any human encounter can be other than zero, that is, we can both win and, if we do, under certain conditions, it is not one plus one equals two but rather, with synergism, three.

- Leave the environment when they lose interest in it. For example, when it comes to vesting (of rights), people don't wear vests, phrogs do.

- Accept personal responsibility for their own activities in the habitat. Phrogs, for instance, demand that bullphrogs take responsibility for the swamp. People will not permit others to take over their responsibilities for the habitat and its operation.

- Trust one another in a wide variety of situations. Phrogs distrust 'most everybody. Given their distrust, they put in time clocks which say, "We don't trust you to do an honest day's work, so prove that you did." They demand doctors' certificates when someone calls in ill. They have private offices so that others access to them is limited and so that their conversations and work with other phrogs can't be observed and overhead. They demand close verification of expense accounts because "Everyone knows those slick swamp salesmen would rob the marsh blind if a bullfrog doesn't keep tabs on them." They keep just-in-case (JIC) files to protect themselves from other phrogs' poisons.

People have, by contrast, very few rules and procedures that question the honesty of others. In fact, they assume other people can be trusted and live with the reality that in a few cases such trust will be violated.

- Be treated as subjects—not objects. R. D. Laing has pointed out that one way to make others mentally ill is to treat them as depersonalized objects or things, (that is, objectively) rather than as "personalized" subjects (that is, subjectively). Bullphrogs try to treat others objectively. They try to gauge the performance of others objectively, and they try to "keep their feelings out of the situation." However, when you treat another objectively (that is, as an object), you should know that the price of being objective—eliminating one's feelings from the situation—is that you become an object yourself, since you have denied the very essence of your own humanness. Thus are bullphrogs born.

Humans don't treat one another as objects. They try instead to build a work environment in which human subjectivity is accepted as an integral part of the habitat's problem-solving process.

"You still haven't answered the question of "What do we do to save ourselves from the swamp?" you may say. You are too vague, too idealistic, and too impractical. You certainly have not fulfilled your responsibilities as an article writer."

I hope you don't feel that way, but
it you do about all I say is: "You're right. I
haven't. I tried."
"Ribbit."

Selected Bibliography

For a penetrating discussion of the manner in
which groups and organizations pursue courses
of action that subvert their essential purposes,
see Wilfred Bion's *Experiences in Groups* (Basic

In his article, "One More Time: How
Do You Motivate Employees?", (Harvard Busi-
ness Review: Vol. 46, January-February 1968,
pp. 53-62), Frederick Herzberg makes a gen-
eric differentiation between rape and seduction
as it applies to motivation in an organizational
setting.

Anatol Rapoport's and Albert Cham-
mah's *Prisoner's Dilemma* (Ann Arbor Paper-
backs, 1970) provides an excellent discussion of
zero-sum and nonzero-sum attitudes.

R. D. Laing describes the impact of de-
personalization in his book, *The Divided Self*
(Pelican Books, 1965).

If you want to be terrified by the po-
tential evil of swamp-bound organizations, read
Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann on Jerusalem* (Vik-
ing Press, 1965).

Finally, after skimming *Bartlett's Fa-
miliar Quotations*, I am intrigued by the way
in which frogs have long played an important
part in literature and mythology. Authors from
Goethe to Mark Twain have made noteworthy
references to frogs in their works, and in those
references frogs have ultimately served some
serious purpose. Perhaps one ancient poet
(Bion) spoke for all Phrogologists when he said,
"... though boys throw stones at frogs in sport,
the frogs do not die in sport but in earnest."