Organization Development Network

OD_Practitioner_

Advances in Dialogic OD

Guest Editors: Gervase R. Bushe and Robert J. Marshak

OD Practitioner is now available to academic and corporate libraries by special subscription. We invite you to include this publication in your library resources.

Library Subscriptions

	USA	Canada*	All Other*
University Non-profit	$150	$160	$180
Corporate For-profit	$200	$225	$255

ODP Library Subscriptions using SecureCredit Card Processing.

* All prices in US funds.

Organization Development Network

An Introduction to Advances in Dialogic Organization Development

By Robert J. Marshak and
Gervase R. Bushe

This special issue of the *OD Practitioner* continues a conversation with the organization development (OD) community about Dialogic OD that we started a number of years ago (Bushe, 2005, 2009; Bushe & Marshak, 2008, 2009; Marshak, 2006). As long time OD practitioners and educators we believe there is now a bifurcation in the field between what we are calling Diagnostic and Dialogic OD that is not well recognized nor understood and we hope this special issue of the *OD Practitioner* will help stimulate new understandings and ideas for practice.

Foundational or Diagnostic OD is grounded in the 1950s-1970s formative period that established organization development as a distinct set of premises and practices. Broadly speaking, Diagnostic OD emerged to improve the functioning of overly bounded, hierarchical organizations by thinking of them as living, open systems. Following Kurt Lewin's and Ron Lippitt's theories, small intact groups were considered to be both the target of and vehicle for planned change using data-based action research methodologies (Lewin, 1943, 1947; Lippitt, Watson, & Westley, 1958). Because of the early focus on the functioning of teams OD consultants of that era were expected to have highly developed competencies in small group dynamics and process consultation (Schein, 1969) often acquired through T-Group experiences. Although not exclusively so, the orientation of early action research methods was on diagnosing the contributing factors to the "real" (rather than the presenting) organizational

problem(s). Change was the result of a normative-re-educative process (Chin & Benne, 1969) of increasing awareness through accurate diagnosis and engaging members in formulating changes based on that new awareness.

Starting in the 1980s and accelerating into the present, OD has been influenced by developments in the social, biological, and physical sciences as well as newer interventions and approaches to change created by innovative practitioners. These include social construction, the complexity sciences, the linguistic turn in the social sciences, Appreciative Inquiry, and large group methods. In combination and over time these have now coalesced enough to set the outlines of a different paradigm we are calling Dialogic OD. This includes a number of practices that are usually known as large group interventions but which we also label dialogic to draw attention to some of the ways in which they significantly differ from earlier OD premises and practices.

Rather than a focus on open systems, Dialogic OD is based, in part, on a view of organizations as dialogic systems where individual, group, and organizational actions result from socially constructed realities created and sustained by the prevailing narratives, stories, metaphors, and conversations through which people make meaning about their experiences. From this perspective change results from changing the conversations that shape everyday thinking and behavior by involving more and different voices, altering how and which people engage with each other,

and/or by stimulating alternative or generative images to shape how people think about things. Thus instead of change driven by diagnosing how to objectively align or re-align organizational elements (strategies, structures, systems, people practices, etc.) with the demands of a broader environment as suggested by open systems theory, the dialogic systems perspective invites considering how to induce new ways of thinking by altering the ongoing organizational conversations that continuously create, re-create, and frame understanding and action (Barrett, Thomas, & Hocevar, 1995; Marshak & Grant, 2011).

The selection of articles in this special issue offer a broad range of Dialogic OD premises, practices, and settings from coaching to working with community organizations. The authors come from a variety of backgrounds, and are located in North America and Europe, demonstrating the wide interest in dialogic practices. Each of the articles sheds light on the mindsets and practices associated with Dialogic OD. Each article adds an interesting perspective to what is still an underdefined field of practice, and helps to illustrate why these practices can be both exciting and impactful.

The issue is divided into three sections after the initial article by **Stefan Cantore** and **Wendy Hick**, who start us off by offering a glimpse of what a dialogic consulting process looks like from the perspective of the consultant and the client. Dialogic OD in Practice: Conversational Approaches to Change in a UK Primary School will be of particular interest for readers looking for a concrete description of Dialogic OD in action. It provides a detailed account of the dance of thinking and conversation between client and consultant as they co-created and co-facilitated a one-day intervention at a school. The presentation offers insight into the mindsets behind what the client and consultant did and their commitment to a conversational approach to change. The case example provides the one-day design they used and also illustrates the importance of leadership commitment, the client and consultant operating from a shared mindset, and

their being willing to stay with uncertainty about what will emerge from the dialogic process.

The first section, Theories of Dialogic Consultation, offers four articles focused on theories that can guide the Dialogic OD consultant. Each goes some way in attempting to answer questions about the underlying theory base of Dialogic OD practice. While complimentary, each emphasizes a different underlying process for the transformational potential of Dialogic OD: generativity, emergence, re-description, and reflexivity.

The section begins with **Gervase R. Bushe** in Dialogic OD: A Theory of Practice describing his generic model of Dialogic OD practice and its underlying theory of how social reality is transformed. Bushe offers a conceptual and practical overview to themes, topics, and a vocabulary that will turn up in varying degrees in all the articles in this issue. Arguing that a coherent theory of practice is necessary for the field to learn and evolve, his discussion offers detailed explanations about how Dialogic OD is targeted to transformational change in complex or chaotic situations and involves three main phases: getting ready, holding dialogic events, and incorporating emergent changes. The article proposes the central role of generativity in Dialogic OD, the need for senior sponsorship of dialogic events, the role of the consultant in creating and enacting generative containers, and identifies 27 different methods that can be used in a Dialogic OD process.

The next article by **Peggy Holman**, A Call to Engage: Realizing the Potential of Dialogic Organization Development, offers an overview of what Dialogic OD is, why it is critically important in today's

world, and a framework for designing dialogic engagements. She also explains the relationship of dialogic practices to the theory and processes of emergence which includes stages of disruption, differentiation, and coherence. For her, Dialogic OD involves three main aspects: 1) Creating a container for dialogue by asking possibility oriented questions, inviting diversity into the system, and being welcoming; 2) Creating opportunities for individual expression and making connections; and 3) Creating ways for people to reflect together to find meaning and coherence. She explains why and how Dialogic OD makes diversity and encouragement of differentiation a source of strength and creativity and the basis for real community.

Rather than a focus on open systems, Dialogic OD is based, in part, on a view of organizations as dialogic systems where individual, group, and organizational actions result from socially constructed realities created and sustained by the prevailing narratives, stories, metaphors, and conversations through which people make meaning about their experiences.

Jacob Storch and **Morten Ziethen** in Re-description: A Source of Generativity in Dialogic Organization Development shift the focus of discussion to a more in-depth understanding of a key aspect of dialogic practice, that language constructs reality. Using Richard Rorty's philosophy of language they explain how transformational change results when the local agreed upon language or way of talking about things is shifted to new ways of talking and thinking via re-description. This creates generativity and the emergence of new ways of understanding and experiencing things. They also provide a case example of a shift from talking about the effects of recession on a consulting company to a more energized discussion when using the generative image of "re-session." The fact that re-session had no agreed upon meaning in the company's local language allowed the participants to create new meanings and new ways of thinking. Their provocative proposition is that

transformation cannot occur without such a change in language.

Christine Oliver and **Stephen Fitzgerald** in How to Explore Meaning Making Patterns in Dialogic OD and Coaching offer an approach and tool for collaborative meaning making between the client and consultant/coach. Their premise is that changes to the ongoing thoughts, feelings, and actions in individuals and organizations occur when embedded and cyclical patterns of stories and interactions are identified, challenged, and altered, thereby changing the narrative(s) guiding thought and behavior. They propose that a core purpose of Dialogic OD is to increase the organization's capacity for such reflexive dialogues. They also discuss the premise

mindset they work from, which consists of two main elements: 1) Designing a container for conversations; and 2) Hosting (rather than facilitating) the conversations. The case example helps clarify the difference between hosting and facilitating. As a host their concern is less about facilitating or controlling the conversation and more about the design of the container in which conversations will unfold. The case is somewhat unique in offering an example of a dialogical, transformational change process occurring within limited time constraints.

The next article by **Keith W. Ray** and **Joan Goppelt**, From Special to Ordinary: Performing Dialogic OD in Day-to-Day Complexity, offers a rich discussion of

Approaches. She explains the premises and facilitation practices related to a specific dialogic approach focused on emergence and the co-creation of meaning and how it differs from more traditional approaches. A main focus of the article is fostering collective creativity, arguing that because creativity is non-linear, facilitation methods also need to be non-linear. Some suggestions turn widely accepted facilitation techniques on their head, such as welcoming initial solutions instead of actively delaying solution finding. Four important aspects of Dynamic Facilitation to foster creativity are introduced and illustrated. These include: 1) The facilitator as an advocate who demonstrates multipartiality rather than being a neutral, objective presence; 2) Protecting the emergence of a creative field by maximizing creative tension while minimizing interpersonal anxiety; 3) Retroactively organizing information rather than using a preplanned agenda; and 4) Holding space for emergent convergences rather than trying to facilitate towards a managed convergence.

Section **Three Diagnosis and Dialogos**, raises issues about the interplay of diagnosis and dialogue in organization development. Are they actually competing, complimentary, or something else? What are the implications for OD practice without diagnosis?

Robert J. Marshak in The Controversy over Diagnosis in Contemporary Organization Development summarizes five different arguments that are made against diagnosis and the counterpoints to each. He argues that the field of OD would be better served by moving away from point and counterpoint, either/or debates about diagnosis and instead actively thinking in terms of both/and, contingency, or mixed/blended approaches. One type of contingency model is presented as an illustration. He raises a concern that moving away from diagnosis might encourage newer practitioners to not assimilate complex models of group and organizational functioning, with a resulting loss of discernment in their work. Marshak concludes by asserting the critical importance for OD consultants to have well developed theories and skills to assess various situations encountered

> **From this perspective change results from "changing the conversations" that shape everyday thinking and behavior by involving more and different voices, altering how and which people engage with each other, and/or by stimulating alternative or generative images to shape how people think about things.**

that the client and consultant are co-creators of meaning and illustrate their approach with an extensive coaching case presentation that also illustrates the main types of patterns and stories one is likely to encounter. They include tips for how to establish collaborative authority, whereby client and consultant participate together in meaning making.

Section Two, **Dialogic Practices in Small Groups**, offers a series of cases along with theoretical commentary. Each describes a way of working with small groups in organizations grounded in dialogical thinking. They are similar in their emphasis on emergence and in their divergence from facilitation, but they also have some interesting contrasts in their application of that thinking.

John Inman and **Tracy A. Thompson** in Using Dialogue Then Deliberation to Transform a Warring Leadership Team describe their dialogic approach for helping a management group create a new story to live into. They explain the Dialogic OD

how the shift to incorporating discursive, complexity, and meaning making premises leads to different ways of thinking and acting as an OD consultant. They describe a dialogic approach grounded in the theory of complex responsive processes, which does not include hosting special events or creating containers but works with everyday conversations in which consultants are fully engaged in organizational meaning making processes. Their dialogic approach emphasizes four dimensions: 1) Questioning dominant discourses and seeking to delay convergence; 2) Being mindful of patterns of inclusion and exclusion that increase or decrease diversity; 3) Working with everyday interactions and ways of relating; and 4) Considering follow-on actions as experiments, not plans. Change is achieved by disrupting previously semi-stable discursive patterns and by expanding conversations across various communities.

The last article in this section is **Rosa Zubizarreta's** Co-Creative Dialogue for Meeting Practical Challenges: New

in an OD engagement whether this is called diagnosis, scoping, sizing things up, or whatever.

Yabome Gilpin-Jackson illustrates and extends some of Marshak's points in Practicing in the Grey Area between Dialogic and Diagnostic Organization Development: Lessons from a Healthcare Case Study. Using a case example, she suggests the need to clearly understand the mindsets of both approaches in order to be able to move between the two when and how needed. She explains how she and the others in the case made choices to use diagnostic, and then dialogic interventions, and the reasoning behind those choices. The article proposes a grey zone requiring use of both approaches when: 1) Complexity of the situation is moderate to high (suggesting the need for a dialogic approach); but 2) System readiness to use a dialogic approach is moderate to low (suggesting a diagnostic approach).

Because we are exploring new terrain, many of these articles are theoretically challenging and full of interesting implications for the practice of OD. Many are worth reading more than once. Seeking out and working with the authors of these articles has been an exciting and inspiring time for us. The coherence in many of the underlying images and approaches described in this special issue offer, we think, a convincing illustration of the possibility of creating a coherent theory and practice of Dialogic OD. The many differences in perspective and detail, however, also point to the early stages of that work, and the need for further conversations to identify and begin convergence on a coherent narrative about the theory and practice of Dialogic OD. We hope you will find this special issue as stimulating and fruitful as we have. Finally,

we'd like to acknowledge the *OD Practitioner* Editor, John Vogelsang, for his support and involvement in making this special issue possible.

References:

Barrett, F. J., Thomas, G. F., & Hocevar, S. P. (1995). The central role of discourse in large scale change: A social construction perspective. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 3(3), 352–372.

Bushe, G.R. (2005). Revisioning OD: A post-modern reconstruction. Conference on Social Construction: A Celebration of Collaborative Practices. Taos Institute, Taos, NM, Oct. 6–9, 2005.

Bushe, G.R. (2009). Dialogic OD: Turning away from diagnosis. In W. J. Rothwell, J. M. Stavros, R. L. Sullivan, & A. Sullivan (Eds.), *Practicing organization development* (3rd ed.) (pp.617–623). San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer-Wiley.

Bushe, G.R., & Marshak, R. J. (2008). The postmodern turn in OD. *OD Practitioner*, 40(4), 9-11.

Bushe, G. R., & Marshak, R. J. (2009). Revisioning organization development: Diagnostic and dialogic premises and patterns of practice. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 45(3), 348–368.

Chin, R., & Benne, K.D., (1969). General strategies for effecting changes in human systems. In W. G. Bennis, K. D. Benne, & R. Chin (Eds.), *The planning of change* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Lewin, K. (1943). Forces behind food habits and methods of change. Washington, DC: National Research Council, Bulletin CVII.

Lewin, K. (1947). Frontiers in group dynamics. *Human Relations*, 1(1), 5–41.

Lippitt, R., Watson, J., & Westley, B. (1958). *The dynamics of planned change.* New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World.

Marshak, R. J. (2006). Emerging directions: Is there a new OD? In J. V. Gallos (Ed.), *Organization development: A Jossey-Bass reader* (pp. 833–841). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Marshak, R. J., & Grant, D. (2011). Creating change by changing the conversation, *OD Practitioner*, 43(3), 2–7.

Schein, E. H. (1969). *Process consultation.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Robert J. Marshak, PhD, is Senior Scholar-in-Residence for Organization Development Programs at American University, Washington, DC and maintains a global consulting practice. His current interests include language-based change and Dialogic OD. Bob is a recipient of the OD Network's Lifetime Achievement Award. He can be contacted at *marshak@american.edu.*

Gervase R. Bushe, PhD, is Professor of Leadership and Organization Development at the Beedie School of Business, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver Canada. His research and consulting focuses on transformational change processes and the development and leadership of collaborative organizations. For more information visit *www.gervasebushe.com.*

"It was important that I set the scene for the conversational approach with the staff from the outset of my Headship there. As Manorfield school was in special measures there was a real tension with quick fix approaches as opposed to giving the staff a voice. I felt that listening to staff and beginning to build a culture of professional dialogue was absolutely necessary."

Dialogic OD in Practice

Conversational Approaches to Change in a UK Primary School

By Stefan Cantore
and Wendy Hick

Setting the Scene

This case study explores what Dialogic OD (Bushe & Marshak, 2009) looks and feels like in practice from the perspective of a client and an OD consultant. It charts the development of a working relationship between Stefan Cantore, a conversational consultant, and Wendy Hick, the recently appointed Headteacher of Manorfield Primary School, London, UK during 2012, and a Dialogic intervention they planned and delivered together. Each contributes their own narrative in the style of a conversation. Editing has been kept to a minimum to retain the richness and uniqueness of each perspective.

Context

Manorfield Primary School is a larger than the average primary school located in the East End of London. The number of pupils is increasing and there are approximately 650 pupils and 87 staff at present. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is very high. The largest ethnic group is of Bangladeshi heritage and the next largest group White British. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is more than twice the national average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is also higher than the national average. Most of these difficulties relate to speech, language, and communication needs. The school meets the current "floor" standard set by the government for pupils' performance (60% of the children

reaching a basic level in English and Math at age 11, and where children make below average progress between 7 and 11).

In February 2012 the school went into "special measures." The Schools Inspections agency considered that the school failed to supply an acceptable level of education and appeared to lack the leadership capacity necessary to secure improvements. Wendy Hick was appointed as Executive Headteacher for an interim period in order to help the school to improve and raise standards.

Wendy (WH): Stefan, can you describe how you came to be a Dialogic OD practitioner and something about your approach?

Towards the end of a 20+ year career in healthcare management I took on a system transformation project that prompted me to reflect deeply, perhaps for the first time, on what was most impactful in my leadership and support for change. I came to the conclusion that the conversations I encouraged amongst professionals seemed to make the most difference. For me, a dialogic approach means hosting both one to one conversations with clients as well as group or organisation-wide conversations helped along by processes like World Café (Brown & Isaacs, 2005) and Open Space (Owen, 2008). I use the term *hosting* deliberately and prefer it to using the term *consultant* that tends to imply, in my mind, a more expert advisory role than that of host which offers more possibility of a co-created process emerging between myself and those I am invited to work with.

A conversational host pays attention to how spaces are co-created in which mind-to-mind and heart-to-heart exchanges generate new shared futures.

Underpinning my practice is a growing appreciation of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008; Lewis, Passmore, & Cantore, 2008) as both a philosophy informing my thinking and a set of processes that effectively contributes to my work. By weaving Appreciative Inquiry (AI) with conversational processes I sense new opportunities to be of service to people.

Stefan (SC): Wendy can you please tell me about your background, interests, and what brought you to Manorfield.

I am currently the Interim Executive Head Teacher for Manorfield Primary School and Kobi Nazrul Primary school in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. I have been in the teaching profession for 18 years and in that time I have held a variety of posts that have equipped me well for school leadership. This has included consultancy work, school improvement work, and training and developing others. A particular interest of mine that has emerged from my studies at University of East London (UEL) is using Appreciative Inquiry as a means of developing staff. In retrospect, this is the approach that I used at Kobi Nazrul primary school to lead the school into being a successful primary school. I didn't originally set out to use this particular approach. I did, however, set out with the intention to build a solutions focused team who incorporated open questions and active listening into their approach.

SC: Wendy what did you find when you arrived at the School (strengths and challenges) and what did you decide needed to happen? What then led you to make contact with me?

When I arrived at Manorfield I used the experience from my previous headship to establish structures and systems. This time, however, I was keen to be more explicit about using coaching (including Appreciative Inquiry) as an approach to

develop the staff and pupils. This was, therefore, clearly outlined in the school improvement plan. Having met you, Stefan, at UEL, I approached you initially to discuss ideas for a whole school INSET (staff development day) for about 100 people. It was important that I set the scene for the conversational approach with the staff from the outset of my Headship there. As Manorfield school was in special measures there was a real tension with quick fix approaches as opposed to giving the staff a voice. I felt that listening to staff and beginning to build a culture of professional dialogue was absolutely necessary.

Beginning the Work

WH: Stefan, can you remember our early conversations about Manorfield? What particularly struck you as we spoke? How did what I describe connect with your own interests in conversational OD?

We first spoke in the context of a staff development day you were planning on April 20. You had asked me via a colleague if I would be available to help facilitate the day. I remember your enthusiasm about the potential of the staff at Manorfield. You spoke of previous experiences in changing attitudes and behaviours of staff at one of your previous schools and how you found that a very rewarding experience. We also talked about a session I led in 2011 on Appreciative Inquiry during your Coaching Masters program. There was a sense you had that we were on the same wavelength in our approach to leading change. You talked specifically about developing a coaching culture in the school and using coaching as a process for transformation. I am not sure that either of us knew quite what that might look like but it did not seem to matter. Indeed, I really found your willingness, Wendy, to stay with the uncertainty about what might emerge as really exciting. I have learned that if a client is open to the unknown, holding lightly to specific processes and frameworks, then this augurs well for something really interesting to be co-created. I thought that you were offering the opportunity to inquire with you into what would work

best for the school. I really warmed to your desire for us to work in partnership. I sensed freedom and potential emerging in our early contact. As I shared some initial ideas and we bounced them between us you signalled your interest and willingness to take fair risks, and this left me excited at what conversational approaches might take shape. You also signalled that you saw this as a long term project rather than a one off assignment and that also opened up new possibilities in my mind.

SC: That's my perception, Wendy, but what was important to you in our conversations? What did you see in what I offered as a dialogic consultant as being relevant to your own situation and the needs of Manorfield?

I use open questions to promote reflection and dialogue a lot in the training that I deliver to staff. Also, I use collaborative group techniques to allow for greater interactions. I was therefore really interested in the World Café approach during my early conversations with you. I had not heard of this approach before and it fitted well with my own style of delivering training. An important factor for me in our initial discussions was discussing and mulling over ideas and you guiding me with framing the most important questions to ask. The use of questions to promote conversation was absolutely key and you used questioning and active listening techniques with me also to best understand what my aims were for developing the staff.

Planning and Hosting Conversations for the School Staff

WH: Stefan, can you describe the process you went through to come up with the proposed design for the staff engagement day? What were the principles, practices, and processes that you wove together to come up with your initial proposal?

It began with carefully listening to all that you said to me in our initial telephone conversation. I was less concerned about the facts and more attentive to what I sensed or heard behind the narrative. I was paying attention to language and the

description of relationships, attitudes, and behaviors. I was interested in your reaction to the school and how it triggered various thoughts and feelings for you. As you spoke I sensed in myself a series of reactions. Sometimes empathy with the staff and children, sometimes for you, and sometimes recollections of my own life experiences that resonated with the situation. All of this data enabled me to access my own thoughts about the questions that staff might be asking during this difficult time in the school's life, and indeed for some in their own professional lives. Prior to speaking with you I looked

» Share the context for the day and the overall approach to development.
» Give people an opportunity to experience a different approach to change.
» Identify key actions that will enable transformational improvement in relationships and outcomes for pupils and staff.
» Secure the support of staff and governors for change.
» Help people see the strengths and resources they have available to them and understand how they might begin to use them for the benefit of the whole school.

the tension between the old ways and the emerging new.

The objectives demonstrated our mutual intention to focus on strengths and to do all we could to help the staff to do likewise. There was plenty in the school's recent past to talk about from a problem solving perspective. Instead we discussed the need for staff to use their energies to converse about the future rather than contemplate what went wrong. Our interest was not in training people in a particular approach like Appreciative Inquiry, although we have talked about that as a possibility for future leadership development activities, but rather to use it to help shape the philosophy and language of the day.

One interesting feature of the day is that I was only able to be present in the afternoon. Wendy, you were more than willing to host the morning World Café. I remember you saying how much the process I suggested fitted with your own previous experience. The main work for both of us was therefore less about the technicalities of the process and more about framing the questions that would form the focus for the conversations. I sent you a number of options and you picked the one that you thought best fitted with the intention of the day. This was, for me, a great example of co-creativity in a Dialogic OD process.

At the end of the morning we included some silent reflection time and I offered a few questions to guide people in their thoughts. I am always struck how this is often a particular help for people whose preference is to reflect on ideas before speaking. It also gave acknowledgement on this day to your desire to build a coaching approach to how relationships develop in the school in the future. I thought that getting people used to reflecting in response to open questions would help achieve that aim, at a least a little.

The day was designed to be a blend of World Café and Appreciative Inquiry. My reasoning, on reflection, was that World Café, through its cycles of movement between tables, enables people to connect and have conversations that may never have happened before. Quite simply it would give an opportunity for everyone

> **In this case, Wendy, I recall you thought the staff and external stakeholders, like the local education authority, would feel much more confident in the future direction of the school if there were some clear recorded outcomes. In Dialogic OD the conversational processes and the changes that happen within them are the key focus. Holding to the familiar in peoples' experience as they engage in conversational change also seems important. In designing days like this the skill is in holding, with the leader, the tension between the old ways and the emerging new.**

at the school website to get a feel for the language and colors and people represented there. I reflected on the aspirations staff might have for themselves and for the children. I wondered what the local community needed the school to be in the future. All these thoughts and impressions I held as I stepped back to take a reflexive position, to consider how and why I was reacting to what I was hearing. This deep listening was fundamental to developing a sense of what might be useful to offer you.

After our call and my reflections I jotted down some outline objectives/outcomes for the development day:

Objectives
» Encourage people to speak with one another about the things that are important to them.

These objectives I think reflect the tensions I sense in working dialogically. At one level, for me, the conversations between staff around questions that matter are the work. If that happens, well then I am content that what needs to happen later will manifest itself. I personally have no pre-occupation with action lists in the context of relational changes. They can feel like a distraction. In this case, Wendy, I recall you thought the staff and external stakeholders, like the local education authority, would feel much more confident in the future direction of the school if there were some clear recorded outcomes. In Dialogic OD the conversational processes and the changes that happen within them are the key focus. Holding to the familiar in peoples' experience as they engage in conversational change also seems important. In designing days like this the skill is in holding, with the leader,

to speak and be listened to. Appreciative Inquiry enables people to both feel comfortable that an action list will emerge whilst continuing to engage in conversations around questions that matter to them. An afternoon is a very short amount of time to cover all the four elements of Appreciative Inquiry, Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny, and yet a time limit adds momentum and focus to the conversations. What I like about the last stage, Destiny, is that it is very suited to having the whole group in a large circle with individuals speaking, as they feel able, into the community to commit to some next steps.

SC: Wendy, what was your reaction to my suggestions and do you recall how you shaped the final design? What knowledge did you use to make your own judgements?

Your suggestion, Stefan, to host a World Café style event resonated with me. I particularly liked the structure of the AI approach and could visualize how the day would flow. The planning of the questions was fundamental. The structure of the day was important as it allowed for flexibility if staff needed to have longer conversations. The support that you offered helped me to structure the day although I did start the day with some VIA strengths work (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and personal discussion, which helped it to get off to a positive start. One of the most useful aspects in the design of the day was to have creative conversational support from you (particularly as you are not directly involved with primary education).

Plan for the Day

Table 1 (next page) sets out the plan for the day. I sent it to Wendy to enable her to make some choices about questions and format.

Learning from the Day

SC: Wendy, what happened for you and the staff on the Development Day? What were the highlights and where could we have improved upon our design? What did you observe about

my behavior and how would you say that differed from conventional facilitation?

You did not attend the morning session, Stefan, but when you arrived you fitted into co-hosting the session seamlessly. I feel this was due, in part, to the fact that we had planned the session so well together. The staff felt truly empowered by the day and commented on the fact that they had never had the opportunity to talk and interact with each other like this before. This was an important starting point for me as I am focused on developing a coaching culture throughout the school. An extremely important part of the afternoon session for me was when they were in discussion and you asked me coaching style questions about the staff. For example, you asked me to reflect on their energy and their use of body language. This was powerful indeed as often one is caught up with delivering training and not always reflective enough on one's own practice.

WH: How did the day go for you Stefan? What did you observe and what did you learn?

I remember wondering on the car journey up to London, given that I was not present in the morning, if things had gone as we had hoped. I definitely need not have had any level of anxiety. I have vivid memories of arriving at the school hall and being almost overwhelmed by the noise of the conversations! The whole room was buzzing and the body language of participants demonstrated very high levels of engagement. You mentioned that it had been like that all morning. It had been as if this huge amount of energy had been pent up for a long time and now found a space in which to express itself. The afternoon hosting of the Appreciative Inquiry process largely took care of itself. I learned that the process must be the servant of the participants rather than my treasured possession to hold onto at all costs. It is, I confess, how I feel at times after spending much effort of designing a day. On this day people were in a flow and I thought our role was to sup-

> The staff felt truly empowered by the day and commented on the fact that they had never had the opportunity to talk and interact with each other like this before. . . . An extremely important part of the afternoon session for me was when they were in discussion and you asked me coaching style questions about the staff. For example, you asked me to reflect on their energy and their use of body language. This was powerful indeed as often one is caught up with delivering training and not always reflective enough on one's own practice.

port them. I remember helping with pens and paper for tables as well as looking after some of the refreshments. These tasks are an integral aspect of hosting and not a chore.

It struck me how seamless our thinking and acting during the event appeared, at least to me. Co-design and co-hosting were I think truly modeled by us. I found myself relaxing and enjoying the passion and liveliness of the people in the room. I was again reminded that in Dialogic OD 95% of the work is in building the relationship with the client and in careful listening and preparation. The remaining 5% is in bringing yourself and your willingness to serve on the day.

WH: Stefan, what did you learn through the experience of working with me and the staff at Manorfield?

It was great meeting someone like you Wendy who really gets dialogic approaches

Table 1: Draft Plan for the 20th April Development Day

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHO/RESOURCE
10:00-10:15	Welcome, outline of day and objectives, brief table check-in: » One thing you are pleased about today. » One thing you would like to experience today.	WH
10:15–10:30	Setting the context/background to the day/personal reflections	WH
10:30–10:35	Explanation of World Café approach, the value of conversation; encourage people to have fun at the tables etc.	WH+ world café materials already on the tables
10:35–11:15 Round 1	**The Manorfield Development Café is open** Ask someone at the tables to volunteer to be the host for the table (and draw attention to the one copy of host guidelines on each table; also ask people to look at the café etiquette and have a few copies of those on the table; it is worth reading each point out). The question on the table is something like: » What strengths do we have individually and collectively that will enable us to achieve our vision for the children we teach in the next 3 years? Or » What can we do individually and together to achieve our vision for the pupils and school as a whole?	WH
11:15–11:45 Round 2	Invite people to move to new tables and ask the hosts to welcome people / facilitate introductions and re-cap on key points from the last conversation.	Perhaps a coffee break at this point or take coffee to tables?
11:45–12:15 Round 3	Invite people to move to new tables and ask the hosts to welcome people / facilitate introductions and re-cap on key points from the last conversation (It may be useful to put in a new question at this point, e.g., How can we support one another and the pupils in the work we need to accomplish in the next year?).	
12:15–12:30	Invite folk to be quiet for a period of reflection while you ask some prompt questions like: » What's emerging that is new for you? » What new connections are you making? » Is there anything that's surprised you? » If there was one thing that hasn't yet been said to reach a deeper level of understanding /clarity what would that be? » What is missing from the picture so far? What are we not seeing? » What deeper questions are emerging for you?	
12:30–12:45	Plenary Conversation: invite comments and insights from the conversations.	WH
12:45–13:30	**Lunch**	
	Making a reality of our vision by working together-appreciating our strengths, and building on them	
13:30–13:45	Introduction to Stefan and AI principles (maybe with an immediate post lunch check-in as well)	SC
13:45–14:00	Appreciative Pairs Interviews 1 Using the pro-forma as a guide tell the story of when you felt you made a great personal contribution to the life and learning of a Manorfield pupil/s.	SC — pro-forma guide
14:00–14:15	Appreciative Interviews 2 Using the pro-forma as a guide tell the story of when you worked effectively with a colleague to make a great contribution to the life and learning of a Manorfield pupil/s.	SC — pro-forma guide
14:15–14:45	In groups of 4 consider what Manorfield would look and feel like for staff and pupils if the best of your past experiences happened 100% of the time.	Perhaps invite them to capture this in writing/drawing on a flip chart paper that we can put up around the room if that is possible?
14:45–15:45 Including tea break	In new groups of 5/6 explore what needs to happen to enable the vision to become a reality—ask people to write down action points.	
15:45–16:00	In larger groups of say 12 invite people to say to colleagues in one sentence what they plan to do on Monday morning to start putting the plan into action.	
16:00–16:30	Closing plenary and comments	WH/SC

to OD. You get it with your mind and your heart and there was never a need for me to struggle to explain what we might be attempting to do. This meant that we could enjoy lively creative conversations. It also meant that we did not need to spend a great deal of time between us trying to negotiate a compromise. We both had a sense of excitement about the possibilities of the day and the longer term.

You have a strong belief in the potential of the staff at the school and this, strengths based attitude, is quite catching. As we talked about the staff I think your expectation that their potential will be realized became apparent in the intentions behind the day and what you and I think they collectively experienced. I was reminded of the social constructionist truism that what we speak about is what we shall ultimately experience as a social reality. It began for me with our early client-consultant relationship and manifested itself throughout the design and delivery process. In some ways the Appreciative Inquiry Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny cycle also set the frame for how we worked together.

SC: Wendy, what would you say have been the outcomes of the work we have done so far?

This important day has set the scene for developing the conversational practice at the school, and is always part of staff training. Developing the school as a coaching school is becoming part of the reality. Fifteen members of staff have expressed an interest in taking coaching training. Staff are becoming more reflective, they have space to discuss their ideas and the energy of the staff group has become more focused and less pent up. We are currently in the process of developing our vision and values.

Closing Reflections on the Practice of Dialogic OD

Hopefully, we have well illustrated the dance of conversation between client and consultant that co-created a powerful conversational space for the staff of Manorfield Primary School. Both Wendy and I have had moments of insight in our studies and careers that have shifted us towards a commitment to conversational practice. The consequence has been a growing emphasis on listening to others and seeking to understand the questions in the organization, and indeed the wider system. Alongside this is a practice of listening to our own intuitions and responding appropriately. So emotions, gut instincts, past narratives, longings for a better future, and a passion to further develop ourselves and those around us all contributed to the liveliness in conversation we both enjoyed with one another and in some strange way infected those we worked with. Making choices about how to approach the OD challenge offered by Manorfield was neither the consultants nor the clients' prerogative. Conversation can, and did, bring a sense of equality and unity between people. We think that was our experience both in our working relationship but also in the relationships among school staff that emerged after the event. If you enjoy consulting because of the individual status, expert power, and recognition it gives you then we would say that Dialogic OD is probably not for you. However, if you value working as a collective then the rewards for all are huge.

References

Brown, J., & Isaacs, D. (2005). *The world cafe: Shaping our futures through conversations that matter.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Bushe, G. R., & Marshak, R. J. (2009). Revisioning organization development: Diagnostic and dialogic premises and patterns of practice. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 45*(3), 348–368.

Cooperrider, D. L., Whitney, D., & Stavros, J. M. (2008). *Appreciative inquiry handbook: For leaders of change.* San Francisco CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Lewis, S., Passmore, J., & Cantore, S. (2008). *Appreciative inquiry for change management: Using AI to facilitate organizational development.* London, UK: Kogan Page Ltd.

Owen, H. (2008). *Open space technology: A user's guide.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Stefan Cantore is Senior Teaching Fellow in Organizational Behaviour at the School of Management, University of Southampton, UK. Through his company, Converse7 Ltd he also consults in the areas of Leadership and Organizational Development using Dialogic OD approaches. He is currently completing a doctoral research program which focuses on understanding the nature and practice of what he calls Conversational Consulting. He can be reached at *S.P.Cantore@soton.ac.uk.*

Wendy Hick has been in the teaching profession for 18 years and in that time has held a variety of roles that have equipped her for school leadership. This has included consultancy work, school improvement work, and training and developing others in various aspects of school leadership including coaching. She is currently undertaking a Master in Coaching at the University of East London. She can be reached at *wendhick@hotmail.com.*

Dialogic OD

A Theory of Practice

By Gervase R. Bushe

A couple of years ago Bob Marshak and I defined a bifurcation in OD practice and we called these two strands Diagnostic and Dialogic OD (Bushe & Marshak, 2009). While we identified the underlying philosophical differences and similarities to these two types of organization development, we did not offer much clarity about the Dialogic OD change process other than it is based in social constructionism and involves changing narratives that underpin social reality. In this paper, I describe my generic Dialogic OD change process. I invite you to look under the hood at practices as disparate as Open Space, Visual Explorer, and World Café with me, and I will describe the engine I see behind transformational change.

Why is it useful to have a generic model of Dialogic OD? Two reasons. One is that an increasing number of practitioners are identified by the technique(s) they specialize in and therefore employed by organizations in fragmented ways (Gilpin-Jackson, 2013). Rather than hiring an OD consultant to aid in long term change processes, they hire Open Space practitioners, or World Café facilitators, and so on, for specific events of limited duration. Practitioners become less able to influence the overall design and execution of an organization's change strategy. Having an overarching theory of change, like this model, positions us differently with leaders and clients.

The second is that without underlying theory, it is hard to learn why dialogic interventions succeed or fail, and as a consequence no way to accumulate a body of knowledge. Thomas Kuhn (1962) pointed this out in his landmark book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* A body of knowledge only develops by being able to see unexpected things show up against a background of expectations. Unless you have a clear set of expectations (and this is what a good theory gives you) you cannot notice anomalies or surprises—the very things that force a body of knowledge to evolve. An adequate theory of Dialogic OD practice will give us an organizing framework for all the dialogical change approaches of the past 25 or so years, and it will enable us as individuals, and as a profession, to learn and grow.

I will start by outlining my model of Dialogical OD practice and the underlying theory of how social reality is transformed. Then I will discuss two key parts of it— the nature of generative images and the context of transformational change. Finally, I will list 27 Dialogic OD techniques that can each be used within this model, and describe what I have found are the key conditions, during the Dialogic OD process, for transformation to occur.

The Generic Model

In this article I will use the word *community* to describe any size group of people that does not exist to accomplish specific, interdependent tasks. Teams, by definition, have interdependent tasks and win or lose together. Communities and teams are different, and most groups in organizations are not teams (Bushe, 2004), even though that is what they are usually called. This

model may also work with teams but teams are in some ways simpler and offer a variety of other dialogical possibilities for OD.

This generic model of Dialogic OD rests on the assumption that change occurs when the day to day thinking of community members has altered their day to day decisions and actions, which leads to a change in the culture of the community that entrenches those new ways of thinking. Their thinking is changed when the language, stories, and narratives the community uses is altered in a profound way (Barrett, Thomas, & Hocevar, 1995; Grant & Marshak, 2011). This alteration occurs from a *generative image*. *Figure 1* outlines the consulting process that I will elaborate in the rest of the article.

I advise using Dialogic OD when leaders want to transform a social system, be it group, organization, network of stakeholders, or society. This is not about incremental change, which is how to make the current system better at what it already is and does. Transformation changes the very nature of the community to be better at what it aspires to be and do. There has to be a big problem, issue, concern, or challenge for leaders and community members to bring the energy and provide the resources real planned transformation requires. You cannot plan transformational change like you can plan a project. When you begin you do not know exactly where you want to end up and you can be assured that unexpected things will happen. I find attempts to transform to some predetermined end almost never work and most often result in negative, unforeseen consequences (cf., Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003). You can, however, identify the challenge you want to address and you can plan how to address it. Normally, the problem, issue, or concern motivating the change effort gets reframed in a future-focused, possibility-centric way. While Dialogic OD is concerned with problems, it does not deal with them through "problem-solving."

The Nature of Generative Images

I think Dialogic OD addresses problems and produces change through generative images. I define generative images

Figure 1: A Dialogic OD Consulting Process

Sponsors and change agents identify the concern driving the change effort and reframe it in a possibility-centric and future focused way. They plan how the community will get engaged in conversations that focus on this reframe and how they will respond to the changes that emerge from events they run.

In one or more events, community members engage in conversations that differ from their normal conversations. Relationships among community members are enhanced to enable more creativity and engagement. Generative images are used to elicit new ideas. Sometimes these are already given by leaders or consultants, but most often the process needs to stimulate generative images from the community. Now seeing options for action that did not occur to them before, new ways to change become possible.   Community members make presonal, voluntary commitments to new behaviors and projects.

After the event(s), new thinking and talking allows people to make new choices in their day to day interactions. There may be self-organized group projects stimulated by the generative image, as well, but most of the change comes from community members developing different attitudes and assumptions over time - that is, a change in the social construction of reality.

(Bushe, 2007) as ideas, phrases, objects, pictures, manifestos, stories, or new words with two properties:

1. Generative images allow us to see new alternatives for decisions and actions. They have the "…capacity to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is 'taken for granted' and thereby furnish new alternatives for social actions" (Gergen, 1978, p.1346).
2. Generative images are compelling images—they generate change because people like the new options in front of them and want to use them.

Generative images are usually fuzzy, ambiguous, and sometimes combine what seem like opposites. Attempts to precisely define them miss the whole point. They are generative because they evoke so many different meanings. Perhaps the most powerful generative image of the past 30 years is "sustainable development." Recall that

before that image emerged, ecologists and business people were at war and had nothing to say to each other. In 1986 the VP of future planning of a major forest products company in British Columbia was overhead opining in a ski line that "this environmental stuff will just blow over." When the image of sustainable development surfaced in the Brundtland Report in 1987, it transformed relationships throughout the world community so profoundly that Green Peace Canada was suddenly being invited to advise business and government. It found itself with unprecedented influence, yet some members were afraid of being co-opted. It almost dissolved from the internal conflicts over what direction to take in a transformed world.

Think of all the new choices, decisions, and actions that came (and continue to be stimulated) by the words sustainable development. That is generativity. Between 1975 and 1985 "Quality of Work Life" transformed unionized workplaces in America. At British Airways "exceptional arrival experiences" was the generative image used

to work on the problem of lost passenger luggage (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). In one semi-autonomous work team of business analysts, "trust costs less" allowed them to get unstuck and function autonomously (Bushe, 1998). The most powerful generative images change the core narratives in the community—the stories we tell ourselves about who we are, what we care about, and what is possible.

In OD efforts, generative images are usually new words, phrases, or longer texts, but pictures and objects can be generative too. Consider the generative power of the first images of the earth taken from outer space. Is there any doubt that seeing that blue and white jewel with its tiny, fragile ecosystem, embedded in a cold, black void, catalyzed the outpouring of ecological research, writing, and activism that soon followed?

The change sequence, shown in *Figure 2*, assumes that the decisions and actions we take are based on what we think. Over time as we witness our own and other's decisions and actions, we develop shared attitudes and assumptions. These become taken for granted and form the culture, which in turn shapes what we think. A generative image disrupts this pattern both by altering what we think, and by motivating new decisions and actions.

The Context of Dialogic OD

Transforming a community of any size, even a dyad, is a complex situation. You cannot predict how everyone in the community will think, you cannot predict what ideas will get generated, and you cannot predict what new actions people will want to take. There are so many variables influencing each other simultaneously (the context, other groups, the sense-making going on in people, the variety of motives and interests in the community) that it is impossible to know what caused what until after the fact. This is what defines the difference between a complicated situation and a complex one, as shown in the Cynefin model in *Figure 3* (Snowden & Boone, 2007).

The Cynefin Model, developed at IBM's Institute for Knowledge
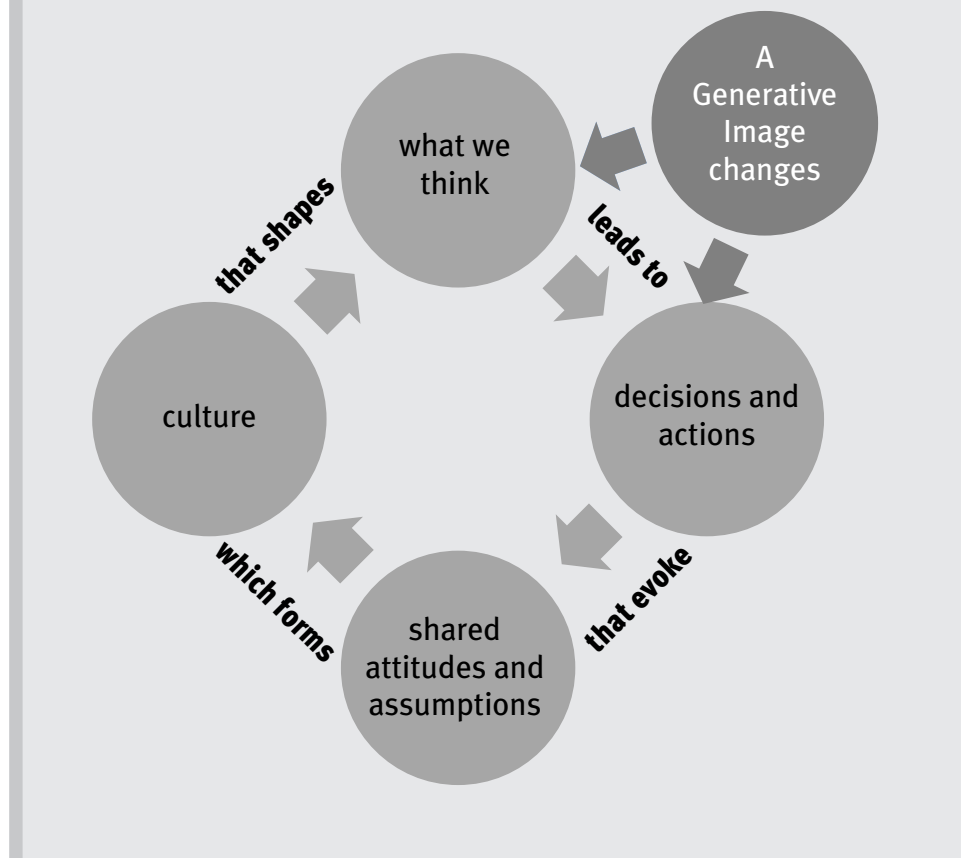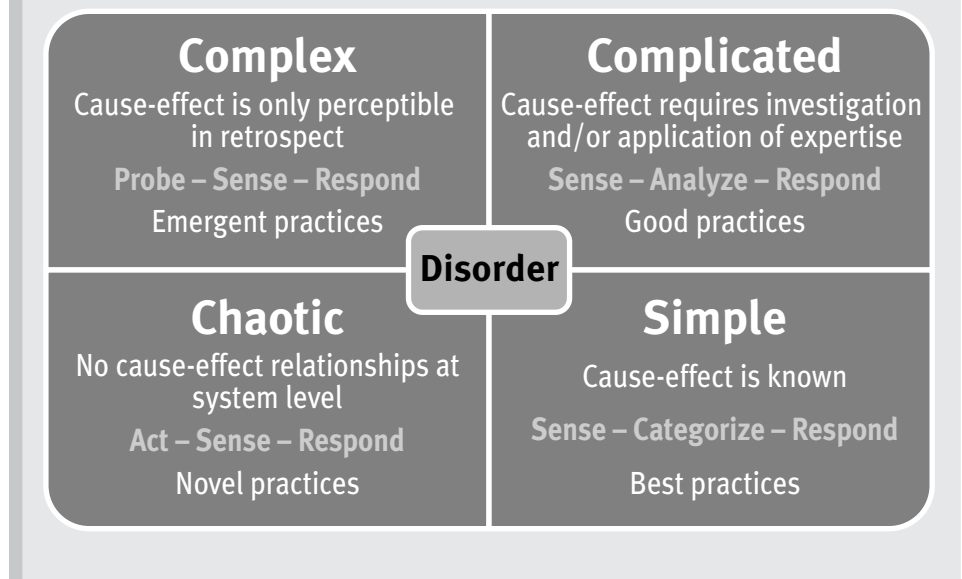

Figure 2: A Theory of Change

Figure 3: Snowden and Boone's Cynefin Model

Management, says that the appropriate decision-making process depends on how well cause-effect relationships are understood. In a complicated situation (upper right quadrant) what causes what can be figured out, ahead of time, so collecting data to analyze before making decisions is appropriate. But in a complex situation (upper left), Snowden and Boone advise to first experiment with possible changes (probes) and then select the ones that accomplish the objective. Stimulate the emergence of multiple options for new actions, pay attention to the consequences of those actions, and respond in ways that further enable those new actions that accomplish the desired results.

I think what is needed in complex change situations are new ideas (as the old ones are not working anymore) that community members will embrace and act on. My ultimate purpose when using Dialogic OD is to create conditions inside the community that stimulate emergent practices (probes) and ensure the effective ones get recognized and incorporated into the community. This is done by working through generative images that stimulate new ideas that in turn lead to emergent practices.

The Usual Sequence of Key Conditions

The model in *Figure 1* shows three steps; getting ready to launch events, holding events, and incorporating emergent change that comes out of the events. An event is a choreographed interaction among community members. In this section I highlight some key conditions I think have led to success (or failure from their lack of) in Dialogic OD projects I have been in and others I have studied.

Getting Ready
Dialogic OD requires the full engagement of at least one leader with enough authority to support systemic changes that emerge from the change process. This person needs to act like a sponsor, working effectively with internal or external change agents (Conner, 1993) from the beginning in defining the issues to be addressed and in convening the community. One of the early issues that must be addressed is who

is the community and how will we get them to come to our events? In defining the community you can ask, "If we came up with changes that really addressed the issues, who would likely have to support those changes being implemented?" Often, but not always, the right community for the change includes people inside and outside any particular group.

I have seen a few attempts to use Dialogic OD in communities where there are no obvious sponsors. These have all involved social issues, like poverty. They can be highly innovative in how they engage communities in events. Their processes brought a variety of stakeholders into meaningful conversations, but I have not seen much sustained change come from them. In one path to failure, they produce lists of great ideas no one can do anything about. In another, there is no one to track and amplify desired changes, no resources to support motivated people, and the momentum for self-generated change fades. Of course, that can happen in organizations too, when sponsorship is not right.

When trying to change organizations, there are likely to be people inside the company tasked with driving the change—they are the change agents (Conner, 1993). Usually, leaders want to treat change as a project and treat these people like project managers. There are project skills involved, but change agents need to act differently than project managers, and their relationship to the boss has to be quite different. Dialogic OD cannot be run like a project because of its emergent properties and because of the need for different power relations than is typical between senior managers and project leaders. General Electric, among others, adapted Conner's Sponsor-Change Agent-Target model successfully, articulating the requirements for each role, which is nicely described in Nilikant and Ramnaryan (1998).

You can do Dialogic OD in small groups, with middle management leaders as sponsors and the consultant as change agent. But when the community is a large organization it requires lots of people to be significantly engaged, maybe simultaneously, or maybe in a sequence of

smaller events. In any case, it is time and human resource intensive, so not much happens without very senior sponsorship. Compared to being an executive running a business, a change sponsor needs to be more personally connected to front line change activity, and less controlling. Sponsors do not have much time so they rely on the change agents, who typically come from the middle of the organization, to keep them informed and connected. Executives need to understand a sponsor's role is not to tell the change agent what to do. It is the opposite. Dialogic OD cannot occur unless sponsors take the advice of their change agents, particularly on what the sponsor needs to do as the process unfolds. As an external consultant in a dialogic OD process one of my main jobs is to build the sponsor—change agent relationship in the organization. I usually need to teach them the change roles and coach them in how to work together, so I need to have a good relationship with both sponsors and change agents (or be the change agent).

From the outset, sponsors need to understand that the point of these events is not to identify, agree upon, and then implement THE change. It is to unearth, catalyze, and support the multitude of motivations and ideas that already exist in the community, in the service of transforming the community in the desired direction. The design of the change process has to ensure that two key things happen:
1. The people who will ultimately embody and carry out the change are engaged, along with leaders and other stakeholders, in discussing what changes ought to occur.
2. Members self identify, individually and in groups, the changes they want to take responsibility for.

In all the Dialogic OD projects I know of the initial issue has been reframed in possibility centric and future focused ways. For example, instead of working on the problem of dissatisfied customers by analyzing what went wrong in the past, we work on the possibilities for creating raving fans by focusing on what they want in the future. This is one area where Appreciative Inquiry and Future Search have had a big impact

on change practitioners. There are good reasons why possibility centric framings of issues are more likely to engage community members and lead to more generative outcomes, well described by Boyd and Bright (2007). I am of the opinion that this initial framing is crucial to the success of the entire effort. One, it needs to focus the community on what the sponsors really care about. If the framing takes community members off into conversations that sponsors do not care about, nothing much will come of the effort. Two, it needs to emotionally engage and inspire the community. I try to hold out until we have framed the issue in a way that community members will be "willing to crawl over glass" to attend events where that is what is being talked about. Three, the framing of the issue has to be open enough to allow unexpected, surprising ideas to surface.

The readiness phase is over when the sponsors and change agents have reframed the problem or challenge in a possibility centric, future focused way. They have a plan for how to engage the community (whether small group or large system) in working with or surfacing generative images and for how to work with emergent changes, and the understanding that the plan will probably need to adapt and evolve as the process unfolds.

Convening Events

Dialogic OD can utilize any number of techniques during events that engage as many members of the community as possible, rapidly, in one or more new conversations. For a small group this might be one meeting or a series of meetings. For a large community it might also be one or a series of large group meetings. *Table 1* lists 27 Dialogic OD techniques. Each offers variations in how to structure and host events. These practices can be used in ways other than the theory of practice I am offering here. However, I think that whenever one of my clients has failed to transform it is because we were missing one of these key conditions. While dialogic OD does not use diagnosis, it does ask questions and engage people in inquiry. But it is not empirical inquiry and the point is not to find "the truth." Only inquiry that is linked to things

that fully engage members, and addresses a widely shared challenge, has a chance of being transformational. The more emotionally engaged members are the more energy will be put toward change. Any of the techniques listed in *Table 1* has the potential to be used during events, though they each probably work best under different circumstances. The Dialogic OD practitioner's skill is in knowing which is most likely, in that specific situation, to achieve the ultimate purpose of these events: 1) uncover generative images and stimulate new ideas; and 2) make it more likely that people will voluntarily change their behavior/choices, without direction or orders.

However, sometimes you first need to use the dialogic techniques listed in Table 1 to generate new conversations about issues in the community itself. This is when unacknowledged resentments, frustrations, and sources of conflict need airing before people can emotionally engage with the change issue. In Dialogic OD practice, the purpose of this inquiry is not to decide what exactly the issue is, who is right or wrong, or try to resolve the past. Frustrations and resentments do not need to be resolved for successful events to take place; what makes them a barrier is if community members feel these have not been heard. In such situations, I work to surface and acknowledge the wide variety of experiences in the community about the heretofore undiscussed issue(s). These conversations are geared to bringing as many different and repressed voices into the room, eliminating inaccurate stories people have of each other, listening to what people want differently in the future, and perhaps doing some interpersonal healing.

Containers

A common image used to describe Dialogic OD events is the creation of a container: a time and space where normal, business as usual ways of interacting are suspended so that different, generative conversations can take place. I think what most differentiates dialogic OD techniques are their guidelines for how to create and facilitate those containers. The image of facilitation in conventional OD, grounded in social psychology and small group dynamics, does not

fit with the image of facilitation in dialogic change practice as convening or hosting. Often, the work is done in groups too large to facilitate. The design of the event needs to set the conditions for self-generated and self-regulated conversations to take place; conversations that will be productive and useful. The consultant is more of a planner

and designer than a facilitator and the process is less controlled and more emergent.

Containers need to focus attention and interaction in predictable enough ways that leaders can feel secure enough to let go. One aspect of good containers that has been widely discussed is the quality of questions used to focus attention and interaction (Vogt, Brown, & Isaacs, 2003). The right question, worded the right way, can make all the difference in the success or failure of a dialogic change process. Another widely discussed attribute is the mix of people engaged in those conversations. Whether it is the need for multiple organizational levels, multiple stakeholders, or people inside and outside of the target system, the emerging consensus is that the more diversity in the group the more generative the outcomes are likely to be.

The metaphor of container evokes in many people concrete issues of place, time, how a room is set up, how removed people are from their normal routines, that sort of thing. And I still think that can make a difference to what happens among a group of people. But I am now convinced that the really important qualities of containers arise from the qualities and character of the leader in relation to the group being contained. By leader I am referring to the person or group that is convening and leading the dialogic change event. This could be a consultant, internal facilitator, or the actual leader of the group—it is the person who is holding the space or hosting the event. We could probably list skills of people who are good at creating effective containers—things like knowing when to hold on to an agenda or topic and when to let go, knowing how to read and move with the energy of a group, being a non-anxious presence. But it probably also has a lot to do with the character or psychological maturity of the person co-creating the container with the community. Elsewhere I have discussed this aspect of containers in more detail (Bushe, 2010).

During events it is important to balance holding off action to ensure the best ideas surface, with going with momentum and energy. Too much focus on the former can reduce the latter. Transformational change needs good ideas coupled with energy. I think Dialogic OD helps communities surface and create good-enough ideas with energy behind them.

Incorporating Emergent Changes

At some point the Dialogic OD process shifts from stimulating ideas through generative images to launching action (probes). In a small group this might look like agreements among members to act differently, along with different things people say and do back on the job in the following days. Generally, when I use Dialogic OD I am not trying to facilitate convergence, or collective decisions, about which ideas or projects ought to be chosen or implemented. Instead, I want people to discuss how they might act differently because of the generative image, and then feel encouraged to act on what they find most personally relevant and meaningful.

Enough individuals have to accept personal accountability for change—or it will not be transformational. Enough people must put energy into change and the impact of their efforts have to be satisfying enough that they want to keep putting energy in, for transformation to occur. The energy for acting on generative ideas comes from: 1) the amount of inspiration people feel; 2) the quality of relationships in the community; and 3) clarity about what to do next. Events are structured to optimize those three outcomes.

After the events, change is facilitated by people in the community tracking the actual changes taking place and supporting sponsors in recognizing and amplifying desired changes (sensing and responding to successful probes). The amount of transformational change depends on unsupervised, self selected individuals and groups just acting differently, on their own. They make different choices daily at work. Specific projects might require more coordinated action among community members, but most change does not come from a project as much as it comes from talking and thinking differently daily. For the change to lock in, sponsors need to pay attention to what is working, and make changes to the community's infrastructure and operational processes required to fully embed those changes.

Plan to have unassigned resources (like money, time, and space) available so that people can be supported taking action. Sponsors need to imagine what kind of resources are likely to be needed by those pursuing worthwhile change and be ready and able to supply those when momentum and energy is high.

Summary

Table 2 summarizes the conditions I have found need to be in place for my Dialogic OD projects to be successful. A sponsor with the authority to support emergent change is required; someone or group who has their hands on enough levers that at the end of the process people will not be left with a lot of good ideas they cannot do anything with. Whether I am the sole change agent or the project includes an internal group of change facilitators, the relationship between sponsors and change agents has to be right. Sponsors need to

treat change agents like trusted allies that they make plans with, not subordinates or suppliers carrying out orders. Change agents need to be ready to tell sponsors what they really think, particularly about the sponsor's actions, and provide useful advice to the sponsor as the change unfolds. The issue they will work on has to be important to the community and they need to create a frame that will be used to engage the community in new conversations—typically a frame that looks at future possibilities, not the past, and that captures people's hearts and imagination. They need to identify the community best suited for implementing the changes, consider how they will be able to convene that community for one or more events, and how much community building will be required before it is ready to really focus on the change issue.

Events need to be convened that build the community and engage that community in uncovering some new possibilities for decisions and actions created by one or more generative images. Sometimes, the events need to begin with community building. Sometimes they need to create the generative image, and sometimes that already exists prior to the event. The events provide people the opportunity to consider the new possibilities evoked by the generative image, and the chance to find like-minded others who self-organize around change proposals (probes). Little effort is put into assessing or choosing amongst these proposals. Instead, everyone is authorized to do whatever they think best to make the changes occur. Processes are put in place to help sponsors to "track and fan" desired changes—identifying emergent practices they want to keep and finding ways to support and amplify them (Bushe & Pitman, 1991; Bushe 2009).

By working with the self-organizing, emergent qualities of human communities, Dialogic OD works around the obstacles that make controlled, orderly change difficult in complex situations and side steps the problems of resistance to change and unintended consequences that often accompany attempts to implement solutions. Surfacing and creating generative images, however, is easier said than done.

References

Barrett, F. J., Thomas, G. F., & Hocevar, S. P. (1995). The central role of discourse in large scale change: A social construction perspective. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 3(3), 352–372.

Boyd, N. M., & Bright, D. S. (2007). Appreciative inquiry as a mode of action research for community psychology. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 35(8), 1019–1036.

Bushe, G. R. (2010). Being the container in Dialogic OD. *Practicing Social Change*, 1(2), 10–15.

Bushe, G. R. (2009). *Clear leadership*. Boston, MA: Davies-Black.

Bushe, G.R. (2007). Appreciative inquiry is not (just) about the positive. *OD Practitioner*, 39(4), 30–35.

Bushe, G. R. (2004). Managers want tribes not teams: An invitation to rethink teambuilding. *OD Practitioner*, 36(1), 9–12.

Bushe, G. R. (1998). Appreciative inquiry in teams. *Organization Development Journal*, 16(3), 41–50.

Bushe, G.R., & Marshak, R. J. (2009). Revisioning organization development: Diagnostic and dialogic premises and patterns of practice. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*. 45(3), 348–368.

Bushe, G.R., & Pitman, T. (1991). Appreciative process: A method for transformational change. *OD Practitioner*, 23(3), pp. 1–4.

Conner, D. R. (1993). *Managing at the speed of change*. New York, NY: Random House.

Gergen, K. J. (1978). Toward generative theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36(11), 1344–1360.

Gilpin-Jackson, Y. (2013). Practicing in the grey area between dialogic and diagnostic organization development: Lessons from a healthcare case study. *OD Practitioner*, 45(1), 60–66.

Grant, D., & Marshak, R. J. (2011). Toward a discourse-centered understanding of organizational change. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 47(2), 204–235.

Kuhn, T. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago,IL: University of Chicago Press.

Nilikant, K., & Ramnaryan, S. (1998). *Managing organisational change*. New Delhi, IN: Response Books.

Ogbonna, E., & Wilkinson, B. (2003). The false promise of organizational culture change: A case study of middle managers in grocery retailing. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(5), 1151–78.

Snowden, D. J., & Boone, M. E. (2007). A leader's framework for decision-making. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(11), 69–76.

Vogt, E. E., Brown, J., & Isaacs, D. (2003). *The art of powerful questions*. Waltham, MA: Pegasus.

Whitney, D., & Trosten-Bloom, A. (2003). *The power of Appreciative Inquiry*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Gervase R. Bushe, PhD, is Professor of Leadership and Organization Development at the Beedie School of Business, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver Canada. His research and consulting focuses on transformational change processes and the development and leadership of collaborative organizations. For more information visit *www.gervasebushe.com*

"We have an opportunity to spread awareness and increase capacity for habit-breaking, transformative engagement that leads to more alive organizations, families, communities, and societies. I believe we have a sacred obligation to spread the skills for engaging with challenging circumstances as widely as possible."

A Call to Engage

Realizing the Potential of Dialogic Organization Development

By Peggy Holman

What would it mean if we knew how to successfully engage people who face intractable challenges so that our organizations and communities thrived?

Many of our social systems are facing unprecedented situations that challenge traditional approaches to change. Whether you are working with corporations, governments, or nonprofits, stories of breakdown are everywhere, leading to mergers, layoffs, and a need for new approaches to OD.

In such situations, Dialogic Organization Development (OD) offers promising practices for creative engagement. As practitioners, we can help organizations run better by engaging the people of a system in addressing complex, even conflicted situations. But that is just the beginning. We have an opportunity to spread awareness and increase capacity for habit-breaking, transformative engagement that leads to more alive organizations, families, communities, and societies. I believe we have a sacred obligation to spread the skills for engaging with challenging circumstances as widely as possible. Our future depends on it.

In what follows, I will tell you how I define Dialogic OD and why it matters—why I make such a bold statement that our future depends on it. I will describe a framework for designing dialogic engagements to make them more broadly accessible. I will end with an invitation for you to get involved in this promising development not just for traditional OD purposes but anywhere that disruption or conflict arises.

What is Dialogic Organization Development?

Dialogic OD engages the diverse people of a system in focused yet open interactions to catalyze unexpected and lasting shifts in perspective and behavior. A basic assumption of Dialogic OD practices is that change occurs through changing the conversations in a system.

Because dialogic practices support the people who make up a system to interact creatively around complex, important issues, they generate new ideas and connections, and inspire agreements to act around emerging shared aspirations. A common result of continued use is a shift in the cultural narrative that shapes the way people see their personal and collective identities.

For more than 50 years, experiments in organizations and communities and across other types of social systems, like education and health care, have shaped dialogic methods for engaging the diverse people of a system in ways that lead to unexpected breakthroughs. Leaders in working with dialogic forms of change developed and named practices such as Open Space Technology, The World Café, Future Search, and Appreciative Inquiry (Holman, et al., 2007). In 1992, Margaret Wheatley's groundbreaking *Leadership and the New Science* contributed to theory by connecting our changing understanding of science to human systems.

The current generation of dialogic practitioners, myself included, have built

on these dialogic practices by mixing and matching them to extend their reach into a variety of situations, for example, working online. Many of us have sought a deeper understanding of the patterns that make these practices work so that we can address each unique situation with increasing confidence that the processes will lead to productive outcomes. Further, by understanding the essence of these practices, we can make them more broadly accessible, doable without the need for extensive training.

My quest to unlock the mystery of what is involved in changing systems began in the late 1980s. I started noticing shifts in my understanding of how change occurs when using dialogic practices. Examples are in the side bar. I noticed a pattern of change through the lens of emergence—increasingly complex order self-organizing out of disorder—that helped me to understand why Dialogic OD practices work (Holman, 2012).

A Pattern of Emergence

Emergence is nature's way of changing, in which increasingly complex order arises from disorder. We see emergence all the time in its cousin, emergencies. What happens?

A disturbance interrupts ordinary life. In addition to natural responses, like grief or fear or anger, people differentiate—take on different tasks. For example, in an earthquake, while many are immobilized, some care for the injured, others look for food and water, a few care for the animals. Someone creates a "find your loved ones" site on the Internet. A few blaze the trails and others follow. They see what is needed and bring their unique gifts to the situation. A new order begins to arise.

This pattern of change flows as follows:
» *Disruption* breaks apart the status quo.
» The system *differentiates*, surfacing innovations and distinctions among its parts.
» As different parts interact, a new, more complex *coherence* arises.

So whether you are working with an organization, a community, or other social

---

Traditional and Emerging Ideas about Change (Holman et al., 2007)

In no particular order, the following table compares traditional thinking about change with ideas that support emergence. This list grew out of my work with Dialogic OD. Understanding the differences can help us to make more informed choices about how we approach change.

Traditional Ideas About Change	Emerging Ideas About Change
Difference and dissonance as problem	Diversity and dissonance as resource, with problems inviting exploration
Restrain and resist disturbance	Welcome and use disturbance in a creative dance with order
Focus on the predictable and controllable	Focus on the mysterious from a foundation of what we understand
Ensure that there are no surprises	Experiment; learn from surprises
Focus on outcomes	Focus on intentions; hold outcomes lightly
Focus on the form and its stability	Focus on intended function; work with forms as they arise and dissipate
Hierarchy	Networks containing natural, often fluid hierarchies
Visionary leadership	Shared, emergent, flexible leadership
Top-down or bottom-up	Multidirectional
Work solo	Work in community and solo, bringing our unique gifts
Pay attention to the mainstream	Pay attention to the dance between the mainstream and the margins
Build/construct/manage	Invite/open/support
Follow the plan	Follow the energy, using the plan as useful information
Manufacture	Midwife the birth of novelty and cultivate its development
Assemble the parts	Interactions among the parts form a novel whole
Design processes	Design processes and cultivate nutrient environments
Handle logistics	Cultivate welcoming conditions, including handling logistics
Strive for sustainability	Sustainability exists in a dance of dynamic tensions
Incremental shifts	Periodic leaps and incremental shifts
Classical	Classical skills that also support jazz and improvisation
Declare/advocate	Inquire/explore, using what is at the heart of our advocacy as a resource

The next time you face disruption and don't know how to approach it, look at the left side of the table. If it reminds you of what you would ordinarily do, look at the right-hand counterpart. Perhaps you will find new insights for handling your situation. If taking the approach on the right seems like a lot of effort, consider the reasons why it might help.
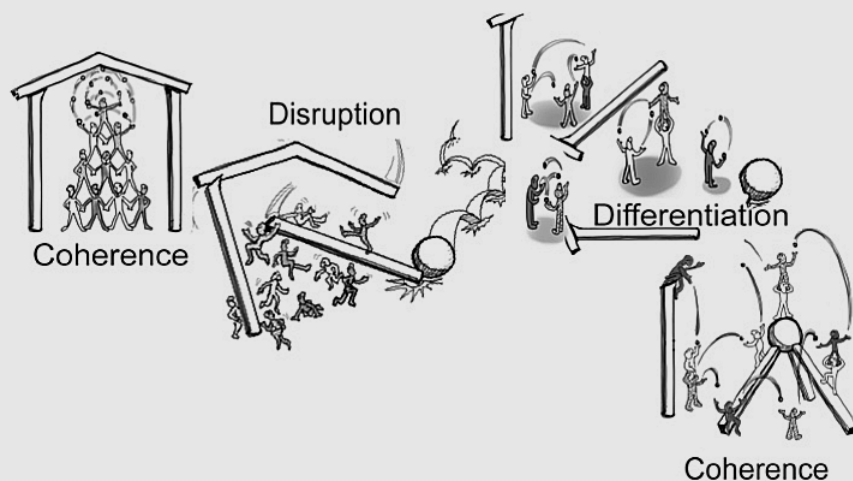
Figure 1: A Pattern of Change

Illustration by Steven Wright, steven@wrightmarks.com

system, developing the capacity to work with this natural pattern of change also contributes to cultivating the consciousness and skills for people in the system to engage with structural changes in their system. My work with a biotech company highlights the shift from fixing a problem to cultivating a system capable of addressing its own challenges.

A Biotech Begins

A biotech company was building a new facility. The regional director saw an opportunity to find synergies across departmental divides in anticipation of moving from separate buildings into a shared space. As part of the process, they convened an Open Space Technology meeting, bringing together about 100 people from all parts of the region. Open Space Technology invites people to self-organize around what they love in order to address complex, important issues (Holman, 2010). At the close of the first day of the gathering, one participant characterized the experience by saying that she had worked for the company for years and finally left out of frustration. She returned a few months ago after five years away to find that not one of the issues that had frustrated her had changed. She declared that by the time this unprecedented meeting ended, those issues would be addressed. That declaration became a rallying cry, as others echoed both her frustration and their determination to break ingrained, unproductive habits. By the end

of the event, not only had people handled long-standing issues, they developed a deeper understanding of how interconnected they were that would serve them in moving forward.

By using a dialogic practice, this company broke through ingrained habit to begin developing new relationships for shared purposes. Now imagine if more of our work left more capable, engaged systems in their wake.

Why Dialogic Organization Development Matters

When we use dialogic practices to engage the people of a system in conversations that address their own issues, we not only solve the immediate problem, we leave behind a more evolved system, with a greater sense direction and hope, of personal connection, and the energy and will to work across previously unbridgeable boundaries.

What would it mean to families and communities if they knew how to hold such conversations? What could it mean for our ability to govern ourselves in our red-blue divided nation?

Robert Putnam, best known for *Bowling Alone*, which looked at the decline of social capital in the US (2001), has more recently found that other things being equal, *more* diversity in a community is associated with *less* trust both between and within ethnic groups (2007). Given the increasing diversity not just in the US but also across the globe, our collective

well-being depends on our learning to use our differences as a resource. Enter the practices of Dialogic Organization Development, which thrive on diversity.

While Putnam's research implies that increasing diversity in our neighborhoods could diminish our capacity to work together, Dialogic OD offers a path to a different and promising outcome. We can choose to face our seemingly intractable challenges by coalescing into a vibrant, inclusive society characterized by creative interactions among diverse people. In many ways, this path is counterintuitive. It breaks with traditional thinking about change, including the ideas that it occurs top-down and that it follows an orderly plan, one step at a time. We do not control emergence. Nor can we fully predict how it arises. It can be threatening, intense, overwhelming. Yet, through dialogic practices, we can engage it, confident that unexpected and valuable breakthroughs can occur.

Benefits of Using Dialogic OD to Engage Emergence

Although specific outcomes from Dialogic OD are unpredictable, by engaging with it some benefits are foreseeable. Stories from Journalism That Matters (JTM), an initiative that convenes conversations among the diverse people who are shaping the emerging news and information ecosystem, illustrates likely benefits:

Individually, we are stretched and refreshed. We feel more courageous and inspired to pursue what matters to us. With a myriad of new ideas and confident of the support of mentors, collaborators, and fans, we act.

> At an early Journalism That Matters gathering, a recent college graduate arrived with the seed of an idea: putting a human face on international reporting for US audiences. At the meeting, she found support for the idea. Experienced people coached her and gave her entrée to their contacts. Today, the Common Language Project is thriving, having received multiple awards.

New and unlikely partnerships form. When we connect with people whom we do not normally meet, sparks may fly. Creative conditions make room for our differences, fostering lively and productive interactions.

> A technology-averse veteran investigative reporter was teamed with a young digital journalist. They created a multimedia website for a story based on a two-year investigation. Not only did the community embrace the story, but the veteran is pursuing additional interactive projects. And the digital journalist is learning how to do investigative reporting.

Breakthrough projects surface. Experiments are inspired by interactions among diverse people.

> The Poynter Institute, an educational institution serving the mainstream media, was seeking new directions because its traditional constituency was shrinking. Because Poynter co-hosted a JTM gathering, a number of staff members participated. They listened broadly and deeply to the diverse people present. An idea emerged that builds on who they are and takes them into new territory: supporting the training needs of entrepreneurial journalists.

Community is strengthened. We discover kindred spirits among a diverse mix of strangers. Lasting connections form, and a sense of relationship grows. We realize that we share an intention—a purpose or calling guided by some deeper source of wisdom. Knowing that our work serves not just ourselves but a larger whole increases our confidence to act.

> As a community blogger who attended a JTM conference put it, "I'm no longer alone. I've discovered people asking similar questions, aspiring to a similar future for journalism. Now I have friends I can bounce ideas off of, knowing we share a common cause."

The culture begins to change. With time and continued interaction, a new narrative of who we are takes shape.

> When Journalism That Matters began, we hoped to discover new possibilities for a struggling field so that it could better serve democracy. As traditional media, particularly newspapers, began failing, the work became more vital. We see an old story of journalism dying and provide a place for it to be mourned. We also see the glimmers of a new and vital story being born. In it, journalism is a conversation rather than a lecture. Stories inspire rather than discourage their audience. Journalism That Matters has become a vibrant and open conversational space where innovations emerge. New language, such as news ecosystem— the information exchange among the public, government, and institutions that can inform, inspire, engage, and activate—makes it easier to understand what is changing. People say, "I didn't know I could be effective without a big organization behind me. Now I do."

These experiences show that working with emergence using Dialogic OD practices can create great initiatives, the energy to act, a sense of community, and a greater view of the whole—a collectively intelligent system at work.

As more people engage emergence, something fundamental changes about who we are, what we are doing, how we are with each other, and perhaps what it all means. In the process, we tear apart familiar and comfortable notions about how change works. We bring together unlikely bedfellows and re-imagine and re-create our organizations, communities, and social systems so that they serve us better.

At the Heart of Dialogic Organization Development

If working with emergence through dialogic practices is a pathway to success, how do we do it? Using dialogic practices like Appreciative Inquiry, Future Search, or others named above, is an excellent place to start. My hope is that as OD practitioners embrace dialogic practices, they extend the skills for hosting conversations to people who bring them into a myriad of settings: home, church, community centers, and more. Change is simply too important to be left solely in the hands of professionals.

I offer my most current framing of three simple acts for designing dialogic

Figure 2: Actions for Dialogic Engagement

Create a container for dialogue by:
- Asking possibility-oriented questions
- Inviting diversity of the system
- Being welcoming

Create opportunities for **individual expression & connection**

Reflect together to find meaning, coherence
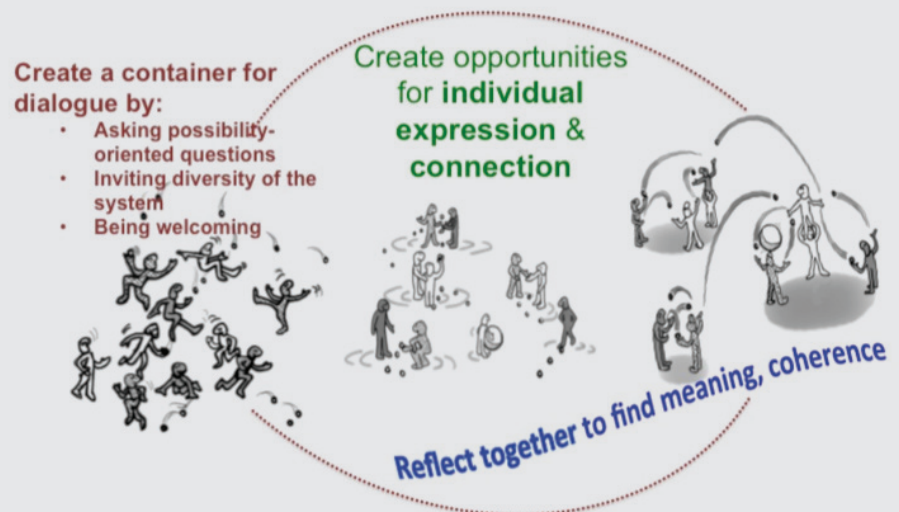
engagements, along with a story, in the hopes that it gives you the context to jump in.

Creating a Container for Dialogue

All change begins with disturbing the status quo. We may find it positive: a promotion, losing weight, a new baby. We may experience it with dread: losing a job, a contract, a life. Any disruption, because it is disturbing, can lead to change. Dialogic practices help us develop a positive relationship with disruption because they offer an aikido move in dealing with it. By embracing disruption, we become hosts for welcoming who and what needs to interact in order for the differences that make a difference to emerge.

As hosts, our work is not to intervene, but rather to create a container—hospitable space for working with whatever arises. Three actions weave spacious containers for engaging with conflict and complexity. They are:

» Asking possibility-oriented questions;
» Inviting diversity; and
» Being welcoming.

Asking Possibility-oriented Questions
How do we inspire explorations that lead to positive action?

If your first impulse when facing disaster is to ask questions that surface images of a positive future, your chances of making it through upheaval increase. It kept psychiatrist Viktor Frankl alive, as he continually sought meaning even in a concentration camp during the Holocaust (1997).

Ambitious, possibility-oriented questions are attractors, drawing diverse people who care. They disrupt by focusing on opportunities for something better, more meaningful. A general question is "Given all that has happened, what is possible now?" This question acknowledges the present without making it bad or wrong. It focuses on the future, setting the stage for a productive inquiry. If we do not know the answer and are genuinely curious, we have got the beginnings of a great question.

Bold, affirmative questions carry us through chaos into creativity. They

mobilize change by helping us to envision our dreams and aspirations. Such positive images generate positive actions (Cooper-rider, 2000).

As important as the questions that we ask, is who engages in exploring them.

Inviting Diversity
How can we include the true complexity of the situation?

Dialogic OD encourages people to look beyond habitual definitions of who and what makes up a system. Think of protesters outside the doors of power. What would happen if they were invited into an exploratory dialogue? Making space for different perspectives while in a healthy container opens the way for creative engagement.

How do we decide whom to invite? The simple answer: those who care. Future Search creators Marv Weisbord and Sandra Janoff suggest inviting all who "ARE IN": those with *a*uthority, *r*esources, *e*xpertise, *i*nformation, and *n*eed (2010).

Inviting can be time-consuming and challenging. It involves being receptive to unfamiliar perspectives, going to unfamiliar places, and cultivating relationships with people different from you.

Creating a robust container involves cultivating a spirit of welcome, for whomever and whatever shows up.

Being Welcoming
How do we cultivate conditions for the best possible outcomes?

Welcoming fosters civility. Engaging a diverse mix of people is simpler when they sense that they belong, right from the start. Welcoming conditions make the difference

between a screaming mob and a circle of peace. Though we cannot see welcome, we can sense it. Think of that small voice that informs you when you enter a place whether to relax or watch out.

The broader the diversity of people and perspectives, the more important a healthy container is. A welcoming space supports people to participate fully. It cues us about how much to reveal, how deep we are willing to go. When the environment supports expressions that might be considered

> A welcoming space supports people to participate fully. It cues us about how much to reveal, how deep we are willing to go. When the environment supports expressions that might be considered disruptive in other settings, disturbances tend to show up as less toxic. In welcoming spaces, people take charge of their situation, compelling facilitators to move out of the way and traditional leaders to contribute as one part of a larger system.

disruptive in other settings, disturbances tend to show up as less toxic. In welcoming spaces, people take charge of their situation, compelling facilitators to move out of the way and traditional leaders to contribute as one part of a larger system.

Creating a welcoming container is as important as setting a useful agenda. How do we make intentions clear? What is welcome? What of our history needs to be shared? What of our aspirations? How about physical space—what messages does it send? The questions are endless. All we can do is our best to discern what matters given the situation. The good news: what we miss will show up as a disruption. By embracing it, we learn, adjust, and continue evolving.

The work of cultivating a great container is a bit party host, a bit stage manager, a bit den mother, and yet none of these. Like many relational skills, when practiced well, it is invisible.

Having bounded the space of disruption with possibility-oriented questions, been mindful about inviting the diversity of the system, and created a welcoming space, what do you do with it?

Creating Opportunities for Individual Expression and Connection

How do individual passions contribute to stronger communities?

With a container created, no matter what dialogic practice, when successful, it creates a sense of spaciousness for divergence. For many, this space of differentiation seems messy and chaotic. It is also ripe for creative endeavor, for experiments to occur, for connections to be made. The heart of the work of Dialogic OD is crafting activities that invite individual expression and make room for unexpected connections.

Dialogic practices that thrive brilliantly support the counterintuitive insight of spaces for differentiation: pursuing what matters to us individually enables us to discover commonalities in our mutual needs and longings. Sadly, most of us were taught that pursuing what we love is selfish. So we set aside what makes us different and unique, and sacrifice ourselves for the common good. In practice, this choice often leads to strong egos, and unfulfilled, unhappy people who secretly take out their resentment on others.

In contrast, by embracing what we love, deeper meaning trumps ego needs, and sparks openness to others. We discover that what is most personal is universal. We are no longer alone but part of some larger whole. Something shifts. "I" see myself as part of a larger "we." We relate not just to each other but also to the whole. A social system—a community—emerges, with its own identity, distinct from the individuals in it. Yet we share a common story, common intentions. Knowing that, in essence, we want the same things, differences cease to be obstacles. They become creative pathways to innovations that contain what is vital to each of us and all of us. Our capacity and desire to listen to each other grows. Our uniqueness turns from disruption into creative contribution.

As practitioners of Dialogic OD, once differentiation is underway, we can test for convergence, where a new coherence arises.

Reflect Together to Find Meaning, Coherence

What is arising now?

Reflecting helps meaning to coalesce. It is listening's mirror, making visible what we sense. It supports us in stepping out of the flow of activity. It helps us to notice larger patterns taking shape. Reflective questions help us perceive what is converging. What are we learning? What surprised us? What is meaningful? What simple rules—patterns, assumptions, principles— are surfacing? What can now be named? Buddhists say that you cannot predict enlightenment, but practicing meditation prepares the way. Reflecting prepares us to notice shifts even as we experience them.

I use two complementary definitions for *reflecting*. The paragraph above describes reflection as sensing patterns arising. This form of reflection involves actively seeking coherence. Reflection also means being a mirror for others—to repeat their words or describe their feelings.

In this second form, reflecting is listening going deep, bearing witness for another. Reflecting back another's words and feelings helps them to hear themselves. It can get underneath ineffective expressions—shouting, whining, bullying—to deeper longings buried in their angst. Supporting others to hear themselves clarifies the heart of their cry. Perhaps it helps them to realize what they wanted to express for the first time. Feeling fully heard frees them to listen to others.

Both forms of reflecting help us to notice our differences and stay connected, discovering a larger, more complex picture forming from our diverse views. That bigger picture is often an unexpected, coherent pattern that could not have arisen without deep expressions at the heart of our differences. A new, wiser, higher-order coherence emerges.

Through the simple acts of creating a container, creating opportunities for individual expression and connection, and reflecting together to find meaning and coherence, Dialogic OD helps the conversation of a social system to change.

A Story of Communities in Change

As Putnam's research on increasing community diversity and decreasing trust makes clear, perhaps nowhere is the need for new conversations as great as in our communities. The work of the Community Learning Exchange (CLE)– *http://www. communitylearningexchange.org* offers a promising counter trend. CLE is a network of resilient local communities, vibrant organizations, and active change agents who share local wisdom and collective leadership approaches with each other so they can be more effective in addressing critical social issues. Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, CLE spreads community wisdom about collective leadership for community change across the U.S.

From reimagining education to understanding the roots of trauma in Native American communities, CLE has grown the capacity for communities to make themselves stronger. In 2011, I worked with CLE to bring together 35 thought leaders for an inquiry into the role of public education in U.S. society. Our diverse planning group composed the question, "What is our narrative of public education?" as part of creating a container for our work. We invited the diversity of the system, people who cared about public education—students and teachers, policy makers and teachers of teachers, drawn from public and private education. We met at the Highlander Center, a place that played an important role in preparing leaders of the civil rights movement, such as Rosa Parks. Throughout the session, the space itself worked on us, as one of the hosts continually brought us back to a story of Miles Horton, a founder of Highlander, asking Rosa Parks, "so what are you going to do when you get home?" to which she replied, "I don't know, but I'm going to do something."

In this container, we, as hosts, used a variety of practices to support differentiation. We opened with a circle process for people to introduce themselves through stories of their own experiences with education. Circle process elicits deep speaking and listening that seems to arise from the form itself—a ring of chairs and a clearly

> A social system—a community—emerges, with its own identity, distinct from the individuals in it. Yet we share a common story, common intentions. Knowing that, in essence, we want the same things, differences cease to be obstacles. They become creative pathways to innovations that contain what is vital to each of us and all of us. Our capacity and desire to listen to each other grows. Our uniqueness turns from disruption into creative contribution.

Peggy Holman has helped explore a nascent field of social technologies that engage whole systems of people from organizations and communities in creating their future. The current edition of *The Change Handbook* profiles 61 change processes. Her award-winning *Engaging Emergence: Turning Upheaval into Opportunity*, dives beneath these processes to describe patterns, principles, and practices to guide us through turbulent times. Holman is on the faculty at American University's MSOD program. She can be reached at *peggy@peggyholman.com*.

defined purpose—inspiring collective wisdom and action (Baldwin & Linnea, 2010). Participants then connected in a World Café to discuss the current narrative of education. The World Café fosters strategic dialogue by creating a living network of connected small-group conversations focused on shared "questions that matter" in order to foster the emergence of collective intelligence and committed action (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). The next day we used Open Space Technology to explore possibilities. We wove the history of Highlander itself into the meeting, drawing power from the rich history and high stakes of its work.

As the second day ended and the last day began, our questions moved from opening explorations to reflecting on what had emerged among us. The group broke into trios to discern an emerging narrative for public education that drew from all they had experienced. Through their reflections, we defined key features of a new narrative. And because people were each going back to their own worlds, we ran coaching circles, in which they could test their ideas for action with peers as sounding boards. By the end of the gathering, everyone walked away with a clearer, shared perspective about the role of public education. Each person also left with new connections that continue to lead to opportunities for synergy, as participants call upon each other while they take their own next steps. I am now working with several participants on another education related undertaking.

When dealing with a topic as complex as the U.S. educational system, the answers do not come overnight. Yet with each new connection, each new convening, threads of a new narrative for public education forms. Without a central authority in charge, the system itself changes as the narrative among the networks of relationships evolves.

In Closing

Throughout our social systems, a new story is arising that works creatively with complexity, conflict, and upheaval. The practices of Dialogic OD are ideally suited for helping us to find our way in these changing conditions. Rooted in the skills of everyday conversation, we all know something about dialogic practices. They are our birthright. When issues are complex, stakes are high, and emotions are right below the surface, these practices help us engage with each other. Broadly deployed, dialogic OD can help us to re-envision our organizations, our communities, and the systems where we live and work—health care, education, politics, economics, and more. So join me in not only practicing Dialogic OD, but also sharing the practices with others. Together, we can change the world.

This article is dedicated to Harrison Owen, creator of Open Space Technology. Who, among other things, opened a rabbit hole that I fell through. It continues to be an adventure.

References

Baldwin, C., & Linnea, A. (2010). T*he circle way: A leader in every chair*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Brown, J., Isaacs, D., & World Café Community. (2005). *The World Café: Shaping our futures through conversations that matter*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Cooperrider, D. L. (2000). Positive image, Positive action: The affirmative basis of organizing. In D. L. Cooperrider, P. Sorensen, D. Whitney, & T. Yaeger, (Eds.), *Appreciative Inquiry: Rethinking human organization toward a positive theory of change* (pp. 29–53). Champaign, IL: Stipes Publishing.

Frankl, V. (1997). *Man's search for meaning* (rev. upd. ed.). New York, NY: Pocket.

Holman, P. (2010). *Engaging emergence: Turning upheaval into opportunity*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett- Koehler Publishers.

Holman, P., Devane, T., & Cady, S. (Eds.). (2007). *The change handbook: The definitive resource on today's best methods for engaging whole systems* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Putnam, R. (2001). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York, NY: Touchstone Books by Simon & Schuster.

Putnam, R. (2007). E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and community in the twenty-first century—The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture. S*candinavian Political Studies*, 30 (2), 137–174.

Weisbord, M. R., & Janoff, S. (2010). *Future Search: Getting the whole system in the room for vision, commitment, and action* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

"How do people start claiming that something else is the case instead of that what earlier counted as self-evident in the local language-community? Rorty's answer to that question is that new insights do not come because people discover new facts about the world. Instead, new insights emerge when new ways of talking are created."

Re-description

A Source of Generativity in Dialogic Organization Development

By Jacob Storch and
Morten Ziethen

At the time of the general economic downturn in 2008/9, Storch (one of the authors of this article) was asked (due to his position as director and founder) to give his account of the market outlook at a staff meeting in our company, a Scandinavian consulting firm whose OD Practice is based on the systemic tradition (Bateson, Maturana, and Varela, the Milano School, etc.) and social constructionism (Gergen, Cooperrider, etc.). Storch's immediate concern at the time was with how media and politicians were continuously talking about a recession and with it all the numbers and statistics that supported that label. He was concerned about how the cacophony of worried voices could result in a foggy, anxiety-provoking experience of the situation and the impact that would have on his employees and the firm.

In this article we will describe an approach to leadership and organization development that turned that situation from one of depressed anxiety to one of energized optimism. We will describe a source of generativity in OD (Bushe, 2007; 2013), called *re-description*, which is performed through the combined use of irony and metaphors, based on the philosophy of Richard Rorty (1979, 1989, 1991, 1999). Despite the fact that Rorty has had a heavy impact on the so-called "postmodern turn" within humanities and social sciences, it is uncommon to use him in OD (with a few exceptions such as Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). For that reason this article is divided into four parts: Part one introduces Rorty and his considerations concerning transformational change; part two works out the inner

relation between irony and metaphor; part three reports on a case where Rorty was used for OD; while part four discusses both possibilities and challenges when carrying out this Rortyrian approach in the field of OD.

Rorty for a Beginning

Over the past few years it has become common to think of organizational development (OD) as something which takes place within the ongoing stream of dialogues in the organization. It is generally claimed that every observation is an interpretation (e.g., Bushe, 2009), and as such also an event, in the flux of the organization. Dialogic OD takes that as point of departure when trying to understand and facilitate the processes going on in OD.

Now the dialogic approach to OD includes a plurality of theories, most prominently the social constructionism that is the foundation of Cooperrider's (1987, 1999) Appreciative Inquiry, and complexity theory advanced by the Hertfordshire tradition (Ralph Stacey, 1992, 2001; Chris Mowles, 2011; Patricia Shaw, 2002). Common to every dialogic approach to OD, is the importance of how we are talking when trying to help organizations develop. In this article we argue that one can get inspired to talk in a new way by reading Richard Rorty in a certain way.

Rorty is one of the most influential American philosophers of the late twentieth century. His position can best be described as a postmodern pragmatism, though he prefers the term

anti-representationalism (Rorty, 1999). Like all postmodernists he rejects the mainstream assumption that language mirrors the outer world (Rorty, 1979). Instead, Rorty argues that meaning is a result of our social pragmatics: understanding something does not mean understanding the thing (in itself) but the way my language-community has agreed to talk about the thing:

> nothing counts as justification unless by reference to what we already accept, and that there is no way to get outside our beliefs and our language [...]. The True and the Right are matters of social practice... (Rorty, 1979, p.178)

Crucial to our purpose, Rorty is not only a postmodern pragmatist; he also has a very refreshing view on individual and cultural change that easily can be translated into considerations concerning OD. Let us start out with some of his basic assumptions. As already quoted, there is nothing in the world which is true according to Rorty. The world and the things simply *are*, only sentences are judged true or not true (Rorty, 1989, p. 5). In ordinary life people do not notice this; our day to day conversations take place with others who more or less agree on the suggested way of talking about the world and things in it– and that is why we do not notice how truth gets established. When people from different company/cultures communicate, they sometimes discover that they are talking almost completely differently about the so-called world and the facts in the world. When that happens, it is easier to see that it is not the world, but the totality of my language (Rorty calls it one's *final vocabulary*—and we will call it one's *local world-language*), which produces the truth value of any sentence in my everyday conversation. For that reason, says Rorty, you can discuss the truth of a sentence with another person who uses the same local world-language, but never with a person who uses another local world-language. Hence a discussion about whether a German or a Chinese vocabulary is the most true way of talking about the world and the

facts, is nonsensical because it is the local world-languages themselves which determine what the world and the truth is.

Those considerations lead Rorty to some important suggestions concerning how "the new" (i.e., development) takes place. Consider this question: How do people start claiming that something else is the case instead of that what earlier counted as self-evident in the local language-community? Rorty's answer to that question is that new insights do not come because people discover new facts about the world. Instead, new insights emerge when new ways of talking are created. To explain how a new way of talking emerges, Rorty introduces a distinction between two types of language: familiar and unfamiliar ways of speaking, which he calls literal and metaphorical language (Rorty, 1989, p. 17). By literal language Rorty means the way people are used to talking that counts as true in our language. Thereby speaking literally is a way of talking in which I am using the already existing conceptual schemes in my local world-language. By metaphorical language Rorty on the other hand describes a way of talking, where one does not lie, but does not say anything true according to the already existing rules of the local world-language—hence it is a new way of talking. As such metaphors do not say anything true; they produce effects (Rorty, 1989, p. 18). One possible effect is that others hear it as nonsense. Another, more helpful effect produced by a metaphor is the re-configuration (i.e., development) of the local world-language and the things of the world (when this process is completed the metaphor is not a metaphor anymore but an accepted truth). According to Rorty, re-description of the local world-language is the only possible way to transformational change, both of ourselves and culturally, hence change always requires a change in language.

It can sound as if Rorty means that re-description is just another way of talking about the same facts of the world. But that misses the whole point, because to Rorty there are not any facts out there we can talk about in new ways. All we know and understand is embedded in our local world-language, and a re-description of the local

world-language is therefore an essential transformation of how we understand the world and the so-called facts. So a re-description is not just a new label on old wine—on the contrary, re-description is a creative process that (metaphorically speaking) can transform water into wine—and vice versa. Let us take a brief look at how one can help a customer to re-bottle her organizational world.

How one can take those insights into the essence of change as point of departure in organizational consulting is illustrated by a major consulting project involving absenteeism in a Danish municipality of 5,500 employees. During a two year process, our consulting team facilitated conversations enabling the whole organization to re-describe an alternative to a culture of absenteeism. This required developing both a language and a culture of well being and thriving. We engaged people in questions such as: "What is the practice of people feeling well at work?" "What kind of leadership creates, sustains, and develops healthy habits?" "How are welfare services delivered by engaging and thriving employees?" "How do we talk with our employees when they get sick so that they find it easy to get back into work again?" Sustaining and further developing these dialogues created a step by step development towards a reinvigorated organization that managed to drop absenteeism by more than 30% to a level well below the national average and redistributed millions of Danish kroner to welfare services. At no point during the process did we or they figure out what was right or the causes of high absenteeism. Rather we continuously took advantage of openings for learning to take place (i.e., openings for the creation of new metaphors), distributing these toward desired ends. While we facilitated the process and training, they applied their own solutions in local contexts and we offered necessary support.

When signing the contract with the municipality we did not say anything about Rorty, re-description, and OD as the emergence of new metaphors (but maybe we will do that in a year or two). What we were aiming at, and what we think happened through the process, was exactly a

continuous re-description of the language in the municipality. According to the employees many became able to relate to themselves, to colleagues, and to the organization in new and helpful ways that the previous local world-language did not make possible. The horizon and thereby the field of possibilities was somehow transformed.

A New Turn in OD—
Irony as the Vehicle of Transformation

Thinking of OD this way is quit uncommon. Compare prominent theorists who seem to be very different, like Kotter and Buckingham. Kotter (1997) has formulated the idea that the most effective way to provide OD is to articulate a deficit, a "burning platform," that is characterizing the current situation of the organization, or what things might lead to if nothing is done. Buckingham (2007) on the other hand, puts forward the argument that change is more likely to succeed if organizations build on the successes and the strengths of people. Despite their apparent disagreements about strategies for change, they unite in a common satisfaction with the current discourses, their literal horizon, their vocabulary, and from there on pursue what they have come to believe as the better way (focusing on deficits or strengths in the situation).

In contrast, Rorty's point is that whatever we want, can understand, dream of, be concerned about and so forth, is determined by the literal horizon, the local world-language that is available to us. Any desire for change that gets formulated within an already existing local world-language can and will only lead to variations on the themes that the vocabulary-horizon makes possible for us. And for that reason, transformational change is not something that can be thought up through a reasoned examination of the literal horizon (whether examined according to problems or successes). Instead, transformational change is only possible through a poetic and un-reasonable creation of a new metaphor, letting one's self and one's world be re-viewed within a new conceptual frame. This is also why, according to Rorty, it is impossible to say

exactly what we want with, and think of, the new language before it has emerged. It is the new language itself that, for the first time, lets us understand, talk, think, and do in a new way. The new language comes with its own intelligibility—it is not logical until the metaphor comes with the new logos—which is why transformational change only takes place if one lets go, for a while at least, the security of the literal and already well-know logic of one's local world-language.

Rorty indirectly formulates a critique of what we think is a dominant tendency within the dialogical approach to OD, namely that dialogue is always something good (i.e., developmental), that every dialogical event is seen as a contribution to the ever ongoing flux in the organization. Instead Rorty is arguing that transformational development only takes place through re-descriptive dialogue, hence dialogues without metaphors only preserve the already spoken local world-language. Obviously there is a need for both kinds of dialogues in the organizational flux, because nobody and no culture can constantly live on the edge of the world, and (almost) nobody and no culture is not forced to re-connect to their surroundings from time to time. But nevertheless it seems an important Rortyan point to us, that dialogue is not enough when it comes to the question of transformational OD. Only dialogues driven by the metaphorical language will have this transformative capacity.

This begs the question how a metaphor emerges, how re-description is at all possible? Rorty does not give a clear answer to that question but he seems to insist on the intrinsic relation between the metaphor and a certain approach he calls "irony." Rorty himself explains irony as follows:

The ironist spends her time worrying about the possibility that she has been initiated into the wrong tribe, taught to play the wrong language game. She worries that the process of socialization which turned her into a human being by giving her a language may have given her the wrong language, and so turned her into the wrong kind

of human being—but she cannot give a criterion of wrongness. (Rorty, 1989, p. 75)

Rorty does not mean irony as it is commonly used, by which it means saying the opposite of what one really means. Instead he means Socratic irony, what Socrates did when trying to make the young people of Athens start thinking. What he did with them was to show the incompleteness of the positions they were holding on a certain issue (for example justice, love, friendship, etc.). Socrates was not criticizing a claimed position—rather he was criticizing a certain way of holding a position, i.e., holding something as truth. When the youngsters asked Socrates, what he thought was true on the topic at stake, he always claimed that the only thing he knew was that he did not know anything. That claim is Socratic irony in a nutshell. What the Socratic irony does is not to say the opposite of what the speaker really means, but to establish a reflexive distance to every given and culturally mediated way of taking something to be the case.

The ironic stance that we think is required for re-description is a certain kind of reflexive self-awareness, which turns oneself into a question, which makes oneself (i.e., one's language) un-obvious. The ironic stance lets you constantly ask yourself whether you can commit yourself to the language that, due to socialization, is the taken for granted way of communicating. The ironic stance provides a distance from the local world-language, and this distance makes it possible for new conceptual formations—the metaphors—to emerge. In the following example we look at how we used irony and metaphors in combination as an OD intervention in a concrete organizational situation.

From Recession to Re-Session

We return to the case we opened this article with. At the time of the general economic downturn in 2008/9, Jacob was asked to give his account of the market outlook at a staff meeting in our company. He wanted to transform the situation from something scary and hopeless, to something

engaging and energizing that they could do something about. For that reason, the messy situation was, from Jacob's position, begging for inquiry. The messy situation in this case was the global-crisis-manifested-in-our-organization-as-loss-of-orientation, and the OD work to be done was to transform the situation into something so determinate that people could see where to go next as an organization and thereby what every single employee in relation to this direction, or end-in-view, could do.

Now the problem of the cacophonies and anxious vocabulary rising from the global crisis was that there was little room left for other voices, and Jacob was therefore missing a voice saying something about what it takes to move beyond the mood of recession and show a new organizational direction. As such one could say that Jacob was ironically aware of the need to deconstruct the claustrophobic logic of the global crisis—he was just missing the helpful metaphor to create an alternative logic.

One day that autumn the metaphor came to him, that one could try to start talking of the recession as a "re-session." Jacob decided to design a company day by making use of Rorty's thoughts on re-description. It took place like this: On the day of the staff meeting Jacob in an introductory speech simply suggested that instead of talking about recession (a word and underlying logic on heavy rotation at that time), we should talk about what Jacob re-described as re-session, arguing that we needed to session ourselves to new market conditions. Hence the kind of session we needed to engage ourselves in was not one that could be located through rational thinking, since it was a request to engage in the not yet actualized. The point was furthermore stressed by saying that the challenge was not so much figuring out what was right to do according to our old market agendas, but instead to become increasingly responsive to the voices that invited us into new and different stories about making consultants relevant, so that we could orient and prepare ourselves to markets not yet realized. So the skills Jacob asked for were those of orientation, meaning creating a broadening set of responsive skills towards times of uncertainty.

After his brief introduction Jacob invited people to engage in conversations relating to two questions:
1. What voices does the idea of re-sessioning our selves call forth in us?
2. What kind of conversations, and with whom, do we need to invite ourselves into, in order to increase our responsiveness to our being in the market?

What is methodologically important here is, that the word *session*, used in this way, does not make sense in the local world-language of this or any OD or business group we know of. That is the point. The unintelligibility of the word allows for a suspension of the taken for granted knowledge in the local world-language. But the fact that it riffed off the word *recession* made it at the same time somehow seem worth exploring. Or to put it in another way: The image of re-session was familiar enough and strange enough at the same time, and it seems obvious to us that there has to be some connection between the generative image being offered and the issues that are top of mind for the client group—it is unlikely that any nonsense word will have the same impact.

After the conversations that took place in small groups, we did a round where each group highlighted the most important messages from their work. The event produced spontaneous responses from all sides in the organization offering their support to making new moves possible. A consultant later reflected on the event (the following quote is a transcription of an interview taken from Jacob's doctoral thesis):

A central episode in the process was to see a budget and results presented by a director who seemed undaunted by the dark clouds of the market outlook. He presented (dull and ordinary) financial figures with words such as "relationships," "to do what you are best at doing," "to build on our competencies," and to deconstruct the word "recession" and instead inquire into "re-session" through brief encounters that opened up chances

for talking about our best practices. It was an episode that was ground breaking. Never have I experienced anything like it. I was hit by a strong gratitude that it was even possible.

As such the potential impact of the re-description as a way to OD should be pretty obvious, and importantly the organization managed to act in ways that led to growth rather than decline, an almost unique performance in a difficult Scandinavian consulting market.

Are all Re-descriptions Helpful?

In the case above the re-description was helpful, but not every metaphor is helpful, so it seems important to ask how one evaluates the helpfulness of a re-description. It is our experience that one has to take the following two dimensions into account: 1) The relation between the metaphor and the function of the organization the metaphor is to re-describe; and 2) The relation between the metaphor and the web of meaning in the local world-language.
1. First of all one has to examine whether a new metaphor sustains the overall function of the organization. Example: A primary school is (at least in Denmark) supposed to be inclusive to all children in the neighborhood (except if the child has a clinical diagnosis). Now if the director of the school, on a staff meeting, introduces a metaphor by saying that he wants his teachers and thereby school to be "on the top," i.e., be the best school in the area at the yearly benchmarking, one can consider whether this "on the top" metaphor is sustaining the essence of being a school. One problematic effect of the metaphor could be (as we have experienced), that the identification between being a good teacher and winning a competition is transferred into the teachers' relations with children in such a way, that the teachers turn more exclusive; so much that they try to get rid of some of the problematic children by searching for a diagnosis for them. As such the metaphor supported a good benchmark, but not necessarily

the overall function of the school: inclusion, teaching, and socialization. For that reason one always has to take into account whether the metaphor is aligned with the basic function and values of the organization, i.e., client system.

2. The introduction of a new metaphor is the same as saying the world could be understood and described differently than it is now. It is our experience that there are basically two reactions to that claim from the speakers of the local world-language, and only one of them supports the new metaphor: Restorativism and Playfulness. Restorativism is when the metaphor makes people so insecure and anxious, that they now fight even harder than ever to defend their local world-language. One can find this attitude in every culture and almost every organization, and it is often provoked when people, in one way or another, are feeling intimidated by the insecurity, the metaphor generates. On the other hand playfulness, where the speakers of the local world-language take the initial meaninglessness as a being set free, which allows the metaphor to act as a new lens for seeing the world anew. For that reason, one has to forecast as carefully as possible how the speakers of the local world-language might respond to the metaphor, and what might be the best process to introduce the metaphor.

If one takes those two dimensions into account, a) metaphor and functionality and b) metaphor and compatibility, then it is our experience, that one will have a high rate of success when introducing a new metaphor in the local world-language, i.e., in an organization.

Provisional Conclusion

The aim of this article was to: 1) introduce Rorty and his conception of re-description, hence it has inspired us to think of transformational OD in a new way; 2) work out the inner relation between irony and re-description; 3) describe a case in which we used re-description for OD; and 4) consider more generally what one has to be aware of when using re-description as a method for OD. In summary, we'd like to emphasize two key points.

First that Rorty, with his distinction between literal and metaphorical language, is insisting that dialogues are not just dialogues and talk is not just talk. There is a crucial difference between dialogues in which the participants accept the already existing local world-language (what one could call literal dialogues), and dialogues driven by metaphors, which transform the local world-language (what we called re-descriptive dialogues). That distinction seems very important to us if one wants to approach OD dialogically.

Second it is our provisional conclusion that re-description is a powerful but also somewhat risky method of organization development. It is powerful because the right metaphor at the right time and the right place, said by the right person, is able to transform the whole world of an organization, that is, transform the local world-language of the organization and thereby give it new direction. On the other hand it can be risky business because successful re-description only occurs if all factors (metaphor, time, place, and person) are in place, while the refused metaphor marks the speaker with the label of Babel and messenger of non-sense. Somehow it is like poker, the bigger the opportunity, the bigger the risk. What can be won by the metaphor is a new world, and what can be lost is one's acknowledgement as a rational human being in contact with reality. That is what is at stake when trying to use re-description as a way to OD.

References

Bushe, G.R. (2013). Dialogic OD: A theory of practice. *OD Practitioner,* 45 (1) 11–17.

Bushe, G.R. (2007). Generativity and the transformational potential of appreciative inquiry. Unpublished paper prepared for Zandee, D., Cooperrider, D.L., & Avital, M. (Eds.), *Generative organization: Advances in Appreciative Inquiry.*

Bucking, M. (2007). *Go put your strengths to work: 6 powerful steps to achieve outstanding performance.* New York, NY: Free Press.

Rorty, R. (1979). *Philosophy and the mirror of nature.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Rorty, R. (1989). *Contingency, irony, and solidarity.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Rorty, R. (1999). *Philosophy and social hope.* Westminister, UK: Penguin Books.

Jacob Storch, PhD, is the founder and director of a leading Scandinavian consultancy, Attractor. In 2007 the organization merged with Rambøll Management Consulting and is now operating in six countries. He is a leading OD practitioner with extensive international experience. He holds a doctorate in systemic practice, and is external lecturer at Aarhus University. He is author and co-author of several books and articles. He can be reached at *JCOS@r-m.com.*

Morten Ziethen is research manager in Rambøll-Attractor. He holds a Master in Philosophy, a Master in Educational Theory, and a PhD in Philosophy (Heidegger and German Idealism). He is an experienced OD practitioner, is external lecturer within applied philosophy at the University of Aalborg, and author of several articles and chapters in books on both academic philosophy and OD. He can be reached at *MOZ@r-m.com.*

"Recognizing the power differentials implicit in the consultant–client relationship, the relationship of the consultant and client in dialogic consulting practice is not one of expert/inexpert but that of co-creators of meaning—meaning that is not imposed by either the client or the consultant."

How to Explore Meaning Making Patterns in Dialogic OD and Coaching

By Christine Oliver and Stephen Fitzgerald

In this article, we present and illustrate the use of a tool to help Dialogic OD practitioners collaborate with organizational members in discerning and making meaning of patterns that they observe in their co-constructed organizational stories and interactions. We advocate and hope to facilitate *collaborative authority* through which both the practitioner and the organizational member(s) are seen as legitimate meaning makers, coordinating meaning and action together for the benefit of the organizational system and its members (Oliver, 2005; Pearce, 2007).

Dialogic and Diagnostic Practical Theory

Bushe and Marshak (2009) in their account of a bifurcation point in OD practice suggest, "there appears to be a rather large gulf between academics who study change from narrative and interpretive premises and OD practitioners who use dialogical methods" (p.362). They offer a conceptualization of Dialogic OD as "a loose and fuzzy set of premises and practices," but nevertheless propose some clear distinctions between diagnostic and dialogic approaches (2009, p. 351). For example, Diagnostic OD positions diagnosis, an outcome of data gathering, as an essential stage in the consultancy process, occurring in time prior to intervention. Dialogic OD, on the other hand, treats meaning making as an ongoing and integrated dimension of the interactive process. Further, Dialogic OD, as conceived by Bushe and Marshak (2009), rejects diagnosis altogether as a form of meaning making, arguing that the

Dialogic OD practitioner... "will not attempt to diagnose systems so much as attempt to create events and containers where organizational members can increase their awareness of the variety of experiences in the system and how social reality is being co-constructed in their system" (p.364).

But if we are not doing diagnosis first, how do we go about making and negotiating meaning with organizational members, and how do we think about and manage ongoing meaning making in consulting relationships and processes, particularly outside of the now well established practice of large group dialogic processes such as Appreciative Inquiry, World Café, and Open Space? While these certainly fit the bill as the creation of events and containers that privilege "an intersubjective process of inquiry" (Bushe & Marshak, 2009, p.358), we propose that it is possible and desirable to offer frameworks for thinking that serve as tools for exploring together the meaning and impact of cyclical patterns in our co-construction of organizational stories and interactions.

Recognizing the power differentials implicit in the consultant–client relationship, the relationship of the consultant and client in dialogic consulting practice is not one of expert/inexpert but that of co-creators of meaning—meaning that is not imposed by either the client or the consultant. Meanings are treated as temporary, partial, and emergent, rather than fixed and objective, as they are treated in more traditional diagnostic approaches. The goal is to collaboratively develop stories that help to coordinate meaning(s) and

action(s) for the good of the organization and its members. As dialogic practitioners, we are always searching for how we can use language to describe, explore, and facilitate change within the dialogic system of a coaching client, group, and/or organization.

The Interplay of Stories

Drawing upon *Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory* (CMM) (Oliver, 2005; Pearce, 2007) we begin by thinking of interactive patterns as being made up of exchanges of thoughts, feelings, and actions. For instance, one group member may think she is being attacked, feel defensive, and then attack back. This pattern may invite the same response in return from one or more members of the group. These experiences become embedded stories in that organizational system over time. They have an internal coherence and they influence members' thoughts, feelings, and actions within particular episodes of communication.

Just as there is an interplay among the thoughts, feelings, and actions that become embedded in stories over time, we believe there is an interplay among types of stories within an organizational system. We have found it useful to inquire into the interplay of stories of identity, relationship, and culture. Identity stories express the "I" of the individual, for instance, "I feel I am (i.e., identify as) a victim of verbal attack." Relational stories express the meaning that is being made about the "we" of the relationship, for instance, "we always fight," whereas cultural stories express the "we" of the whole group, for instance, "it is necessary to look out for yourself in this group." It is possible that in relation to the pattern above, a cultural story of strong competition among members of the group may set a context for a relational story that members are not to be trusted and an identity story of self-preservation, which in turn may set a context for defensive thought, feeling, and action. The linkage of such interplaying stories will be formed through contextualization, i.e., one story will form a context for another story and all stories will form a context for thinking, feeling,

and action patterns, which in turn form a context for future stories.

Patterns and stories may continue in a self-perpetuating cycle until a conscious choice is made to examine the links and choose to think or act differently. In this sense, once cyclical stories and patterns become embedded, they are self-sustaining and can result in thoughts and feelings of being stuck, whereas consciously engaging in mutual dialogue regarding the links and opportunities to think or act differently holds generative potential for whole system transformation.

> Patterns and stories may continue in a self-perpetuating cycle until a conscious choice is made to examine the links and choose to think or act differently. In this sense, once cyclical stories and patterns become embedded, they are self-sustaining and can result in thoughts and feelings of being stuck, whereas consciously engaging in mutual dialogue regarding the links and opportunities to think or act differently holds generative potential for whole system transformation.

We agree with Bushe and Marshak (2009) that change in dialogic systems is facilitated when participants develop increased awareness of their own contribution to the diversity of stories and patterns of interaction that constitute the system. A key question for the practitioner, however, is how to effectively shepherd and co-create such dialogical processes in the face of tremendous organizational complexity. The first author created a container for co-construction of meaning in dialogical processes that has been useful in practice; it is comprised of three basic patterns, linked to key stories of the system: reactive, paradoxical, and reflexive (Oliver, 2005). We admit that attempting to reduce the complexity of organizational experience to just three patterns is limiting. However, we have found that this tool offers enough complexity to enable co-creators in a dialogic OD process to effectively identify and challenge systemic patterns and generative opportunities to think and act differently. The tool can be and has been shared strategically with clients so that it becomes

a container for the mindful co-development of meaning.

Pattern 1: Reactive

Reactive patterns are made up of repeated linkages between thought, feeling, and action characterized by psychological defense, mistrust, polarization, and a low level of reflective capacity. Actions are more likely to be impulsive, unmediated by thought. A cultural story of poor collaboration between groups often creates an "illusion of unity" within a sub group (Nitsun, 1998). However, this illusion paradoxically establishes a context for a competitive relationship story where the position of the other is delegitimized as in, for instance, "they don't know what they are talking about," which further sets a context for an identity story of exclusive self-legitimation, for instance, "I am right and they are wrong" and often, blame of others, which can have the effect of poor discernment for decision and action.

The following is a personal account from the first author of a coaching session with a client who was herself an organizational consultant specializing in working with groups and individuals who have experienced harm through institutional error.

Coaching Episode

On arrival the client (we'll call her "Betty") described herself as depressed. Betty felt she had "soaked up" the harm experienced by her clients, and that she was "carrying other people's stuff." She felt a growing

responsibility to help her clients move on, yet was finding it difficult to do so. Betty found it hard to feel good about anything. She also related that she was threatened with the onset of a physical illness but had recently taken time out from work and had managed to ward it off.

In giving an account of her predicament, Betty conveyed that her working environment was characterized by themes of "negligence, denial, and concealment." I asked the following questions to explore stories of identity, relationship, and culture:

» Identity:
  • How do you and your clients conceive of your role and purposes in your work with them?
  • Why is this work important to you?
» Relationship:
  • How would you and your clients describe your relationship?
  • How do you and they describe your and their relationship with the institutional context?
» Culture:
  • How do you think about the culture within which you are working?
  • What kind of culture are you working to co-create?
  • What accounts might people in the institutional context give about your work?

Betty's response was to express outrage on behalf of the individuals and families she worked with, at the neglect they had experienced and the lives that had been destroyed. For instance, she talked at length about the poor working systems of the institutions involved, of the apparent lack of ownership of the people responsible, at the impoverishment of institutional response towards those who had suffered, and the denial and concealment of systemic and individual culpability.

While her conscious aim was to provoke new forms of debate within the industry to generate change, Betty expressed such strong emotion in connection to the language of "neglect, denial, and concealment," that I shared the feeling that the themes seemed to carry a hidden burden or weight. I suggested we explore the significance of these themes further. She

conveyed awareness of the dangers of treating the institution as abusive perpetrator and client as victim, recognizing that her goal of "opening debate" would be undermined in the context of such polarization, yet she felt identified with her clients and driven to campaign on their behalf, potentially inviting a reactive pattern whereby each party or group would become more

inclined to fight for their own position, delegitimizing the position of the other, invoking protective defenses by the other and making it less likely that her own conscious consulting goals would be achieved, and, she felt, could potentially undermine her reputation. I asked her whether she felt stuck in a cyclical pattern and she identified how her feeling of depression invoked the thinking that she should work even harder, yet working harder made her feel exhausted and less effective.

Betty seemed to be speaking as if these thoughts, feelings, and behaviors were inevitable, as if she were without autonomy or choice. In co-constructing meaning together, she described herself as caught up in an unwanted pattern where her depressed and defensive thoughts and feelings obliged her to act as a rescuer and champion of her clients. We talked about the potential impact of this reactive pattern on the identity, relational, and cultural stories she had been constructing. She said she felt that a consequence of this pattern might be that little room or opportunity was left for collaborative meaning making with the institutions she was hoping to influence, and that there was a danger of her stories, and the stories of others, being characterized by

competition rather than collaboration. She indicated that as she thought about the interaction in cyclical terms, she imagined that her own defensiveness could stimulate a defensive response in others, with the danger of positioning herself vulnerably in relation to professional leaders and, indeed, in relation to her own mental and physical health.

> We talked about the potential impact of this reactive pattern on the identity, relational, and cultural stories she had been constructing. She said she felt that a consequence of this pattern might be that little room or opportunity was left for collaborative meaning making with the institutions she was hoping to influence, and that there was a danger of her stories, and the stories of others, being characterized by competition rather than collaboration.

Pattern 2: Paradoxical

Paradoxical patterns may be pictured in the form of a figure eight, where exchanges of thought, feeling, and action each stimulate their polar opposite (Oliver et al., 2003). Such patterns are contextualized by processes of fragmentation so that when an individual or group is connected to one experience of thought, feeling, and action, they become disconnected from awareness of its opposite. In a paradoxical pattern, cultural, relational, and identity stories are usually contradictory, ambivalent, and/or polarized.

Coaching Episode

On hearing Betty describe the experience of a cyclical pattern, I suggested that the pattern also had a quality of a paradox whereby her own behavior undermined her goals. I had an embodied feeling of being on a "roller coaster." The dynamic felt unstable whereby one came back to where one started having been made to feel sick in the process. I shared this with Betty, not as a diagnosis but as an opportunity for constructing meaning that took into account my own embodied experience in the dialogue, hoping to help her consider

Figure 1: Paradoxical Pattern

Feeling:	depression	less depressed
Thought:	I'm helpless	I can do something
Action:	champion of others	neglect self
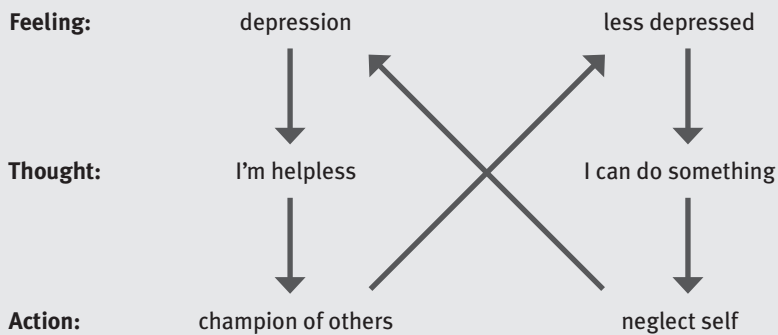
where leverage for intervention in her own stories and patterns might be most effective. The following diagram was developed with Betty through a process of identifying the thoughts and feelings associated with this, the action that followed, the feeling following that action, and so on. Through our dialogue, she identified and described a pattern (*Figure 1*) in which:

1. She *felt* depressed, which
2. Compounded her *sense* of helplessness, which in turn
3. Led her to increase her championing *behavior*.
4. Although that helped her to *feel* temporarily less depressed,
5. Her increased championing behavior made her neglectful of her own health.
6. That rendered her *actions* less effective, which in turn.
7. Contributed to her depression,
8. Which reinforced the entire self-perpetuating cycle.

Pattern 3: Reflexive

Reflexive patterns are those characterised by desire for collaboration, but also by reflexive abilities whereby individuals and groups show preparedness to reflect on and evaluate the ways their own stories and thought, feeling, and action patterns, contribute to the realities and complexities of the dialogic system. A cultural story of collaborative authority, where the diversity of voices is legitimized and treated as valid, even when there is disagreement, sets a context for relationships in which contributions are treated with respect, linked to identity stories where the individual takes a position of humility in relation to their own views and experiences and is curious about those of others. We would suggest

that a core purpose of Dialogic OD is, in fact, to increase the capacity of a system for reflexive dialogues.

Coaching Episode

Following the exchanges above with Betty in which we identified reactive and paradoxical patterns, I saw my role as encouraging a more reflexive position, inviting her to think about her part in the dynamic she found herself, believing that could help her feel a greater sense of agency and choice. I asked if the themes of negligence, denial, and concealment had any resonance in her own life. She became animated when she linked these themes to her story about her family of origin. In her story Betty's father had neglected himself and her in his role as parent. He left the family home and moved to Australia from the UK when Betty was at a very young age, and he had not made efforts to sustain his relationship with her. Any meaningful explanation for his actions had, in a sense, been concealed and its significance denied both by Betty's father and mother.

I asked her what effect she thought this shadowed experience might have had on her sense of obligation to others who had been hurt or neglected (Fitzgerald et al., 2010). She said that it may have meant that she was driven to work hard for people who had been neglected or hurt by powers bigger than themselves; that she had become a kind of super parent in enacting engagement with these themes on a larger scale in an institutional context. The identification of those stories helped us to construct a paradoxical pattern in her current story of her work:

» Family culture: concealment and denial

» Relationship: perpetrator of neglect/ victim
» Identity: super-parent

Betty reported that making such professional/personal links was helpful in re-storying her work with her clients. She began to imagine that thinking about it in this way could affect considerably how she contextualized and invited dialogue about the work; she began to think of her task more as reparative work for those who had been harmed than mission work to challenge the harmers. She was able to put her father's influence into a new story about her identity and relationships with clients, distinguishing her own learning about herself as a daughter and parent and her learning as a professional. She asserted that she did not want to become a champion and an oppressive voice herself. She did not want to see her task as blaming or shaming but in provoking dialogue which could change cultures of neglect. To achieve this, she decided she needed to get her tone of voice more attuned to her goal through working more directly on her story of professional identity. She appreciated that she might have been presenting her position in an idealized light, with the result that other relevant stories that could usefully be heard in dialogue about harm would be denied, reducing dialogic possibilities. She became preoccupied with how to gain consent of participants in the dialogue, rather than engaging in an evangelical debate. She decided that for this to happen her own voice needed to be both credible and authoritative, which for her meant speaking from a less driven position so that professional leaders would listen, and so that she became less identified with stories of harm.

Collaborative Authority

This account of a coaching session describes a process where consultant and client participate together in meaning making. There is no diagnostic punctuation but rather, a dynamic where contexts are set, inquiry is developed, a tool for dialogic inquiry is offered, and punctuations of shared insights are made in the ongoing

Christine Oliver, MSc, is a Systemic Psychotherapist, Group Analyst, organizational consultant and university lecturer at the University of Bedfordshire, UK. Her publications, particularly in the field of Appreciative Inquiry and Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory, contribute to the development of practical theory for guiding and sustaining dialogic processes in psychotherapy and consultancy. She can be reached at *ceoliver1@btinternet.com.*

Stephen P. Fitzgerald, PhD, an organizational psychologist, serves as Faculty Development Director and Associate Professor of Business Administration at Trident University International in Cypress, California. He has published on AI, the Shadow, and organizational behavior, and works with clients to inquire appreciatively into the full spectrum of human experience. He can be reached at *Stephen.Fitzgerald@trident.edu.*

dialogue. Change occurs from a change in the narrative guiding one's thinking and actions. In the process of inquiry, particular questions are predicated on ongoing co-construction of patterns and stories. What is offered is one possible collaborative framework, accessing and enhancing authority for client and consultant in dialogic work. Of course the complexity of organization systems means that collaborative authority within a larger consultancy process is a more complex task than in a one to one coaching session.

Some useful criteria to adopt in developing collaborative authority in dialogic systems might include the following:

» Contextualizing the work relationally with the client so that it is clear that meaning making is a shared activity and not structured by an expert/inexpert dichotomy.
» Structuring dialogue with the client so that it is clear when meaning making is expected and legitimized, clarifying roles and tasks in the shared meaning making process.
» Offering frameworks to the client for structuring meaning making contributing in this way to a tool for the dialogue.
» Orienting inquiry so that it accesses and explores stories at the individual, group, and organizational levels, such as stories of identity, relationship, and culture, and their links to thinking, feeling, and acting patterns.
» Inviting reflexive patterns through the ways in which small and large group exercises are designed, so that individuals and groups grow in responsibility for developing self awareness and self authoring as a function of organizational membership.

In the case described above, the consultant chose to invite a link between personal and professional stories and patterns, predicated on her own meaning making in the room in real time in the midst of dialogue with Betty. We are not necessarily advocating this as a common intervention but each meaning making system will have its own unique features. In this case it appeared to enhance collaborative authority, the client becoming more aware and connected to her narrative, thus more potentially able to link her desired future to a more effective narrative and actions.

References

Bushe, G.R., & Marshak, R.J., (2009). Revisioning Organization Development: Diagnostic and dialogic premises and patterns of practice. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 45 (3), 348–368.

Fitzgerald, S., Oliver, C., & Hoxsey, J. (2010). Appreciative Inquiry as a shadow process. *The Journal of Management Inquiry*, 19 (3), 220–233.

Nitsun, M. (1998). The organisational mirror: a group analytic approach to organisational consultancy, Part 2 – Application. *Group Analysis*, 31(4), 505–518.

Oliver, C. (2005). *Reflexive Inquiry*. London, UK: Karnac.

Oliver, C., Herasymowych, M., & Senko, H. (2003), *Complexity, relationships and strange loops: A reflexive practice guide*. Calgary, AB: MHA Institute.

Pearce, B. W. (2007). *Making social worlds: A communication perspective*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Using Dialogue Then Deliberation to Transform a Warring Leadership Team

By John Inman and
Tracy A. Thompson

The new organization normal is complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity. Old paradigms or mindsets of leadership based on positivist and linear approaches to problem solving worked well in predictable and stable contexts, but they are less well-suited to address the complexity and challenges of the current world. If leaders are to create organizations that thrive in the world as it emerges, they need a different mindset, one that enables them to design and host transformative conversations (Groysberg & Slind, 2012).

Because they are rooted in constructivist and interpretive approaches targeted towards changing deep mindsets, Dialogic OD interventions (Bushe, 2010; Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Marshak & Bushe, 2009) offer an appealing means for developing leaders. We begin by discussing the importance of mindsets to OD practice and the key elements of a dialogic mindset. Building from methods that focus on collaborative forms of discourse (Bojer, Roehl, Knuth, & Magner, 2008; Raelin, 2012), we describe the dialogue then deliberation approach, which focuses on creating transformative conversations. We illustrate how an internal OD professional used this approach to shift the mindsets of warring leaders in a business unit of a large telecommunication company, enabling them to work together more effectively, and we conclude with recommendations on how to move forward with the dialogue then deliberation approach.

Features of a Dialogic OD Mindset

The role of an individual's mindset, how he or she views the world, is central in Dialogic OD. Indeed, Dialogic OD practices target mindsets, not behaviors, because that is what creates self-sustaining change. Focusing on behaviors alone does not alter the underlying mindset that drives the behavior in the first place.

Rather than viewing the organization as something that can be designed, controlled, and predicted, a dialogic mindset sees organizations as being enacted through conversation. In this view, organizations, including their cultures, strategies, and structures, are not things that exist independently; instead organizations are co-created by people one conversation at a time (Ford, 1999; Pearce, 2000). Over time, this enacted organizational structure interacts with ongoing conversations recursively, thus the organization is continuously emerging (Hernes & Bakken, 2003; Hernes, 2008). But how exactly an organization evolves depends on how the conversation flows, and a dialogic mindset embraces the openness and emergent nature of the process.

A dialogic mindset also assumes that knowledge and wisdom come from the involvement of more rather than fewer people in the conversation. Such a belief is particularly relevant in environments characterized by complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty. Research has shown how heterogeneity and diversity in a team can lead to better performance on complex tasks, provided the group process is

Dialogue Then Deliberation to Develop a World Class Organization

Divergent Conversation Creates

⬇

Possibilities New Knowledge Innovation Strong Social Systems

Dialogue

Harvest

Synthesize/Prioritize

Deliberation

Convergent Conversation Creates

⬇

Decisions Action Steps Work Improvement
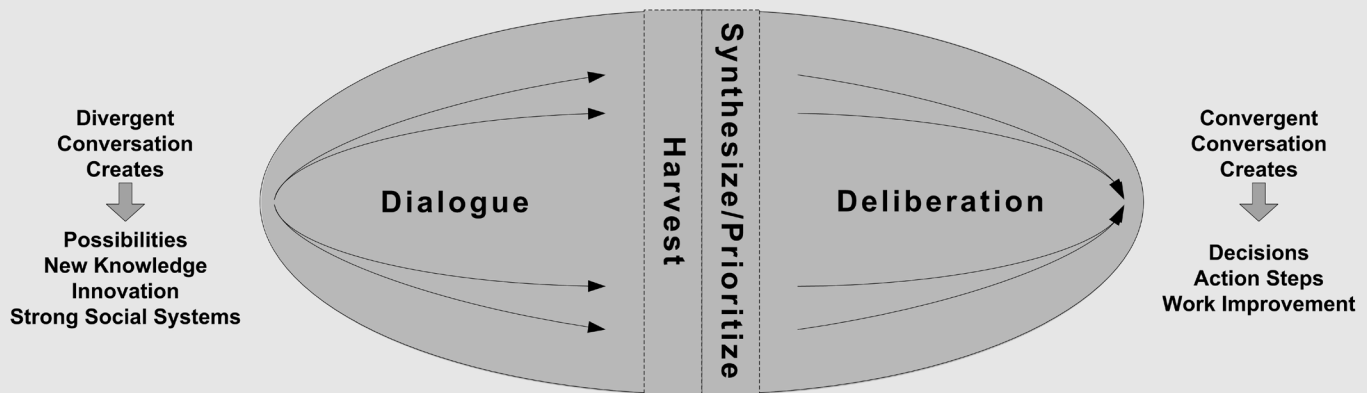
well-managed so that diverse information, knowledge, and perspectives can be fully utilized (c.f., van Kippenberg & Shippers, 2007). A dialogic mindset sees knowledge as being co-created through conversation among a number of diverse people, rather than residing in individual's brains, just waiting to be found or discovered.

The Dialogue then Deliberation Approach

To those with a dialogic mindset, conversation not only creates organization, it is also central in the change process, for changing the conversation changes individuals (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2002) and how they organize (Ford, 1999; Marshak & Grant, 2011). The dialogue then deliberation approach targets conversation directly via two practices, designing the container and hosting the conversation.

Designing the Container

All conversations occur in a container which includes factors such as the physical space, how it is arranged, the materials available, who is part of the conversation, what kinds of conversations will be occurring, and how the conversation topics will flow over time. The dialogue then deliberation approach emphasizes three choices that are critical for designing a container that will generate transformative conversations. They include involving a diverse group of people, appropriately sequencing the types of conversation, and developing questions that are matched to the kind of conversation required at that time.

Those with a dialogic mindset take for granted the value of convening a diverse group and thus design containers that are more rather than less inclusive. Including a wide variety of individuals from different generations, functional backgrounds, levels in the organization, and ethnicity in the conversation helps ensure that critical aspects of the complex issues facing an organization are not missed. Also, including as many voices as possible in the conversation encourages each person to stay engaged and become part of the solution.

Since organization emerges through conversation, a second critical design element in the dialogue then deliberation approach involves carefully sequencing conversational activities. Conversation can be defined as an umbrella term for a variety of verbal activities including dialogue, deliberation, discussion, and debate. The last three, deliberation, discussion and debate, help people come to a decision. Each works by processing a large number of options through a funnel, narrowing them down to a decision or an answer. In contrast, dialogue is a generative conversational practice that encourages possibilities to emerge. Dialogue should not be confused with brainstorming, which focuses on the processes that help unearth already-existing ideas from the minds of participants. In dialogue, new knowledge, possibilities, and wisdom are co-created through the act of talking together about future-focused questions that matter (Holman, 2010).

Specifically, as suggested by the name of the practice, shifting mindsets, changing

behaviors and arriving at better decisions is best accomplished by using dialogue before deliberation. Starting with dialogue ensures that the team's co-created and collective intelligence and wisdom become the inputs to deliberation. Regardless of how good deliberative practices can be, garbage in, garbage out is always a concern. Co-creating insights via dialogue prevents garbage based on narrow perceptions from being introduced into the deliberative process.

A third element of container design starts with an acute awareness of the power of the question to shape conversation. A question such as "What does the team we want to work in look like?" tends to generate dialogue. A question such as "Which solution should we choose?" tends to generate deliberation. Leaders with a dialogic mindset inherently assume the wisdom of a diverse group of people and allow it to emerge through the astute use and timing of questions, some of which are explicitly targeted towards opening up possibilities and visions and others which help a group come to a collective decision or action plan.

Hosting

The second practice important to the dialogue then deliberation approach is to host rather than facilitate. Facilitating a group means actively influencing the exact content of the conversation through the use of leading questions and inserting one's own insights. In contrast, hosting means not controlling the conversation or having a clear idea of where you think the

conversation should go as it is occurring. Hosting is about letting the conversation emerge and giving participants as much latitude as possible to focus on issues and topics that matter to them. But that does not mean a leader with a dialogic mindset thinks of conversation as a free for all. Rather it is through carefully designing the container, involving the right people, asking the right questions in the right order, that hosting comes alive.

Applying Dialogue then Deliberation to a Warring Leadership Team

We applied the dialogue then deliberation approach in a business unit of a large telecommunications company with a diverse team of 16 senior leaders that included operational managers, an operational associate director, and managers from human resources, facilities, IT, L&D, OD, business support, and staffing, all of whom reported to a General Manager (GM). Fueled, in part, by the GM's decision to remove the operational managers from the senior leadership meeting and have them meet separately, conflict between the operational and support members in the unit had escalated, and corporate performance metrics showed this unit to be in the lowest quartile of the entire organization.

An internal OD consultant initiated a conversation with the GM to express a concern that the GM's leadership team was separating further and that a direct intervention would be needed to fix the situation. Agreeing, the GM gave the consultant a total of four hours of the leadership team's time away from the business unit and asked for a resolution in three weeks. Although he did not want to be involved in the actual intervention, the GM promised to abide by whatever plan was developed by the group.

Preliminary Conversations

Backed by the GM, the internal consultant approached the 16 senior leaders, each of whom agreed to a meeting to talk about the GM's decision to allot four hours of manager time away from the unit and to decide how they, as a group, wanted to handle it.

All of the support leaders but only one of the operational leaders showed up to the meeting. At the meeting, the leaders talked about their frustrations and perceptions, and they asked the consultant to talk to the entire team (themselves and those from operations who were not present) about their working relationships.

The survey and additional information garnered through individual interviews made one thing crystal clear: there were plenty of hurt feelings. The operational management team felt marginalized and the support management team felt snubbed. Within a week, the GM convened another meeting with all 16 leaders and the consultant to decide how the team would allocate their four hours of time away from the unit. They unanimously decided to hold two 2-hour sessions over the next 10 days.

Designing the Session Containers

To pull the team together, create a new future, and complete a sustainable plan of action, the consultant designed and hosted a two phase process based on dialogue then deliberation. The first two-hour session was focused on breaking down barriers, building understanding, healing hurt feelings, opening up possibilities, and co-creating a new future. The harvest from that initial dialogue was used to outline a new future, and the second two-hour deliberative session provided a venue for the leadership team to decide how they would achieve their new future.

Session One: Dialogue

The first session started with an overhead of the organization's diversity statement: To create "... an environment where people with different backgrounds and perspectives can collaborate effectively to create products and services that delight customers." Tying the goals of the session to an already-existing organizational aspiration reduced the friction that might have otherwise surfaced, set the context for the conversation to communicate what success looked like from a larger organizational

perspective, and made salient what was not happening on the site.

The consultant framed the two sessions as a conversation to collectively co-create a new story to live into. To start, he explained that each individual and team had constructed a current story, were telling those stories as if they were real, and were living them out. The results of this process were creating the problems experienced on the site. He used some of the data collected before the session to tell the story from the perspective of both the operations group and the support group. The host also highlighted the importance of honoring the stories, even though they were not happy ones. This helped ensure that no one felt wrong and that all were validated about what they felt. Once the stories were spoken out loud for all to hear, the host explained that this was the last time these were going to be told and that the following conversation would help them look into the future and create a new story to live into.

The second hour of the session focused on dialogue using The World Café (TWC) process (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). As a scalable small group process (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007), TWC was chosen because it fosters highly collaborative conversations between diverse individuals, in this case a leadership team comprised of individuals with different backgrounds, roles, levels in management, and ages. TWC tends to minimize power differentials, providing the space for each voice to emerge in the dialogue (Dessel & Rogge, 2008), and it brings people together, thus allowing the wisdom of a group to emerge, all in a non-facilitated format.

The Café design consisted of three rounds of 20-minute conversations. After each round, the table selected a host to stay at the table and the rest of the participants rotated out to other tables, thus ensuring extensive cross-pollination of ideas among everyone in the group. The table host reviewed the prior conversation with the new participants and in turn the new participants shared conversations from other tables and the dialogue continued. Four tables were set with

paper, markers, and pens, with room for four leaders each. The questions were as follows:

» **First round:** Who are we being that the eyes of every person in this site are shinning? (The leadership team had previously been exposed to the work of Ben Zander.)
» **Second round:** What are we doing that the eyes of every person in this site are shining?
» **Third round:** What is our new story?

The last half hour of the session was devoted to harvesting the insights and wisdom generated in the small group dialogues. At the end of the third round, each table was given an additional 15 minutes to capture their ideas of what was to be included in the new story. After each table finished their harvest, they posted their insights on a wall to provide a graphic recording of the wisdom generated for all to see. In the final 15 minutes of the session, everyone was invited to add further thoughts to the graphic wall.

The interaction among the combined support and management teams had produced new language and the ingredients for a different story to emerge. After the session, the consultant collected and listed every insight from the harvests. He then reduced the list, eliminating redundancies, and wove together a new story for the team, incorporating all of the actual phrases and concepts from the session which appear as bolded text below:

Story to Live Into

We are one site. In everything that we do we portray a **unified voice** to the site as a whole. We accomplish this first by **including** all leadership at the table providing a forum (container) for us to work together, get to know each other, and build **trust** and **rapport**. We understand at our core that when we do not work together the logical outcome is misunderstanding, miscommunication, and mistrust: A lot of misses. We regularly meet as a leadership team to work **proactively** on the future of the site and to **jointly**

solve problems as **partners**. And when solving problems, our initiatives and solutions are **simplified** and designed to drive **performance**, easy to **understand**, and use direct and understandable language insuring easy implementation.

This unity of mind and action supports our desire to live the diversity vision of the enterprise "to be a diverse team creating an environment where people with different backgrounds and perspectives can **collaborate** effectively to create products and services that delight customers." We ask, "Do we have all of the perspectives we need to solve this problem?" before we act and always consider how our decision **impacts** others. As a team of talented professional managers, our practice is differentiated based on our ability to **coach**, **consult**, and **collaborate**. We demonstrate our professional capabilities through **asking questions, listening with an open mind, proactively** looking for ways to **solve problems together, recognizing** in others small wins, improvement, and big wins, and finally through reaching out a **helping hand** to others rather than just providing feedback.

We understand that the enterprise is a high pressure fast changing culture and that no matter what we do, we do **make mistakes** and that is perfectly OK as long as we ask, "What did we learn?" and "What are we going to do differently based on our learning?" After all we are humans and not robots. In every situation there is **positive** movement and we focus on the **positive** rather than the negative. As we focus on the **positive**, when we do have a **question** or **insight** for another manager we seek out that person and **talk with them directly** as we have learned that if we do not do this we are bound to blow the issue out of proportion. We do not simply wait for input however; we proactively reach out and ask others to be a part of our business always keeping in mind that we as a team own the whole site.

And finally we know in our hearts that we each **care** deeply about each other's **success** and that of the site. We live our story and insure that we **leave no one behind**; if one of us fails, we all fail.

Session Two: Deliberation

The second session shifted the conversation from dialogue to deliberation. Like the earlier dialogue session, this second session was designed to foster collaboration and small group work, but unlike the prior session, this conversation was designed to move the group towards determining the specific things they would need to do to live into their new reality. Prior to the session, the consultant sent out an agenda for the second session which included the story to live into as well as the raw data from the TWC harvest. Each manager had a day to review the story and key areas of focus and to suggest changes before the second session. The consultant used this feedback to finalize four topic areas to be discussed.

When the leaders arrived, they self-selected into one of four tables based on their personal interest in the topics. Self selection increased each leader's engagement in the topic and with others to assertively move solutions forward. Table teams drafted a proposed course of action including the content, context, and time line for the specific topic areas during the first hour. The four table topics were as follows:

» **Table one:** Define rules of engagement
» **Table two:** Activities to help bring the team together
» **Table three:** How do we structure projects going forward, and how do we generate a commitment?
» **Table four:** Action items to consider

After one-hour of deliberation, table teams captured the proposed plans on flip charts and posted the results on the wall. During the second hour, table teams presented their recommendations to the whole leadership team, and the conversation was opened to questions and challenges. At the conclusion of the two hour deliberative

session, the teams unanimously and enthusiastically accepted the four plans, and they made commitments to move each one forward.

Developing and Delivering the Final Plan

After the session, the consultant synthesized all of the information into one coherent plan of action which was sent out to the leadership team for input. After integrating feedback from all of the leaders, the leadership team and the consultant presented the final plan to the GM. Implementation started immediately after the GM's approval.

Results

The four-hour format of this intervention caused little disruption in leaders' lives, yet it delivered large results. The dialogue then deliberation sessions allowed the managers to appreciate one another, their roles, and the value that each brought to the team, and it brought the team closer together. For example, one leader said, "Everyone had similar issues and concerns. We were not so different when we started talking." The dialogue-based conversation in session one provided an important foundation that allowed the team to implement and buy into the critical projects developed in the deliberative second session. The diversity of ages, roles, and backgrounds provided the ingredients for passionate engagement and a rich set of perspectives on what the future could look like and how to get there. The group's new-found respect for one another was especially apparent during the second session, where leaders were able to challenge one another's opinions regardless of who offered the idea up for deliberation.

Energized by the two sessions, the leaders were beginning to see that the new working relationships they had forged through dialogue then deliberation would enable them to live into their new, positive story. As one leader reflected, "I think that the process of discovery and the journey that we as a team went through to come to a place where we created our own story was huge! We now have a document and story

that is our own." The following quote about the entire experience is indicative of the feelings and hopes of the team:

> The three question method was both thought and dialogue provoking. It was a very positive and effective way of getting the team members engaged. It was very rewarding to see that when each of the teams posted their thoughts on the second day that we were all thinking in pretty much the same direction. That was very encouraging. I think the plan we have come up with is a great start and will be a living evolving process as the leadership team matures.

In addition to enabling them to co-create a new organization and story to live into that was cooperative and inclusive, the intervention also worked at a deep level to subtly shift leaders' mindsets which in turn altered behaviors in the weeks and months that followed. Not only were they able to articulate and appreciate the power of transformative conversations in shaping future behavior, the consultant observed the leaders actively living into and enacting their story. The leaders in support were collaborating with their counterparts in operations and vice versa. Moreover, some leaders were even explicitly modeling the dialogue then deliberation approach in their day to day interactions with each other and their subordinates, thus revealing a more dialogic mindset. From a larger organizational perspective, the increasingly collaborative behaviors led to very tangible outcomes, increasing the unit's performance from the bottom quartile to the top quartile in just one quarter. Performance stayed at this higher level for one and a half years until corporate cutbacks caused a downturn in morale. Shortly thereafter the business unit was eliminated in a reorganization.

Moving Forward with Dialogue then Deliberation

A dialogue then deliberation approach requires paying special attention to how a conversation's container is designed and

how it is hosted. Effective conversations are ones in which a diverse range of minds are present, the intent of the conversation is strategically sequenced, questions are artfully posed, and the host stays out of the way to allow the wisdom of the group to emerge. Adding dialogue to the front of conversations improves the knowledge, information, and wisdom in the ensuing deliberative conversations. Hosting reduces the inherent power differentials that exist in a typical facilitated session and opens up the conversation to possibilities that are co-created by everyone in the conversation, possibilities that no one person creates or owns.

Although we have attempted to distill the dialogue then deliberation approach down into a concise set of practices, it is not a simple OD intervention. Knowing when to use dialogue and deliberation paradoxically requires a dialogic mindset, and executing it effectively requires considerable skill. A dialogic mind continually asks questions such as, "Is there anything that we should know, that if we did know it, would fundamentally change our direction?" or "Who should be in this conversation that has not been included?" or "How do we begin to understand the complexity that surrounds this issue?" Such questions can often trigger the need for dialogue then deliberation.

In terms of the skills involved, designing and hosting transformative conversations has less to do with controlling the conversation or the outcomes and more to do with controlling the design of the container for the conversation. Some leaders and practitioners may face difficulties switching from influencing the content of the conversation to influencing the structure of the container. These are different skill sets and both need to be well developed to be able to move effortlessly between facilitating and hosting conversations.

When practiced effectively, the dialogue then deliberation approach can be used to transform leaders' beliefs about themselves and others in their organization to enhance performance, relationships, understanding, and engagement. Although Western leaders are comfortable engaging

in deliberative conversation, they are less comfortable and familiar with dialogue. The dialogue then deliberation approach can remind them of the importance and benefits of dialogue. At a more fundamental level, this approach can help to shift leader's mindsets to become more inherently dialogic. However, mindsets don't change overnight and neither do organizations. Busy and stressed leaders are rarely able to gain large blocks of time away from operations. Starting to transform an organization may require small interventions like the one described above that allow leaders to experience the benefits of such a shift in mindset, one person at a time. Leaders will need continual reinforcement to continue with these practices, since the dominant organizational mindset focuses on gathering information about a problem, figuring out what to do, and then implementing that envisioned solution, often with only minimal input from others. However, the payoffs are big for those who recognize the emergent nature of organizations. Those who can design appropriate containers for and host inclusive, transformative conversations are those who will co-create thriving and sustainable organizations.

References

Baker, A. C., Jensen, P. J., & Kolb, D. A. (2002). *Conversational learning: An experiential approach to knowledge creation.* Westport, CT: Quorum Books.

Bojer, M. M., Roehl, H., Knuth, M., & Magner, C. (2008). *Mapping dialogue: Essential tools for social change.* Chagrin Falls, OH: Taos Institute Publications.

Brown, J., & Isaacs, D. (2005). *The world café: Shaping our futures through conversations that matter.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Bushe, G. R. (2010). Dialogic OD: Turning away from diagnosis. In W. Rothwell, R. Sullivan, J. Stravros, & A. Sullivan (Eds.), *Practicing organization development: A guide for managing and leading change* (3rd ed.) (pp. 617–623). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bushe, G. R., & Marshak, R. J. (2009). Revisioning organization development: Diagnostic and dialogic premises and patterns of practice. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 45(3), 348–368.

Dessel, A., & Rogge, M. E. (Winter, 2008). Evaluation of intergroup dialogue: A review of the empirical literature. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 26(2), 199–238.

Ford, D. F. (1999). Organizational change as shifting conversations. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12(6), 480–500.

Groysberg, B., & Slind, M. (2012). Leadership is a conversation. *Harvard Business Review*, 90(6), 76–84.

Hernes, T. (2008). *Understanding organization as process: Theory for a tangled world.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Hernes, T., & Bakken, T. (2003). Implications of self-reference: Niklas Lunmann's autopoiesis and organization theory. *Organization Studies*, 24(9), 1511–1535.

Holman, P. (2010). *Engaging emergence: Turning upheaval into opportunity.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Marshak, R. J. (2009). *Organizational change: Views from the edge.* Bethel, ME: The Lewin Center.

Marshak, R. J., & Bushe, G. R. (2009). Further reflections on diagnostic and dialogic forms of organization development. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 45(3), 378–383.

Marshak, R. J., & Grant, D. (2011). Creating change by changing the conversation, *OD Practitioner*, 43(3), 2–7.

Pearce, W. B., & Pearce, K. A. (1998). Transcendent storytelling: Abilities for systemic practitioners and their clients. *Human Systems*, 9, 167–185.

Pearce, W. B. (2007). *Making social worlds: A communication perspective.* Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Pruitt, B., & Thomas, P. (2007). *Democratic dialogue: A handbook for practitioners.* New York, NY: CIDA, IDEA, OAS, UNDP.

Raelin, J. A. (2012). Dialogue and deliberation as expressions of democratic leadership in participatory organizational change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 25(1), 7–23.

van Knippenberg, D., & Schippers, M. C. (2007). Work group diversity. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58, 515–541.

Wilson, M, & Gerber, L. E. (2008). How generational theory can improve teaching: Strategies for working with the "Millennials." *Currents in Teaching and Learning*, 1(1), 29–44.

John Inman, EdM, MA, PHR, is the founder and principle of John Inman Dialogue (*www.johninmandialogue.com*), an international consultancy focused on designing containers for, convening, and hosting conversations for organizations and communities of all types. His passion is developing healthy and productive social systems where all individuals are able to thrive in the current world of complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity. He is located in Seattle, Washington and can be reached at *John@johninmandialogue.com*.

Tracy A. Thompson, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Management at the Milgard School of Business, University of Washington Tacoma. She teaches courses in organizational change, and strategic management, and her current research activities on the rise of a new organizational form, the benefit corporation. She can be reached at *tracyat@uw.edu*.

"The fundamental assumptions of the nature of human interacting informs and forms methods for an OD practitioner, yet for many practitioners it can be left unspoken and unexamined. This is an attempt to describe how our theoretical foundation influences our work and how our work influences our theory."

From Special to Ordinary

Dialogic OD in Day-to-Day Complexity

By Keith W. Ray and
Joan Goppelt

As a field of practice, Organization Development has debated how to define itself (Wirtenberg, Abrams, & Ott, 2004), is possibly in the process of a transformation from a modern to post modern orientation (Bushe & Marshak, 2008), and may be moving away from key assumptions of the founders of OD (Bushe & Marshak, 2009).

The classical OD approach, called Diagnostic OD by Bushe and Marshak (2009), can be summed up by the following definition:

> Organization development is an effort (1) *planned*, (2) *organization wide*, and (3) *managed* from the *top*, to (4) increase *organization effectiveness* and *health* through (5) *planned interventions* in the organization's "processes," using *behavioral-science* knowledge. (Beckhard, 2006, p. 3)

Beckhard (2006) continues by saying that an OD program involves a systematic diagnosis of the organization. The methods that follow from this approach often create special, extra-ordinary, processes and episodes in order to create the planned, organization-wide, and managed interventions aimed at improving organization effectiveness.

There are two main ways that typical change methods create special processes or situations. First, is through data collection, diagnosis, and processes of reflection. These processes such as interviews, surveys, and psychometric instruments hope to produce new knowledge that can be used to design a plan for change to a new

desired state. This knowledge is special either because no one person has until now understood the whole picture, or because it is new insight for the manager who was previously kept from getting the information. Second, practitioners often create special situations with special processes that attempt to temporarily change the way people relate with the expectation that they will take a new way of relating into the future. To do this, theorists create a map of an idealized way of interacting and then practitioners attempt to intentionally produce an episode where the ideal is realized. This produces methods for both traditional OD and even for newer forms of OD.

We have found ourselves increasingly avoiding creating special processes and situations in favor of working in and with the everyday communicative actions that constitute the way people organize themselves. This way of working is informed by theories of social construction, communication, and complexity.

Complexity theory is also undergoing a transformation as it moves from the hard sciences to being used in social sciences. Though some OD theorists such as Wheatley (1999) use complexity theories as a metaphor (Burnes, 2005), others are attempting to understand how conceptualizing human interaction as complex systems (Kurtz & Snowden, 2003, 2007; Snowden & Boone, 2007) or as complex responsive processes (Shaw, 2002; Stacey, 1996; Stacey, 2011) adjusts how managers and OD practitioners frame their work and create positive change in organizations. We take the position that social systems

are complex in the mathematical sense and exhibit phenomenon similar to complex systems such as emergence, unpredictability, adaptability, and sudden change. This position then influences what we interpret is happening in organizations and how we work with them.

Taking a perspective of social interaction as a complex responsive process leads to an alternative perspective of what an organization is and is not, what people are doing in organizations, and how they are doing it. This perspective can also lead an OD practitioner to interpret and act in ways that differ from a practitioner whom adheres, either intentionally or habitually, to a more classic OD framework. The fundamental assumptions of the nature of human interacting informs and forms methods for an OD practitioner, yet for many practitioners it can be left unspoken and unexamined. This is an attempt to describe how our theoretical foundation influences our work and how our work influences our theory.

Trying Something Different

One of us (Joan) received a phone call from a program manager in an organization whom we had worked with off and on for several years. The manager, we will call him Alejandro, had just met with the project sponsor and was traveling back home from across the country. He had learned that his project leads did not have the knowledge and understanding of their projects that he thought they should have and he now wanted to make major organizational structure changes to correct the situation. Having worked with this manager before, we had experienced confusion in the team as Alejandro initiated changes and adapted to every situation with gusto. We had also worked previously with both Alejandro's Chief Engineer (CE) and Chief Operating Officer (COO) and felt some tension and uncoordinated action between all three. Joan's belief was that this change, imposed by Alejandro, would not result in a satisfying change for anyone on the team.

Alejandro had the entire change and process planned out and he was asking for our help in facilitating the meeting to explain the change to everyone. Before accepting, Joan listened and asked, "Alejandro, what are your concerns?" Alejandro admitted that people would not understand what he wanted, that his two top managers were not aligned, and that previous changes did not end up where he had wanted. Joan then asked, "Do you want to try something different this time?"

Alejandro paused for several moments and then said, "Yes. That is really why I called you. But my heart is racing right now. I don't know what to do and I'm so unsure what will happen."

Joan reminded him that if he continued with his plan, his expectations were that it would not turn out well. Therefore, trying something different may just as likely create something better.

Our suggestion was that we start with a conversation between Alejandro, the CE, and COO. What followed over the next 6 months were several conversations between us and the three top managers that included group meetings, one-on-one phone calls, and casual face-to-face conversations that covered a variety of topics from how they work with one another to the roles they expected each to assume. The conversation then expanded to include an internal change agent and eventually all the managers in the program. These meetings had loose agendas if any agenda at all. The conversations often wandered from topic to topic, were sometimes awkward, sometimes animated, but always engaging. Unlike previous meetings of this team, people asked different questions, the focus was less on Alejandro, and some people who seldom spoke in meetings were fully engaged. The change is still in progress and the team has reacted without their typical statements of confusion, blaming, and frustration.

If we had reacted in a way consistent with Diagnostic OD methods, we might have suggested interviews with team members in preparation for the meeting, present our findings at the meeting so that all valid data was exposed, and design a meeting agenda and process that led to understanding and alignment of a new structure and way of operating. Such a meeting would typically end in a plan or list of action items assigned to various people that would encourage follow up after the meeting. We might have even attempted to get full consensus at the meeting that the plans were the right plans for the team and that everyone was fully committed to the change.

Our experience has been that such special events seldom lead to expected outcomes so, out of frustration and exploring new forms of engaging, we have begun to use a different set of theories to guide our actions. These theories take positions about change, ways of reasoning, how people create their social worlds, and what Dialogic OD practitioners do that differs markedly from Diagnostic OD's underlying theories and resulting actions.

Discourse of Organization Change

Organization development practice has existed long enough to form and be formed by dominant discourses of how organizations change. Some of these discourses are reflected in the definition of organization development above and many exist side-by-side with discourse about management theory and leadership theory. As OD practitioners we are also affected by these discourses and we should increase our awareness of which discourse is at play for us and for the people we are trying to help. From a complex responsive process perspective, "systematic discourse is a jointly sustained way of ordering the essentially vague and open nature of our communicative action in the living present" (Shaw, 2002, p. 97). Constructionist and complexity theories about the nature of human interaction and organizations can both enable and challenge the discourse of classical OD (Marshak & Grant, 2008). Dominant discourses constrain how people think and constrain expression of their doubts, fears, and ideas.

One example of how discourse can be constraining occurred during a meeting we had with a client group and another consultant to discuss strategies for increasing collaboration. One manager asked how we would show a return on investment (ROI) with this work. The other consultant readily agreed that we needed to develop

a method for measuring ROI. Initially, we did not engage much in this conversation. After this conversation proceeded for several minutes, we began to see that there were no new ideas being presented and the others in the room were stuck in a must-but-can't pattern of stating the need but finding no way forward. We became increasingly uncomfortable with the conversation as we had participated in ROI conversations with this client organization on previous projects and had witnessed many hours of work developing complicated measures and analysis procedures

namely the anecdotal stories of transformation that they were actually using to make decisions and motivate themselves and each other toward action. By questioning the legitimate discourse of ROI we were able to help amplify a marginalized and important set of beliefs about how change occurs in this organization. We are not questioning ROI as a conceptual and practical tool for making business decisions in all cases. We merely questioned the pragmatic nature of ROI in this particular case, explored what the conversation was creating for people at that moment, and

knows what he or she is supposed to do in this situation. The ROI story above is an example of a context of discussing how to move a project forward that had become a ritual in the client organization. Everyone knew that an ROI measure was supposed to be designed and tracked. But we were constrained within the bounds of acceptable action of the ritual episode. Paradoxically, these managers felt they needed to be in charge of this program but they also felt they were not in control of the outcomes nor even of any measures that would prove the outcomes. With improvisation, we may still create fast coordinated responses, yet the outcome is unknowable as people enable and constrain each other into acting in novel and spontaneous ways. We helped the group move to improvisation by merely asking the group to reflect on the usefulness of ROI in this type of program. We also asked out of our own curiosity, how they actually made every day decisions about this and similar programs. This led to the emergence of a method of engaging people in the program that was new and unique for this organization; namely, telling the stories of positive change.

Our experience has been that such special events seldom lead to expected outcomes so, out of frustration and exploring new forms of engaging, we have begun to use a different set of theories to guide our actions. These theories take positions about change, ways of reasoning, how people create their social worlds, and what Dialogic OD practitioners do that differs markedly from Diagnostic OD's underlying theories and resulting actions.

that were never used in either making decisions or informing new ideas. We asked if people had used ROI to inform their decisions to engage in this project so far. No one had. We suggested that they have many stories of change and transformation that were enough proof that positive change can happen from this work and perhaps that is all they really needed. The conversation then turned toward what positive experiences of change had already occurred and what they hoped to see happen in the future as they tried to intentionally develop people's self-awareness toward increasing collaboration. We listed the hopes on a wall and instead of narrowing them down to a small set of goals that would then be finalized with a group consensus as more traditional OD methods might suggest, we left the list as a less than complete and somewhat contradictory set of hopes and needs of various people. They continued to use this list and their own evolving stories to determine if the program was producing positive change.

As the above story suggests, the powerful discourse of ROI made silent an aspect of people's experience of positive change,

how the quality of the conversation might be affecting the possibilities of the future. In doing so, people were able to express different ways of knowing that became more legitimate as the conversation progressed. This in turn led to a different way of relating and acting into the future.

Change

Organizational life varies from highly staged and ritualistic performances to spontaneous improvisations. Staging and ritual serve a purpose. However, as we embrace theory and practice of complex responsive processes, we are becoming more comfortable in the improvisational moments. Ritual produces and enhances stable patterns while improvisation disrupts patterns and produces novelty and change as it amplifies diversity and brings in more of the network of conversations, relationships, ideas, intentions, history, experience, and actions that make up what we call an organization. In ritual, there are clear contextual forces (Pearce, 2007) that enable collective coordinated action with predictable outcomes, i.e., everyone

What we, and possibly what others working with complex responsive theory, are doing is to dampen the legitimate discourse of control and design that can constrain certain interaction and limit diversity. By amplifying diversity inherent in the relationships built on historical interaction, meaning making, and identity formation, we can help create novel ways of relating and thus create change. This allows shadow themes, such as not making choices on ROI but on our localized experiences, to emerge and challenge the legitimate. Additionally, we are challenging and helping others to challenge the dominant discourse not by a special meeting or special processes, but by the normal communicative actions that people engage in every day.

From Diagnosis to Abductive Reasoning

To diagnose one takes an epistemological position that the observer is outside the system and that observing is an objective process of inferring reality (R. Stacey,

Griffin, & Shaw, 2000). To intervene one often takes a position that the intervener is somehow separate from the system and because he or she is separate and can be objective, he or she can see a better way for the system to act, move, or transform. We take a critical view of both of these positions. A social constructionist perspective assumes that every communicative interaction is constitutive. We, individually and collectively, create the social world as we interact with it and are being created by it. Therefore, every act of asking questions or people filling out surveys changes the social world. This is a position taken up directly by Appreciative Inquiry practitioners (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2001) and for others using more dialogic methods (cf., Sprangel, Stavros, & Cole, 2011). Taking this position, there is not a world out there to be understood and analyzed; there are only worlds in the making and possible worlds yet to be made. One cannot diagnose without affecting the system in the process of diagnosis and one cannot intervene without being affected by the intervention.

Even though we do not diagnose, we still try to make meaning of the interactions between people, the patterns that seem to be occurring, and the social world that is being created. This process may look like classic OD data gathering but the intent and what we do with the learning stems from very different premises. We may, for example, talk to people in what might be called an interview, but we do not assume we are finding out the truth or even understanding individual or collective thinking, motivations, emotions, or beliefs. We talk to people as a way to begin to enter into the ongoing conversation, to begin to understand what is being made, and to begin to shape and be shaped by the conversations. We begin to interact with others in order to live with the paradoxes at play.

As we engage in the everyday processes of sensemaking we move from the scientific inductive rationality of diagnosis toward an abductive reasoning. Abductive reasoning can be explained as "a cerebral process, an intellectual act, a mental leap, that brings together things which one had never associated with one another: A

cognitive logic of discovery" (Reichertz, 2009, p. 6). This type of reasoning allows for explanations that are good enough to proceed while holding the tension that everything has multiple meanings depending on what perspective you take (Pearce, 2007). These multiple meanings can often show up in stories and the manner in which the stories are told.

We are mindful and try to increase awareness of how stories and narrative are shaping the social world. We may ask questions such as: "Do you have an example of that?" "What happened?" or "Where did this start?" This is different from asking for an explanation or an analysis using causal logic and moves to engaging in the sensemaking process people use every day.

Stories and narrative can also amplify diversity and enable change to emerge. Narrative allows for the paradoxical nature of our interacting (enabling-constraining) to be highlighted while reducing abstracting and idealizing through analysis and explanation. These latter modes of relating call forth a dominant discourse, which sustains and stabilizes patterns of interaction. Describing, explaining, and referencing commonly expressed idealizations tend to create stable and repetitive patterns that people can experience as being stuck. Through narrative we create a more fluid and unstable communicative interaction, as meaning is both formed by and forming the collective "we" and the individual "I" bringing awareness to marginalized ideas, thoughts, and beliefs.

From Intervention to Exploration, From Plan to Experiments

We do not pretend that we are external neutral observers who are merely acting in the best interest of the client. We are constantly interacting, negotiating, hoping, influencing, and being influenced. In other words, we are people doing what people do and we hold no special place in organizational interaction. As we learn about the organization, we are mindful how we are changing it by our learning and we are also being changed by it. Every question we ask and every interaction with others has the potential to reciprocally change us, the people we

are interacting with, and the way we relate with one another. Making meaning is not a one-way process of reflecting *on* experience but rather meaning-making *is part of* our experiential flow. It is a process of forming and being formed by the very thing we are trying to understand. Taking this position, it no longer makes sense for managers or OD practitioners to stand back, design, or diagnose since we are inextricably part of the same flow of meaning and action. This can be an uncomfortable position for OD practitioners, as we can no longer see ourselves as separate from the political processes that form the patterns of organizing. As Shaw stated, "I am insisting that to claim to be apolitical in human affairs makes as little sense as to claim to be able to take up a position outside interaction" (Shaw, 2002, p. 95).

If we do not diagnose or make planned interventions that are system wide, what then, you might ask, are we doing that we call OD? We believe that by taking a complex responsive process perspective our role as OD practitioner is to: 1) help people explore ways of acting differently by questioning dominant discourse and delaying convergence so that new forms of relating can emerge; 2) be mindful about and increase awareness of patterns of inclusion and exclusion that increase or decrease diversity; and 3) work within the everyday interactions, relationships, and ways of relating that are being enacted and emerging.

We help people act into the unknown by not preparing too much, by creating a loose framing of a beginning, and by not converging too soon so that multiple possible futures can be explored. When a new idea for action emerges, we suggest that it become a small safe-to-fail experiment to try for a while and see what happens (Snowden & Boone, 2007). These are not experiments in the way a scientist might think with hypotheses to be tested, but rather something to try that may or may not create a reaction that is expected and may even create something that is unexpected and surprising. If the reactions of the new way of acting are positive, then we suggest people look for ways of amplifying it. If the reactions are not positive, then

we look for ways of dampening it. This removes the problem of trying to plan an unpredictable future and embraces the paradoxical emergent nature of human interaction.

An illustration of a safe-to-fail experiment occurred when a group of managers were trying to "get buy in," as they stated, on a new way of doing business. They were not getting people involved as fast as they wanted and they were concerned about people not being "aligned." They met with us to decide how to get the "right" group of people in the room and "get the

governance group to stay informed of the changes and help others stay informed. If the meeting had not produced enough positive difference, then they would simply not have had another one. Little would have been lost.

As the above story also suggests, we do not try to create special forms or forums of conversation such as creating containers for dialog (Isaacs, 1999), but focus on the everyday and ordinary conversations that shape organizational life. With this perspective, a practitioner is also not as concerned about an artificially safe

this experience is that an artificial container can sometimes create positive change when people are in the container and still not translate to new conversational patterns in day-to-day interactions.

These day-to-day interactions create patterns of inclusion and exclusion that often reduce diversity of thinking and ways of relating. By paying attention to these patterns we can help change the diversity and encourage the emergence of change. How to invite people into the conversation is a difficult question for managers who are not used to working across the organization with peer managers. There are discursive forces against it. For example, we were involved with an organization that was in the early stages of engaging in a leadership development program that was conducted by another consulting group. A group of lower to middle level managers and interested people had gathered to decide how to promote and continue the effort. Each of these people had already been personally involved in the leadership development program and they all thought it was valuable. The group began to talk about if they should try to get top management endorsement, what other groups and departments they should engage to promote the effort, and how they should approach the managers of the other departments. Rather than develop a rational planned approach to deciding who should be involved in the effort, we asked how each of the people in the room became involved with the effort. Their stories varied and a pattern emerged that someone they knew and trusted talked to them about it. We then suggested that the managers and others in the room simply ask whomever they knew that they thought might benefit from the program. This had the effect of enacting a network of relationships similar to Snowden's Social Network Stimulation (SNS) method (Kurtz & Snowden, 2003; Snowden, 2002).

Perhaps, in the end, all we are doing to help the client is to be different. We may only be a difference that makes a difference as Bateson put it (Bateson, 1972). We are information of a different enough nature to disrupt the previously emerged semi-stable patterns and thus allow for new patterns to emerge. We question what others have

> As we learn about the organization, we are mindful how we are changing it by our learning and we are also being changed by it. Every question we ask and every interaction with others has the potential to reciprocally change us, the people we are interacting with, and the way we relate with one another. Making meaning is not a one-way process of reflecting *on* experience but rather meaning-making *is part of* our experiential flow. It is a process of forming and being formed by the very thing we are trying to understand.

point across." We suggested that they try an experiment to grow interest rather than impose alignment. We started with a large set of names of people to invite and allow anyone who was interested to show up. We then suggested that the managers not prepare a presentation but that one of them start by discussing what his or her concerns were and ask what people's questions were about this new way of doing business. Almost all of the people they invited showed up and what ensued was a flowing group conversation. People were able to express their confusion, feelings of exclusion, desire to be involved more, and shared where they were already involved. The managers were very pleased with the outcome of the meeting so they continued to hold three more with the topics always changing to meet the present need. The meetings started with little to no agenda and people who were interested showed up and participation grew to include new parts of the organization. Other themes emerged from the meetings such as convening a

space for people to interact. Shaw (2002) described her intentions about safety as not setting out to make situations safe for others. Rather she is interested in learning, with others, how to live at times with a somewhat less safe sense of self.

One organization we worked with held quarterly meetings with a set of managers with an expressed intention of learning to collaborate with one another and not compete. At the time, we were more habitually acting as classical OD practitioners and so were intentionally trying to create a safe container for people to interact. We used explicit ground rules and intervened when we thought it was necessary. We designed processes for people to bring up undiscussable issues as we had learned to do (Schwarz, 1994). The meetings did seem to improve. We were surprised when, after a year and a half, one manager said, "We really treat each other well during these meetings and we play nice. I feel good about it. But when we leave here, we stab each other in the back." What we learned in

learned not to question, we become aware of what they have learned to ignore, and we are curious about what they take for granted. We do this not by way of special processes or special situations but rather in the ordinary everyday complexity that is organizational life.

References

Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind; Collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology.* San Francisco, CA: Chandler Publishing.

Beckhard, R. (2006). What is organization development? In J. V. Gallos (Ed.), *Organization development : a Jossey-Bass reader* (pp. 3–12). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Burnes, B. (2005). Complexity theories and organizational change. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 7*(2), 73–90. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468–2370.2005.00107.x.

Bushe, G., & Marshak, R. (2008). The postmodern turn in OD. *OD Practitioner, 40*(4), 9–11.

Bushe, G., & Marshak, R. (2009). Revisioning organization development: Diagnostic and dialogic premises and patterns of practice. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 45*(3), 348–368.

Isaacs, W. (1999). *Dialogue and the art of thinking together: A pioneering approach to communicating in business and in life* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Currency.

Kurtz, C. F., & Snowden, D. J. (2003). The new dynamics of strategy: Sensemaking in a complex and complicated world. *IBM Systems Journal, 42*(3), 462–483.

Kurtz, C. F., & Snowden, D. J. (2007). Bramble bushes in a thicket: Narrative and the intangibles of learning networks. In M. Gibbert & T. Durand (Eds.), *Strategic networks: Learning to compete* (pp. 121–150). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Ludema, J., Cooperrider, D., & Barrett, F. (2001). Appreciative inquiry: The power of the unconditional positive question. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research: participative inquiry and practice* (pp. 189–199). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Marshak, R. J., & Grant, D. (2008). Organizational discourse and new organization development practices. *British Journal of Management, 19*(S1), S7–S19. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467–8551.2008.00567.x.

Pearce, W. B. (2007). *Making social worlds: A communication perspective.* Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Reichertz, J. (2009). Abduction: The logic of discovery of grounded theory. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 11* (1). http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1412/2902.

Schwarz, R. M. (1994). *The skilled facilitator: Practical wisdom for developing effective groups* (1st ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Shaw, P. (2002). *Changing conversations in organizations: A complexity approach to change.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Snowden, D. J. (2002). Complex acts of knowing: Paradox and descriptive self-awareness. *Journal of Knowledge Management, 6*(2), 100–111.

Snowden, D. J., & Boone, M. E. (2007). A leader's framework for decision making. *Harvard Business Review, 85*(11), 68–76.

Sprangel, J., Stavros, J., & Cole, M. (2011). Creating sustainable relationships using the strengths, opportunities, aspirations and results framework, trust, and environmentalism: A research-based case study. *International Journal of Training and Development, 15*(1), 39–57.

Stacey, R. (1996). Management and the science of complexity: If organizational life is nonlinear, can business strategies prevail? *Research Technology Management, 39*(3), 8–10.

Stacey, R. (2011). *Strategic management and organisational dynamics: The challenge of complexity to ways of thinking about organisations* (6th ed.). New York, NY: Financial Times Prentice Hall.

Stacey, R., Griffin, D., & Shaw, P. (2000). *Complexity and management: Fad or radical challenge to systems thinking?* New York,NY: Routledge.

Wheatley, M. J. (1999). *Leadership and the new science: Discovering order in a chaotic world* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Wirtenberg, J., Abrams, L., & Ott, C. (2004). Assessing the field of Organization Development. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 40*(4), 465–479.

Keith Ray, PhD, has over 20 years of experience in organization development, organizational research, strategic change, project management, software development, and systems engineering. In 2008, he co-founded Act Too Consulting, Inc., which provides organization development and research services to a variety of clients. He has a bachelor's degree in physics and a PhD in Human and Organizational Systems from Fielding Graduate University. Ray's interests are in complexity and narrative in organizations. He can be contacted at *keith@acttooconsulting.com*.

Joan Goppelt, PhD, has over 25 years experience in leadership development, organizational change, software development, and project management. In 2008, she co-founded Act Too Consulting, Inc., which provides organization development and research services to a variety of clients. She has a bachelor's degree in mathematics, a master's degree in computer science, and a PhD in Human and Organizational Systems from Fielding Graduate University. Her interests include collaboration, adult learning, and new concepts of leadership. She can be contacted at *joan@acttooconsulting.com*.

Co-Creative Dialogue for Meeting Practical Challenges

New Approaches

By Rosa Zubizarreta

Several decades ago, during an earlier lifetime in education-related work, I was hired as a writer at an education reform non-profit. This organization promoted constructivist approaches for improving students' academic learning and developing their socio-emotional intelligence. My own background as a teacher had been in language arts, so I was well-versed in using dialogic approaches for helping students engage with texts and explore questions of values and meaning. Yet I remember being genuinely puzzled at first by this organization's mathematics department: how might one engage in constructivist dialogue, in a field where it seems obvious that there is one right answer?

I offer this story in connection with the initial reluctance some of us may feel when considering dialogic approaches within certain hard realms, whether with children or adults. There has been much fertile growth in the realm of Dialogic OD in the last several decades (Bushe & Marshak, 2009). This includes a growing number of emergence-based dialogic methods, each with its own gifts, niches, and applications. Some of these emergence-based methods have applications in realms that may, at first blush, appear to be an unlikely fit.

In that long-ago initial encounter with constructivism in mathematics education, I was given an article to read that contained an enlightening description of a classroom dialogue, where various teams of students were offering their solutions to a given math problem, and describing aloud the various ways they had arrived at such. As the students gave voice to their divergent thought processes, they became aware of a diversity of valid approaches to arrive at a given solution. In addition, they also had the opportunity to discover their own misunderstandings and self-correct their own thinking as needed, all within a supportive climate of experimentation and respect—thus encouraging the emergence of a deeper understanding of the underlying concepts at work.

While this example opened my mind to the possibility of using dialogic approaches in other realms, it also made it clear that this kind of learning requires skillful facilitation, and is not reducible to letting students loose to learn on their own. The connections between this story and new dialogic approaches for facilitating groups addressing practical challenges will be developed further below. Next, I want to briefly consider the subject of co-creativity.

Creativity and Non-Linearity

In the realm of business, creativity has been recently heralded as "the most important leadership quality" for success, an "essential asset" that must "permeate the enterprise." Leaders are encouraged to "practice and encourage experimentation at all levels of the business" and to "equip their entire organization to be a catalyst for creativity" (IBM, 2010). What is key here is not just individual creativity, but even more so, the ability to be co-creative together with multiple stakeholders, including internal staff as well as external customers (Ramaswamy & Gouillart, 2010).

Yet there are many ways that our

organizations and methodologies conspire against creativity. For example, while we know about the non-linear nature of creative thought (DeBono, 1992), many collaborative design/collaborative problem-solving methodologies are still structured in a linear fashion. This includes interest-based stakeholder consensus methodologies as well as group problem-solving processes that begin with getting agreement on defining the problem, then on all of the solution requirements, then ask participants to prioritize all of those requirements; only in the last stage do we get to begin looking at actual solutions.

Of course, even when attempting to follow a linear model, most of us acknowledge that real-life processes are seldom quite so neat and tidy. Nonetheless, the conventional model is one of step-by-step progression (*Figure 1*). In contrast, a contemporary example from the field of software development can help us envision other alternatives (*Figure 2*). Agile methodologies have been developed as alternatives to the conventional waterfall approach, partly based on the key understanding that early solution attempts or prototypes can be crucial for deepening our understanding of the problem itself.

What might our collaborative approaches look like if we incorporated this agile insight regarding the value of initial solutions? One initial example along these lines is the concept of rapid-cycle prototyping (Senge et al., 2004; Scharmer, 2007), which is a component of the Change Lab process (Bojer, Roehl, Knuth, & Magner, 2005). Next, I will describe two other facilitation approaches that also incorporate this key insight, albeit in a different manner than the Change Labs.

Dialogue Mapping and Dynamic Facilitation

I first encountered the above charts in 2002, in a Dialogue Mapping workshop led by Jeff Conklin, who was illustrating cognitive science research findings on opportunity-driven problem-solving. In fact, he did not mention "agile" at all; his green line was labeled "Designer/subject process." His intention was to

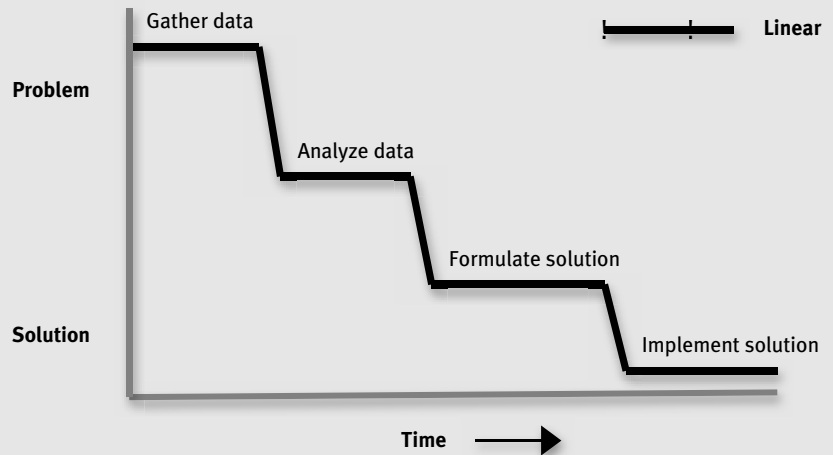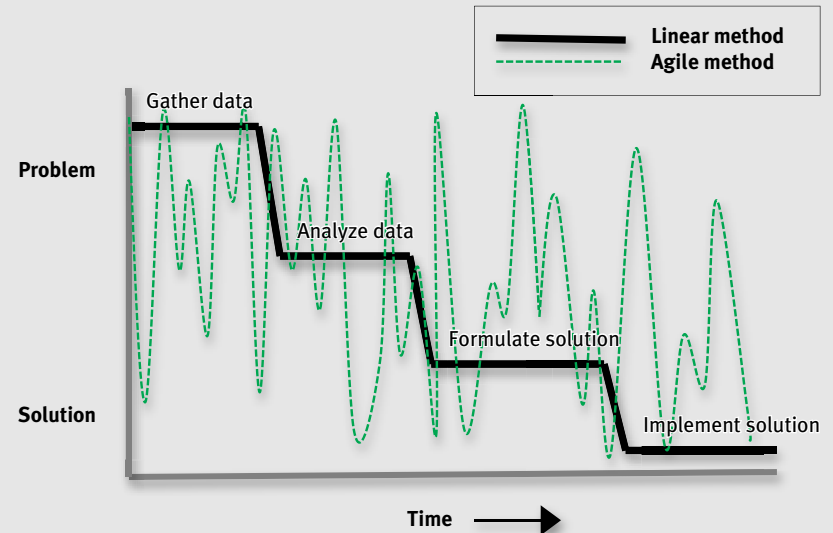Figure 1: Traditional Group Problem-Solving Process

Figure 2: Comparing Linear Method and Agile Method

help workshop participants understand why the approach of welcoming initial solutions was such an effective element of his non-linear, software-assisted facilitation approach, designed specifically for addressing wicked problems (Conklin, 2005).

Unlike the math class described earlier, wicked problems are not ones that have a single right answer. Yet these highly complex problems call for actionable, real-world solutions. Thus, they also fall into the realm of hard problems that are typically (albeit ineffectively) addressed with waterfall approaches (Conklin, 2005).

At the same time, there seems to be a growing appreciation of the need to address complex problems in creative and

iterative ways (for example, see Innes and Booher's 2010 description of collective bricolage, pp.136-138). Non-linear methods are beginning to gain greater traction. In their recent work, Culmsee and Awati (2011) illustrate Dialog Mapping in action by describing powerful case studies of multiple-stakeholder projects in Australia.

In this article, I will be sharing some brief case examples from Dynamic Facilitation, a low-tech dialogic approach designed to reliably evoke creative breakthroughs (Rough, 2002a, 1997). While also incorporating the key principle of welcoming initial solutions, it does not require any software. Some basic ways in which Dynamic Facilitation differs from

conventional approaches to facilitation include: a) welcoming initial solutions rather than postponing solutions; b) facilitator multipartiality rather than neutrality; c) protecting the emergence of a creative field through spatial redirection rather than temporal constraints; d) retroactively organizing information rather than using an agenda; and e) holding space for emergent convergences rather than facilitating toward convergence. Next, we will see what this approach looks like in practice.

Many of us experience being able to think more clearly, beyond our usual limitations, whenever we are fortunate enough to be listened to in a non-judgmental, supportive way. Meanwhile, current brain science supports the crucial role of a supportive listener, through its findings regarding how quickly our physiology can shut down from an expansive creative mode, to a protective and defensive one, especially in response to minute social cues...

First Case Example

The setting for this meeting was a small winery experiencing both record growth and ensuing growing pains. The sales and the warehouse department had been experiencing some friction among them. During this particular joint meeting, the intention was to explore a frustrating situation regarding truckers who often arrived late. These truckers delivered cases of wine to stores and restaurants, the winery's customers. Customers, in turn, often bought their wine via a broker, an outside middleperson who interfaced with the sales department.

After a brief introduction to the facilitation process, we began by inviting someone to jump in, and sketch out the situation as they saw it: "This is not a small company anymore... we deserve to be treated as a large corporate business... we are at a point now where we could choose to do things differently, but we are bent over a barrel, because we don't have any repercussions in place for truckers who are late."

This initial solution of establishing repercussions evoked different perspectives: "We should treat our customers, the way they treat us.... if it is a particularly valuable customer who has placed a last-minute order, it may make sense to go many extra miles... we should still bend over backward, as long as it doesn't get in our way."

Other participants proposed additional possibilities: "whatever policies we create, we need to make sure the brokers know about them... we could charge the truckers for being late... we could have customers pay a 'rush charge' for late orders... we could 'ding' the brokers, whenever the truckers are late."

Concurrently, participants were also surfacing concerns with regard to one another's solutions: "It could affect our image negatively if we start charging truckers who are late. It would change it to a more corporate image... not sure we can charge truckers for being late. It would need to be directed at the distributor... a 'late charge' to the truckers would take lots of manpower to create and enforce, and could cause a lot of frustration...if we were going to institute a 'late charge,' we would need to give the truckers advance notice."

Other relevant information—historical, procedural environmental—was also surfacing: "Sometimes we have in fact turned away truckers who were late. They in turn billed us, and when we didn't pay them, they short-paid us on other stuff, to get back at us... Currently we give truckers a few hours' window. If we were to create a harder policy, first we'd need to get upper management to commit to it, and then

we'd need to let the customers know... Other companies turn away truckers. They don't care—we are different because we *do* care about the customer getting their wine."

During this part of the conversation, the main facilitator interventions consisted of listening to and drawing out each participant ("Can you say more about that?"), inviting them to shift their complaints into creativity ("How would you address that issue, if it were up to you?"), checking for meaning, and recording each contribution on one of four charts: solutions, concerns, data, and problem-statements. At one point the facilitator asked a manager to wait until a participant had finished speaking, before voicing her concern regarding that idea. Whenever a concern arose regarding a proposed solution, the facilitator had the participant redirect that concern to the facilitator, instead of toward the idea originator.

After exploring a variety of possible solutions with no easy answers in sight, participants began shifting into a more reflective mood. At this point the facilitation role consisted of "just listening" while participants experienced the challenge of their current situation. Teresa, a warehouse employee was describing how frustrated she had been about the most recent incident of lateness, where she'd had to stay in the warehouse for six hours past the end of her shift. Suddenly Sally, a sales associate, jumped into the conversation: "What?!! You had to wait here, for *how* long?"

Other participants were shaking their head; this was not news to anyone. Yet it seemed as though Sally was just hearing this for the first time. "I told you," said Teresa, "I told you I had to miss my afternoon class, and call around like crazy for a babysitter."

Sally looked deeply chagrined. "I knew there was a problem, but I thought you warehouse people were sort of exaggerating."

Allan from the warehouse chimed in, pointing to the charts: "Well, there really *is* a problem, and that's what we've been working on here." As Sally's gazed floated over the charts, suddenly she brightened and said, "Well you know, the brokers are

the ones who hire the trucking companies. Next time anything like this happens, I need to know about it, so that I can give this feedback to the brokers. And if it's a pattern, I will definitely be encouraging the brokers to hire a different company."

Exploring the Story

There's always more to a story, and any story can be read in different ways. Below, I will explore some of the key principles of this approach, as illustrated by this example. Yet first, I want to clarify what I am not saying.

 I am not claiming that we would not have arrived at a similar result, had we used another method. Sometimes we obtain results in spite of our methods, while other times our methods more directly support our outcomes. So the point is not that what happened here would not have happened otherwise. Maybe it would have!

At the same time, I have found great value in using approaches that work with and encourage creativity, rather than constrain it with attempts to over-manage. Just as Open Space Technology foregrounds, optimizes, and supports what tends to happen in any conference during coffee breaks (or what tends to happen at the office, around the water cooler), some open meeting technologies serve to foreground, optimize, and support co-creative flow and meaning-making. These large-group and small-group emergence-based methods can be combined in synergistic ways; for example, Howard, Galarneau, Perez and Shaw (2005) explore how Open Space Technology can be combined with Dynamic Facilitation.

Returning to the winery, here are some key principles I would like to highlight:

Eliciting creativity by welcoming initial solutions. From a theoretical perspective, we can understand the need for people to "empty themselves" or "download" the solutions they already have, before something new can be created. Indeed, we often hear from practitioners that the energetics of using Dynamic Facilitation appears to embody the Theory U model (Scharmer,

2007); for an intriguing story that parallels the pause at the bottom of the "U," see Rough (1991).

However, the benefits of welcoming initial solutions are not just limited to downloading. They also include honoring participant's individual creative work to date; helping participants begin to listen better to one another, through the experience of being fully heard; and giving participants the opportunity to realize, as they compare notes, the various assumptions and incomplete perspectives that were embedded in their initial solution attempts (Zubizarreta, 2006).

At the same time, this key principle runs counter to most conventional facilitation wisdom (including interest-based negotiation), which typically asks participants to restrain themselves from jumping to solutions with the positive intention of helping them detach from their own initial strategies. From the viewpoint of Dynamic Facilitation and Dialogue Mapping, we support the intended outcome of broadening perspectives, yet offer a different and paradoxical approach for getting there.

Taking all sides. The stance of active multipartiality is different from the conventional facilitator role of being neutral. Instead of a transactional view of communication, where each speaker is conveying a discrete, pre-formed cluster of meaning, we can invoke a more relational process, where meaning is actively co-constructed between people (Pearce & Pearce, 2000). This is not only applicable for interactions between participants, but also between a participant who is speaking and the facilitator who is listening; we find much common ground with Pearce's perspective that the role of the facilitator is to "shape emerging patterns of communication so that multiple voices and perspectives are honored, and the tensions among them are maintained" (Pearce & Pearce, 2000).

Yet viewing the role of the facilitator as an active, co-creative listener is not only a postmodern perspective; from a constructivist stance, Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" in children (Vygotsky, 1978) may well be a phenomenon that continues on throughout adulthood. Many of us

experience being able to think more clearly, beyond our usual limitations, whenever we are fortunate enough to be listened to in a non-judgmental, supportive way. Meanwhile, current brain science supports the crucial role of a supportive listener, through its findings regarding how quickly our physiology can shut down from an expansive creative mode, to a protective and defensive one, especially in response to minute social cues (Rock, 2008).

From any of these perspectives, we have a significant opportunity as facilitators to support each participant by actively engaging with them in the meaning-making process, letting each person know what sense we are making of what we are hearing—not as a mirror coldly reflecting back, but as active participants in receiving the gift that each participant is seeking to offer. Jean Rough, one of the founders of Dynamic Facilitation, calls this *we-flection* (Zubizarreta, 2012).

Actively protecting the emergence of creative field. We saw one example of this when the manager at the winery was interrupting her staff member, and the facilitator intervened. Continually re-directing any concerns toward the facilitator is another aspect of this active protection, and is key for creating a field where creative thinking and critical thinking can co-exist.

We are all familiar with brainstorming, where creative idea generation and critical idea evaluation are separated *in time.* Another example is the brilliant Six Thinking Hats model (DeBono, 1992, pp. 77–85) where there are different times for "green hat thinking" and "yellow hat thinking," as distinct from "black hat thinking." In contrast, in Dialogue Mapping and Dynamic Facilitation the facilitator protects participants' creativity *in space.* In Dynamic Facilitation, we ask the participant to direct their concern to the facilitator, who writes it on the concerns chart. In Dialogue Mapping, the concern is placed on the growing logic tree of the electronic shared display, visibly supplementing (rather than supplanting) the idea that provoked the concern. In both approaches, the spatial redirection serves to minimize

interpersonal anxiety, while maximizing creative tension.

Second Case Example

This second case example portrays a longer process, a two-day strategic planning retreat. The client was an accounting software reseller, servicing small-to-mid-sized firms. The cast included the founder and CEO, as well as nearly all of the remaining employees of this small company where a recent economic downturn had resulted in a string of layoffs.

Given an adequate orientation to the sometimes disorienting nature of a non-linear method, participants seem to generally appreciate and find value in this approach. Yet as with any method, a great deal depends on the initial contracting work with the client. Also, as we saw in the second example, dialogic processes can be effective for inviting greater participation, and even co-creation, when authority structures are clear. However, like many other processes, they work less well when leadership is unclear or disputed—likely due to the greater difficulty of engaging a group in a creative flow when there is a high degree of basic anxiety in the background.

When the CEO of the firm initiated a request for a strategic planning retreat, he acknowledged that during the last year, he had not called any whole-staff meetings since "I only had bad news to share." However, now they had "hit bottom," were fully lean, and "had nowhere to go but up." So he felt it was time to rebuild morale by involving the staff in a collaborative planning process. At the same time, the CEO was very clear about retaining his final decision-making authority, and saw the purpose of the two-day meeting as solely that of input-gathering.

Not having worked with this company previously, our conversational arc included initial individual interviews with each staff member. This was an opportunity to establish rapport by exploring organizational strengths ("What's working well?"), organizational challenges ("What do you see as the main areas that need attention?")

as well as individual creative initiatives ("If it were up to you, what do you think needs to be done about it?") while at the same time, reaffirming the agreed-upon frame of input-gathering. Unlike a typical action research process, however, I did not do anything with this information, instead I asked each person if they would be comfortable offering their input to the whole group during the upcoming two days.

During the first day with the whole staff, I proceeded as described above in the first case example; drawing out participants' initial solutions, redirecting any concerns, checking for understanding, and recording their various perspectives, creative solutions, and concerns on chart paper. During the course of the first day, we thoroughly covered the walls.

That evening, after typing up a raw version of the notes, I also did a light sort. Our day-long, free-ranging conversation clustered easily into a set of themes. Placing the corresponding solution ideas, concerns, and perspectives under these thematic headers, resulted in a document that clearly highlighted how much the group had accomplished.

Day two started with handing out both sets of notes, the raw as well as the light sort, and inviting participants to correct, modify, or add anything that was needed. From there, participants jumped into the conversation again, now at a deeper level. During our mid-morning break, the CEO called me aside. "This is great!" he said. "I

know originally I said I just wanted input. But I think the way the conversation is going, I'll be able to make a quick sketch of a plan over lunch, and then bring it back to the group this afternoon to get their take on it. It just seems really obvious, what the next steps are that we need to be taking."

Exploring the Second Case Example

Again, there are many ways we might read this story. For now, I'd like to highlight two main themes:

Retroactively organizing information. Rather than using an agenda to keep participants on topic, we can consider the agenda to be the creative process of the group, as it emerges through the creative process of each individual within the group and their interaction with the whole. All of the information that is gathered can be then organized retroactively.

Clarity around decision-making. I often invite clients to engage in creative dialogue as a "tilling the soil" in preparation for their customary decision-making process. At the same time, it's quite common for much of the need for subsequent decision-making to evaporate, as the way forward becomes clear and obvious to all involved. When outcomes are arrived at as a result of an emergent process, there seems to be much higher levels of alignment, motivation, and follow-through; hence the value of evoking outcomes through co-creativity and emergence rather than negotiation.

Challenges and Limitations

In this section I will focus on some of the challenges encountered by new practitioners, as well as by those of us seeking to share this work with our colleagues.

Given an adequate orientation to the sometimes disorienting nature of a non-linear method, participants seem to generally appreciate and find value in this approach. Yet as with any method, a great deal depends on the initial contracting work with the client. Also, as we saw in the second example, dialogic processes can be effective for inviting greater participation,

and even co-creation, when authority structures are clear. However, like many other processes, they work less well when leadership is unclear or disputed—likely due to the greater difficulty of engaging a group in a creative flow when there is a high degree of basic anxiety in the background.

One challenge often encountered from fellow practitioners is the perspective that "this isn't dialogue, since you can't have dialogue when you're talking about solutions!" As I described in the beginning of this paper, dialogue can serve worthwhile ends even in the context of a mathematics classroom, where there may be multiple ways to obtain a given solution. Co-creative dialogue is even more useful in situations where the solutions need to be created freshly, through the participation and collaboration of everyone involved.

Practitioners are sometimes also uncomfortable with the initial phase of the process, where participants are intentionally asked to talk to the facilitator instead of directly to one another, especially when voicing concerns. This runs directly counter to what has conventionally been taught as good practice.

Having a more active facilitator role during the initial phase allows participants to "come as they are," without any initial training in dialogic conversation. Rather than laying out norms, we are creating a developmental container where attitudes are caught, not taught. Yet this also points to a limitation of these kinds of practices. To allow untrained groups to engage in a free-ranging creative exploration, while at the same time arriving at shared understanding and powerful results, requires a certain level of skill on the part of the facilitator.

The practice of actively taking all sides, recording participants' contributions, and holding space open for creative possibility, might best be described as "simple, but not easy." For those used to more directive approaches, some unlearning may need to take place. One of the greatest challenges can be to refrain from efforts to manage convergence, which is key for allowing a different kind of convergence to emerge. Instead of focusing on the majority perspectives, dot-voting, and so on, we are

continually listening for the voices at the edge, complexity theory's weak signals that can help us shift together into new ways of understanding the situation at hand (Schoemaker & Day, 2009).

Wrapping Up and Going Further

In this paper, I have pointed to the value of co-creative dialogue in situations where, due to the nature of the subject matter, we often default to more linear, control-oriented approaches. Two case examples have illustrated the value of welcoming initial solutions, while also showing how an emergence-based process can interface productively with established authority structures. We have seen how an active facilitation role creates an environment where both creative thinking and critical thinking can co-exist simultaneously, and how organizing information retroactively can allow us to engage in a more open-ended process moving forward.

What has not been explored here, and thus remains implicit, is the developmental potential of having people work on practical and challenging issues in a co-creative and dialogical manner. While we have anecdotal evidence of this (Atlee, 2012, pp.108-109; Rough, 2002b), more research is needed on how using this approach with task-oriented groups creates conditions where participants can shift from what Shepard called "primary mentality," or "me vs. we," to the perspective of "secondary mentality," or "me AND we" (Shepard, 1965). Harrison (1995, 1987) has another, more direct yet controversial way to talk about this kind of shift; "releasing the power of love in organizations."

This brings us full circle to the math department mentioned at the beginning of this paper. In line with the mission of the larger organization, this department's focus was not limited to helping teachers teach mathematics in a constructivist way; it also sought to tap the potential for fostering socio-emotional development that is inherent in a collaborative, discovery-oriented math classroom.

As a species, we are only just beginning to tap into the power of dialogue (Eisen, 1995; Kahane, 2012; Seikkula &

Trimble, 2005). In parting, I want to leave my readers with these questions: What if our pressing practical challenges, including ones where we find ourselves polarized due to a divergence of multiple and often clashing perspectives, could became opportunities for greater creativity and interpersonal growth? And, what if we already have much of what we need, to help this come about?

References

Atlee, T. (2012). *Empowering public wisdom: A practical vision of citizen-led politics.* Berkeley, CA: Evolver Editions, North Atlantic Books.

Bojer, M. M., Roehl, H., Knuth, M., & Magner, C. (2008). *Mapping dialogue: Essential tools for social change.* Chagrin Falls, OH: Taos Institute Publications.

Bushe, G. R., & Marshak, R. J. (2009). Revisioning organization development: Diagnostic and dialogic premises and patterns of practice. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 45(3), 348–368.

Conklin, J. (2005). *Dialogue mapping: Building shared understanding of wicked problems.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Culmsee, P., & Awati, K. (2011). *The heretic's guide to best practices: The reality of managing complex problems in organizations.* Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, Inc.

De Bono, E. (1992). *Serious creativity: Using the power of lateral thinking to create new ideas.* New York, NY: Harper Business.

Eisen, S. (1995). Redesigning human and global systems: A conceptual and strategic framework. Paper presented at the Academy of Management and Case-Western Reserve University Joint Divisional Conference on the Organizational Dimensions of Global Change, Cleveland, Ohio. May 3–6, 1995.

Harrison, R. (1995). *The collected papers of Roger Harrison.* San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass.

Harrison, R. (1987). *Organization culture and quality of service: A strategy for releasing love in the workplace.* London, UK: Association for Management Education and Development.

Howard, P., Galarneau, T., Perez, J., & Shaw, D. (2005). Integrating Open Space Technology and Dynamic Facilitation. *Participatory Learning and Action*, 53.

IBM. (2010). Capitalizing on Complexity. IBM Global CEO Study Series.

Innes, J. E., & Booher, D. E. (2010). *Planning with complexity: An introduction to collaborative rationality for public policy.* London and New York: Routledge.

Kahane, A. (2012).*Transformative scenario planning: Working together to change the future.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Pearce, W. B., & Pearce, K. A. (2000). Extending the theory of the coordinated management of meaning (CMM) through a community dialogue process. *Communication Theory*, 10(4), 405–423.

Ramaswamy, V., & Gouillart, F. (2010). Building the co-creative enterprise. *Harvard Business Review*, 88(10), 100–109.

Ramaswamy, V., & Guillart, F. (2010). *The power of co-creation*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Rock, D. (2008). SCARF: a brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others. *NeuroLeadership Journal*, 1(1), 44–52.

Rough, J. (2002a). *Society's breakthrough*. Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse.

Rough, J. (2002b). Using crises and teams to "turn on" a system. *Journal for Quality and Participation*, 25(1), 5–9.

Rough, J. (1997). There's training and then there's... Dynamic Facilitation and the magic of self-organizing change. *Journal for Quality and Participation*, 20(3), pp. 34–38.

Rough, J. (1991). Choice-Creating: How to solve impossible problems. *Journal for Quality and Participation*, 14(5), 58–61.

Scharmer, C. O. (2007). *Theory U: Leading from the future as it emerges.* Cambridge, MA: Society for Organizational Learning.

Schoemaker, P. J. H., & Day, G. S. (2009). How to make sense of weak signals. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 50(3), 81–89.

Seikkula, J., & Trimble, D. (2005). Healing elements of therapeutic conversation: Dialogue as an embodiment of love. *Family Process*, 44(4), 461–475.

Senge, P., Jaworski, J., Scharmer, C. O., & Flowers, B. S. (2004). *Presence: Human purpose and the field of the future*. Cambridge, MA: Society for Organizational Learning.

Shepard, H. A. (1965). Changing interpersonal and intergroup relationships in organizations. In J. G. March, (Ed.). *Handbook of organizations* (pp. 1115–1143). Chicago, IL: Rand McNally & Company.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher psychological process* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Trans. & Eds.) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Zubizarreta, R. (2012). *Dynamic Facilitation: A practical guide to Jim Rough's Choice–Creating Process*. Port Townsend, WA: Dynamic Facilitation Associates.

Zubizarreta, R. (2006). Practical dialogue: Emergent approaches for effective collaboration. In S. P. Schuman (Ed.), *Creating a culture of collaboration: The International Association of Facilitators handbook* (pp. 256–278). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass/Wiley.

Rosa Zubizarreta works as a community and organizational learning consultant. Principal of DiaPraxis, she facilitates collaborative planning and redesign with business and nonprofit organizations, and public conversations with communities facing challenging issues. She earned an MA from the Organization Development program at Sonoma State University in 2002, and has been working in the field since 2000. She can be reached at *rosa@diapraxis.com*.

The Controversy over Diagnosis in Contemporary Organization Development

By Robert J. Marshak

Diagnosis, it seems, has become somewhat of a dirty word among many of today's organization development (OD) practitioners. Even people who were leading contributors to the OD diagnostic literature now question its usefulness or even legitimacy in most situations (e.g., Weisbord, 1976, 2012). Given the importance placed by the founding theorists and practitioners on an action research process typically described as including entry, contracting, data gathering, diagnosis, feedback, intervention, evaluation, and exit (Anderson, 2012, p. 98) this is seen by some as a disturbing development and by others as a welcomed advancement in theory and practice.

Concerns about Diagnosis

The reasons given by many of today's practitioners for moving away from diagnosis in OD are plentiful and persuasive. All seem directly related to dictionary definitions of *diagnosis* and/or its implicit everyday usage:

» The art or act of identifying a disease from its signs and symptoms
» Investigation or analysis of the cause or nature of a condition, situation, or problem

All have also emerged mostly from the mid-to-late 1980s with the development of dialogic and other change technologies not predicated on the classic data collection – feedback model of early forms of OD, such as Appreciative Inquiry, Future Search, World Café, Open Space, and more recent interventions based on the complexity sciences and concepts of emergence and continuous change. The reasons for moving away from diagnosis given by proponents of these and other related approaches usually include some or all of the following:

1. Diagnosis explicitly or implicitly invokes the doctor-patient model. Whether in Beckhard's early definition that "Organization development is an effort…to increase organization effectiveness and health…" (1969, p. 9), or just part of our socialization, diagnosis is said to inherently imply an expert treating a patient, with the resulting conscious or unconscious biases towards that type of relationship and actions. "Although Lewin's model does not assume sickness, it is easy to infer for those of us socialized to the medical model with diagnosis its most sacred act" (Weisbord, 2012, p. 261).

2. Diagnosis, whether implicitly invoking the doctor-patient model or not, still assumes there is a problem to be addressed that requires an objective expert to help with an analysis of the real causes. Afterall, one of the reasons given in early formulations of OD for conducting a diagnosis is to test whether the "presenting problem" of the client is, in fact, the "real problem" needing to be addressed (Block, 1981, p. 144). Whether operating from a biological model of health where the causes of sickness need to be discovered and treated or from a more mechanical model where the machine-like organization is broken or has a problem that

needs to be fixed, the presumption is to find and remedy the debilitating condition and its causes. Aside from raising questions about who knows best in the consultant-client relationship or if the consultant can ever be an objective observer, this orientation is one that is problem-centric and focused on deficiencies rather than being possibility oriented and/or strengths-based. This has been one of the principal ways proponents of Appreciative Inquiry since its origins in the 1980s have sought to differentiate their approach from foundational OD.

3. Whether intended or not, diagnosis can become the special domain of the consultant who may select the diagnostic model(s) and methods for data collection and feedback. This again has a tendency to thrust the OD consultant into an expert authority role rather than a collaborative change partner one. And, of course, early lists of competencies required by OD consultants included diagnostic abilities as a fact-finder or researcher (e.g., Lippitt and Lippitt, 1978). Furthermore, diagnosis assumes there is an objective reality that the unbiased consultant helps to discover rather than understanding that the consultant is also a participant in the emergence and construction of an organization's social reality.

4. Diagnosis at best can only capture a moment in time and in today's world of rapid and constant change it inherently provides an out of date picture for the client system to work with. By the time contracting is completed, a diagnostic process initiated, data collected, responses prepared for presentation, and a feedback session conducted conditions could have shifted in important ways. This has always been a limitation of the data-feedback model, but it has become an increasing concern with the shift to today's world of hyper-active systems and continuous change (Marshak, 2004).

5. Our emerging understanding of organizations and organizational processes is too complex for any diagnostic model to accurately capture. Leading models

of organization diagnosis such as the Burke-Litwin Causal Model, Galbraith Star Model, McKinsey 7-S Model, Nadler-Tushman Congruence Model, and Weisbord 6 Box Model, may capture many important factors, but they also all leave out potentially important dynamics (e.g., organizational politics) or are unable to account for the relationships posited by, for example, complex systems theory that go far beyond simple cause-effect models of organizational dynamics.

Diagnosis at best can only capture a moment in time and in today's world of rapid and constant change it inherently provides an out of date picture for the client system to work with. By the time contracting is completed, a diagnostic process initiated, data collected, responses prepared for presentation, and a feedback session conducted conditions could have shifted in important ways. This has always been a limitation of the data-feedback model, but it has become an increasing concern with the shift to today's world of hyper-active systems and continuous change

Are the Concerns Overstated?

All these critiques, while certainly having some validity, may also be overstated by those advocating OD approaches that differ in varying degrees from the foundational data collection-diagnosis-intervention sequence wherein the OD consultant does not advocate an intervention approach until after a diagnosis is completed. In that regard they sometimes can begin to sound like "talking points" used by those who seek to accentuate how and why what they are doing not only differs from, but is better than, traditional OD action research approaches.

One set of rejoinders, therefore, in this current debate include some or all of the following:
1. Diagnosis assumes the Doctor-Patient Model. This, of course, is explicitly not what the OD consulting relationship is intended to be and is a source of constant vigilance in OD theory

and practice. Schein, for example, is especially clear about this in the early pages of his classic work on process consultation where he criticizes the doctor-patient model of consulting and calls instead for a collaborative client-consultant relationship on all matters (1969). Speaking from my own experience as one of the early generation of practitioners taught OD principles by the founders, avoiding the expert "tell clients what to do" model in favor of a collaborative relationship was virtually the prime directive for becoming an OD consultant. In practice this might occasionally prove difficult when client wishes for expert answers as well as consultant egos invite stepping into the doctor/expert role, but explicit OD theory, practice, and ethics provide constant warnings to avoid that path.

2. Diagnosis is Problem-centric. Along with concerns about implicit biases towards the doctor-patient relationship the worry that diagnosis is inherently and only problem focused may be overstated. Yes, certainly the purpose of diagnosis in OD could include discovering the potential factors contributing to a current problematic state. However, diagnosis could also help identify potential factors needing to be leveraged or strengthened to achieve a desired future state. In terms of the diagnostic aspects of force-field analysis there can and should be attention to both limiting and positive factors in

any change situation. OD also includes practices wherein participants identify a desired future and then consider (diagnose) what needs to happen to achieve that positive vision.

3. Diagnosis is the Special Domain of the Consultant. Certainly there are times and practices within a formal diagnostic step when the OD consultant might exercise greater authority, expertise, and somewhat independent action regarding the client and client system. This includes choices or strong suggestions about what diagnostic model(s) or dimensions will be considered, what data will be collected, what will be the means and methods of data collection, what data will be fed-back and in what format, and the intended processes and participants involved in working with the data (e.g., Nadler, 1977). This does not mean, however, that clients are or should be excluded from the planning or execution of a diagnostic step. OD theory and practice invite collaborative joint actions throughout the consulting relationship and this includes diagnosis. Clients should be involved in co-determining and carrying-out what data should be collected, by whom, using what methods, from which people, at what locations, and how that data will be configured and presented to which stakeholders using what processes. In that sense the OD consultant is clearly a partner in diagnostic meaning making and not a purely neutral, outside observer. In short, in practice the range of client involvement in diagnosis can range from active involvement to closely informed bystander, although in my experience OD theory suggests it should tend more towards involving the client system in the diagnostic process as much as possible. This could include designing questions, carrying-out interviews, aggregating and presenting the data, and designing and conducting meetings to determine what the data may mean and what actions to initiate.

4. Diagnosis Takes Too Long for Today's Fast Paced World. The pace and rhythm of many of today's 24/7, globally connected workplaces experiencing continuous change may be different in degree and kind from the industrial age workplaces of the 1950s-70s. Taking an extended period of time to collect data and diagnose an organization before considering action may not be a viable option in those settings. At the same time diagnosis does not have to take months and months to perform. Important data can be collected and important insights garnered to help guide a change approach in a matter of weeks or even days. Even in the most fast paced organization experiencing continuous change a few weeks of data collection and diagnosis of what might be going on to help lead into action taking meetings and events is not so slow as to make the data invalid and out of date. In fact, more abbreviated forms of diagnosis have been part of OD consulting practice for at least as long as the almost 40 years I have been a practitioner. For example, I and others under a range of circumstances might ask during entry and contracting to be able to talk to a few - or quite a few - people before proceeding further. This was a deliberate diagnostic step to insure a meaningful contract and approach as well as to minimize potential surprises.

5. Organizations and Organizational Processes are too Complex for any Diagnostic Model or Approach. The nature of today's organizational world combined with an increasing array of organizational and change theories advanced since the foundation days of OD have added to the complexity of trying to understand organizational phenomena. Consider that such concepts as social construction, organizational culture, organizations as meaning making systems, continuous change, and complex adaptive systems have both enriched our understandings and also increased the array of possible explanatory variables, factors, and relationships. Add to that multi-cultural global organizations operating in rapidly changing and highly competitive industries and it becomes clear that no one theory or diagnostic model can encompass all the factors and relationships that may be influencing the way things are and could become. The fact that no one theory or model encompasses everything, however, does not necessarily mean that no theory or model is useful, nor the possibility of selective use of different diagnostic models depending on informed judgment about what might be most appropriate in a particular situation. After all, in physics there are multiple competing theories for different phenomena including notions that light is both a particle and a wave. It is widely recognized that each theory captures only part of the complex physical world and also that each provides useful and instrumental value in engaging aspects of that world. The fact that the organizational world is highly complex does not mean that the selective use of some type of formal diagnostic process to seek an informed approximation of what might be involved in a situation is not potentially worthwhile. Furthermore, formal diagnosis does not have to involve using one model or focus alone. Diagnostic approximations addressing organizational dynamics, group dynamics, leadership behavior, and issues of power, authority and conflict, among others, might all be useful in an OD engagement whether as part of a formal diagnostic step or implicitly during the life of a consulting engagement.

What has been covered so far might be considered a condensed version of some of the point and counterpoint discussions that in my experience are occurring in the OD community via articles and books, presentations, and hallway discussions at various conferences and meetings, and in OD-related workshops and degree programs. As such they illuminate many of the issues and considerations regarding diagnosis in contemporary OD, but present practitioners, especially newer practitioners, with conflicting arguments about how OD should be conducted. What if, however, both were roughly true? What if instead of either/or we tried to think in terms of both/and? What might that discussion sound like?

Even if the Concerns are Mostly Valid is there Still a Role for Diagnosis in Contemporary OD Practice?

I do not profess to have a well rehearsed version of both/and to convey to you at this time and place. Instead, I would like to illuminate that way of thinking by discussing the possibility that both sets of positions may have applicability. Put another way, what if the concerns about diagnosis in contemporary OD were all true or mostly true? Would that invalidate the use of diagnosis in all situations? Let us review

reluctant about proceeding with a change initiative and needed the psychological assurance that they were working with a very knowledgeable and experienced practitioner? In addition, what if they were very clear about a specific problem or developmental objective they wished to accomplish and might not need complex or transformational change? What if furthermore a valid (to them) process of data collection and diagnosis would help reassure or convince them of the need to change and enhance their confidence in working with an OD consultant on possible intervention

organizational world. Here the concern is that diagnosis cannot capture the ongoing or emerging dynamics of rapidly changing complex organizational systems. Again, at the extreme the answer is probably that diagnosis is of little or no value under such conditions. However, not all organizations fully meet such conditions. Yes, things move quickly in today's world, but not at overnight speed on all dimensions. The premises of complexity science might be fully applicable in specialized instances of the physical world, but might also be considered more like analogies or approximations in the social world of organizations. It is also true that diagnoses can be helpful without necessarily having to account for every possible variable or relationship. Certainly all of us navigate the complexities of our everyday lives without a full understanding of all the variables and their relationships. What we do have and what is needed in organizational diagnoses are good enough instrumental approximations of what to pay attention to in order to take effective actions and the ability to adapt and adjust when faced with new data and circumstances. So, again, I am suggesting that diagnosis might not apply to all organizational situations, but I do not think it is ruled out in all situations either.

> Yes, things move quickly in today's world, but not at overnight speed on all dimensions. The premises of complexity science might be fully applicable in specialized instances of the physical world, but might also be considered more like analogies or approximations in the social world of organizations. It is also true that diagnoses can be helpful without necessarily having to account for every possible variable or relationship. Certainly all of us navigate the complexities of our everyday lives without a full understanding of all the variables and their relationships.

the arguments again and see. For the sake of this presentation the five main concerns listed above are grouped into two categories: 1) concerns about an expert, problem-oriented, and consultant driven diagnostic process, and 2) concerns that the speed and complexity of today's organizational world make diagnosis at best an outdated, limited focus, snapshot in time.

First are the concerns about an implicit tendency to move into an expert relationship that is deficit-oriented and problem-centric, and wherein the consultant has the preponderance of influence in the diagnostic process. For the sake of this discussion, what if this was roughly true? Are there still any set of conditions when one might still include formal diagnosis in an OD engagement? In the extreme, the answer in OD theory and practice would be "no," but what if we adopted a more nuanced stance that was not totally black and white?

What if the client and client system were somewhat ambivalent or even

strategies? While it is true that OD consultants seek to avoid the expert authority role it is also true that whether they like it or not, they occupy a type of authority role and also have expertise in collaborative helping and processes of change. It is also true that sometimes an OD engagement might be requested in order to address a relatively straightforward problem or deficiency. Not all change projects necessarily involve complex, whole system, transformational dynamics. Finally, for more bounded problematic situations where some type of data and feedback might help convince a leader, team, or set of stakeholders to endorse and pursue a course of action, having that information provided to them through processes involving an unbiased, experienced outsider might be essential. Do these conditions in some form or another apply to all potential OD projects? No. Might they apply to some or a class of potential OD projects? I would have to say yes.

The second set of concerns involves the speed and complexity of today's

Where this mind experiment of "what if" leads is perhaps the beginning of a contingency theory of diagnosis and OD. That is, under one set of conditions one might use a formal diagnostic step and under another set of conditions one might not. It could also include a mixed or blended approach that combined the two in some way or another, perhaps sequentially. This, of course, is a tricky business and it is difficult to be highly precise. With that caveat and given the above discussion, suppose we thought about two somewhat extreme conditions and the role of diagnosis in each.

Type I: An organization in a slow to moderately changing environment, with a limited set of stakeholders, confronting a more or less bounded and defined problem or deficiency, that is experiencing some but not immediate urgency, with a concerned but not fully committed leadership, who need a

data-based or proven rationale for change. In terms of the Cynefin Framework for decision making this might be considered a Simple or Complicated situation (see Snowden & Boone, 2007).

Type II: An organization in a rapidly changing environment, with a complex array of stakeholders, confronting an unstructured and highly complex situation that has high urgency and requires new thinking and possibilities, with a fully committed leadership willing to endorse and actively participate in a more emergent process of discovery. In the Cynefin Framework this would likely be considered a Complex or Chaotic situation.

One might conjecture that a formal diagnostic step could be more applicable in the Type I, Simple-Complicated situation, whereas no formal diagnostic step might make sense in a Type II, Complex-Chaotic situation. These, of course, are conjectures based on a rough typology that does not capture the richness of organizational situations. But, it might be enough to suggest that it is time to move beyond the point and counterpoint discussion and seek a contingency-based discussion to guide practice going forward. Elsewhere my colleague Gervase Bushe and I have tried to start such a discussion by delineating what we describe as a bifurcation in contemporary OD practice leading to two forms of OD, one Diagnostic and the other Dialogic that eschews classic diagnostic premises and processes (Bushe and Marshak, 2009). In that discussion we mainly describe the differences and not how they might be reconciled or under what conditions each might be more or less applicable. Clearly that is a next step for researchers and practitioners alike to address.

My Concerns about the Current Controversy

Finally, I would like to add some thoughts and concerns as a longtime practitioner and educator about the current controversies involving diagnosis in OD. I worry about the denigration of the term diagnosis in OD practice not because the concerns

raised above are ill-founded or inappropriate. They are not. I worry because they may seem to apply to many other aspects of the function of diagnosis broadly defined and as applied in practice. Here I am not talking about a formal diagnostic step that searches for organizational causes or underlying dynamics before pursuing some intervention. Instead I am raising the broader processes of discernment involved in trying to understand a situation before taking action. These processes perform similar functions to diagnosis, but might be called such other names as: assessing, scoping, sizing-up, judging, interpreting, evaluating, and so forth. For example, before I start the simple act of walking across a busy street I assess the situation. I check to see if there is any on-coming traffic, if there is a traffic light and if so what color it is, the width of the street and how long it might take me to cross it, whether there are others crossing at the same point and in the same direction, and so on. This happens in a moment, but is my learned diagnostic checklist of things to consider before deciding whether to wait or go ahead and cross the street . Furthermore I may even have variations on the basic model for use in London or New York. Similar diagnostic checklists both explicitly and implicitly inform my work as a consultant whenever I am assessing what is happening with the client system, if the leader seems supportive and committed, whether to proceed or devise a new approach, how to handle interactions

in different phases of an engagement, and so on.

Whether we label this kind of professional practice as diagnostic or just a quick scan, it relies on similar basic competencies. In brief, it involves assessing a client situation and noting factors that some theory, model, checklist, or informed experience tells us we should pay attention to in order to determine how best to proceed. In this process we may or may not be searching for what we consider to be problems and their causes, but rather arriving at informed judgments about how best to

> In this process we may or may not be searching for what we consider to be problems and their causes, but rather arriving at informed judgments about how best to proceed based on some type of data (facts, feelings, impressions, etc.) as processed through some personal and/or professional judgment schema. Consequently, whether we ever formally diagnose anything, we still need to assess, read, size-up, interpret, or otherwise make judgments and choices about clients and client situations from start to finish; and these judgments will be based on knowledge and skills similar to those used in diagnosis.

proceed based on some type of data (facts, feelings, impressions, etc.) as processed through some personal and/or professional judgment schema. Consequently, whether we ever formally diagnose anything, we still need to assess, read, size-up, interpret, or otherwise make judgments and choices about clients and client situations from start to finish; and these judgments will be based on knowledge and skills similar to those used in diagnosis.

My concern, then, is that some OD practitioners may someday begin to think that there is no need to learn the extensive range of theories, models, and concepts that help one to understand and assess what is happening throughout an OD consulting engagement. These include, to name a few, theories and models of: leadership; change; organizational, team, and individual behavior; power, authority, and conflict; culture and diversity; methods of constructive engagement; and

so forth. Suggesting in un-nuanced ways that diagnosis is not needed could lead to implicit misunderstandings that in OD one can simply contract to conduct a series of pre-defined steps in an orchestrated series of activities, and achieve superior results. That might in fact happen—although somehow never to me in my experience—but it leaves out critical aspects of what helps to shape success in OD. Consider the following few examples:

» Assessing a situation to see if it is a viable candidate for success.
» Making choices before, during, and after client contacts, activities, and events based on judgments about recurring or novel occurrences and interactions.
» Reflecting on what happened in order to up-date one's theory of practice and perhaps to share those insights and ideas with others via conference presentations, writings, or other means of professional information exchange.

What is needed given the current bifurcation of OD into diagnostic and dialogic approaches is more nuanced and agreed upon terminology for processes called by such names as diagnosis, inquiry, discovery, assessment, discernment, sensing, informed judgment, and so on. These terms are used by adherents to different OD approaches, but without common agreement as to if or when they should be used nor their meaning(s) in theory and practice. The consequence is discussions and debates within the OD community that sometimes seem to be comparing

diagnostic apples and oranges. This is not helpful to anyone and especially to the advancement of the field.

In conclusion, then, I want OD practitioners to know what works, but also when and why things work so they can be master practitioners capable of knowledge-based innovations to the body of theory and practice called Organization Development. I do not care if they select work such that they never, always, or sometimes conduct a formal process of data gathering, diagnosis, feedback, and intervention in their practices, but very much want them to be able to size up a situation, read presenting dynamics, and scope what is needed in order to assess how best to proceed throughout the life of an OD engagement.

References

Anderson, D. L. (2012). *Organization development: The process of leading organizational change* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Beckhard, R. (1969). *Organization development: Strategies and models.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Block, P. (1981). *Flawless consulting.* Austin, TX: Learning Concepts.

Bushe, G. R., & Marshak, R. J. (2009). Revisioning organization development: Diagnostic and dialogic premises and patterns of practice. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 45(3), 348–368.

Lippitt, G. F., & Lippitt, R. (1978). *Consulting process in action.* San Diego, CA: University Associates.

Marshak, R. J. (2004). Morphing: The leading edge of organizational change in the 21st century. *Organization Development Journal*, 22(3), 8–21.

Nadler, D. (1977). *Feedback and organization development: Using data-based methods.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Schein, E. H. (1969). *Process consultation: It's role in organization development.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Snowden, D. J., & Boone, M. E. (2007). A leader's framework for decision making. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(11), 69–76.

Weisbord, M. R. (1976). Organizational diagnosis: Six places to look for trouble with or without a theory. *Group & Organization Studies*, 1(4), 430–447.

Weisbord, M. R. (2012). *Productive workplaces: Dignity, meaning and community in the 21st century* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Robert J. Marshak, PhD, is Senior Scholar-in-Residence for Organization Development Programs at American University, Washington, DC and maintains a global consulting practice. His current interests include language-based change and Dialogic OD. Bob is a recipient of the OD Network's Lifetime Achievement Award. He can be contacted at *marshak@american.edu.*

"… when a process rather than a methodology-centered perspective is incorporated into OD practice, the dichotomy between methodologies diminishes and the possibility that there is a grey area and continuum in the space between Diagnostic OD and Dialogic OD emerges."

Practicing in the Grey Area between Dialogic and Diagnostic Organization Development

Lessons from a Healthcare Case Study

By Yabome Gilpin-Jackson

Overview

The field of Organization Development (OD) continues to buzz with the excitement of its third-generation methodologies. These methodologies represent OD practices that are based on the premise that an organization or system already has positive examples of what they want more of or what is needed for a desired change. The premise of third generation OD methodologies is, therefore, to search out, highlight, or amplify what is already working in a system through genuine inquiry and conversation to understand varying perspectives. Examples of third generation methodologies include Appreciative Inquiry and various whole system engagement methodologies such as Future search or Open Space conferences that seek to unlock and amplify the generative potential in organizations. Third generation methodologies are distinguished from their first and second-generation precursors by the commitment to acknowledging and working with the subjectivity and meaning-making of all involved. It is an approach that upholds the social construction of human experience and embraces dialogue, inquiry, and an emergent process and approach to change (Bouckenooghe, 2010; Cameron, 2005).

At the opposite end of the spectrum, first-generation OD methodologies are based on the assumption that change can be orchestrated by objectively identifying and quantifying problems with a system or organization. Identified problems are then corrected with prescribed solutions

and recommendations that people in the system must adopt and implement. Traditional action research is the classic example of first-generation OD methodologies, where objective data or valid information is sought out and used as the basis for diagnosing deficiencies in a system and recommending solutions. Second-generation methodologies are the set of approaches that bridge the first and the third generations. They represent the developmental methodologies that built on action research to action science and learning organizations. The core tenet of second-generation methodologies is to work with observable data to identify discrepancies between desired and actual behaviors and outcomes. It involves a commitment to reflection and public analysis of attitudes, commitments, and behaviors that get in the way of desired outcomes, so that system learning can occur (Raelin, 2006).

OD practice has embraced its third generation methodologies. For example, there has been an explosion of whole system methodologies with features of third generation methodologies (Holman, Devane, & Cady, 2007a). As with any movement however, new challenges and complexities tend to underscore emergent opportunities. Bushe and Marshak have named a bifurcation in the field, defined by the move to the practice of Dialogic OD, which is characterized by the use of third-generation OD methodologies. They explain that the move to Dialogic OD remains unacknowledged in OD scholarship, as OD scholars continue to research and teach from the perspective

of conventional, traditional Diagnostic OD (Bushe, 2010; Bushe & Marshak, 2009).

Diagnostic OD is traditional OD practice in which a formal investigation is conducted so that objective data is collected and analyzed to make a diagnosis and recommendations for problem-solving—in effect, methodologies used in Diagnostic OD are likely to be first-generation methodologies. Second-generation methodologies arguably represent Diagnostic OD because of their reliance on using valid data to uncover discrepancies between desired and actual behaviors and outcomes. However, second-generation methodologies could represent Dialogic OD when identified gaps are addressed using dialogic interventions. For example, the practices associated with developing learning organizations often require the use of valid or verifiable data to engage in dialogue about discrepancies between espoused and actual behavior in organizations (Senge, 1990; Argyris, 2005).

One commentary in response to Bushe and Marshak (2009) noted and expanded on specific issues in the presentation of Diagnostic and Dialogic OD that raised a further question—can Diagnostic and Dialogic OD co-exist and be used as complementary forms of engagement in practice? (Oswick, 2009). In a recent debrief of a major healthcare project that involved all of the health authorities in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Canada, I found myself wrestling with this same question. The case in question was the Lower Mainland Consolidation of Medical Imaging in the healthcare system of British Columbia. In August 2009, the lower mainland consolidation strategy was identified for specific health services, including Medical and Diagnostic Imaging, as part of a strategy to manage spending and reduce growing healthcare costs. The goal of the program was to save $100 million through efficiency gains, while at the same time maintaining the quality of care and service levels to patients.

In this article, I use lessons from this case to describe two complexities associated with OD practice in the context of the tensions and balance between Dialogic and Diagnostic OD. The first relates to

the dichotomous distinction being drawn between OD methodologies that define Dialogic and Diagnostic OD. The second is the challenge associated with focusing on the methodologies that define one form of OD to the exclusion of others. I use examples and illustrations to discuss how I and the team of OD practitioners working on this project experienced and addressed these issues. I conclude with a brief discussion of some implications for practice that arise from what we learned through this case.

sustained OD interventions, based on iterative cycles of data collection, analysis, and action to forward change with the client system (Bouckenooghe, 2010; Boyd & Bright, 2007; Rothwell & Sullivan, 2010). The distinction between AR as a methodology and AR as a process is significant because when viewed as a process, AR becomes a basis for practice and within each iterative AR cycle, any intervention can be used to forward change. Thus, Lewin's original AR model of analysis, planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and acting again, becomes the consulting

The art of mastering the grey zone in between Diagnostic and Dialogic OD becomes how well a practitioner can move along the continuum as appropriate to the circumstance. The crucial element becomes practitioners' ability to understand the orientations, philosophical basis, and intentions of the different forms of OD, such that they can effectively move between and switch their own mental models to practice effectively in either realm. This is not just a question of acquiring Diagnostic or Dialogic OD skills, but a matter of mastery such that practitioners can safely and effectively practice along the continuum.
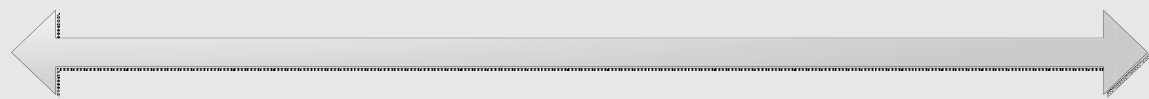
The Dichotomous Distinction of Methodologies

Bushe and Marshak (2009) describe well the divide between Dialogic and Diagnostic OD. In practice, this divide is articulated in the discourse surrounding OD methodologies. First and second-generation OD methodologies such as action research and action science are dubbed traditional methods, because they are used with a problem-solving lens. On the other hand, third-generation methodologies that represent Dialogic OD practice are associated with the future of OD (Rothwell & Sullivan, 2010). In the process, the fact that OD methodologies are often an approach as well as a process for OD practice tends to be lost. Hence, while action research (AR) for example is an approach and methodology from OD's first wave that might easily be labeled a diagnostic methodology, it is also a generic process for carrying out

model in itself. The focus here is less on diagnosis in order to present a prescriptive solution, but more on understanding the situation in order to take action to forward change and then reflecting on the impact of the actions in order to act again and so on (Wolf, Hanson, & Moir, 2011).

Therefore, when a process rather than a methodology-centered perspective is incorporated into OD practice, the dichotomy between methodologies diminishes and the possibility that there is a grey area and continuum in the space between Diagnostic OD and Dialogic OD emerges. While methodologies may be broadly categorized as one form of OD or the other, it is the nature of the practice and the intention behind the use of the methodology that would ultimately make it diagnostic versus a dialogic practice. If the intention behind a data collection tool like a survey for example is to support a

	Conventional Diagnostic OD	The Grey Zone	Conventional Dialogic OD
Type of OD Methodologies*	First-generation OD methodologies, e.g., action research.	First, second or third generation OD methodologies. Second-generation methodologies include features of Diagnostic & Dialogic OD.	Third-generation OD methodologies, e.g., Appreciative Inquiry.
Goal of OD program, process, approach, or inquiry*	Prescriptive diagnosis based on a biological metaphor of organizations. A focus on an ideal identified outcome.	A blend of diagnosis and dialogue as needed at different stages of the change process. A focus on effective change process to realize identified outcomes as well as potential.	Emergent self-organizing around a shared vision created in conversation and interaction. A focus on acting on opportunities and potential in the organization system.
Type of OD practice*	Methodology-centered where *diagnostic methods* define the OD program.	Holistic and adaptive practice that is responsive to emergent needs.	Methodology-centered where *dialogic methods* define the OD program.
Philosophical orientation to practice	Knowledge can be objectively discerned through research.	Knowledge is co-created through objective data and emergent subjective realities during the process.	Knowledge is emergent and constructed from real-time social interactions.
Role of OD Practitioner	Expert consultant.	An expert, collaborator, project member, facilitator, trainer, mediator, and other roles as situations demand.	Facilitator who recognizes that their presence influences knowledge creation.
Source of OD Interventions**	Interventions are recommended by the OD practitioner.	A blend of the practitioner's expert recommendations and self-organized solutions from organization members.	Interventions are co-created by all involved and especially through self-organizing.
Practitioner influence on implementation	Zero/limited influence where practitioners' role is limited to diagnosis or maximum influence where contracted to implement recommendations.	High influence at early stages where the emphasis is on diagnosis and zero to limited influence as the focus shifts to Dialogic OD.	Zero/limited influence— interventions are implemented through self-organization of participants.

*OD methodologies are the set of methods, tools, techniques, or defined processes used to inquire and/or take actions to improve an organization's effectiveness.

**OD program is a full cycle of research and actions taken to improve organization effectiveness.

***OD Practice is the professional exercise of organizational development using a variety of OD methodologies.

****OD Interventions are the action(s) and methodologies within an OD program.

practitioner to make expert judgments of an organization's health, because that data is held as objective and final, then it is a diagnostic tool used for Diagnostic OD practice. If the same data generated from the survey is used to facilitate inquiry and dialogue through which a change program is furthered from emergent ideas about varying and open interpretation of the data, a diagnostic tool has been used dialogically.

From a practitioner's standpoint therefore, the continuum from diagnostic to dialogic practice depends on how much one moves from expert on the diagnostic end of the spectrum to facilitator on the dialogic end of the spectrum. The art of mastering the grey zone in between Diagnostic and Dialogic OD becomes how well a practitioner can move along the continuum as appropriate to the circumstance. The crucial element becomes practitioners' ability to understand the orientations, philosophical basis, and intentions of the different forms of OD, such that they can effectively move between and switch their own mental models to practice effectively in either realm. This is not just a question of acquiring Diagnostic or Dialogic OD skills, but a matter of mastery such that practitioners can safely and effectively practice along the continuum. *Table 1* presents a summary of my proposals for practicing in the grey zone of the Diagnostic to Dialogic OD continuum, based on the lessons from the Medical Imaging case, which I describe further below.

The divide and discourse in Dialogic versus Diagnostic OD showed up

immediately in the case of the consolidation of Medical Imaging, during the launch meetings with the team of OD practitioners. The question of what form of OD we would practice was raised implicitly and explicitly as follows: what methodologies will we use to facilitate this change process? Would we be able to support the team to make the changes required if we took a diagnostic approach? How soon could we bring the whole system involved together using dialogic methodologies so that they could decide how to move forward with the consolidation mandate? There was a pull among the team to take a dialogic approach based on the current discourse in OD and experiences within the health authorities indicating that successful changes occurred where dialogic processes had been used to involve as many people as possible.

The reality, however was that little was known about the client system and so initial data collection and analysis was needed to determine a course of action, in effect a diagnostic approach using first-generation methodologies. After a set of fact-finding interviews, analysis and diagnosis, the recommendations were that the first level of intervention would be with the leadership team, before going out to the whole. Being a consolidated team themselves, it was decided that the leaders needed time for dialogue, decision-making, and team-building before any dialogic work with the whole system could be initiated. The recommended initial work was individual leader assessments followed by a series of five meetings to bring the group together over a six month period. The intention of these meetings was for the leadership to understand their own experiences as a consolidated team, work out how they wanted to be, and lead together through ongoing change across the whole.

The recommendations were made and agreed to through a classic Diagnostic OD consulting process of data collection, analysis, diagnosis, and a feedback meeting with the client where the recommendations were accepted. However, the recommended sessions were facilitated dialogically. For example, the design for each meeting was often emergent and adapted to the needs of the groups in real-time. Multiple

perspectives and voices were encouraged in the meetings and facilitation processes based on inquiry were used to open conversations so that different perspectives could be openly discussed. Dialogue was the main facilitation tool used to support the group to arrive at their shared vision. The general thrust of all the exercises in the meetings was centered on how to create the future they wanted through engaging dialogue at their level and across the whole. Several first-generation and Diagnostic OD methodologies were used to generate data from the group about how they work together. However, that data was generated for the purpose of furthering conversation and was not held as the final truth on which to make decisions. Multiple interpretations of the data generated were invited, acknowledged, and considered by the group in determining how the data would influence their next steps. In these ways, a blend of diagnostic and dialogic methodologies was used. The facilitation team and the client made a specific commitment to engage in dialogic practice centered on inquiry, engagement, and an emergent process. This commitment was intentional in order to build the capacity of the Medical Imaging leaders and organization to use dialogic processes because the change they were experiencing was complex and continuous.

The Move to Methodology-Centered Practice

Closely associated with the dichotomous distinction of methodologies in OD's new wave is a focus on single-method OD practice. Increasingly, there is an assumption that inquiry that is not dialogic will not generate the engagement, self-organizing, and creative potential needed for transformational change. Correspondingly, there is a move towards practitioners that focus on particular third-generation dialogic methodologies. Bushe and Marshak (2009) do warn that tools should not be used to determine practice, but this is indeed taking hold when practitioners market to clients as "Appreciative Inquiry facilitators" or "Open Space facilitators" and so on, as opposed to Organization Development

practitioners. The trend in practice is therefore for change leaders to seek out OD practitioners or facilitators to lead single third-generation methodology-centered events, without necessarily inviting them into the longer-term change effort the event supports. Client groups are then left to follow-up within their systems to sustain the self-organizing that is promoted and encouraged during the event. However, clients often do not have the time, skill, or capacity to do so. Thus, self-organized changes often fall away after the novelty and euphoria of the engagement event wears off.

There is, of course, the question of client-readiness to invest in long-term change efforts. However, the reality is that phenomena like sustained engagement and other soft organization effectiveness indicators predicated on human behavior do not happen overnight. The growth of methodology-centered OD practitioners, however, facilitates a short-term mentality and ability for change leaders to purchase piecemeal OD efforts, but this is not effective OD (Rothwell, Stavros, & Sullivan, 2010, p. 15).

In the case of Medical Imaging, you will recall one of the questions that arose early on was: How soon could we bring the whole system involved together using dialogic methodologies so that they could decide together how to move forward with the consolidation mandate? This question arose in part because of the OD team's commitment to practice dialogically in order to encourage optimal engagement and self-organization across the system. The team had been intentionally trained and supported in the practice of dialogic processes like Appreciative Inquiry, Conferencing, and other whole system OD methodologies. However, it was apparent after the first few meetings that the leadership and organization members were not yet ready for a large-scale dialogic process, because the foundations for dialogue did not even exist. Employees expressed distrust for leadership and the idea of a Dialogic OD practice through large-scale engagement was not initially welcomed. Employees felt that any dialogic process would not be genuine engagement,

but rather another attempt to impose health ministry and leadership mandated changes. The leadership team also needed to make agreements about how to engage the organization while balancing the reality of ministry mandates. In addition, the OD team's design and debrief conversations brought the conclusion that to lead with the question of methodology was to put form of practice before context. This meant putting a solution forward regardless of the situation, thus creating a prescriptive scenario for dialogic methodologies, which is one of the critiques of Diagnostic OD.

The team concluded that it was best to hold an adaptive and holistic orientation to practice, to ensure sustainable change in the context of a complex human system. We saw holistic and adaptive practice as OD efforts that are long-range and focused on all levels in a system—individual, team, and system-wide. In addition, it is practice that is responsive to the inter-level dynamics of the system as they emerge (Bouck-enooghe, 2010; Coghlan, 2000). This requires knowledge and understanding of OD in all its waves, including diagnostic and dialogic methodologies, such that the right intervention is shifted to at the right time to facilitate the required changes. Practitioners need to be able to articulate and present these issues to clients in ways they can understand and accept, or else be clear that a single event, no matter how transformational the experience, is insufficient to sustain change.

In the Medical Imaging case, the context shifted over the year that the initial work with the leaders ensued. The leaders became increasingly aware of the positive impacts of their own dialogic conversations. They noticed that their own engagement increased when they focused on uncovering meanings they each attributed to the consolidation. They noticed that they were able to move forward simply by having the conversations that mattered, which they defined for themselves in the sessions. Through this process, they recognized ways in which the next levels of leaders were not being engaged. Correspondingly, staff feedback showed growing discontent. The context was now right for whole system engagement which was introduced

as a pilot with two sites where a team of approximately 14 leaders and 200 staff were experiencing compound changes.

The pilot whole system engagement included a series of staff meetings at each of the sites where the process was introduced and staff were asked about the future they wanted to create based on an Appreciative Inquiry intervention. The impact of the multiple changes and the transition was also acknowledged at these meetings, which gave staff the opportunity to express and address their ongoing concerns with the leaders. Classic AR interventions in

can be and the affect it has on everyone. I am so thankful for the opportunity and experience with all MI staff. It was draining and emotional but sooooo worth it. (Director)

The qualitative process evaluation revealed the following themes of participants' experience: (1) increased connection to each other, leaders, and the whole; (2) sense of shared vision; (3) increased felt responsibility for own and team engagement; and (4) desire for continued action and annual/bi-annual all-staff conferences. Further-

The trend in practice is therefore for change leaders to seek out OD practitioners or facilitators to lead single third-generation methodology-centered events, without necessarily inviting them into the longer-term change effort the event supports. Client groups are then left to follow-up within their systems to sustain the self-organizing that is promoted and encouraged during the event. However, clients often do not have the time, skill, or capacity to do so and thus self-organized changes often fall away after the novelty and euphoria of the engagement event wears off.

the Diagnostic OD tradition were used to generate data that formed the basis for dialogue. All staff were then invited to two conferences that were facilitated using a variety of whole system dialogic interventions including Appreciative Inquiry and the Axelrod Conference Model.

The pilot whole system engagement was successful from all the evidence. At the end of the conferences, participants spontaneously wrote a poem to articulate the experience (see *Figure 2*), a testament to the success of the dialogic interventions in engaging the whole system. The Director for the sites gave the following written feedback:

The experience was off the scale for me and the benefits and changes that we are seeing and feeling - they are evident, palpable and visible in all of the modalities and staff conversations. It's amazing how contagious a smile

more, change was realized within the organization and back at work through self-organizing. Each of the staff teams made simple commitments to take actions that would improve how they work together and support the consolidation changes. Within six weeks of the first conference, every team had voluntarily implemented at least one, and for some teams all of the actions they agreed to.

Thus, the dialogic processes of the conference that included principles of Appreciative Inquiry and the Conference Model followed the initial work and staff meetings, which were based on a mixture of diagnostic and dialogic methodologies. In the debrief of the project with the client and the facilitation team, it was agreed that the whole system dialogic intervention would not have been successful without the initial blend of Diagnostic and Dialogic OD interventions that set the foundation for the work. The initial diagnostic

Figure 1: The Grey Zone Grid for Blended Diagnostic/Dialogic OD Practice
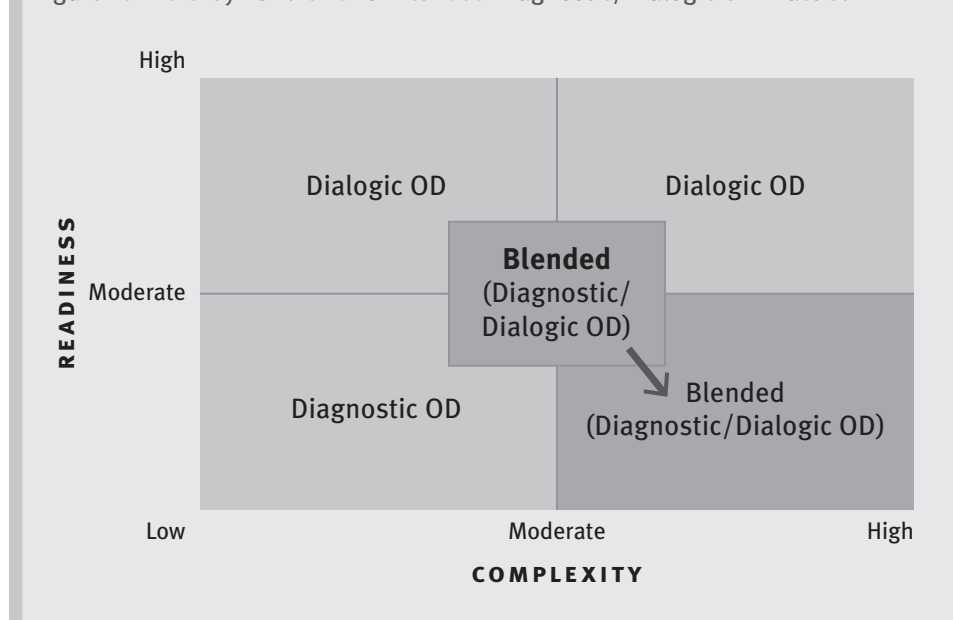
intervention resulted in data being generated and played back to the system as a common foundation for ensuing dialogue. The small group conversations at the leadership and staff meetings that were then encouraged using dialogic interventions and facilitation served two purposes. First, it moved the groups forward in their planning and implementing of the changes. Second, it gave leaders and staff an opportunity to experience Dialogic OD and assess for themselves the value and impact of engaging in this way. As such, it created openness in the client system for large scale engagement and dialogue as the basis for implementing ongoing consolidation changes.

The client agreed that given the history of limited Dialogic OD practice in a system that was philosophically biased to diagnosis and measurement, any attempt to start initially with dialogic interventions would have been perceived as touchy-feely and would have failed. The blending of interventions and methodologies was crucial to the success of the OD work and the subsequent dialogic interventions in particular. The long-term focus and sequence of interventions was also critical to the progress that was made—A single event would not have accomplished the same level of momentum. In the words of the Executive Director and Consolidation Lead, "given the opportunity to lead the consolidation of Medical Imaging again, the only thing I would do differently is start the

foundational OD work and whole system engagement earlier."

Implications for Practice

The key learning from the Medical Imaging case in advancing the practice of Dialogic OD is that it is possible to blend and have diagnostic and dialogic methodologies co-exist. Furthermore, Diagnostic OD can be used as a lead-in to the practice of Dialogic OD, based on the assumption that Diagnostic OD generally reflects the objectivity and data-oriented perspectives in most organizations. Setting the foundation for dialogic practice can be accomplished by engaging in dialogic facilitation; in effect, using Diagnostic OD tools to initiate dialogic conversations.

Two key questions must be answered to determine whether a situation requires a blended diagnostic/dialogic practice in the grey zone. What is the level of complexity of the case? What is the level of readiness of the organization for dialogic practice? *Figure 1* presents a grid outlining how OD practice might be adjusted based on the dimensions of complexity and readiness. In particular, from what we have learned from this case, a blended approach is most appropriate for situations in the grey zone where the level of complexity is moderate to high, but there is moderate to low readiness for dialogic practice. A high degree of leadership and organizational readiness is crucial for dialogic practice because of

the emergent and unpredictable nature of the process and outcomes associated with this approach. Dialogic practice requires a foundation of trust from organizational members that self-organization is acceptable. Furthermore, leaders must be willing to give up control of the change process and outcomes because any attempt to control these once Dialogic OD work starts will undermine the process and erode trust. Where readiness is low, dialogic processes in the experience of this case were met with cynicism. In addition, where the change complexity is high, defined by a context where there are multiple vested parties and variables to consider, Dialogic OD is more likely to lead to change that sustains in the long-term. Thus, in the context of high complexity and low readiness as in the Medical Imaging case, a blended approach where Diagnostic OD methodologies are used with dialogic facilitation and principles creates a foundation of trust and openness for subsequent dialogic practice.

As organizational readiness for dialogic practice increases, a fully dialogic approach can be consistently used as it becomes standard practice and the cultural norm for addressing change, regardless of the level of complexity of the change. However, where readiness is low and the complexity of the situation is also low with well-defined variables and a low number of impacted parties, a Diagnostic OD process is most appropriate.

References

Argyris, C. (2005). Double-loop learning in organizations: A theory of action perspective. In K. G. Smith & M. A. Hitt (Eds.), *Great minds in management* (pp. 261–279). Oxford, UK: University Press.

Bouckenooghe, D. (2010). Positioning change recipients' attitudes toward change in the organizational change literature. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 46(4), 500–531. DOI: 10.1177/0021886310367944.

Boyd, N. M., & Bright, D. (2007). Appreciative inquiry as a mode of action research for community psychology.

Journal of Community Psychology, 35(8), 1019–1036. DOI: 10.1002/jcop.20208.

Bushe, G. R. (2010). Turning away from diagnosis. In W. J. Rothwell, J. M. Stavros, R. L. Sullivan, & A. Sullivan (Eds.), *Practicing organization development: A guide for leading change* (pp. 617–623). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Bushe, G. R., & Marshak, R. J. (2009). Revisioning organization development: Diagnostic and dialogic premises and patterns of practice. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 45(3), 348–368.

Cameron, K. (2005). Organization effectiveness: Its demise and re-emergence through positive organization scholarship. In K. G. Smith & M. A. Hitt (Eds.), *Great minds in management* (pp. 304–330). Oxford, UK: University Press.

Coghlan, D. (2000). The interlevel dynamics of large system change. *Organization Development Journal*, 18(1), 41–50.

Holman, P., Devane, T., & Cady, S. (Eds.) (2007). *The change handbook: The definitive resource on today's best methods for engaging whole systems.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Oswick, C. (2009). Revisioning or re-versioning? A commentary on diagnostic and dialogic forms of organization development. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 45(3), 369–374.

Raelin, J. A. (2006). Action learning and action science: Are they different? In J. V. Gallos (Ed.), *Organization Development: A Jossey-Bass Reader* (pp. 202–222). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Rothwell, W. J., Stavros, J. M., & Sullivan, R. L. (2010). Organization development and change. In W. J. Rothwell, J. M. Stavros, R. L. Sullivan, & A. Sullivan (Eds.), *Practicing organization development: A guide for leading change* (pp. 11–42). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Rothwell, W. J., & Sullivan, R. L. (2010). Change process and models. In W. J. Rothwell, J. M. Stavros, R. L. Sullivan, & A. Sullivan (Eds.), *Practicing organization development: A guide for leading change* (pp. 43–70). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization.* New York, NY: Doubleday.

Wolf, J. A., Hanson, H., & Moir, M. J. (Eds.). (2011). *Organization development in healthcare: High impact practices for a complex and changing environment.* Charlotte, NC: Information age Publishing.

Yabome Gilpin Jackson, PhD, is a Senior Organization Development Consultant at Fraser Health, Surrey, BC. She has also worked with Vancouver Coastal Health and on various healthcare projects as a Consultant. Her 10 years' experience includes work in private and nonprofit sectors. She holds a Doctorate and Master in Human Development/Organization Systems from Fielding Graduate University. She has an MBA from Simon Fraser University, where she teaches OD and Change. She can be reached at *yabome@ supportingdevelopment.com.*

Figure 2: Poem Spontaneously Developed by Medical Imaging Staff at the Pilot Whole System Engagement
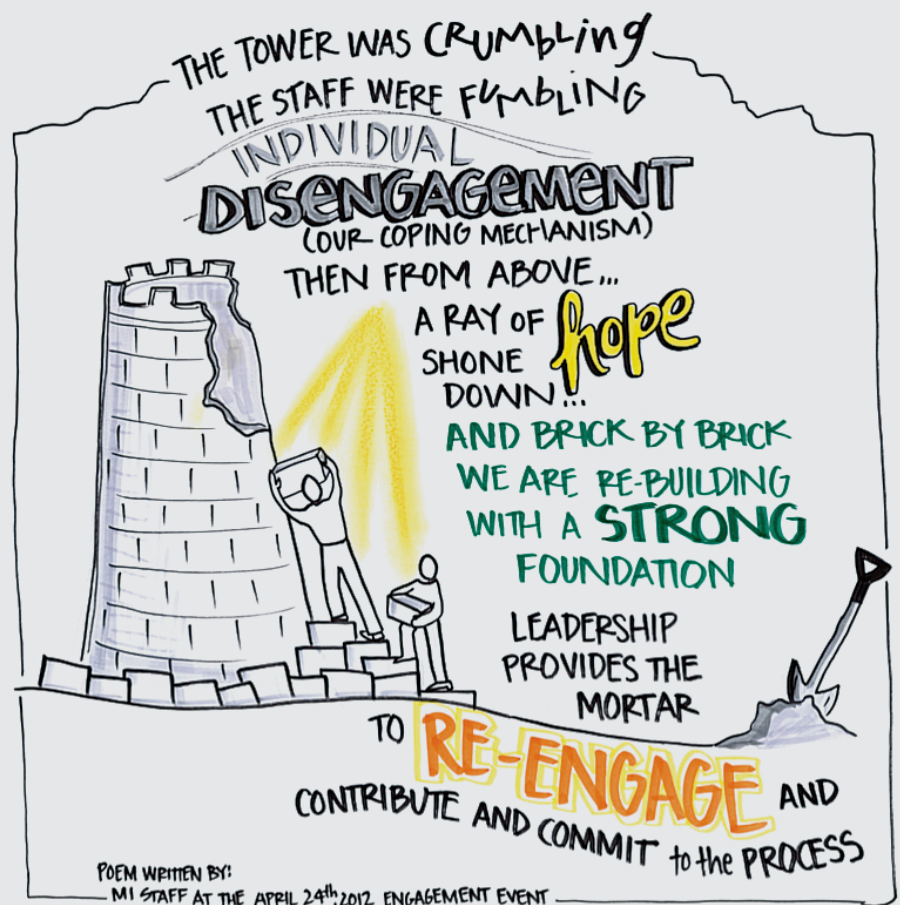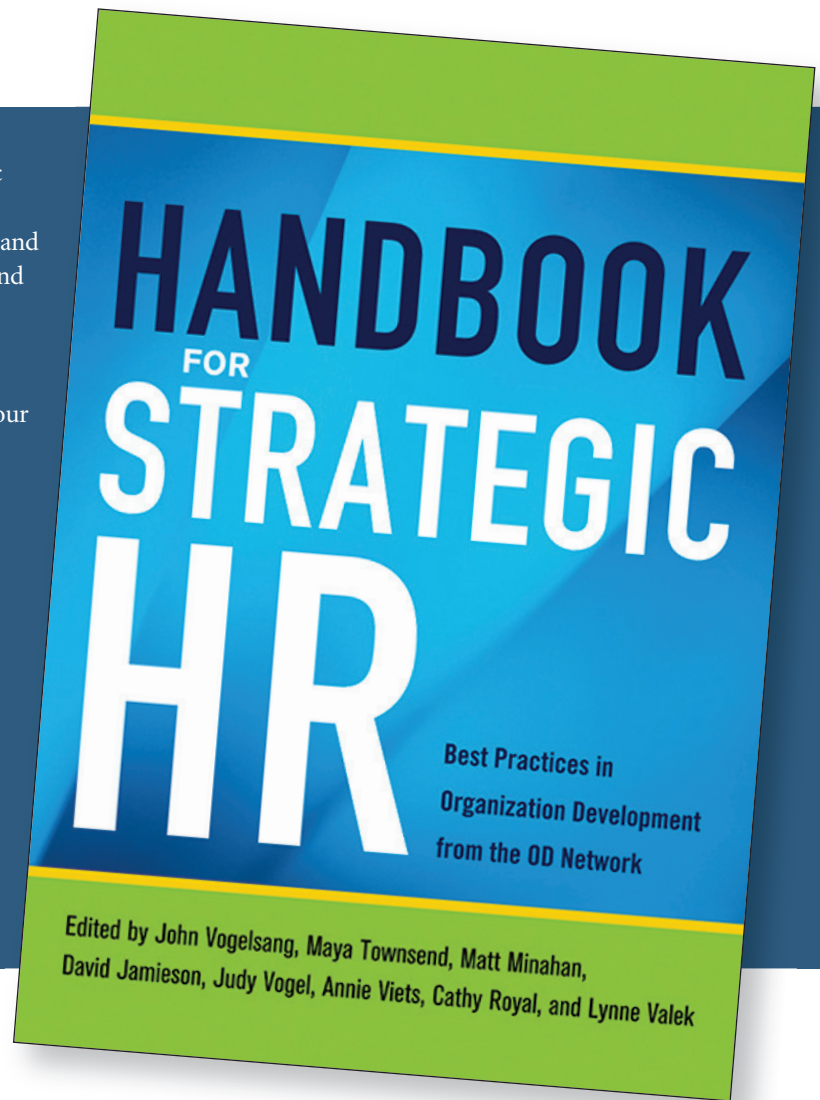
Things are changing in the world of human resources.

Human Resource Management is changing. Moving beyond basic transactional functions, your role as an HR professional has now evolved to working with executives and managers to set priorities and guide change for your organization. Drawing upon the research and practice of seasoned Organization Development professionals, *Handbook for Strategic HR* collects articles found in the esteemed journal *OD Practitioner* to give you a full overview of the core knowledge and skills you need to play a trusted advisory role in your organization.

A compendium of the best thinking on the subject, *Handbook for Strategic HR* supplies you with methods to help you: see the big picture, think systemically, and strategically identify where best to foster change in your organization; team up with consultants and senior level staff in leading change projects; put employee engagement to practical use in the important work your organization is doing; operate effectively in cross-cultural and virtual working situations; and much more.

Featuring 78 articles containing creative approaches, practical tips, and proven methods that will help you add value to your company, *Handbook for Strategic HR* is the gold standard resource on the important topic of organizational development.

HANDBOOK FOR STRATEGIC HR

Best Practices in Organization Development from the OD Network

Edited by John Vogelsang, Maya Townsend, Matt Minahan, David Jamieson, Judy Vogel, Annie Viets, Cathy Royal, and Lynne Valek

About the Editors:

OD PRACTITIONER is the quarterly journal of the Organization Development Network, an international association whose members are committed to practicing organization development as an applied behavioral science.

The Handbook for Strategic HR is edited by: John Vogelsang, Maya Townsend, Matt Minahan, David Jamieson, Judy Vogel, Annie Viets, Cathy Royal, and Lynne Valek

ISBN: 978-0-8144-3249-5
Hardcover, $60.00 US

A compendium of the best thinking on the subject, *Handbook for Strategic HR* includes 78 articles from the renowned *OD Practitioner*. It introduces readers to core organization development strategies and skills, giving them creative approaches, practical tips, and proven methods to help them:

- See the big picture, think systemically, and strategically identify where best to foster change in their organization
- Team up with consultants and senior-level staff in leading a change project
- Put employee engagement to practical use and involve "minds, hearts, and hands" in the important work of the organization
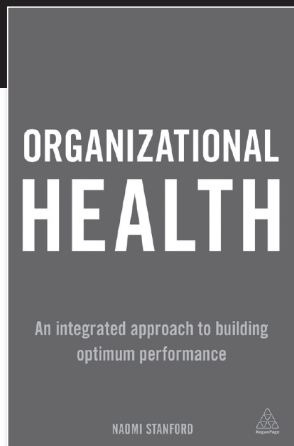- Operate effectively in cross-cultural and virtual working situations

Comprehensive and practical, this forward-thinking book enables readers to become key partners in leading their organizations forward.

NTL INSTITUTE
Learn it. Live it.™

Advancing... KNOWLEDGE • SKILLS • AWARENESS • EXPERIENCE • CHANGE

In today's global workplace, being effective means not only knowing what works, but also achieving results with diverse others. Get skilled with NTL's experiential training. Below is a partial list of 2013 programs:

The T-Group Experience:

Human Interaction Laboratory:

January 20-25, 2013 | DC Metro Area
February 3-8, 2013 | Seattle, WA
March 10-15, 2013 | Ft. Lauderdale, FL
April 14-19, 2013 | Chicago, IL
May 5-10, 2013 | DC Metro Area
June 16-21, 2013 | Bethel, ME
July 21-26, 2013 | DC Metro Area

Human Interaction Laboratory II:

April 21-26, 2013 | DC Metro Area

Interpersonal Skills for Leadership Success:

February 3-8, 2013 | DC Metro Area
May 19-24, 2013 | Seattle, WA

Facilitating Groups & Teams:

Group Process Consulting in Organizations:
February 11-15, 2013 | DC Metro Area

Creating and Sustaining High Performance Teams:
July 8-12, 2013 | DC Metro Area

Working Globally:

Collaborating as a Global Team Player:
April 15-17, 2013 | DC Metro Area

Global Team Dynamics:
August 27-30, 2013 | DC Metro Area

Organization Development:

Start Up - Creating a Consulting Contract:
February 25-28, 2013 | Seattle, WA

Appreciative Inquiry - Strategic Planning:
March 4-8, 2013 | DC Metro Area

Diagnosing Organizations with Impact:
March 11-15, 2013 | DC Metro Area

Intervention Strategies:
March 18-22, 2013 | DC Metro Area

Theory and Practice in OD:
April 7-12, 2013 | DC Metro Area

Leading Organizational Change:
April 9-12, 2013 | Seattle, WA

Facilitating and Managing Complex Systems Change:
April 29-May 3, 2013 | DC Metro Area

Personal Growth & Communication:

High Impact Relationships:
April 29-30, 2013 | Seattle, WA

Self Awareness and Being:
June 10-13, 2013 | DC Metro Area

Coaching:

Coaching for Performance and Accountability:
March 4-6, 2013 | Chicago, IL

Coaching Tools and Techniques:
June 6-7, 2013 | DC Metro Area

go to ... WWW.NTL.ORG

Organization Development Network

Advancing the Theory and Practice of OD

330 North Wabash Avenue
Suite 2000
Chicago, IL 60611

OD Network Products and Services

Publications

» *OD Practitioner,* the flagship publication of the OD Network, is a peer-reviewed quarterly journal.

» *OD Seasonings* is an online journal highlighting the experience of seasoned practitioners.

» *Practicing OD,* our online ezine, provides practice-related concepts, processes, and tools in short articles by and for busy practitioners.

All three publications and their submission guidelines are available online at *http://www.odnetwork.org.*

Member Benefits

Low annual dues provide members with a host of benefits:

» Free subscriptions to all three of our publications.

» Free access to online job ads in the OD Network Job Exchange.

» Discounts on conference registration, OD Network products (including back issues of this journal), Job Exchange postings, professional liability insurance, books from John Wiley & Sons, and more.

» OD Network Member Roster, an essential networking tool, in print and in a searchable online database.

» Online Toolkits on action research, consulting skills, and HR for OD—foundational theory and useful tools to enhance your practice.

Professional Development

OD Network professional development events offer cutting-edge theory and practice. Learn more at *http://www.odnetwork.org.*

» OD Network Conferences, held annually, provide unsurpassed professional development and networking opportunities.

» Regular webinars include events in the Theory and Practice Series, Conference Series, and OD Network Live Briefs.

Online Resources

In addition to the online resources for members only, the OD Network website offers valuable tools that are open to the public:

» Education directory of OD-related degree and certificate programs.

» Catalog of OD professional development and networking events.

» Bookstore of titles recommended by OD Network members.

» Links to some of the best OD resources available.

» E-mail discussion lists that allow OD practitioners worldwide to share ideas.

» Lists, with contact information, of regional and international OD networks.

» Case studies illustrating the value of OD to potential client organizations.