

Dialogic Organization Development

Recapturing the Spirit of Inquiry

GERVASE BUSHE & BOB MARSHAK

FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON DIALOGIC OD

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Change has changed

Since 1985 how we go about trying to transform organizations has itself transformed.

In North America, the two biggest influences in practice have been Appreciative Inquiry and Open Space Technology and the two biggest influences in theory have been Social Construction and Complexity Science.

Dozens of new techniques have arisen...mostly without any theoretical basis or explanation.

Some Dialogic OD Techniques

Art of Convening (Neal and Neal)

Art of Hosting (artofhosting.org)

Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider)

Complex Responsive Processes (Stacey, Shaw)

Conference Model (Axelrod)

Coordinated Management of Meaning (Pearce & Cronen)

Cycle of Resolution (Levine)

Dynamic Facilitation (Rough)

Engaging Emergence (Holman)

Future Search (Weisbord)

Narrative Mediation (Winslade & Monk)

Open Space Technology (Owen)

Organizational Learning Conversations (Bushe)

Reflexive Inquiry (Oliver)

Real Time Strategic Change (Jacobs)

Re-Description (Storch)

Search Conference (Emery)

Solution Focused Dialogue (Jackson & McKergow)

Structure of Belonging (Block)

Syntegration (Beer)

Systemic Sustainability (Amadeo & Cox)

Talking stick (pre-industrial)

Technology of Participation (Spencer)

The Circle Way (Baldwin)

Visual Explorer (Palus & Horth)

Work Out (Ashkenas)

World Café (Brown & Issacs)

Why do they sometimes work and sometimes not?

Dialogic OD is an attempt to answer that question...

We think it requires changing how we think....

About change

About organizations

About leadership

About consulting

As Ralph Stacey says in our book...

The dominant narrative talks about	But what we mostly experience is
Organizations in the abstract, as things and processes	Organizations as conversations
Individuals making choices and taking action	Our interdependence and how we constrain and enable each other.
Wise, heroic leaders	No one can control what everyone else is choosing and doing
Rational, analytical ways of making decisions	Far from being purely rational, people are emotional
Generalizable tools and techniques	Uncertain situations and local contingencies
Results coming from the choices, intentions and strategies made by leaders and teams	Results emerging from the interplay of all the stakeholders in both intended and unintended ways
Uncertainty and ambiguity but then proceed to act as if there was certainty	We have very little control and we can never be certain what will happen next

What we have learned is that when it comes to change...

Every organization and every situation is different because...

- We are all meaning making beings, depending on the stories we tell ourselves and each other to make sense of the fragmented pieces of information that come or don't come our way.
- The way meaning influences our actions, which influence how we make meaning, are always in motion, even when they seem stable.

The search for “best practices”, for tools to apply to create change, are only useful in very limited circumstances.

In the complexity of real life in real organizations, there isn't any cookbook, but there are good questions, and ways of thinking, that seem to create more consistent, positive outcomes...

We call it the Dialogic Mindset – a set of assumptions that seem to underlie all Dialogic OD processes

- Reality and relationships are socially constructed
- Organizations are meaning making systems
- Language, broadly defined, matters
- Creating change requires changing conversations
- Groups and organizations are inherently self-organizing
- Increase differentiation before seeking coherence
- Transformational change is more emergent than planned
- Consultants are a part of the process, not apart from the process

The Secret Sauce: The three ingredients we think produce the transformational potential of Dialogic OD

➤ Emergence

- when a disruption in the ongoing social construction of reality is stimulated or engaged in a way that leads to a more complex re-organization.

➤ Narrative

- when there is a change to the main storylines people use to explain and bring coherence to their organizational lives

➤ Generative Images

- When words or symbols are introduced or emerge that allow people to see old things in new ways

Emergence

Emergence is nature's way of changing, in which increasingly complex order arises from disorder.

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.

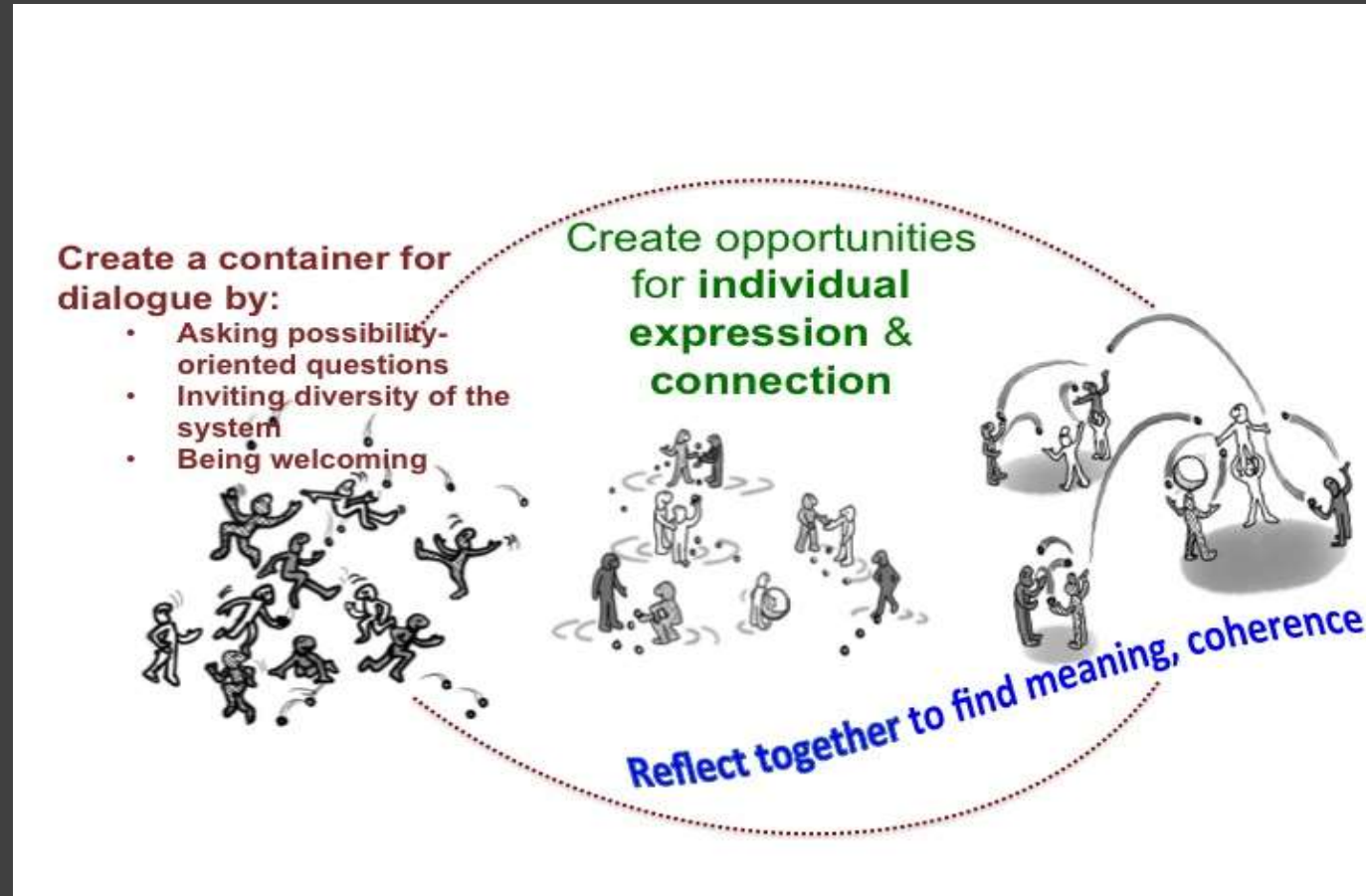
Emergence and Change

Change is part of the continuous process of self-organizing that occurs in all human collectives.

New organizational behaviors and practices result from emergent rather than directed processes.

After disruption, emphasize differentiation before seeking new coherence.

Peggy Holman gives us an image of planned emergence



Narrative and Discourse

Language (words, stories, metaphors, texts, narratives, etc.) does more than simply convey information.

Instead language creates, frames, sustains, and transforms social experience, shapes organizational members' mindsets, and influences the resulting organizational behavior.

- Words create worlds
- Talking is action
- *“Speaking differently rather than arguing well is the chief instrument in cultural change” (Rorty, 1989)*

Narratives

- ▶ Narratives are coherent stories that are shared by a group of people and explain how things are, help them make sense of their world, and provide a rationale for decisions and actions.
- ▶ It's assumed that in any organization there are a variety of different narratives about the same things.
- ▶ Dialogic OD processes do not work at deciding which narratives are “right”, but they can try to:
 - ▶ help people look at the consequences of the narratives they hold,
 - ▶ understand the variety of narratives influencing situations,
 - ▶ recognize which narratives are “privileged” or suppressed,
 - ▶ and/or support the emergence of new narratives

Generative Images

“The most powerful force for change is a new idea”

Suresh Srivastva

- ▶ A combination of words, symbols, pictures that allows us to see old things in new ways and thereby furnish new alternatives for action that we didn't realize we had
- ▶ A very generative image is also attractive and compelling – we want to act in these new ways
- ▶ A generative image is not a picture or an idea, it is an ambiguous combination of words that opens up people's thinking and leads to new ideas

Dialogic Conditions for Transformational Change

Disrupt the status quo – we know things don't hold together anymore and we can't go back

Identify the adaptive challenge – hold the complexity and acknowledge the need for emergence

Create a container – a space where new conversations take place

Emphasize generativity – future focused, possibility centric as opposed to problem solving

Foster conditions that lead to new ideas – without prior commitment to any specific change

Enrich social networks – so people with similar ideas and motivation can find each other

Encourage self-organizing experimentation – don't try to pick winners, but see when they emerge

But in every situation...

- How we apply that Dialogic Mindset
- How we create the conditions for Dialogic Transformation
- How the Three Ingredients are mixed and stirred

will be different!

And that is why inquiry is central,

and the spirit of inquiry the force that animates our work,

and what will always set Organization Development apart from other
“change management” processes

and why the world needs OD, now more than ever!

We will now have about 30 minutes before the first workshop session starts

Refreshments are right outside the doors

Please make a point of introducing yourself to some people you don't know and discuss your reactions to our ideas about transformational change and the evolution of organization development