An Introduction to Dialogic Organization Development

# Dialogic Organization Development

## Companion Booklet to the BMI Series in Dialogic OD

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# Volumes in the BMI Series in Dialogic OD

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| Sarah Lewis | Co-Constructing With the Dialogic Design Team |

If you have an idea for a short (under 30,000 words) book on a specific aspect of Dialogic OD practice, please contact either Gervase (bushe@sfu.ca) or Bob (bobmarshak@aol.com) to discuss.

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# Preface

If you are reading this, chances are good that you have recently been introduced to the concept of Dialogic Organization Development (OD) and plan to read one or more books in the BMI series in Dialogic OD. The purpose of this "backgrounder" is to provide a basic understanding of the theory and practice of Dialogic OD so that each of the books in the series can stay short and focused on one aspect of practice without having to explain the foundations of the field.

If you are interested in our more academic work on the foundations of Dialogic OD you can download two articles from the academic resources page on our website and read them in this order:

1. Revisioning Organization Development: Diagnostic and Dialogic Premises and Patterns of Practice (2009)
2. The Dialogic Mindset in Organization Development (2014)

And if you want the full meal deal our book, *Dialogic Organization Development: The Theory and Practice of Transformational Change* (2015) has 17 chapters by leading theorists and practitioners that cover the material in this booklet in much more detail.

# Introduction to Organization Development

Organization Development (OD) emerged in the 1960s as an identifiable field of practice that included action research, survey research, T-Groups, humanistic psychology, open systems theory, team building, and process consultation. Since then, ideas and methods have enriched and expanded its range of theories and approaches. Many of these ideas and methods have converged since the 1980s into a form of OD that differs in important ways from earlier OD theory and practice. We have labeled this recent development "Dialogic OD" and contrasted

it with forms of "Diagnostic OD" based on the earlier, foundational ideas and practices (Bushe and Marshak, 2009, 2014). Dialogic OD is not a new method – it's a way of grouping a set of OD practices and explaining what is going on when they are used successfully.

We can't emphasize enough that these are not two different methods so much as two different mindsets. They are different ways of seeing and thinking that lead to different decisions and actions. Further, both mindsets probably operate in any one OD person's practice, and they are probably mixed and matched depending on the needs of the situation. While it is true that there are many different methods that lend themselves to a Dialogic approach to change (see Table 2), many of those methods can also be used from a Diagnostic mind-set.

In this booklet we'll start by describing the difference between a diagnostic and dialogic mind-set, and then focus in on the key aspects of a dialogic mind-set and how this translates into OD practice.

## Diagnostic Concepts

Diagnostic OD is based on the change theories developed in the 1940s-50s by Kurt Lewin and Ron Lippitt. Here, change is a planned process of "unfreezing" a current social equilibrium, creating "movement" to a new and more desirable future equilibrium that then needs to be "refrozen" to sustain the change. A key aspect of planned change is action research, which includes "diagnosis" of the existing situation - the elements, factors and forces maintaining the current state – in order to know where and how to intervene to induce movement in the direction of the intended desired state

A second key element of the diagnostic mindset came from Lewin's conception that within the social field of forces, some forces promote

and some resist whatever change is desired. Lewin argued that reducing resistance was an easier and more productive route to change than adding more force for change. As a result, the diagnostic mindset is especially interested in methods of identifying and reducing resistance. Participation in decision-making is the key solution OD offers, aligned as it is with democratic and humanistic values, and the need for a collective learning process to support change. This usually involves engaging small groups (teams, task forces, diagonal slices of the organization) in an action research process intended to diagnose the real factors and forces impacting a situation and thereby create the motivation and commitment needed for unfreezing, movement and refreezing. Ideally, those impacted by a change are involved in and/or perform the data collection, analysis, decision-making and action taking with the guidance of the OD consultant.

A third core element was added in the late 1960s when open systems theories became an integral part of OD, leading to models of how organizational elements (mission, strategies, structures, information and reward systems, leadership, culture, etc.) needed to be aligned with each other and strategically responsive to external environments in order to position the organization for future success. The contrast of the new "organic" metaphor of organization with the prevailing "machine" metaphor contributed to the notion of organizational health, and healthy processes, as a common element in the Diagnostic OD Mindset. Good diagnosis would uncover the ways in which any particular group or organization varied from the "healthy" ideal or was deficient in one way or another.

The diagnostic mindset continues today through widespread interest in such things as: discovering best practices, bench-marking against world

Table 1 Comparison of Diagnostic and Dialogic OD

| | Diagnostic OD | Dialogic OD |
|---|---|---|
| Influenced by | Classical science, positivism, and modernist philosophy | Complexity science, social constructionism, critical and post-modern philosophy |
| Dominant Org Construct | Organizations are like living systems | Organizations are networks of meaning making |
| Ontology and Epistemology | • Reality is an objective fact<br>• There is a single reality<br>• Truth is transcendent and discoverable<br>• Reality can be discovered using rational and analytic processes | • Reality is socially constructed<br>• There are multiple realities<br>• Truth is immanent and emerges from the situation<br>• Reality is negotiated and may involve power and political processes |
| Constructs of Change | • Usually Teleological<br>• Collecting and applying valid data using objective problem-solving methods leads to change<br>• Change can be created, planned and managed<br>• Change is episodic, linear, and goal oriented | • Often Dialogical or Dialectical<br>• Creating containers and processes to produce generative ideas leads to change<br>• Change can be encouraged but is mainly self-organizing and emergent<br>• Change may be continuous and/or cyclical |
| Focus of Change | Emphasis on changing behavior and what people do | Emphasis on changing mindsets and what people think |

From Bushe & Marshak, 2009

class organizations, collecting the "right" data, as well as continual searches for the singular cause of some problematic situation that can be fixed by applying analysis and expertise. Because this orientation tends to search for the "right answer", "best solution", "latest ideas", and so on, there is also an implicit tendency to seek out experts who can supply tested solutions. Table 1, adapted from Bushe and Marshak (2009) summarizes some of the broader differences between Diagnostic and Dialogic OD.

## Dialogic Concepts

Dialogic OD has emerged from the confluence of a number of significantly different concepts and practices associated with organizational change, as shown in Table 1. These are still being developed in differing combinations, but all in a way to suggest that Dialogic OD proceeds from a different mindset about change, even though it generally adheres to the same underlying values and ethics as all forms of OD (covered in Bushe and Marshak 2009, and 2014).

Our analysis of a range of theories and practices that have influenced the OD practices listed in Table 2, as well as other dialogic approaches, suggest seven key premises that we think form the basis of the Dialogic OD Mindset as it exists today (Bushe and Marshak, 2014). These premises rest on two important intellectual movements that have fundamentally reshaped how scholars and many practitioners think about organizations and change, and that have come into prominence in OD since the 1980s and 90s: the science of complexity and interpretivist social science. The scientific discovery that what appeared to be chaotic systems actually produce order and that order continuously emerges in nature without planning or control has catalyzed a revolution in thinking about all human processes, from individual cognition to economic development. The evolution of complex adaptive systems

## Table 2: Examples of Dialogic Change Methods with Associated Authors

Art of Convening (Neal and Neal)
Art of Hosting (artofhosting.org)
Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider)
Community Learning (Fulton)
Conference Model (Axelrod)
Coordinated Management of Meaning (Pearce & Cronen)
Cycle of Resolution (Levine)
Dynamic Facilitation (Rough, Zubizarreta)
Engaging Emergence (Holman)
Future Search (Weisbord & Janoff)
Intergroup Dialogue (Nagada, Gurin)
Narrative Mediation (Winslade & Monk)
Open Space Technology (Owen)
Participative Design (M. Emery)
PeerSpirit Circles (Baldwin)
REAL model (Wasserman & Gallegos)
Real Time Strategic Change (Jacobs)
Search Conference (Emery & Emery)
Six Conversations (Block)
SOAR (Stavros)
Solution Focused Dialogue (Jackson & McKergow)
Sustained Dialogue (Saunders)
Syntegration (Beer)
Systemic Sustainability (Amadeo & Cox)
Technology of Participation (Spencer)
Visual Explorer (Palus & Horth)
Whole Scale Change (Dannemiller)
Work Out (Ashkenas)
World Café (Brown & Issacs)

You can download a bibliography with more examples at B-M-institute.com

theory (Kaufmann, 1995) has had a large effect on the Dialogic Mindset.

Philosophical movements (often grouped under the label post-modernism) that challenge the key tenets of the modern scientific world view have slowly gathered influence in the social sciences to the point where they now verge on being dominant. We have grouped many of these under the label "interpretivist" in that they all agree that the world is not something objectively independent of us, but rather is a product of how we interpret it. Social construction (Barrett, 2015; Gergen, 2009; Searle, 1995), the idea that social reality is something created through human interaction, has been a major influence in creating the Dialogic Mindset, as has the belief that language doesn't just convey information, but actively shapes how we think and therefore the world we live in (Heidegger, 1971; Rorty, 1979; Wittgenstein, 1967). The seven premises and three change processes of the Dialogic Mindset, that we review below, are a melding of these two intellectual movements.

## Key Premises of the Dialogic OD Mindset

The theories and ideas informing the Dialogic OD Mindset are introduced here in the form of seven key premises that underlie the effective use of any of the methods listed in Table 2.

### Reality and relationships are socially constructed.

What people believe to be true, right, and important emerge through socialization and day-to-day conversations. In one organization, the "bottom line" is all-important; in another, it is growth and market share. Remember the dot-com bubble, when businesses without revenue were trading at astronomical valuations? That "irrational exuberance" was a socially constructed reality. Barrett et al (1995) demonstrate how the introduction of quality management, like any change, doesn't happen all of a sudden, but rather meaning and relationships are slowly changed

through thousands of conversations. In 1980, one of us worked at General Motors, when quality in that organization meant conformance to specifications, was more expensive to achieve, and automotive engineers knew better what a quality car was than customers. By 1990, quality meant whatever the customer thought it was, and it could be achieved at lower costs by building it right the first time. This change did not occur as a result of any single change program, planned set of events, or training program, but rather emerged over time after many different change programs, many different events, and lots of zig zags in strategic direction. And yet, there were still groups where a different "quality narrative" held sway.

Social construction is powerfully influenced by what leaders talk about, share, endorse, read, comment upon, ignore, dismiss, negate, or downplay. Nonetheless, there are other powerful influences, and leaders cannot just insert or implement new social "realities" like they might a mandated reorganization, new strategy, or new performance standards. Indeed, attempts to implement a new social reality using the same kind of processes one would use to implement a new computer system always results in unintended consequences—usually, unhappy ones (Kotter and Heskett, 1992; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003). Social reality emerges out of the multitude of day-to-day interactions embedded in social contexts. The Dialogic Mindset pays close attention to what people in the organization are saying, reading, and writing about organizational dynamics. Ignoring interactions that are dismissive of critical issues could be as dangerous as ignoring downturns in productivity, sales, and revenues. It becomes an essential aspect of change to encourage interactions, conversations, and resulting social agreements about what the organization, its people, and its stakeholders should pay attention to and be concerned with, and then encourage the development of new ideas to address them.

### Organizations are social networks of meaning-making.

We are meaning-making creatures, compelled to make sense of what we and others are doing and what is going on around us (Weick, 1995). In organizations, an active fantasy life is always present where people make up what is going on in the organization and with their leaders—what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what they are likely to do next. How much is fantasy and how much is reality depends on how much straight-talk takes place, who talks with who, and how willing leaders are to be transparent. And, of course, we don't just make sense of our leaders, we make sense of other groups, customers, suppliers, and all-important stakeholders. When things aren't making sense, people might go and directly ask the source of confusion "what's going on?" "Why did this happen?" But more often than not, people will talk to trusted colleagues, friends and spouses (or just themselves) to try and figure out what is going on. These networks create common beliefs about what others are thinking, feeling, and wanting, and then people act on this sense-making as if their beliefs are true (Bushe, 2009). The Dialogic Mindset assumes that what happens in organizations is influenced more by how people interact and make common meaning than by how presumably objective factors and forces impact the organization. This also means that attention to, listening to, and including marginalized or excluded voices is critical for innovation in a diverse world with a complex array of factors, influences, and stakeholders.

A Diagnostic OD Mindset might seek to measure and diagnose the competitive environment and the organization's existing vision, mission, strategy, structure, operating systems, technological capabilities, human resources practices, and the like. Drawing on behavioral science research, these factors would be explicitly "measured" against some model, standards, or theoretical propositions.

Then, remedies to develop or re-align the organization for competitive success would be developed with the client. This mindset assumes that an organizational change's success and failure depends on how well interventions to directly change these factors are developed and implemented.

Environmental forces and organizational factors are obviously important, but OD practitioners who also view organizations as social networks of meaning-making will pay equal or even greater attention to what people throughout the organization are thinking and saying and how they make sense of their daily work experiences.

### Language, how meaning is made, and the narratives which guide people's experience, are central to organizational change

The meanings and interpretations that arise in organizations are shaped and reinforced by the narratives or "storylines" that help explain to people how to make sense of what they see taking place (Marshak, Grant and Floris, 2015). For example, if a company decides to build a new manufacturing plant in a developing country, how people will make meaning of this expansion will depend on the story they have about the organization, its competitive environment, and its leaders. People who have a story about the organizations' leaders as caring, capable stewards may decide that off-shoring cuts costs and ensures our survival and growth. People who have a story about their leaders as ruthless and greedy may decide that off-shoring cuts people and leads to job losses and decline.

The Dialogic Mindset believes that the actual reasons for why leaders take whatever decisions they take are not as influential as the interpretations people make about those decisions. It's the narratives people hold that will determine how people see and react to leadership

decisions. Developing new narratives and meanings to shape new and agreed upon ways of thinking is a core part of Dialogic OD. New narratives stimulate new meanings which in turn will allow previously impossible or incompatible actions to be seen as not only possible, but long overdue.

This means Dialogic OD practitioners attend to what meanings are being made in the organization, how those meanings come into being, what sustains or challenges them, and what the leader might do to encourage the emergence of new meanings to meet new situations. To engage stakeholders in a generative change process, they will encourage some meanings or interpretations over others. Finally, while leaders may be able to influence meanings people make about important organizational factors, they will not be able to dictate them. Therefore, Dialogic OD practitioners will also seek to influence the processes of meaning-making, including the use of various structured engagements and events intended to catalyze inquiry, dialogue, and decision.

### Organizations are continuously changing, in both intended and unintended ways, with multiple changes occurring at various speeds.

One of the legacies from 20th century thinking that influences the Diagnostic OD Mindset is the tendency to think of organizations as entities with inherent stability (inertia) where change is something that occasionally happens between periods of stability through processes of unfreezing, movement, and refreezing (Marshak, 2004). Certainly, there are times of stability and forces for stability, but the Dialogic Mindset sees organizations as flow processes in which lots of things are moving at different speeds and change is merely a matter of temporal perspective. From this point of view, "stability" is just slow-moving change. Furthermore, what is changing and why things are changing is

often out of the hands of any person or group. Change inside organizations can be the consequence of changes in the political, social, technological, economic, or natural environment. Any single "planned change" has to contend with a multitude of other forces pushing the organization in a myriad of ways. The larger and more complex the organization, the more likely a variety of planned changes are simultaneously underway and at various stages of unfolding. The image of change as a unitary sequence of strategic analysis, visioning, and implementation seems like an oversimplification or very limited view to the Dialogic Mindset (Stacey, 2015).

For example, an organization, with which one of us consulted, was formed as a major division of an international corporation through the acquisition of two smaller independent companies in North America and Europe. The presidents of these smaller companies were retained to run them, but the organization put a new CEO in place to oversee the total operation. Initially, the division focused change efforts on operational efficiencies in manufacturing. While working on this, the need for a more "integrated" division emerged as a pressing requirement. At first, the meaning of "an integrated global organization" was unclear, yet sparked new conversations that led to efforts to change the division's structure, brand and marketing plans, career pathways, and organizational identity and name. As these efforts were underway, outside factors contributed even more requirements for change. Stock market analysts were anxious to see improved profitability after the acquisitions and pressed for cuts in employees and expenses; the competitive environment was in the midst of shifting from competition based on quality to competition based on price; the costs of base materials began to shift wildly; and political factors in Asia were impeding efforts towards another planned acquisition in order to complete the original vision for major operations in North America,

Europe, and Asia. The political and cultural dynamics within the top team composed of a new CEO, two former presidents (who each thought he should be CEO), and members from Columbia, France, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the USA all compounded these perturbations. All of this unfolded over a period of only two and a half years!

### Groups and organizations are inherently self-organizing; disruption is required for transformational adaptation and change.

In nature, order emerges without a plan or leadership. Science has recently taught us that complex behavior emerges from a few simple rules. This is easily seen when catastrophes occur and large numbers of people are able to self-organize rapidly in response. Self-organization occurs in organizations wherever and whenever there is ambiguity and space for innovation and adaptation to emerge. Whether that self-organization will be more or less beneficial to the organization depends on leadership and the narratives that guide people's meaning-making. Traditional management assumes that without proactive leadership, there will be disorganization, anxiety, and chaos, so order needs to be imposed. It may be true that you can impose (temporary) order more quickly than it will emerge, and therefore may seem like a more productive route, especially when anxiety is high. However, leaders cannot unilaterally impose the meanings people will make of situations. Furthermore, well-intended efforts to control may lead to narratives of oppression, and narratives detailing complex rules and specific behaviors often lead only to compliance and submissive responses. In a world of uncertainty and complexity, the Dialogic Mindset seeks to work with, rather than against, self-organizing processes, and attempts to shape them, when possible, towards organizational needs (Holman, 2015).

Unless the ongoing processes of self-organization are disrupted, they may continue to re-create familiar, but limiting patterns of thought and action and thereby pose a barrier to necessary learning and adaptation. It is only when close to chaos that the self-organizing properties of systems will re-organize into more complex, adaptive states (Waldrop, 1992); this is replicated in organizations (Pascale, Milleman, and Gioja, 2001). While traditional management views disruption as an unwelcome threat to success and thus something to guard against and avoid, the Dialogic Mindset understands that disruption is integral to transformational change and embraces it (Holman, 2010; Marshak 2016). In order for adaptive self-organizing processes to emerge in organizations, people must believe that the old order no longer works, there is no going back, and that true transformation in thinking and action is needed. A leader may guide a transformation in response to an unplanned disruption (e.g., a new disruptive technology that poses an existential threat to the organization). Alternatively, a leader may have to encourage disruption to existing narratives and patterns of meaning-making to create the necessary stimulus for innovation and adaptation. In the latter case, the leader is, in effect, doing the very opposite of the visionary narrative: rather than show people the way forward, the leader shows them the current way is no longer tenable and must be thrown out. Instead of imposing a new vision to address the issue, the Dialogic Mindset disruption to support collective inquiry and processes of self-organization and emergence.

### Increase the diversity and emphasize differences among the people engaged in creating change before seeking coherence and solutions.

When disruption occurs, there is a tendency to want to quickly "fix it", but the Dialogic Mindset believes that doing so will actually get in the way of effective change. Much of that push to get past disruption is a

response to anxiety, and quick fixes might actually make things worse. Instead, stimulating new ideas and solutions to complex problems requires increasing the diversity of views and perspectives, giving time and space for differences to be aired and rub up against each other (Holman, 2010). The Dialogic Mindset believes that what is initially called for after disruption is not looking for the answer, but allowing for a period of time for the engagement of all the stakeholders in a process of inquiry, where differences can rub up against each other. This is often described as creating a "container" (Bushe, 2010; Corrigan, 2015) that can hold the anxiety, hold back the tendency to jump at the first credible solution, and instead cook a creative brew out of which a new order will eventually emerge that is better able to take on the complexity the organization faces.

### Consultants are a part of the process, not apart from the process.

In Diagnostic OD, consultants stand apart from the system they are studying, collecting data and giving feedback while trying to remain neutral. The Dialogic Mindset believes that OD consultants cannot stand outside the social construction of reality, acting as objective observers or independent facilitators of social interaction. Their mere presence influences the meaning making taking place. Consultants need to be aware of their own immersion in the organization and reflexively consider what meanings they are creating as well as what narratives their actions privilege and marginalize.

Dialogic OD always involves processes of collaborative co-inquiry that have at least four aspects (Barge, 2015). The first is co-missioning, conversations that explore and set mutual expectations for the project. Another is co-design, the development of collaborative spaces where stakeholders and consultants discuss and experiment with ways of structuring the consulting process to facilitate new patterns of meaning-

making and action. A third is co-reflection, deliberately introducing different perspectives that challenge the current meanings of both the consultant and system members. The fourth, co-action, are conversations where clients and consultants influence each other in identifying what they will do in the future.

These seven premises lead to a different way of thinking about the basic building blocks of organization development, even as practitioners may engage in similar consulting steps as in Diagnostic OD. Dialogic OD consultants enter and engage with people in a team, organization or community. They involve people in working on issues they are concerned about. They create processes for people to communicate ideas and information. They avoid becoming a prescriptive expert. These and other actions can look just like textbook descriptions of Diagnostic OD. Yet when all these actions and the attendant processes, tools and techniques follow from a Dialogic OD Mindset, the choices made and actions taken by the consultant will be very different. As Shaw (2002) notes: "Above all I want to propose that if organizing is understood essentially as a conversational process, an inescapably self-organizing process of participating in the spontaneous emergence of continuity and change, then we need a rather different way of thinking about any kind of organizational practice that focuses on change" ( p. 11).

## The Three Core Enablers of Organizational Change in Dialogic OD

A quick glance at the variety of Dialogic OD methods in Table 2 (which is continually expanding – a constantly updated bibliography is available at www.B-M-Institute.com) suggests there are many different change approaches available to the Dialogic OD consultant. While there are a

variety of methods, and on the surface, they can look quite different, we do not believe that the actual change processes underlying successful Dialogic OD are that many or that different. It appears that some people are more consistently successful using Dialogic OD methods than others, and that simply following the formulas for running an Open Space, an Appreciative Inquiry, or any dialogic process is no guarantee that successful organization development will occur. One of the reasons for our efforts to outline the Dialogic Mindset is because we suspect some of the success/failure rate is associated with one's mindset as much as tools and techniques.

We propose there are three core, underlying change processes that, singly or in combination, are essential to the successful use of any Dialogic OD method. We emphasize that simply engaging in good dialogues, in creating spaces where people are willing and able to speak their minds, and where people are willing and able to listen carefully to one another, is not sufficient for transformational change to occur. What we do believe is required is one or more of the following change processes to have occurred during the OD practitioner's work, whether orchestrating large group events, working with small groups or teams in dialogic forms of process consultation, or in one on one coaching.

## Change Process 1: Emergence

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

Dialogic OD assumes that social systems, like complex natural systems, are self-organizing. In the natural world, without leaders or plans, what appears random resolves into pattern. Even strings of numbers produced from non-linear equations, resolve into patterns. Organization emerges. Thousands of people typically self-organize

within a few hours during natural disasters. Working with notions of complexity and emergence allows Dialogic OD to offer a viable alternative to the analyze the current state, articulate a vision, plan for how to achieve that vision, and execute, model of change leadership (Holman, 2015).

However, while groups are continuously self-organzing, unless certain things are in place, they are not likely to self-organize for the collective good. The organization will be a reflection of the competing interests and agendas, and not always well integrated. The Dialogic OD practitioner pays close attention to what makes people want to serve the collective good, and what can be done to amplify that.

As we earlier noted, disruptions can be planned or unplanned. Disruptions are always non-linear and when planned, typically produce unintended consequences, some of which can be happy ones. Those affected may be able to self-organize for the collective good and transform without a leader or a plan. This is most likely when people share a common identity or common purpose (Bushe, 2020). In any case, something will emerge, though it may be unpleasant and unwanted.

Planned or unplanned, transformation is unlikely to take place without disruption in the current meaning-making processes (Holman, 2010; Stacey, 2001). Leaders, with the help of OD practitioners, may attempt to disrupt meaning-making processes in groups/organizations /networks of stakeholders as part of the OD process. In other cases, they may ask an OD professional to help them deal with an unplanned disruption. A variety of Dialogic OD approaches are designed to create containers within which disruptions can be both the cause, and the result, of engaged and concerned people talking earnestly with each

other. Transformational change always involves disruption to the ongoing patterns of self-organizing.

Disruption doesn't have to be tense and anxiety provoking. Bringing appreciative inquiry into an organization that isn't used to being appreciative will be very disruptive. But disruption can surface difficult feelings, so OD practitioners of all mindsets look for ways to manage and alleviate the anxiety that disruptive endings and change create (Marshak, 2016). Once disrupted, it is impossible to plan or fully control the self-organizing process. Dialogic practitioners therefore attempt to influence what happens after a disruption occurs to help promote the emergence of new and more effective patterns of organizing. Organisms close to chaos will retain their structures until some variable is pushed over an unpredictable limit. This is the bifurcation point, where the previous organization dissolves and the system takes a leap. At that point the range of possibilities may be known, but where any one particular system will leap remains unknown and situationally emergent. Options range from complete dissolution to reorganization at a higher level of complexity (Prigogine and Stengers, 1984).

Expanding and enriching networks makes it easier to self-organize and helps people cope with anxiety. Dialogic OD practitioners therefore attend to building relationships and trust while helping people find their common and complementary interests and make newly informed meaning of the complex situation they collectively face (Gordezky, 2015). Dialogic OD practitioners assume that the richer the communication and relationships in a network, the more likely the leap after bifurcation will land in a "better" place.

The Dialogic OD Mindset assumes this natural process of disruption and

emergence, and works with it in the consultation process. For example, practitioners operating from a Dialogic OD Mindset may tend to encourage greater confrontation of established, and perhaps comfortable, patterns when organizations face significant risks (Gilpin-Jackson, 2015). It is becoming fashionable for dialogic practitioners to call themselves disruptors instead of facilitators. Confrontations that get people to face the complexity and the urgency of the situation, if successful, will induce a greater sense of chaos – required for self-organizing. It is at the close to chaos boundary that self-organized change erupts and emerges, and also where anxiety may be at its greatest (Kauffman, 1995; Pascale, Milleman and Gioa, 2001).

## Change Process 2: Narrative

### A change to one or more core story-lines that influence shared meaning-making takes place.

The Dialogic Mindset believes that every day, in every conversation, the social construction of reality is being created, maintained, and changed. A key way organizations change is when new words enter their vocabularies, and when the meanings people attach to words and other "discursive phenomena" change (Barrett et al, 1995; Marshak, 1998). One of the most important discursive phenomena for understanding stability and change in how people in organizations make meaning, are narratives.

The core narratives are the storylines people take for granted as true, embodied in everyday conversations, documents, metaphors, symbolic representations. They help to explain and bring coherence to our organizational lives. They create and convey the socially constructed versions of reality which delimit what is important, how things are related, what is possible, and how one should behave organizationally (Grant, Hardy, Oswick, and Putnam, 2004; Marshak, 1998). They are

more than tales told at meetings or around the water cooler. A core narrative isn't one story; it's a storyline that can encompass a variety of specific interactions and events. For example, the "organizational health narrative" has informed and shaped the thinking of OD practitioners and has been used to confront managers who might be influenced by efficiency and productivity narratives associated with machine-like images of an organization.

Individual behavior is also influenced by our stories of ourselves, our internalized narratives that "tell" a person who she or he is, what they can and should do, and what is possible in all situations. For example, leaders informed by life experiences, colleagues, bosses, management books, etc. telling them that successful leaders must be "in charge," decisive, and even feared – sometimes referred to as the Man on a White Horse narrative, or The Captain on the Bridge narrative - may tell themselves "servant leadership" skills are signs of weakness and avoid performing those behaviors even when needed. Thus narratives, whether about leaders on white horses, the need for machine-like efficiency and productivity, or prescribing remedies to ensure the growth and good health of an organization, create the context for how things are considered and thereby both enable and restrict thinking and action.

The significance of narratives for effecting organizational change is therefore considerable because they set the guiderails for rationales supporting the status quo or pointing the way to new potentialities. The Dialogic Mindset assumes that transformational change is not possible without the emergence of new, socially agreed upon narratives that explain and support the new reality and possibilities. In an organization where the storyline is that leaders only look after themselves, people will need to see their leaders putting themselves out to look after others

before they are likely to engage in real conversations about change. In an organization with a storyline about competing factions, finding something that different groups will want to cooperate to do will be necessary to create a new narrative of collaboration. A variety of the methods listed in Table 2 can be used as a conscious intervention into the narrative and story making processes of an organization.

## Change Process 3: Generativity

### A generative image is introduced or surfaces that provides new and compelling alternatives for thinking and acting.

Generative is an adjective meaning the power to generate, produce, originate. Dialogic OD believes that transformational change requires new ideas, new conversations, and new ways of looking at things, and is interested in capabilities and processes that can generate those. Bushe's research has found that *generative images* are central to successful appreciative inquiry efforts (Bushe, 1998; 2013; Bushe and Kassam, 2005) and we propose that they are central to Dialogic OD success. A generative image is a combination of words, pictures or other symbolic media that provide new ways of thinking about social and organizational reality. It, in effect, allows people to imagine alternative decisions and actions that they could not imagine before the generative image surfaced. A second property of highly generative images is that they are compelling; people want to act on the new opportunities the generative image evokes.

For example, in a study on using dialogic change processes in teams, Bushe (1998) found that teams that were stuck would, when given the opportunity to discuss stories of peak team experiences, often produce a generative image that provided a path out of the dilemma they were stuck in. Included in his examples is one team that was stuck between the competitive feelings that members felt toward each other, and the

need for cooperative action to succeed at their task. They resolved the tension through a story about a pick-up basketball game one member participated in where everyone competed to create new, innovative moves and plays, but then, after being acknowledged, taught everyone else the new move. "Back alley ball" became a generative image for this group offering new approaches for building a high performing team that combined the best of competitive and cooperative behaviors.

The generativity of an image depends on the context in which it is used. It has to be new to this group of people, and it has to point to something that is attractive to them. A compelling generative image invites people to imagine new possibilities beyond the prevailing narratives and social agreements that define what is currently possible in a particular situation. Exploring the ideas and insights unleashed by the generative image has the effect of freeing people from their previously confined thinking and opens pathways for realistically considering what may have been considered impossible or unimaginable (Bushe and Storch, 2015; Marshak, 2006). Sometimes such images allow us to transcend polarized thinking, producing a both/and possibility where people previously thought they could only have either/or. For example, the image of sustainable development transcended thinking in terms of either environmental preservation or economic development, and transformed the ecological narrative across the world.

Table 3 summarizes the core premises and change processes of the Dialogic OD Mindset.

Table 3 Dialogic Mindset Premises and Enablers of Change

**Premises**

- Reality and relationships are socially constructed.
- Organizations are social networks of meaning-making.
- Language, how meaning is made, and the narratives which guide people's experience, are central to organizational change
- Organizations are continuously changing, in both intended and unintended ways, with multiple changes occurring at various speeds.
- Groups and organizations are inherently self-organizing; disruption is required for transformational adaptation and change.
- Increase the diversity and emphasize differences among the people engaged in creating change before seeking coherence and solutions.
- Consultants are a part of the process, not apart from the process.

**Change Enablers**

**Emergence**: 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**: A change to one or more core story-lines that influence shared meaning-making takes place.

**Generativity**: A generative image is introduced or surfaces that provides new and compelling alternatives for thinking and acting.

## Dialogic OD Practice

Dialogic OD practice differs along a continuum from episodic change practices to continuous change practices. An episodic change practice focuses on one or more events intended to help a group, small or large, transform from one semi-stable state to another. A continuous change practice is based on a stream of ongoing interactions intended to make small alterations to the ongoing patterns of interaction or self-organization that, over time, accumulate into a transformed state of being.

In either case there is always need for a clear sponsor who has some "ownership" of the group or organization and who employs the Dialogic OD consultant to help foster change (Averbuch, 2015). Particularly when addressing complex social issues, such as education or health care, sponsoring groups are often composed of multiple organizations. The sponsors usually do not know exactly what changes are wanted or how to achieve them. They may be responding to some problems, or concerns, or they may have an intent or general outcome they seek, but they don't know exactly what change will address the concern or create those outcomes. During the entry process, the Dialogic OD consultant will work with the sponsors to identify, in general, their intentions and the range of potentially affected stakeholders who need to be engaged in the Dialogic OD process. They may or may not decide it is important to create a "planning" or "hosting" group that in some way represents the range of effected stakeholders to help architect the change effort. This is usually more important when the intended change effort involves a complex issue, for example: transportation in the region, in which there's a desire to engage a large or very large group and when operating from a more episodic change mindset. It's critical for the OD consultant and the sponsor to agree on the intended outcomes of the

change effort and for the sponsor to be able and willing to make the necessary resources, particularly time, money and personal commitment, available for the project.

Some Dialogic OD methods involve participants in becoming aware of the stories, narratives and patterns of discourse they are embedded in (e.g., Oliver, 2005; Swart, 2015). Others do not (e.g., Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2008; Owen, 2008). In either case, all assume that change will require a change in those narratives. Some focus primarily on changing the discourse (e.g., Shaw, 2002; Storch and Ziethen, 2013), while others focus on both discourse and the changes in action that emerge from that (e.g., Cooperrider, 2012; Nissen and Corrigan, 2009).

Like Diagnostic OD, Dialogic OD involves both structured interventions (like action research) and experiential interventions (like process consultation). In the following we briefly review both types of Dialogic OD practice.

## Structured Dialogic OD

Structured Dialogic OD involves one or more events. These events are designed so that relationships are enhanced to enable more creativity and engagement (Storch, 2015). Generative images and questions are used to elicit new ideas. Sometimes these are already given by leaders or consultants, and sometimes the process needs to stimulate generative images from the group or organization (see Barrett and Cooperrider, 1990 and Bushe, 2013a for examples). Seeing options for action that didn't occur to them before, new ways to change become possible. Participants make personal, voluntary commitments to new behaviors and projects. After the event(s), new thinking, connections 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 the transformation in the social construction of reality comes from participants developing different attitudes and assumptions as they make sense of changes in their day to day interactions.

Structured Dialogic OD practices, like appreciative inquiry, future search, and art of hosting, involve a common sequence of activities in which the Dialogic OD consultant does most, if not all, of the following steps:

### 1. Help the sponsors articulate their wants in a future-focused, possibility-centric way

The Dialogic OD consultant will work with the sponsor, and perhaps a hosting group, to identify the issues motivating the change effort and craft this into an image that is likely to capture the interest and energy of those who become part of the change process. Typically, these are future focused, in the sense that they identify a desired future, rather than identifying what is wrong with the present, and "possibility-centric" in the sense that they open up possibilities for achieving that desired future rather than focusing convergence on a particular solution. Sometimes these will be described as themes, sometimes as questions to be answered, sometimes as generative images (Bushe 2020).

### 2. Coach the sponsors in how to nurture emergent change

Because Dialogic OD works on assumptions of emergence and social construction – very different from the planning and controlling image most leaders have of their work – sponsors need to be coached on how to nurture emergent change (Averbuch, 2015). Dialogic OD assumes that every change situation is unique, and because of the complexity of human meaning making, what worked in one group or organization may

not in another. Because every interaction is ripe with possibilities for new meaning making, causes and effects cannot be predicted ahead of time so there is no point trying to identify and converge on the "right" changes. In such situations, the best change practice is to encourage a variety changes and then work with those that are successful.

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's to unleash, catalyze and support the multitude of motivations and ideas amongst participants, in the service of transforming the group or organization 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 they desire to create and the changes that can bring about that desired future.
2. Members self identify, individually and in groups, the changes they want to take responsibility for.

The outcome of events are altered beliefs, mental models and narratives about the group and about what is possible and desirable, and the launch of multiple changes by committed individuals and groups, without a lot of winnowing by leaders. Instead, the winnowing happens after the events as what seemed like great ideas fall by the wayside while others pick up momentum.

In structured, Dialogic OD, the leader's key responsibilities are to:

- Identify the desired outcomes in possibility centric terms
- Identify the right participants and inspire them to engage in events
- Participate fully in events as one more participant
- Pay attention to the ideas and projects that gain momentum after

events and take the group or organization in the desired direction
- Resource and amplify new, desired behaviors
- Keep asking generative questions

## 3. Identify and include the right stakeholders – emphasize diversity

Increasingly, practitioners are emphasizing the need to include all the stakeholders who make up the system in events for successful Dialogic OD. This can result in events with large numbers of people – from hundreds to thousands. What differentiates them as Dialogic OD from other Large Group Interventions is the mindset behind their practice and the choices that get made as a result. Holman (2013, p. 22) counsels us 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." Weisbord & Janoff (2010) use the acronym "ARE IN" to define who ought to be at dialogic events: those with authority, resources, expertise, information, and need; to which Axelrod (2010) adds those opposed, and to open up to volunteers – anyone who wants to come.

It's not enough to identify the right people; they have to be invited to events in a way that attracts them to come. Sponsors may have the power to compel some people to attend, but probably not all the people who are key stakeholders to the changes to be made. Their willingness to participate will be influenced by the way in which these events are framed and the way in which they are invited (McKergow, 2020). In emphasizing the need to "widen the circle of engagement", Axelrod (2010) for example, describes using small group meetings between events to expand participation.

## 4. Design and host the conversations

What most differentiates Dialogic OD methods are the suggestions they offer for how to design and host conversations. Whether it is small groups or large communities, these may be one or a series of events. Unfortunately, the absence of a coherent "Dialogic OD narrative" has led Dialogic OD practitioners to be mainly known by the method they use. As a result they are often viewed as providers of Appreciative Inquiry or Open Space or World Café (and so on), and employed by organizations to run those processes rather than to consult at a strategic level to an entire change effort. Perhaps the emerging narrative about Dialogic OD as a distinct approach will help them out of this trap – particularly if the strengths, opportunities and limitations the variety of Dialogic OD methods offer can be better understood.

One area of common agreement in dialogic practice is the need to ensure the capacity of participants to engage in inclusive conversations before getting to the substance of the change. Bushe (2002) describes this as the need to shift a group, large or small, from a pre-identity state to a post-identity state – that is from where people don't identify with the group to where they do. The Art of Hosting emphasizes the need for "welcoming", particularly when groups are highly diverse (Brown and Issacs, 2005). This is further elaborated in Holman's (2010) description of creating opportunities for individual expression and connection.

Another area of agreement is the nature of "hosting" dialogic OD events, especially when they involve large groups. Events are designed so that people can interact productively without the need for "facilitation" (Weisbord, 2012). Often this is through a series of conversations structured through specific questions designed to be maximally generative (e.g., Bushe, 2013a; Vogt, Brown and Issacs, 2003), though it can also involve more self-organizing processes where participants

identify the conversations they want to have, as in Open Space (Owen, 2008).

An image common amongst Dialogic OD practitioners, is that of "container." "As hosts, our work is not to intervene, but rather to create a container—hospitable space for working with whatever arises." (Holman, 2013, p.22). Though some work has been done (Bushe, 2010; Corrigan, 2015; Issacs, 1999) to clarify what a container is and how good ones are created, the idea of a container is still more a generative image than a well worked out set of principles and guidelines.

## 5. Harvest for Action

At some point the Dialogic OD process shifts from conversations to launching action. 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. Some dialogic practices focus on an inquiry process at this point, in the sense of reflecting back on and making sense of the variety of conversations and experiences that have occurred during events to provide guidance for moving forward (e.g., Holman, 2013, Nissen and Corrigan, 2009). Some focus on getting people ready to launch new initiatives that have been stimulated by the event(s) (e.g., Bushe, 2020; Cooperrider, 2012). Practice varies considerably amongst Dialogic OD practitioners, and is affected by the intentions of the initiative, as well as expectations and culture of the group or organization. Rather than trying to facilitate convergence, practitioners may design into the process activities through which collective decisions will likely emerge. Often, rather than expecting collective agreement on action, they may also make visible different ideas or projects that people commit to pursuing. Additionally, people may discuss how they might act differently and then are encouraged to act on what they find most personally relevant and meaningful (Roehrig,

Schwendenwein and Bushe, 2015).

Structured Dialogic OD processes work with groups large and small in an orchestrated sequence of events designed to shift the discourse, create or work with generative images, and disrupt patterns to support emergence of productive changes in how people talk, and think, and what they do. But the Dialogic OD consultant can also work in much less structured ways, engaging with the day to day interactions of a client system, and we now turn to a brief description of that.

## Dialogic Process Consultation

One of the foundations of Organization Development is the concept and methods of process consultation, especially as distinct from expert consultation, where the consultant stays mostly out of the "whats" while helping the client to better understand the "hows." As defined by Schein, "process consultation is a set of activities on the part of the consultant that help the client to perceive, understand, and act upon the process events that occur in the client's environment" (Schein, 1969, p. 9). Schein focused primarily on what he considered to be the most crucial human processes for effective organization performance: 1) communication; 2) member roles and functions; 3) group problem-solving and decision-making; 4) group norms and group growth; 5) leadership and authority; and 6) intergroup cooperation and competition. Process consultation in Dialogic OD builds on the foundational idea of helping clients to better perceive, understand, and act on process events, but focuses on "dialogic processes" involving emergence, social construction, generativity and organizational meaning making more so than the interpersonal and group processes described by Schein.

## Dialogic Processes

There are a range of discursive processes a dialogic process consultation (PC) might pay attention to. These include:

1. Communication processes, like those identified by Schein, which are primarily focused on who is conveying what information to whom, and in what ways.
2. Identification of prevailing and influential narratives shaping how people think and act (Marshak, 2020). An example is the influence of narratives about the importance of "shareholder value" or the "bottom line" on consideration of options and the resulting choices. This would also include consideration of the dialogic processes that reinforce these narratives and/or exclude alternative storylines.
3. Consideration of how different narratives, storylines, organizational texts at one level of the organization (e.g. at headquarters), affect another level of the organization (e.g. the field). This can include, importantly, considerations about power and who gains and who is disadvantaged by the prevailing or "privileged" narratives.
4. Attention to the ways in which conversations that differ from the prevailing wisdom are restricted or encouraged, for example the degree to which a diversity of participants and perspectives are included or excluded in key organizational decisions.
5. Attention to how conversations unfold or emerge: the sequence of what is discussed and in what ways and how that may influence participants' thinking and emotions.
6. Consideration of processes of generativity, especially how to foster new images that will influence the ongoing construction and re-construction of social reality.

In the dialogic process consultant's mindset, organizational behavior is not created solely by the objective exchange of information. It's created

by the self and socially constructed images and narratives people hold about their situations, the meaning making going on before, during and after events, and the extent to which those things limit or nurture generativity and the emergence of new possibilities. It's also created by changes in the relationships and networks amongst people in the organization and the new possibilities that get created when new people are included in conversations, new connections are made, and old relations are re-framed.

## Two Approaches to Dialogic Process Consulting

There are a wide range of activities that could be considered dialogic process engagements. These can be sorted into more episodic or continuous change mindsets and practices. Episodic practices are intended to destabilize semi-stable patterns and generate new possibilities or patterns. Continuous practices are intended, instead, to alter or amplify the ongoing discursive processes to encourage the emergence of new possibilities. In brief, the two types are:

1. Dialogic PC and episodic change involves interactions with individuals or teams where potentially limiting mindsets are identified and confronted with narratives, stories, metaphors, images, slogans, and so forth to generate new thinking and possibilities. This type of Dialogic PC is widely practiced, but perhaps with less visibility or clarity in the broader OD community about what is being done and why. Dialogic PC methods based in episodic concepts of change tend to use language-based means to promote recognition of limiting patterns, followed by cognitive restructuring to promote generativity, and emergence of new ways of thinking and acting. Some examples of ways this is done is by asking individuals or teams to write or re-write scripts about their situation (Inman and Thompson, 2013; Oswick et al. 2000); introducing new words, phrases or images to induce new thought

patterns (Storch and Ziethen, 2013); listening for and confronting conceptual metaphors or storylines that are implicitly limiting possibilities and choice (Marshak, 2020; Oliver and Fitzgerald, 2013); or asking an individual or team to draw or sculpture their situation and then tell the story of what's happening and perhaps what they want to have happen (Barry, 1994). In all these approaches to dialogic PC, methods for recognizing how current narratives, discourses and conversations are creating stable patterns of limited possibilities, and then seeking to elicit new language and stories to encourage new possibilities, are employed. For example, a client who was not aware that they continually discussed their situation in terms that implied they were alone on the front lines of a war had that imagery reflected back with the invitation to consider other possible scenarios for conceptualizing their situation.

2. Dialogic PC and continuous change involves unstructured and often ongoing interactions with an individual, team or larger group where the intent is to change the regularly occurring conversations and conversational patterns (who, what, when where, how) and thereby encourage the self-organizing emergence of new patterns, commitments, and ideas. This type of Dialogic PC is less well known in the USA and perhaps less practiced, although its use is spreading. Based on concepts of complexity, meaning making, emergence, and self-organization, these dialogic process activities assume relationships and organizations are continuously re-creating themselves through the ongoing conversations that occur at all levels and parts of an organization, (Goldsmith, Hebabi and Nishii, 2010; Shaw, 2002). Any shifts in the nature of these conversations, for example, their participants, emphases, or patterns, will encourage incremental shifts that lead groups to self-organize in new and different ways. There is no use of specially structured events to shift from a current state to a more

desired future state (Goppelt and Ray, 2015). Instead the consultant joins up with an organization that is assumed to be in the continuous process of becoming, and seeks to accentuate differences from any ongoing dialogic patterns that may be blocking or limiting the organization's ability to evolve, or for new patterns to emerge. For example, in describing a dialogic process intervention with a group of executives stymied by trying to determine the return on investment (ROI) of some change efforts, Ray and Goppelt (2013) explain,

> "…(T)he powerful discourse of ROI made silent an aspect of people's experience of positive change, 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" (p.43).

## When is Dialogic OD Most Applicable?

The continuing development and spread of approaches and methods that can be considered Dialogic OD has also raised questions about when they should be used in addition to, or instead of, other OD methods. Because a narrative of Dialogic OD has only recently emerged there are now only a few tentative answers to those important questions.

The first answer to the question is both philosophical and personal, and implies it is a matter of consultant orientation and not situational choice per se. Put simply, if one's worldview about organizations and change agrees with the premises associated with Dialogic OD, then that approach will be pursued. Conversely, other worldviews result in other forms of OD. Selective choice is an option only when the consultant

believes that the premises and practices of Dialogic OD might fit some situations better than others, while other forms of OD might be wiser choices under other circumstances. There has been some speculation about when such conditions might apply, but no studies to affirm the speculation. The two main lines of discussion about the situational factors influencing when different forms of OD might be applicable suggest contingency and/or blended models.

Contingency considerations for the use of Dialogic OD methods involve some "discernment" of the nature of the presenting situation by the consultant and client, and specifically to what degree the conditions and desired outcomes are more congruent with the premises and practices associated with Dialogic or other OD approaches. The Cynefin Model (Snowden and Boone, 2007) offers one suggestion for how such a contingency model in OD might evolve.

In the Cynefin Model the appropriate decision-making process depends on how well cause-effect relationships are understood. In any specific decision situation, there are likely to be multiple decision "characteristics" and the model argues that these characteristics require different processes. There are five characteristics. In a *Simple decision* cause-effect relationships are known so that best practices can be deployed in response to the situation. In a *Complicated decision* causality is not initially known but can be figured out through diagnostic inquiry leading to good enough responses. In a *Complex decision* cause-effect relationships are not known, except in retrospect, and emergent responses are called for; first experiment with possible changes through probes and then select the one(s) that best accomplish the objective. In *Chaotic decisions* there is no ability to understand cause-effect relationships, so novel responses based mainly on intuition are the best option. Finally, there are no clear leadership options in situations of

complete *Disorder*.

Extending the Cynefin model to OD situations suggests that the premises and methods associated with more foundational, diagnostic forms of OD including a formal diagnostic step, "water-fall" interventions, etc., might be more applicable with Simple and Complicated decisions are called for, whereas many of the premises and methods associated with Dialogic OD might make greater sense when Complex and Chaotic decisions are called for, especially as generative responses are needed. This is still a rough framework, but is suggestive of one contingency way of thinking about when and where to use Dialogic or other forms of OD.

The third answer considers the possibility of blended approaches that would combine both Dialogic and other forms of OD in the same consulting engagement. This would usually happen sequentially (e.g. first a diagnostic approach followed by a dialogic one) and, like the contingency model, would depend in part on the presence or absence of certain conditions.

One discussion of a blended model (Gilpin-Jackson, 2013) argues that the main considerations are whether the situation has low or high complexity combined with the level of managerial readiness for leading change. A low level of readiness would be a concerned but not fully committed leadership who might need a data based or proven rational for change. A high level would be a fully committed leadership willing to actively participate in a more emergent process of discovery. This leads to the contingency answer to use Dialogic OD when there is high complexity and high readiness for change leadership and use other OD approaches when there is both low readiness to change and low complexity. The blended response occurs in a "grey zone" when there is

low readiness and high complexity. In the Gilpin-Jackson case of a highly complex situation with low leadership readiness, first a diagnostic approach was used to gain legitimacy and acceptance, and following success with that approach, dialogic methods were used to encourage the emergence of new thinking to address the complexity of the situation.

These are a few ways for thinking about the question of when and how to use Diagnostic and Dialogic OD, and we expect a great deal more thinking and writing about these issues in the future.

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