

“Our joint experience has shown us that creating events and conferences is not an end. It is the means to the end of deeply collaborative organizations, where high-engagement practices are the norm and where the transformations of our organizations that seem ever elusive might be achievable.”

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# Collaborative Change Engagement in a Pandemic Era & Toward Disruptive Organization Development Practice

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and Richard H. Axelrod

## Abstract

This article chronicles the journey to initiate collaborative change in a Canadian public sector organization in the midst of a global pandemic. The organization embarked on a reorganization, a new corporate strategy, orientation of a new executive team and a shift to a purpose-driven organization, all while 80% of its workforce worked from home or in the field. The authors supported the organization to utilize whole system organization development methodologies to engage in a relaunch and reenergizing of a vision for transformation, over only a six-month period, virtually. The results have been called a case study in the power of high-engagement collaborative change.

**Keywords:** Collaborative Change, High-engagement change, Whole Systems Change, Large-Scale Organization Development, Conference Model, Change Engagement, Change Management, Transformation

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I can honestly say that in all of my years, I have never witnessed an approach/methodology as powerful and impactful as the Conference Model®. In such an effective way, it enabled BCLC to demonstrate a commitment to both its employees and to a holistic strategy to bring all divisions together in a transparent and genuine way. Further, it allowed everyone to feel like equal and valued participants... working together to mold the future of BCLC:

—*Director Corporate Services & Facilities*

This is how the journey began.

“What do you think?” Yabome asked, sounding more confident than the anxiety rolling around her gut was signalling.

Richard looked into the computer camera, his smile giving way to a low chuckle.

“I think doing what you want to do sounds impossible. But I’m up for the

challenge if you are, we’ll figure it out, OK?” And so, with our faith in the process of figuring it out being our assurance, we embarked on a journey to facilitating collaborative change in pandemic conditions.

This article chronicles the journey to initiating whole system transformation in a Canadian public sector organization, the British Columbia Lottery Corporation (BCLC), in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic. BCLC’s mandate is to conduct and manage gambling entertainment in a socially responsible manner to generate revenue for the Province of British Columbia which supports healthcare, education and community programs. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization delivered \$1.3 Billion in net income to the province of British Columbia. On March 16, 2020, the corporation temporarily closed all Casinos and Bingo halls and like much of the world, sent

80% of its workforce to work from home (BCLC, 2020).

However, the organization had also launched a new corporate strategic plan in January 2020, so after the initial impact of transitioning to work from home, a decision was made to do all that was possible to maintain momentum and keep employees engaged in advancing the corporate strategy. The new strategy was meant to create transformational change in the organization. By this, we mean, transformation not in its colloquial usage, but in the true sense of a fundamental shift in the way people think and work and the overall identity of the organization (Gilpin-Jackson, 2015). The new strategy anticipated business model changes that would require a shift to collaborative leadership (called a OneBCLC approach). Achieving it would require business process redesigns, an organization restructure and a shift to a player-centric and purpose-driven organization, all while 80% of the workforce worked from home. As a result, the authors supported the organization in a relaunch of the purpose and vision for the corporate strategy and engage the entire organization and its ecosystem, in defining the changes required. We did this, over a six-month period, virtually, during which we introduced the Conference Model® methodology (Figure 1) to the organization as a high-engagement approach to collaborative change.

### What is the Conference Model?

The Conference Model® involves the “whole system” in transforming the organization in a series of 2–3 day workshop type gatherings. In the Vision Conference participants determine their ideal future, in the Technical Conference participants identify the organization’s disconnects and fundamental beliefs and behaviors, and in the Design Conference participants use the data from the previous conferences to determine their blueprint for the future. Recognizing that not everyone in the organization can attend a conference, walk-thru presentations (walkthroughs) are sessions designed to share the outcomes of each conference with people who could not attend the conference and gather their input. At BCLC, we began with this basic



Figure 1: The Conference Model

framework and redesigned the content and structure to fit BCLC’s needs and a virtual environment. In this case the typical 2–3 day workshops were modified to one day conferences.

### Why a High-Engagement Approach to Change

Contemporary Organization Development (OD) literature and practice, in particular Dialogic OD, has solidified that the problems we face in our increased context of complexity are adaptive challenges, requiring collaborative change to address (Bushe & Marshak, 2015). This is because adaptive challenges, by definition, have no known solutions and require multiple perspectives to make sense of. No one leader or group in an organization can solve adaptive challenges in a world that requires understanding of multiple existing and emerging perspectives to address. As Yabome has articulated, we are in an era of Grey Zone Changes, dealing with complexity at the edge of chaos, where the emerging future is undefined and unknowable (Gilpin-Jackson, 2020). In this context:

1. Transformation is required in the way people work, think and behave.
2. There are plenty of questions.
3. There are no clear answers.
4. There are new things to consider regularly.

5. The end goal and solutions are unknown.
6. Processes and progress are emergent.
7. Many people are involved.
8. Everything seems chaotic.

Richard along with his wife Emily have established through their scholarship and practice that in these more complex change situations, engagement is change management. They have shown that bringing people together in a structured collaborative change approach grounded in high-engagement is essential to success (Axelrod & Axelrod 2006, Axelrod et al., 2010; Axelrod, 2011). A review of case studies has demonstrated that the widely cited statistic that 75% of change efforts fail only applies to situations that required collaborative change, led by stakeholders, but instead were addressed with traditional top-down change methods (Nagaishi & Bushe, 2018).

In addition, in surfacing the needs for the change, we established that supporting the transformation was not only about delivering a change. In the process, our intentions included:

1. Exposing leaders to the collaborative and engagement mindsets required to deliver on the OneBCLC strategy,
2. Building the capacity within the organization for sustained collaboration into the future

Table 1: *The new change management principles and practices from Terms of Engagement, 2nd Edition*

The 4 Engagement Principles	The 3 Leadership Practices
1. Widen the circle of involvement	1. Honesty
2. Connect people to each other	2. Transparency
3. Create communities of action	3. Trust
4. Promote fairness	

3. Taking a train-the-trainer approach with the People and Culture team so that they could support the process and sustain it into the future.

In this way, we were valuing both the developmental process and our desired change outcomes, making this a true OD initiative (Bushe & Marshak, 2017).

#### What We Did?

Against this background, we started by defining clear principles for the change, grounded both in the context of the organization and Axelrod's Terms of Engagement Principles (Table 1) and practices, which underlie the Conference Model®.

In June 2020, this high-engagement approach and principles were introduced to the organization on the heels of a leadership-level reorganization that clearly signalled the expectation that collaboration was the new norm. For example, business lines that previously worked separately as their own entities were brought together under single executive leadership. However, any further reorganization was to occur following business process redesigns which employees would help define. That way, organization structures would be further aligned to business needs for the emerging future of the organization. Executive leadership assured the organization that the work was not a lay-off exercise and shared commitment to the principles and practices of a high-engagement approach to change.

We articulated and shared with the organization, based on discussions and approvals from the Board and Executive Team that we will be guided in the next phases of the Transformation by the OneBCLC lens. OneBCLC was a core aspect of the corporate strategy, which

was a generative image of the desired future and would mean involving the entire BCLC system and ecosystem in co-creating the organization of the future. We would continue to uphold the BCLC values of respect, integrity and social responsibility (BCLC, 2021). We would apply procedural fairness, based on the principles of fair process, meaning Engagement, Explanation and Expectation clarity.

Engagement meant involving individuals in the decisions that affect them by asking for their input and allowing them to refute the merits of one another's ideas and assumptions. Explanation that everyone involved and affected should understand why final decisions are made as they are. An explanation allows employees to trust managers' intentions even if their own ideas have been rejected. It also serves as a powerful feedback loop that enhances learning. Expectation clarity meant that once a decision was made, leaders would state clearly the new rules of the game. To achieve fair process, it matters less what the new rules and policies are and more that they are clearly understood. We committed as part of this to provide clear decision rules along the spectrum of engagement and to be clear whether people are being engaged to inform, consult, co-create or delegate (Kim & Mauborgne, 2003).

To enable the high-engagement commitment, we focused on working at 3 levels:

1. Creating and supporting communities for action (work teams) for the Conference Model® Design
2. Training internal practitioners and communities for action in the Conference Model® and meeting engagement methodologies
3. Engaging and enrolling organization leaders in the purpose and intent for

the high-engagement approach and their role in supporting it.

#### Communities for Action

Yabome's team met with Richard to strategize our first steps and Richard reinforced that:

*People support what they help to create!*

*High engagement methods involve stakeholders in both planning and implementing the change.*

With his guidance, we defined several nested circles of involvement for members of the organization and the BCLC ecosystem to be part of planning and implementing the initial aspects of the change.

We aligned on the roles needed to be successful including:

1. Executive Leadership as sponsors responsible for decision-support and to manage the changes as stakeholders design and define them.
2. A Core team—made up of People and Culture/Organization Development subject matter experts that provided guidance to the organization for the entire process. This team included Richard and Yabome.
3. An Extended Core Team—made up of senior leaders in the organization who held core roles in engaging the whole organization as the process advanced such as the Director of Communications. We also included leaders who held accountability for core organizational strategies and metrics that would be impacted by the process. This group was the first line of contact for consultation on design issues and to test and prototype design ideas.
4. Change Leads who were to be involved in the facilitation of the high-engagement processes and then assigned to support executives and business areas to further embed the new ways of working.
5. A Design and Production Team who were responsible for designing and convening the conferences, conference logistics, conducting walk-throughs,

communicating with the organization, facilitation and overall guidance of the Conference Model® design work.

6. Internal Subject Matter Experts—these were leaders and staff members who were asked to lead segments within the Conferences.
7. External stakeholders—members of the BCLC ecosystems, primarily players and partners who were engaged to share their perspectives during the Conferences.

In total, we engaged approximately 10% of the organization just in the planning and design processes through the work of these groups.

### Training

To prepare the organization for the journey, Richard worked with the first five groups, describing what each of their roles will require and the principles and practices of the Conference Model®. The core teams, expanded core teams, change leads and design and production teams (called collectively the Design teams) spent 3 days together. They experienced and practiced the Conference Model® and learned how to structure everyday engagement into meetings using the meeting canoe as a way to begin practicing (Axelrod & Axelrod, 2014). The neuroscience of engagement was reviewed so that participants learned not just methodologies, but also the principles behind them to ensure they could apply them more broadly.

The team got to work exploring and applying the ideas and Richard worked with the core team to design an early draft of the first conference as well as planning for additional training for the larger team. The plan was to take them through an experience of the design draft and work together to co-create and finalize it. This led to further refinements and careful delineation of all the details that needed to be attended to before day 1 of the first conference.

### Engaging Leaders

While the conference work was being designed another community for action was struck. The group was made up of

internal subject matter experts (strategy design team) who were tasked with using collaborative change methodologies such as design thinking to determine what would be needed to shift the organization to the player-centric approach that the new corporate strategy aspired to. The intent was that output from this team would also be brought into the conferences for the whole organization to discuss, provide input and continue to shape the direction of the organization.

### Design Considerations

There were several design considerations and challenges to work through. Would we be able to engage the whole system virtually? Would basic zoom technology accommodate 1000+ people? How would we translate collected data to make it visible and engaging with that many people?

In the end we decided to offer each one day conference three times—a Vision Conference, a Design Conference, and an Integration Conference. Employees would have the choice of registering for any of the 3 days for each Conference.

The Vision Conference was modeled after the purpose of engaging participants to develop themes of what they want for the future. For BCLC, this meant reengaging the organization in the corporate strategy, taking employees through the journey of the past and into the present and imagining the future together, including the social purpose journey the organization was embarking on.

The Design Conference allowed participants to identify the disconnects in the current organization and the beliefs and behaviors that support organizational success. BCLC players were interviewed, lessons were distilled from our customer support centre and employees who worked at casino sites to facilitate the signature BCLC player health program, shared insights from the field. Our player personas and needs were shared based on the work of the strategy design team and all were given an opportunity to contribute to empathy maps and contemplate what would be needed to create a player experience that exceeded expectations into the future.

The Integration Conference (a combination of the Conference Model®'s Design and Technical Conferences) was meant to explore future themes and take any disconnects and beliefs and behaviors that would support or impede progress to combine them into design criteria for the new organization and its processes. It was about bringing together integration points that had not yet been discussed. Service Providers who operated casinos and Retailers who sold lottery tickets were interviewed. Our technology roadmap was shared, and employees were able to discuss implications for the future. Finally, a virtual open space forum allowed employees to surface themes and self-organize to discuss: What unquestioned beliefs and behaviours about our everyday activities get in the way of us being successful?

In our final planning with the Design teams, these were some of the simple principles and takeaways we discussed for translating collaborative change methodologies, designed for in-person engagement, into virtual delivery.

1. People are hungry for connection, build in plenty of opportunities for people to connect.
2. Virtual workshops take longer than in person workshops and require more detailed planning.
3. No matter how explicit you make the instructions for an activity, people still get confused, so do not sweat the small stuff.
4. Technology, if it can go wrong, it will go wrong, so keep it simple.
5. Planning, Preparation, and Practice are critical to success—there were many moving parts and team members to coordinate virtually. Using breakout rooms for the production and theme teams and alternate chat groups was essential to stay connected and share information emerging from various breakout rooms among the Design teams.
6. Focus on the engagement and connection principles and not the technicalities.
7. Workshop segments should not last longer than 90 minutes prior to a break.



Figure 2: Sample Visual Summary from the final Integration Conference

8. Activities should provide variety, polls, quizzes, music, stretch breaks, to ensure engagement based on neuroscience principles.
9. Technical support is required to respond immediately to issues so that technology does not become a distraction from the process work being done.
10. Visual aids are essential and digital graphic recording has just as powerful an impact online as it did offline (see Figure 2 which was created digitally).

We hosted all 3 Conferences between September and December 2020.

### What Were the Results?

When BCLC announced it was embarking on an organizational restructure one of the things that crossed my mind was that the company's most recent organizational restructure had not lived up to expectations, so why would this time be any different? Change of this magnitude can have some real consequences to the people and the company if not handled with care and attention. Most of us realize that without an engaged workforce that rallies behind and believes in the change, achieving success will be difficult. Leveraging the Conference Model<sup>®</sup> process has enabled employees to be part of the change and given them the space and permission to share their views in a safe and collaborative way. This has resulted in a unity of the people that supports the change because they understand "why" the change is necessary and how they can help ensure success is achieved.

— Director, Enterprise Risk Management Services

At the end of the conferences we had engaged 1030 unique employees across all 3 conferences, essentially the entire organization (headcount of 1060 at the time). There were between 60% and 70% of employees at each conference for a total of 2085 which means more than half of the employees attended more than one conference. This level of participation was a measure of engagement in itself

and an indicator that the organization was ready to be involved in the changes underway. However, how else would we determine whether we were making progress in our interventions?

A primary purpose of the Conference Model® series was to model an engagement-centered approach to organization change and to track that through the change experience and adoption of change in the organization. As per the quote above,

**The organization's risk register is rigorously tracked and updated and had shown high risks in the year prior to the start of the Conference Model® interventions in: organizational culture, organizational alignment, employee engagement and morale, and change management. In the quarter following the high-engagement work, all four risks dropped between three and seven points on the risk register, shifting them from high to low risks. The internal risk team attributes these changes to the collaborative change approach we took, calling it a case study in addressing and transforming risks.**

this was essential given the context and history of the organization. A concern with evaluating organization development efforts is that evaluation efforts tend to stop at reaction and that “after the dance” of collaborative change events, the enduring impacts of the desired organizational changes are not assessed and may not be realized (Eoyang & Quade, 2006). Often, only reaction metrics are used and the enduring organization impacts and business results or return on investments are not tracked. However, it is clear that in contexts of complexity and emergence, where something new is being designed, developmental evaluation is more reliable and enduring (Patton, 2011). This means evaluating and collecting metrics and assessing holistically what the next wise actions are that are required to keep advancing towards the purpose of the intervention in this case.

At the start of the organization redesign, we committed to track employee change experience based on an adaptation

of the Four Rooms of Change model (*The four rooms of change*, n.d.; Weisbord, 2012). Our four rooms were labelled: Reinvigorated, Comfort, Uncertain and Opposition. This model was meant to give us a pulse on how people were transitioning through change as well as a proxy for adoption of innovation which the psychology of the Four Rooms model is also grounded in. Our goal was that no more than 10% of the organization would be in opposi-

tion and to aim for no more than 20% in the uncertain room at any time. Overall, we wanted 70% in the reinvigorated and comfort rooms to keep creating the generativity required.

At our original survey, we had over 50% of employees in the room of uncertainty although only 1% were in opposition. After the first conference, we repelled and the number of people in the room of uncertainty reduced by half. We had also increased those in the comfort and reinvigorated rooms by another 25%. That meant that by the end of September we had 75% of the organization moving through the transition into the reinvigorated and comfort rooms and opposition stayed at 1%. This met our overall goals for the change experience and movement we wanted. A subsequent poll following the last conference in December showed some loss of the gains made especially in the Uncertain room. However, this was attributable to factors such as the Interim CEO who had championed the process till that time

leaving the organization and employees being in a state of limbo, awaiting news of next steps.

We also saw the organizational impact of the high-engagement change approach through the enterprise's strategic risk register. The organization's risk register is rigorously tracked and updated and had shown high risks in the year prior to the start of the Conference Model® interventions in: organizational culture, organizational alignment, employee engagement and morale, and change management. In the quarter following the high-engagement work, all four risks dropped between three and seven points on the risk register, shifting them from high to low risks. The internal risk team attributes these changes to the collaborative change approach we took, calling it a case study in addressing and transforming risks.

A side benefit was the positive impact on the image of the People and Culture function which within the same time frame had rebranded from Human Resources, in part to integrate OD expertise and build the change capacity of the organization. As noted in the quote below:

Conferencing represented the first tangible example of how Human Resources (HR) was shifting its presence to People and Culture (P&C) and how the organization intends to engage its employees in organizational change. Conferencing provided a tangible example of the high level of engagement that employees should expect moving forward. It also signaled an increase in valuing the voice of employees.

—Director, Corporate Strategy

Additional samples of perspectives on the impact of the change on organization leaders and business areas is noted in the table below, in addition to those shared throughout the article. A careful read of these quotes shows that this work is having impacts at all levels of the organization—individual, team and the cultural fabric of the organization, which is the criteria for large-scale OD interventions to achieve transformational change impact (Gilpin-Jackson, 2017).

## Perspectives on Impact for Organization Leaders

The impact to the organization was huge on several fronts—COVID environment—everyone working from remote locations and yet we created an experience where everyone felt so connected, it was an even playing field with no more silo's by field staff or Vancouver or Kamloops locations (and that was typically culture challenges that we faced often with feedback we got from our employees in other past experiences). For me personally it was career changing and I don't say that lightly. It has so changed how I view the possibilities for all the work that People & Culture can do going forward in the organization—from CONNECTION before CONTENT to high engagement to creating communities of work where people feel included and that they are valued—what that really looks like and feels like for each of us and for all of our employees is so powerful. The engagement felt by our employees (even virtually) was palpable and has left such an impact on our employees—it's now a high bar that we need to continue to reach in the work that we do going forward—to challenge ourselves and our thinking to ensure we put our employee's experience and the opportunity to engage them at the centre of everything we do.

—Director People Rewards & Recruitment

The company-wide approach makes it possible to create a movement so people will want to come with leadership through the change(s). With BCLC being a high-relationship-value organization it needed this 'whole' approach. This is supported by the many positive comments after conference #1 regarding the opportunity to meet with people in breakout rooms and discuss a wide range of topics.

—Internal Change Consultant

When I reflect back on the conference model approach, my first thought is how we were able to successfully engage with such a high number of employees, in a meaningful way. In contrast to other employee sessions that we have held, the conference model provided a platform for all employees, not just the vocal

ones, to provide input and feedback on some of the change happening at BCLC. The way in which each conference built off the one before, also created a real sense of momentum, and feeling that input was being incorporated as we moved forward. From a personal perspective, participating in the conferences created a sense of pride in the work that we are doing at BCLC. While skeptical of the model at first, I was a quick convert by the time we hit mid-way on Day 2 from the Vision Conference. Seeing it come to life, and how interactive it was for the participants, I truly felt that we were doing this work not as one division, or one team, but rather with the enterprise as a whole. That makes me proud to continue the work.

—Culture Transformation Partner, People & Culture

The conference model approach allowed for much more collaboration and discussion than I have seen in the past. Our experience was unique as organization of the event and execution was completely virtual. However, despite this, we were able to successfully engage in icebreakers, connect and delve into how things are and where we would like them to be. The feeling post-conference was extremely positive. Personally, I was able to learn more about the people I work with and able to meet a variety of staff I never would have given the virtual nature. I also got an overall feeling that everyone had the opportunity to be heard and felt their input was valuable.”

—Executive Assistant, Operations

First and foremost, I felt the conferences were a great example of technology enabling real connection. By employing different technology at different points in the conferences it allowed for a variety of different opportunities in which people could engage, and most importantly, it allowed them to engage in the manner they felt most comfortable with. This variety gave it a sense of personalization even if it was a process designed to engage hundreds of people concurrently.

Another strong outcome from the conferences which I witnessed on my team was a stronger sense of confidence in

discussing the topics that were covered in comparison to a model lacking true engagement. My team came away ready to discuss what they learned, how they contributed and where they saw BCLC going—and they were excited by it.

Personally, for me I greatly appreciate the opportunity to engage with such a variety of people across the organization. Respecting the individuality of how people engage with BCLC through their roles and experiences was both rewarding and eye opening.

—Director, eGaming Operations

The work continues and our greatest encouragement and indication of progress is the ways in which high-engagement is being applied across the organization.

The business process redesigns were completed alongside the Conference Model® work, using high-engagement principles. As a result, the next phase of the organization redesign in core business areas is underway.

The Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Committee is in the process of designing what they are calling a mini-conference series to deeply engage the organization in making sense of the present times and co-creating the organization as a place of belong for all.

The Corporate Strategy team is working on our Culture Transformation process to engage the organization in defining the culture we want. Their starting point was outputs from the first conference which a cross-functional OneBCLC team has been synthesizing into themes for further engagement.

The quote below, shows the impact on one leader which has led to work being launched for a field engagement strategy, in which the principles of high-engagement will continue to be used to achieve collaborative change:

When I was asked to participate and lead a field team panel for one of the conferences, I have to be honest and admit I thought it was an optics exercise. The panel brought together a group of field employees across four areas of the business. While they all

worked in the same environments, the majority did not know each other or very much information about each other's roles. What impacted me the most, was the consistency of their answers across all the panel members and the honesty and passion with which they spoke. It would have been easy to just move on from that session but what they said really moved me to try and action their inputs and concerns. As a leader of one of these teams, I thought I was doing a good job but realized I could do much better. Facilitating the panel led me to pull together resources to try and implement some changes in three key areas including increasing access to real time information, ensuring input and resolving their feelings of isolation. Without the conferences to connect these business units, we would not have gotten the insights and the ability to enable these improvements from these critical groups.

—Provincial Sales Manager,  
Operations

### Now What: Beyond the Case into the Future of Disruptive OD Practice

We have described our experience cautiously in this article. Our intent is not to chronicle a playbook to be seen as best practice to apply elsewhere, but to have provided a thick enough description of our process and the impacts (Ponterotto, 2006). The intent of this thick description is so that the essence of the principles and practices of high-engagement are made visible. That essence cannot be codified because once it is, it is no longer useful in addressing the complexities of our times or the ability to adapt to that which is constantly emerging. Many other articles in this journal, elsewhere, and books in our field chronicle the how-to of collaborative change methodologies.

Our deeper purpose in writing this article is to uncover our thinking at the level of principles of collaborative change engagement. Our joint experience has shown us that creating events and conferences is not an end. It is the means to the end of deeply collaborative organizations, where high-engagement practices

are the norm and where the transformations of our organizations that seem ever evasive might be achievable. Embracing this form of human engagement and organizing is required for all of us to survive and thrive in the face of the challenges and disruptions of our 21st century. Indeed, it was this looking past the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic era to answer the following question that led us to step into the unknown of this work, at this time in history:

*What are the principles behind what we are trying to achieve and how can we achieve them despite pandemic conditions?*

**Too often, as OD practitioners, we narrow our scope to using our OD skills and practice at one level of an organization or become single methodology practitioners or focus our work in one domain of practice only (the part). This reductionist mindset is fed by the businesses and organizations we support, who want quick, simple, time-bound solutions, that are often implemented independent of other areas of work when connection is required for collective and developmental impact. This attempt to tame complexity and grey zone change is futile and an unrealistic attempt to reduce change anxiety.**

We believe, like Heather Berthoud notes in her article in this issue, that we, OD scholars and practitioners need not worry that our work and presence will translate through the virtual adaptations we have all been testing out. When we focus on the principles behind the practice, the generativity that happens when humans truly connect will emerge. This, we can predict with certainty, from all the evidence of our research and practice.

Therefore, we believe this work points to the need for integration of our OD practices required to affect deeper transformations in organizations. We agree that to return to the core of our field and become effective at developing collaborative organizations, we must do work that impacts people in the organizations and places we serve at the individual, the techno-structural, and the cultural levels

simultaneously (Bushe, 2017). This is a concept we describe in the human systems dynamics community as the simple rule of attending to the levels of systems at the whole, the part and the greater whole. Too often, as OD practitioners, we narrow our scope to using our OD skills and practice at one level of an organization or become single methodology practitioners or focus our work in one domain of practice only (the part). This reductionist mindset is fed by the businesses and organizations we support, who want quick, simple, time-bound solutions, that are often implemented independent of other areas of work when connection is required for collective

and developmental impact. This attempt to tame complexity and grey zone change is futile and an unrealistic attempt to reduce change anxiety.

Yabome has offered in an earlier issue that it is time to return to the full scope of our practice as a field (Gilpin-Jackson, 2018). We offer that we are thinking of this as a return to our field's core tenets of organization-wide development, as well as an expansion that is possible by integrating the generations of evidence-informed methodologies and practices we have learned no matter where we find ourselves. In this way, whatever domain we are working in or feel boxed into in our organizations will not matter, because we will practice in a way that creates ripples at all levels. So what can OD bring? We believe it is time for a Disruptive Organization Development Practice. As a client of



Richard's recently put it, by working across hierarchy and across functions, they had shocked the system—a positive disruption towards needed changes. Disruptive OD practice skillfully disrupts the status quo for the sake of development and transformational change impact. We are calling practitioners to SHARE Disruptive OD by bringing the following in interventions of all kinds and at every level:

1. **Systems Thinking:** Design interventions with the possibility of impacting the whole, the part and the greater whole. The tried-and-true engagement principles in table 1 will create that ripple effect as you engage people in design and implementation and in so doing teach them how to fish.
2. **Humanistic Perspectives:** We encourage practitioners in these disruptive times to continue to model humanity and design interventions that elevate the ability to deeply connect with one another. Richard has been a pioneer for connection before content in meetings and whole system design for over 30 years. He offers that this, more than anything, is the secret sauce of collaborative change engagement. When elevating humanity is paired with the other principles of Disruptive OD practice, our ripple effect in organizations can be exponential.
3. **Architecture of Engagement:** Agility in OD is about constantly sense-making what is needed and being able to adapt to what is emerging. This requires an integrative mindset across the generations of our OD methodologies and technologies, from action research (first generation) to learning organizations (second generation) to Dialogic OD (third generation) practice. In previous work, Yabome described this as moving with agility between the grey zones of our methodologies (Gilpin-Jackson, 2013). She offers now that a better framing is the language of being architects of engagement (Cady, 2019). This is the art of OD design that centres weaving and integrating across and within our methodologies to achieve the organization's purpose or address the adaptive challenge at hand. Survey

research still has its use in helping a system see itself in a macro sense. Reflection-in-action for double and triple loop learning still helps us develop our mental models to learn individually and in groups. Engaging in Dialogic OD methodologies to co-create change and new narratives and futures collaboratively is the essential difference in our work in organizations. Putting it all together makes the developmental impact of our work possible.

4. **Realism:** Disruptive OD confronts reality. This is a call to recognize we are in disruptive times, where we are constantly in the white water of Grey Zone Change and the emerging future is undefined and unknowable. In this context, an orientation to positive organizational scholarship and practice to the exclusion of naming and addressing the realities of organizational traumas and environmental/societal impacts makes us tone deaf and irrelevant. Likewise, confronting our client systems without offering pathways to possibilities breeds disengagement and disempowerment. Disruptive OD operates from the holistic orientations and ambidexterity of both confrontive and appreciative inquiry and practices. Doing the work of reading group dynamics to know when to pivot to move the group, organization or system forward from reality into possibility is ours to bring.
5. **Evaluation and Evidence-Informed Practice:** We must demonstrate organizational impact to fully practice what we preach and gain the trust of those we serve. Our field is an applied and integrative behavioural and social science. This makes us evidence-informed. We must use evidence-informed practices and evaluate our impact. Taking a developmental evaluation lens as we did in this case is one way to do so. We encourage OD practitioners to work with business leaders to understand what they want to achieve and use the evidence from our field as well as contextual evaluation, research and organizational metrics to demonstrate impact and progress. We often hear practitioners argue that

transformation work and complexity cannot be measured. We offer that thinking in that way is itself linear and reductionist. We invite consideration of holistic, non-traditional and complexity approaches such as sense-making, signal tracking and good old human experience to demonstrate impact.

We are all in for Disruptive OD practice into the future...

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