Updating Interdisciplinary Strategies for Virtual Dialogic Communication: A Conceptual Model for the Remote Practice of Dialogic Organization Development

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Abstract: The rise of remote work cements the need for more effective virtual organization development. Scholars and practitioners of Dialogic Organization Development (OD) have long preferred in-person dialogic communication, but the co-location of stakeholders is not always possible. Following an interdisciplinary discourse analysis of existing principles of virtual dialogic communication, a conceptual model is proposed for use in the remote practice of Dialogic OD. The model's principles of (1) authentic responsiveness, (2) added value, (3) real-time updates, (4) inclusive user experience, and (5) centralized access to resources pave the way for more creative, generative discourse in the practice of computer-mediated Dialogic OD.
Keywords: Dialogic Organization Development, dialogic communication, computer-mediated organizational communication

The growing shift to remote work has forced organizations to reexamine operations. From November 2019 to March 2020, Microsoft Teams users increased from 20 million to 44 million, and major firms like Meta, Shopify, and Twitter transitioned to a remote-first workforce (Leonard, 2020). In 2020, an estimated one-third to two-thirds of employed Americans worked from home rather than at their physical place of employment (Katsabian, 2020). A 2021 survey revealed that 75% of employed Americans preferred working from home at least one day a week, cementing remote or hybrid work policies for many organizations (Barrero *et al.*, 2021). The switch to remote work is ongoing, was sped up as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and is a significant change that has forced organizations to lead further change remotely.

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Change implementation failure happens in as many as 70 percent of all planned changes and leads to employee dissatisfaction, burnout, and wasted organizational resources (Allen *et al.*, 2007). Increasing the success rate of organizational change is a primary objective among practitioners and scholars in organization development (OD). In a comparative study looking at 79 cases of organizational change, those that began as diagnostic processes and then pivoted to dialogic processes saw a success rate of 93 percent, a large increase compared to those that continued as diagnostic processes and experienced a far more typical success rate of 33 percent (Hastings and Schwarz, 2022). This aligns with previous research positing that when dialogic communication increases, resistance to change decreases (Matos and Esposito, 2014).

Internal communication is a critical component in the success of organizational change (Matos and Esposito, 2014). More specifically, research suggests that the most effective forms of organizational internal communication are dialogic, or two-way conversations that are "any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions" (Rybalko and Seltzer, 2010: 337). Dialogic OD, with its emphasis on generative dialogue and changing minds rather than just behaviors, is a departure from the more traditional, top-down diagnostic approaches to organization development (Bushe and Marshak, 2015). As an increasing number of organizations move to remote-first environments, change leaders will need to communicate both dialogically and virtually to decrease change resistance and increase the likelihood of successful change implementation.

Despite the turn toward remote work, copresence remains the gold standard for Dialogic OD. Dr. Howard-Grenville, Professor of Organization Studies at Cambridge University, writes "It turns out that even in today's world of abundant online collaboration tools, there is often no substitute for copresence when communication, problem-solving, and creativity are called for. In part, this is because as humans, we make sense of the world and our interactions through our body language, emotions, and embodied experiences, all of which are much different in a virtual space" (2020: 2). Others have declared that "mediated dialogue is a self-contradictory concept" (Zhou and Xu, 2022) and that virtual written communication can be symmetrically engaging but cannot be defined as dialogic (Kent and Theunissen, 2016). That organizational change communication is best delivered in person is a long-established belief (Klein, 1996), yet modern reality is one where organizational stakeholders are not always co-located. This research, then, is guided by the question: What strategies can shape effective dialogic communication in the remote practice of Dialogic OD?

This paper will explore the concept, practice, and principles of virtual dialogic communication in and beyond OD. A review of existing literature will examine definitions of dialogue, the significance of co-located communication, and contemporary understandings of virtual and dialogic communication. Through a discourse analysis of interdisciplinary frameworks and strategies, an updated conceptual model is proposed that builds upon existing frameworks to guide practitioners and scholars of Dialogic OD in the virtual world. Finally, this paper will explore the practical and theoretical implications of this conceptual model on the remote practice of Dialogic OD.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To build upon the existing frameworks for virtual dialogic communication and apply them to the field of Dialogic OD, there are three major concepts that must first be explored: Dialogue, Dialogic OD, and virtual dialogic communication. The literature review that follows will begin by outlining various conceptions of the word dialogue and what it means to be truly dialogic. Then, it will define Dialogic OD and explicate how it differs from the more traditional Diagnostic OD. Lastly, the literature review examines virtual dialogic communication from an interdisciplinary perspective, laying the foundation for a revised set of principles unique to Dialogic OD.

Defining Dialogue

An essential concept in Dialogic OD is that of dialogue. Dialogue can be defined as a verb as well as a noun, or the process as well as the product (Wang and Yang, 2020). Dialogic theory is often associated with Martin Buber, a 19th and 20th century philosopher who viewed communication as a relationship-building process comprised of respect and openness (Kent and Taylor, 1998). At the most basic level, dialogue may be considered a conversation, or an "ontological orientation that involves a communicative give and take between two or more individuals" (Kent and Lane, 2021). This kind of dialogue, sometimes called lower-case dialogue, can be contrasted with upper-case **D**ialogue, which is defined as an interaction "in which collective learning takes place and out of which a sense of increased harmony, fellowship, and creativity can arise" (Lane, 2020: 2). It is this transformative definition of upper-case **D**ialogue that fits most closely into the generative discourse practiced in Dialogic OD (Bohm, 2013; Bushe and Marshak, 2015). The goal of communication in the practice of Dialogic OD is not merely to have a conversation between two or more parties, but to build collective truths, generate new ideas, and evolve together.

Distinguishing between upper-case and lower-case dialogue can include learning to spot DINO, or dialogue in name only (Kent and Theunissen, 2016). As the name suggests, DINO is a type of dialogue that technically meets the requirements of dialogic conversation but is not a truly generative practice. It looks and sounds like **D**ialogue, but it falls short in one or more ways. True **D**ialogue, the counterpart to DINO, displays "high levels of ethical, honest, empathetic, inclusive, and trustworthy communication" (Kent and Lane, 2021: 1). While following a checklist or framework of principles can confirm that communication is dialogic by some definitions, the process of determining a message's inclusivity or trustworthiness is far more complex.

Dialogic Organization Development

Organization development (OD) has a decades-long history but is still an emerging, evolving field (Sorensen *et al.*, 2017). OD "comprises the long-range efforts and programs aimed at improving an organization's ability to survive by changing its problem solving and renewal processes" (Brown and Harvey, 2021: 3). Traditionally, OD has been diagnostic in nature. Diagnostic OD assumes that there are objective data that can be collected for the "diagnosis" of an organization and used in the change process (Bushe and Marshak, 2009). In contrast, a newer

orientation is the Dialogic OD perspective. Dialogic OD can be summarized as a mindset that "assumes that groups and organizations are self-organizing, socially constructed realities that are continuously created, sustained, and changed through narratives, stories, images, symbols, and conversations" (Bushe and Marshak, 2015: 25). A stress on generative dialogue distinguishes it from a top-down diagnostic approach. Practitioners of Dialogic OD place an emphasis on changing minds rather than just behaviors (Bushe and Marshak, 2014). This approach to transformational change uses processes of narrative and discourse, emergence, and generativity to achieve "(1) a change in the core narrative of the group or organization, (2) a disruption in patterns of organizing great enough to compel the group or organization to recognize at a new, more complex level of organization, and/or (3) the utilization or emergence of a generative image that provides new ways of seeing, communicating, and acting" (Bushe and Marshak, 2014: 57). This is a disruption to the traditional hierarchical diagnostic OD perspective and one that seeks to reshape the way that organizations think, operate, and communicate.

A focus of Dialogic OD is on the generation of ideas through dialogue. There are over three dozen recognized examples of Dialogic OD methods ranking from the indigenous talking stick practice, in which participants form a circle and pass a talking stick to delineate who is speaking and who is listening, to strategies such as Theory U, Cycle of Resolution, and Future Search (Bushe and Marshak, 2015). Regardless of the specific approach taken, the Dialogic OD mindset is one that embraces eight key concepts:

1. Reality and relationships are socially constructed.
2. Organizations are meaning-making systems.
3. Language, broadly defined, matters.
4. Creating change requires changing conversations.
5. Structure participative inquiry and engagement to increase differentiation before seeing coherence.
6. Groups and organizations are continuously self-organizing.
7. Transformational change is more emergent than planned.
8. Consultants are a part of the process, not apart from the process (Bushe and Marshak, 2015: 17-18).

These concepts demonstrate the significance of communication and language in OD. Communication and linguistics are widely accepted as a necessary component in organizational change and development (Grant *et al.*, 2001; Matos and Esposito, 2014). Approaches like Communication Constitutes Organization (CCO) go further and argue for the equivalency of organization and communication, suggesting that one cannot exist without the other (Schoeneborn *et al.*, 2019).

Virtual Dialogic Communication

Dialogic communication, or "any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions" (Rybalko and Seltzer, 2010: 337), has been widely studied as an in-person process. Since the end of the twentieth century, many scholars have focused on the computer-mediated version of dialogic communication (Capriotti *et al.*, 2021; Kent and Taylor, 1998; Pang *et al.*, 2018; Wang and Yang, 2020; Wirtz and Zimbres, 2018). Like face-to-face dialogic communication, virtual dialogic communication collaboratively finds

meaning and creates a shared social reality (Bushe and Marshak, 2015). Much of the research on virtual dialogic communication focuses on organizations communicating with external publics such as existing customers, social media followers, or potential hires (Rybalko and Seltzer, 2010; Liu *et al.*, 2020; Wang and Yang, 2020; Waters and Tindall, 2010; Wirtz and Zimbres, 2018). Many organizations that do not have the opportunity to frequently promote their brand or market their services face-to-face turn to online communication through Web 2.0, or "participatory websites and social network systems such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs" (Pang *et al.*, 2018: 69). Similarly, organizations that face crises or scandals may take to the internet to rebuild relationships with their publics and improve their reputation (Kent and Taylor, 2002).

Virtual dialogic communication has been documented in several case studies examining the computer-mediated practice of OD (Paves and Neves, 2021; Spalding and Grandstaff, 2015). Today, many of the stakeholders planning or leading transformational change are not in the same place at the same time (Katsabian, 2020). For that reason, past research has examined how OD can be practiced dialogically when holding remote workshops, managing virtual meetings, and adapting as an organization to the challenges of remote work (Burrell *et al.*, 2021; Spalding and Grandstaff, 2015; White, 2014). Like many firms, pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) switched to a primarily remote workforce as a result of COVID-19. Although employees were no longer working from the same physical space, the organization continued developing teams remotely. Virtual teams developed through a three-step process of (1) sowing: where participants create shared accountability virtually; (2) nurturing: where participants share objectives virtually; and (3) deepening: where participants establish a rhythm and pattern of ownership remotely (Paves and Neves, 2021). In all of these examples, scholars have observed and shared the experience of practicing Dialogic OD remotely.

Building dialogic relationships through online platforms has been studied most notably by Kent and Taylor (1998). Their work outlines five strategies for practitioners who want to communicate dialogically with publics through the internet. Although their strategies arose at a time when the internet was still in relative infancy, they still serve as a reference point when determining whether online communication is dialogic. What does not exist in the literature is a framework that looks at the dialogic nature of virtual communication for internal organizational communication and can be used in the remote practice of Dialogic OD.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

For this paper, a discourse analysis was chosen as the approach. Discourse can be broadly defined as "all forms of speaking and writing" (Carbo *et al.*, 2016: 366). For this study, the discourses used were primarily peer-reviewed journals and books on the principles and strategies for effective virtual dialogic communication as well as discourse on Dialogic OD. Virtual dialogic communication is a growing topic across public relations, marketing, and communication as well as in OD, and is studied differently in each environment. Discourse from each field is related to a unique social system and can "create, embody and sustain local conditional rationalities as opposed to universal rationalities that would apply to closed systems

such as mathematics or geometry" (Heracleous, 2002: 255). This makes discourse analysis an appropriate methodology that can analyze each text through a unique lens. Through a discourse analysis, texts about virtual dialogic communication in multiple areas of study can be compared and contrasted. In the paragraphs below, the framework for the methodology is outlined. It is followed by an explanation for the discourses chosen and additional details for the review, organization, and analysis of said discourse.

Framework of the Method

A discourse analysis is, in its most basic form, "the systematic study of texts" (Hardy *et al.*, 2005: 6). At times controversial, a methodological approach using discourse analysis "can be a powerful analytical tool, particularly in an applied field" (Graham, 2011: 666). Discourse can be analyzed in myriad ways, and the term discourse analysis can likewise be applied to varied types of research. Discourse analysis can be classified into three broad methodological categories: (1) formal linguistic discourse analysis, (2) empirical discourse analysis, and (3) critical discourse analysis, also known as Foucauldian analysis (Kuper and Reeves, 2008). This paper's discourse analysis falls into the category of empirical discourse analysis. Therefore, it is reliant on multiple discourse sources and conducts an analysis of how the language found within those texts constructs effective social practices. Additionally, the discourse analysis framework is used to classify and identify what dialogic means in multiple fields, how dialogic communication happens in the virtual environment, and which emerging patterns could be applied to OD to improve the remote practice of Dialogic OD.

Selection of Relevant Discourse

This discourse analysis began with identifying discourse relevant to the topics of Dialogic OD, Dialogue, and virtual communication. Discourses came from databases (Communication & Mass Media Complete, Emerald Insight, and JSTOR) and search engines covering multiple fields, the most popular of which included communication, marketing, public affairs, management, business, organization development, and public relations. Primary descriptors used to identify relevant discourses included *virtual dialogic communication*, *dialogic communication*, *dialogic*, and *online dialogic communication.* Additional descriptors, including *digital communication*, *digital dialogue*, *dialogic organizations*, and *dialogic organization development*, were used to widen the search and review documents that could provide insight into the nature of virtual work, existing strategies for online communication, and the practice of virtual OD. To ensure that all discourse was applicable to co-located work aided by the internet, no texts written prior to 1995 were analyzed; texts from the 21st century were preferred. All selected discourse was applicable to co-located work aided by the internet. Although technology has changed significantly since 1995, it was important that all texts were written by authors aware of the internet and the role it could play in the future of dialogic communication.

Table 1
Discourse Matrix by Topic

Text	Virtual Communication	Dialogue	Dialogic OD
Allen, Jimmieson, Bordia, and Irmer (2007)			X
Barrero, Bloom, and Davis (2021)	X		
Burrell, Johnson, Shufutinksy, and Ramjit (2021)	X		
Bushe and Marshak (2014)		X	X
Bushe and Marshak (2015)		X	X
Capriotti, Zeler, and Camilleri (2021)	X	X	
Bohm (2013)		X	
Grant, Keenoy, and Oswick (2001)		X	
Hastings and Schwarz (2022)			X
Howard-Greenville (2020)	X		
Jiang, Cheng, Yang, and Gao (2022)	X	X	
Katsabian (2020)	X		
Kent and Lane (2021)	X	X	
Kent and Taylor (1998)	X	X	
Kent and Taylor (2002)	X	X	
Kent and Theunissen (2016)		X	
Klein (1996)	X		
Lane (2020)		X	
Leonard (2020)	X		
Liu, Xu, and Tsai (2020)	X	X	
Matos and Esposito (2014)	X	X	X
McAllister-Spooner (2009)	X	X	
Pang, Shin, Lew, and Walther (2018)	X	X	
Paves and Neves (2021)	X	X	
Rodrigues, Cavalheiro, and Prada (2022)	X		
Rybalko and Seltzer (2010)	X	X	
Schoeneborn, Kuhn, and Kärreman (2019)	X	X	
Spalding and Grandstaff (2015)	X		X
Squillaro (2021)	X		
Wang and Yang (2020)	X	X	
Waters and Tindall (2010)	X	X	
White (2014)	X		
Wirtz, and Zimbres (2018)	X	X	
Zhou and Xu (2022)	X	X	

A total of 215 texts were reviewed for a first-round analysis. This initial round of analysis was intended to weed out texts not applicable to this study. For a text to move to the second round of analysis, it had to meet one or more of the following criteria: (1) the discourse had to focus on virtual communication, (2) the discourse had to focus on either dialogue or dialogic communication, (3) the discourse focused on Dialogic OD, or (4) the discourse considered remote work. Many texts fulfilled multiple criteria, and those that best covered the major topics became part of the final discourse list. In total, 34 pieces of discourse were included in this study. Of those, six texts focused on Dialogic Organization Development, 22 focused on dialogue, and 26 focused on virtual communication. The final list of analyzed discourse is listed in Table 1.

Data Organization and Analysis

The 34 selected discourses were compiled for analysis and review. To identify relevant themes in the texts, each piece of discourse was read and reread carefully by a single coder to identify major themes and recurring patterns (Carbo *et al.*, 2016: 369). For each text, a running document was compiled, outlining strategies and mentions of relevant frameworks for virtual dialogic communication. Over time, key strategies emerged as effective in virtual dialogic communication, and specific frameworks were identified as prominent.

The analysis identified existing strategies for the successful use of virtual dialogic communication in multiple industries. It also identified multiple examples of the remote practice of Dialogic OD. The findings below help identify the most effective frameworks in place for virtual dialogic communication as well as what remains to be addressed in the practice of Dialogic OD.

A FRAMEWORK FOR VIRTUAL DIALOGIC OD

The findings of this interdisciplinary discourse analysis revealed several existing strategies and frameworks for the effective use of virtual dialogic communication. While there are several studies that examine the concept, just a handful offer generalized principles applicable to the widespread use of dialogic communication through online platforms. Three major frameworks emerged through this discourse analysis (Capriotti *et al.*, 2021; Kent and Taylor, 1998; Pang *et al.*, 2018). Pang *et al.* (2018) draw on social information processing theory and the hyperpersonal model to create strategies for organizations who want to interact dialogically with their stakeholders through online media. Their proposed framework is a promising model, but it is designed to facilitate dialogic virtual communication from organizations to their external stakeholders. Similarly, Capriotti *et al.* (2021) offer a conceptual framework for organizations to communicate dialogically with publics via online social networks. Like Kent and Taylor's (1998), it offers five dimensions but is specifically designed for organizations using dialogic communication via social media. If corporate communication on social media achieves the dimensions of active presence, interactive attitude, interactive resources, responsiveness, and conversation, then it is said to be dialogic (Capriotti *et al.*, 2021). Both frameworks require empirical study to determine their effectiveness with external audiences; future research into both will determine their potential for use in the world of organization development.

A seminal work on virtual dialogic communication comes from Kent and Taylor (1998) with *Building a dialogic relationship through the World Wide Web*. Their early framework identifies the potential for dialogic communication online, and it offers five strategies for ensuring that online organizational communication is dialogic: Establishing a dialogic loop, providing useful information, the generation of return visits, intuitiveness and ease of use, and the rule of conservation of visitors (Kent and Taylor, 1998).

Kent and Taylor's (1998) strategies have served as building blocks for over two decades of research into online dialogic communication and have been referenced in more than 1,800 scholarly works and put into practice across multiple disciplines (McAllister-Spooner, 2009; Wang and Yang, 2020). However, they remain most popular among organizations communicating with external stakeholders over social media. The widespread use of Kent and Taylor's strategies (1998) indicates their appeal and their potential. The result of this study's discourse analysis is the proposal of a new conceptual framework that builds upon Kent and Taylor's (1998) popular, empirically-tested strategies to increase the effectiveness of dialogic communication in the practice of remote Dialogic OD.

Figure I
Side-by-side comparison of Kent and Taylor's strategies of online dialogic communication (1998) and updated strategies of virtual dialogic communication in the remote practice of Dialogic OD.

Strategies of Online Dialogic Communication (Kent & Taylor, 1998)	Strategies of Virtual Dialogic Communication in Dialogic OD
Dialogic loop	Authentic responsiveness
Usefulness of information	Added value
Generation of return visits	Real-time updates
Intuitiveness and ease of use	Inclusive user experience
Rule of conservation of visitors	Centralized access to resources

A Conceptual Framework of Virtual Communication in Dialogic OD

This conceptual model follows the five strategies proposed by Kent and Taylor (1998) but updates each for virtual dialogic communication with internal rather than external stakeholders. It also extends their framework to better reflect potential communication strategies over virtual internal communication platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Slack, tools that are frequently used in the practice of remote Dialogic OD. The five strategies, each of which is outlined below and organized in Figure I, are authentic responsiveness, added value, real-time updates, inclusive user experience, and centralized access to resources.

Authentic responsiveness is comparable to the strategy of establishing a dialogic loop, or offering "organizations the opportunity to respond to questions, concerns, and problems" through online chat functions or email (Kent and Taylor, 1998: 326). Authentic responsiveness asks that communication resemble a conversation, ensuring that all participants can contribute to the dialogue and have the freedom to view the dialogue of others. The added factor of authenticity reflects the growing focus on **D**ialogue and the avoidance of dialogue in name only (DINO). If participants in the conversation see an exchange but do not feel heard or understood, then the communication merely looks dialogic but has not achieved authentic responsiveness. In addition to virtual one-on-one or group communication, authentic responsiveness can be practiced in chat threads and smaller breakout rooms during virtual training or meeting events. OD facilitators can monitor these virtual conversations and provide authentic responses when needed. Consider the following hypothetical chat exchange as an example:

> **Stakeholder #1:** Excited for the kickoff call! Anyone joining from San Antonio?
> **Facilitator:** We're excited, too! There are four callers joining from Texas – we will be logging in from Boston. See you online at 9 am CST.

The exchange itself takes just seconds. It recognizes the stakeholder's conversation, tailors the response, and responds in a genuine fashion. The stakeholder is more likely to feel included, and it becomes clear that a real person is involved in the conversation. Furthermore, there is a knock-on effect. Others who observe the chat exchange, even asynchronously, have learned additional information and can see that there are willing and eager participants ready to communicate in the kick-off call and beyond. During real-time video calls or their equivalent, authentic responsiveness can be provided much in the same way that it might be proffered in person: through deliberate responses to participants' feedback that acknowledges effort and input.

Added value is the updated counterpart to Kent and Taylor's call for communication to provide useful information, defined in part as "contact addresses, telephone numbers, and electronic-mail addresses of organizational members… explanation of how products are produced, or services delivered, lists of ingredients…" (1998: 328). While this information is no doubt useful, not all virtual communication in the context of Dialogic OD needs to be informational. In some cases, a conversation that establishes trust or introduces levity might help build a relationship. Therefore, virtual communication need not always be geared just toward informational topics but can be expanded to include anything that adds value during the Dialogic OD process. Just as an in-person Dialogic OD strategy might begin with introductions or icebreakers, so too can a virtual one. An icebreaker exercise may not provide immediately useful information, but it may add value by integrating new members, leading to group cohesion, and enhancing honest communication (Ferry and Guthey, 2019). Even emoji can "play an important role in online interpersonal communication and potentially shape the initiation of new relationships" (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2022: 1), so their use may add value in pre-event emails or real-time mediated chat conversations between participants. While efficiency matters for facilitators and consultants, these "extra" communicative elements can add value to the process in myriad ways.

Real-time updates mimics the original strategy of the generation of return visits, or ensuring that information changes or varies in such a way that visitors might opt to engage on more than one occasion (Kent and Taylor, 1998). In short, it is what makes people come back more than once. If the content does not change regularly, or if information is routinely out of date, then users will be less inclined to return after their initial visits. The newly proposed strategy of real time updates captures that spirit, encouraging return visits by prioritizing regular, reliable updates. In the context of Dialogic OD, this can mean many things, and real-time updates may refer to things as straightforward as revised meeting times or as complex as updated conversations regarding new policy shifts. By providing real-time updates, virtual communication can better approximate in-person conversations where parties readily share information. If updates are not offered in real-time, then participants may look elsewhere for information, diluting the perceived value of the online communication platform. Knowledge is power, and without consistent real-time updates, hierarchies may emerge based on who has access to updated information.
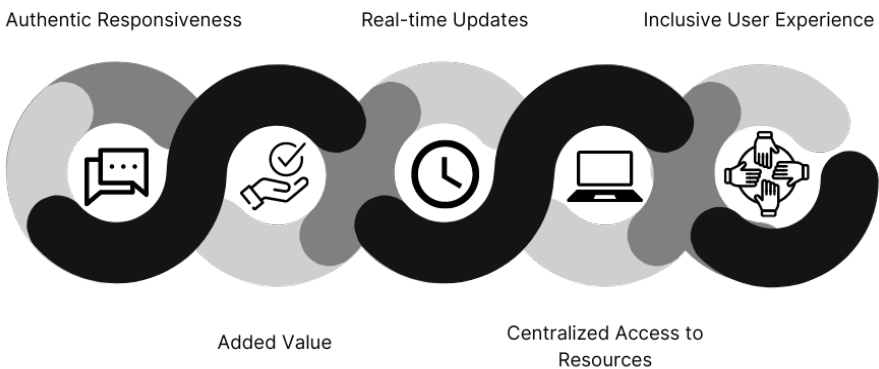
Inclusive user experience amplifies the strategy of intuitiveness and ease of use first proposed by Kent and Taylor (1998) for virtual dialogic communication. Kent and Taylor were primarily focused on the user experience, including how quickly pages could load and whether valuable information was easy to access (Kent and Taylor, 1998: 30). Although navigation and user experience (UX) remain important, it is not enough for virtual dialogic communication to be intuitive. Words like intuitive and easy-to-use mean different things to different people. Instead, communication should be inclusive. To start, that means that access to the conversation is readily available, and all stakeholders have the tools, programs, and devices needed to participate. It also requires that instructions are provided for those without training in the communication platforms, and it assumes that accommodations are provided for all those who may need additional support such as subtitles in video content or translations in written content. While part of this inclusivity stems from the chosen online communication platform, practitioners of Dialogic OD also need to take steps to ensure that the dialogue they need is accessible to all. This is foundational. When considering which platforms or data collection tools to use, factor in accessibility and cost. *Do all participants have the required tools to participate fully? Are there barriers to their use that might prohibit stakeholders from offering their full and honest opinion?* Starting without an inclusive user experience creates an uneven platform to begin the conversation, and it is an obstacle to the equitable, grassroots approach for which Dialogic OD is known.

Centralized access to resources is an evolution of the rule of conservation of visitors, which focuses on limiting the number of outbound links and keeping visitors on dedicated platforms instead of navigating elsewhere (Kent and Taylor, 1998). Today, there is less concern about users navigating out from internal communication platforms and not being able to return. In fact, outbound links to resources can further cement the communication channel as valuable, as it serves as the hub for information. The sharing of resources can also foster better relationships between stakeholders, and it can increase transparency among all users. When information is readily accessible and located in the same digital space for all, there can be greater trust and understanding, even when individuals are communicating asynchronously. As practitioners and participants of Dialogic OD move away from co-located communication, it becomes increasingly important to recognize that many

are operating in differing time zones or simply at different times of day within the same geographic area. Creating a centralized path to resources evens the playing field and does not give preferential treatment or access to any one user, time zone, or location. Since participants may be logging in from different devices or organizations, access should be confirmed before official meetings, calls, or virtual gatherings. This can be accomplished by setting up systems where data is collected to determine who has opened an email, clicked a link, or successfully downloaded relevant information.

The five principles of this conceptual framework are not intended to serve as a checklist to determine the dialogic nature of mediated communication. Instead, they are guiding principles meant to inspire rather than prescribe. Dialogic OD is an inherently dialogic process. To expect a diagnostic framework goes against its very tenets, suggesting a top-down, hierarchical approach unlikely to be suitable for each situation. Truly dialogic virtual communication in OD requires flexibility, participant input, and authentic feedback. Inclusivity, for example, is a socially constructed concept unique to each group, and no checklist can cover all the bases for every possible organization. Adhering to a strict list, rather than the spirit of the principles, may result in dialogue in name only (DINO), something best avoided by those practicing truly Dialogic OD (Kent and Theunissen, 2016). An interconnected model, as shown in Figure II, more accurately depicts the process of implementing remote dialogic strategies. The alternative to DINO is being led by the five principles of virtual dialogic communication and making the adaptations necessary to generate discourse, ideas, and transformational change effectively.

Figure II
Conceptual model for the remote practice of
Dialogic Organization Development

Authentic Responsiveness   Real-time Updates   Inclusive User Experience

Added Value   Centralized Access to Resources

DISCUSSION

This conceptual model is intended to create new opportunities to practice Dialogic OD remotely in a way that makes it comparable, and perhaps even better, than it is when stakeholders are co-located. Building on existing principles of virtual dialogic communication allows the newly proposed model to better reflect contemporary technology and the remote environment common among so many organizations (Barrero *et al.*, 2021; Leonard, 2020). The five principles of authentic responsiveness, added value, real-time updates, inclusive user experience, and centralized access to resources can steer practitioners toward communication that is dialogic even when it is computer mediated. This discussion will begin by outlining the practical implications of this new conceptual model, followed with implications for theory, and finish with concerns related to upcoming changes in technology.

Implications for Practice

There are a number of practical implications for this paper's findings. Perhaps most importantly, a framework now exists for consultants and other practitioners to follow in their remote practice of Dialogic OD. The rise of remote work is unlikely to be a fad or a short-term solution; it has become an integral part of the modern, global organization. Traditionally, many practitioners who rely on a dialogic approach to organization development also favor in-person methods (Howard-Grenville, 2020; Kent and Theunissen, 2016; Zhou and Xu, 2022). Nevertheless, many future practitioners will need to offer global, hybrid or remote-first organizations both a dialogic approach and the option to achieve their goals remotely. This conceptual model can bridge the gap between Dialogic OD and remote workforces by providing practitioners with a roadmap.

If a conceptual model such as this one can better support the remote practice of Dialogic OD, then more organizations may seek out consultants with expertise in online, computer-mediated strategies of dialogic communication and change. It may also disrupt the idea that organization development requires the co-location of stakeholders, expensive and environmentally-damaging flights, and wasted organizational resources. By reducing the overhead and logistical costs of stake-holder meetings, multiple-day retreats, and consultant travel, organizations can use resources to increase accessibility for remote workers or budget additional time for deeper and richer virtual communication among stakeholders. Furthermore, some stakeholders may appreciate the advantages of reduced travel, providing opportunities for caretakers, parents, or other employees with home-based responsibilities to be involved in major organizational change without appearing in person.

Finally, a move toward the increased remote practice of Dialogic OD may shape existing methods or create new ones entirely. Bushe and Marshak (2015) have identified over 40 Dialogic OD methods, including Dynamic Facilitation, Charrettes, Theory U, Syntegration, and Future Search, among many others. While many of these methods have been practiced online, particularly since 2020, virtual versions are often considered sub-par or last-minute substitutes for the real thing (Howard-Grenville, 2020). This paper's conceptual model introduces newly identified strategies for improving virtual versions of existing methods. As a result, existing methods may be tweaked to better fit in the virtual world. For example, a foundational tenet of the Future Search approach is that the entire system must get

in the same room (Weisbord and Janoff, 2010). While that "room" has traditionally been a physical space, switching to a remote perspective might mean widening the parameters and getting the whole system into a single Zoom call or a virtual conference room in the Metaverse. Every existing strategy for Dialogic OD can and should be tweaked so that it can be successfully tweaked and implemented for remote organizations. In the process, brand-new strategies will likely emerge that function best in online environments.

Future research can further explore the practical implications of this conceptual model. Practitioners who remotely lead Dialogic OD have the opportunity to implement, test, and analyze the strategies of added value, authentic responsiveness, real-time updates, centralized access to resources, and inclusive user experience. Their remote use and success are predicated on the user's desire to adhere to the spirit of the dialogue, not just the letter, and to evolve alongside technology.

Implications for Theory

The creation of a conceptual model for the remote practice of Dialogic OD has contributed to existing literature and established a framework ready for future improvement, modification, and evolution. It has also disrupted a leitmotif of Dialogic Organization Development that implies in-person approaches are always preferable. Future research can and should compare the effectiveness of in-person and remote organizational change and development strategies. However, there remains an undeniable trend toward remote work. Therefore, this conceptual model need not be better than in-person approaches in order to contribute to the theoretical understanding of virtual dialogic communication in OD. It can stand independently as a theoretical solution for remote or hybrid organizations that cannot or choose not to facilitate in-person approaches.

Future Directions

Further research is needed to determine the real-world effectiveness of these principles in practice. One particularly interesting avenue for future research involves using this model more broadly in the remote practice of organizational development. It is hypothesized that the success rate of remote organizational change will increase when change leaders implement the five strategies of authentic responsiveness, added value, real-time updates, inclusive user experiences, and centralized access to resources. In addition, this model may be helpful in transitioning traditionally in-person Dialogic OD strategies to the virtual environment. Scholars and practitioners with expert knowledge of a specific Dialogic OD strategy, such as Theory U or Future Search, among many others, could use this model to update their traditionally in-person practice to a remote one.

The primary limitation of this model is that it remains in the conceptual phase. Future qualitative research that applies the model to organizations planning change or development can examine what, if any, impacts appear as a result. Potential benefits of applying this model may include increased rates of employee compliance for remote change initiatives, lower rates of Zoom fatigue, or higher retention rates of remote and hybrid employees. If the goal of Dialogic OD is to change the minds of employees and not just their behaviors, then improved virtual dialogic communication through this model may be beneficial. Similarly, future research

might address whether organizational culture impacts the effectiveness of this model. While this proposed model is recommended for all organizations operating remotely and planning change initiatives, the organizational culture may encourage or hinder its success.

Another area for future research is the impact of technology on virtual Dialogic OD. Rapid change in technology makes it imperative that Dialogic OD can evolve over time. In 1998, when Kent and Taylor first outlined their principles of online dialogic communication, the internet was a fairly new concept. As recently as 2015, remote Dialogic OD was studied through the use of conference call technology (Spalding and Grandstaff, 2015). The platforms and programs used in the remote practice of Dialogic OD will continue to evolve, so this conceptual model is designed for flexibility. This future-oriented framework can be implemented using any number of existing or future tools, platforms, or mediums establishment for organizational communication. One example of rapidly growing communication technology is chatbots, which can mimic interpersonal communication, offer real-time information, fulfill user needs, and "enable value creation through responsiveness and conversation tones" (Jiang *et al.*, 2022: 1). Chatbots, and other forms of AI, serve important communicative roles. The ethical and practical considerations of their role is still up for debate, and further research is needed to determine whether technology like Artificial Intelligence (AI) or the Metaverse can be truly **D**ialogic (Lane, 2020). Looking ahead, there are undoubtedly still more technologies yet to be discovered that will impact Dialogic OD and virtual communication. This is especially likely given the acceptance of new digital norms among younger generations (Squillaro, 2021). The conceptual model proposed in this paper, and any principles established to guide future virtual dialogic communication, must be flexible enough to remain applicable as platforms, programs, and technology evolves.

CONCLUSION

Dialogic approaches to organizational change can significantly reduce the rate of change failure (Hastings and Schwarz, 2022). At the same time, a switch to remote work means that more and more organizations will lead changes virtually (Barrero *et al.*, 2021; Leonard, 2020). However, in-person Dialogic OD is still greatly favored over a virtual approach. The reality is that stakeholders in OD cannot always be physically located in the same place at the same time. Virtual processes are a necessity, so virtual communication must be improved in order to facilitate creative, inclusive dialogue. Building on existing frameworks for virtual dialogic communication, a new conceptual model introduces five principles for virtual communication in the remote practice of OD: authentic responsiveness, added value, real-time updates, inclusive user experience, and centralized access to resources.

There is no question that the widespread remote practice of Dialogic OD creates a new challenge for practitioners. Although computer-mediated dialogue has been called a self-contradictory concept (Zhou and Xu, 2022), it has been used effectively in many areas of study. As organizations increasingly embrace online work, conceptual models like the one proposed in this paper can update existing interdisciplinary principles of virtual dialogic communication to better facilitate the remote practice of Dialogic OD.

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